Public Involvement and Civic Rationalism
in Local Authority Planning and Decision Making

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Summary

This work considers the potential contribution of rational actor and behaviouralist models of political and participatory culture, in understanding specific contemporary issues within the topic of public participation in the decision making activities of UK local authorities. The basis for the research was a range of disruptive or confounding phenomena reported in various literatures, that either generate antipathy during schemes or create negative pre-conceptions that could affect future projects. It is suggested that an appreciation of these confounding factors, when viewed in the context of streamlining local authorities and a rationally acting public, can help us understand issues such as non-participation, apparent apathy in public involvement and certain participatory dynamics. It is argued that understanding these issues is vital, especially given the emergence of the Modernisation Agenda in the UK which places a great deal of importance on the consultative activities of local authorities.

The research draws upon Almond and Verba's Civic Culture theory (1963) and the work of the Public Choice school of political economics, especially the work of James Buchannan and Gordon Tullock, to address issues of political culture and rationalised political activity among both the public and authorities. These provided a framework for a multiple case study research design, looking at public involvement policies and schemes in two English local authorities, against a particularly dynamic policy background.

The thesis identifies a range of issues that are linked to the public's inclination to participate, that are additional to the traditionally quoted issues of apathy or unequal access to democracy. These issues are linked to the perceived effectiveness of participation and its methods, to individuals who are already acting subjectively on the basis of their values and material interests. This work offers and discusses the term 'Civic Rationality' to describe this mix of rationales in a participatory culture.

Acknowledgements

CONTENTS

FIGURES AND TABLES

1.1 Structure of the thesis

This introductory chapter describes issues within the subject of IT mediated public involvement in multi party decision making and the wider topic of public participation in local authority decision making, that at the start of the research were felt to be unresolved. Such issues included the ambiguous and rather over-used notion of 'public apathy' in public participation, the uncertain and unproven nature of many public involvement approaches, the appropriateness of certain information technologies in democratic processes, and an apparent lack of appreciation in some research of certain areas of theory that should be involved in developing such direct democracy. These issues are presented below, by way of an introduction to the background subject of this thesis. This section then sets out the key research questions that when answered will help resolve those problematic issues, and will additionally provide what is felt to be new information on the relationship between 'rationally' acting individuals and a society who's participatory nature is increasing via an apparent popular interest in direct democracy and the policies of Central Government. These research questions are then supported by a contextual background, justifying their inclusion and relevance. Additionally there is a brief introduction to the literatures that provide the theoretical framework that guides the research, and the analytical approach to the empirical work.

Going on from the Introduction, Chapter 2 of this thesis addresses the more formal theoretical aspects of public involvement; its historical heritage, its evolving cultural relevance in planning and social policy and its place in the public sphere. Furthermore, the types of approaches used in public involvement, particularly those involving information technologies are addressed in the context of their academic backgrounds, with a view to

commenting on the relevance and appropriateness of such methods in various settings. The issue of rationality (particularly instrumental rationality) is also addressed to examine the motivations behind administrative policy and the actions of individual members of the general public in terms of participatory behaviour. This discussion of rationality is then married with the behaviouralist Civic Culture theory (Almond and Verba, 1963), to directly consider the place of various forms of rational activity in a participatory culture. These issues are drawn together to form the theoretical framework for the empirical, analytical and discursive work which follows.

Chapter 3 details the way that the central research questions were operationalised using a positivist, extensive research methodology, with a multiple case study approach. The case studies themselves are introduced in this chapter, and the rationale for their selection and their relevance to the specific research issues is also presented. The consideration of data types and the logic behind the design and application of the data collection methods are also detailed, along with the sampling strategies. Literature supporting such a methodology is presented and discussed, while comparisons are drawn between antecedent literatures which share elements of the chosen design, to support the practical choices made. The formal case study protocol, informed by the theoretical framework constructed in Chapter 2, the practical considerations of the data collection strategies chosen and the nature of the case study method, is presented in full as a conclusion to this Chapter.

Chapters 4 and 5 are presentations of the gathered empirical data, following the sequence of the case study protocol, for the two chosen case studies. Results are presented, and the data (having been statistically tested for significance) are briefly discussed, in terms of the research questions and with reference to the relevant theoretical positions that they emerged from. These chapters contain summaries of responses to the survey and interview stages of the empirical work, as well as documented policy statements and strategic positions of any organisations or administrations involved in the individual cases.

Chapter 6 involves the detailed discussion and analysis of the data presented above, comparing cases to one another, examining any differences and similarities, developing the main arguments of the thesis and following the research questions to a logical outcome. This chapter places the results directly in the context of the theory examined in Chapter 1 and 2, and draws out issues for the final statements in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 7 sets out how the research questions have been answered, and if so, what those answers were, and what they mean. These outcomes are examined in terms of theoretical appreciation of rational participatory activity in civic societies, in terms of policy implications for those designing public involvement strategies, and in terms of the perceived value and effectiveness of the methods and tools that might be used in public involvement in the future.

1.2 Contemporary public involvement and unresolved research issues

This work addresses the author's concerns about current attitudes towards public participation or public involvement in local government decision making, the effectiveness of methods and mechanisms currently used to secure involvement or work with the public, and the nature of policies that relate to public involvement in local authority planning and decision making.

The research itself steps forward from the discipline of Collaborative Spatial Decision Making (CSDM), a theoretical area where the technological tools of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) research are incorporated into applications relating to multi-party decision making. Such systems are popularly being put forward as useful tools for local authority planners and service providers, at the same time as being offered to the general public as decision support software over the Internet (Gottsegen 1995, Carver et al 1995, Shiffer 1995b, Hall 1995, 1997). By their very nature, these GIS developments bridge various academic boundaries, and there is an apparent

lack of awareness where the work of this technology based research community addresses the topics of collaborative planning theory and public participation theory.

The success of many practical public involvement projects (in the general sense, and not restricted to those which are IT focussed) is often hampered or confounded by a range of factors. These firstly involve points relating to the democratic implications, logistics, and practicalities of public involvement in collaborative decision making in the first place. Secondly, there are unresolved issues of the appropriateness and value of developing and using 'technologies' in the non-expert public arena then promoting them as democratic decision making tools. Third, there are a range of questions regarding the inclination of the public toward participation in decision making / planning in the first place, and whether or not certain research agendas that have sought to advance particularly IT mediated public participation (such as ESRC's Virtual Society? Program), or indeed other decision making or public involvement tools, are ultimately realistic in the light of the low rates of participation that are often observed.

It is suggested here that the practicalities and effectiveness of public involvement programmes are not only powered by the theoretical and practical frameworks involved in their design and implementation, but are also heavily reliant on credibility and image, as perceived by potential participants. It is conceded that the component parts of collaborative programs are often well established, but it is suggested that there are significant problematic issues arising at the interfaces between the theoretical and practical traditions involved. The primary concern here is that the efficacy of realistic and relevant public involvement projects must be clear to those involved if the practice is to flourish, and that IT dependent public involvement methods which have been accused of irrelevance, inappropriateness and exclusivity can be seen as an additional confounding factor, damaging perceptions of efficacy, and reducing the appeal of civic involvement in general.

The approach taken in this research reflects that desire for quality public involvement programs to succeed. Thus the aim of the research is to step

aside from the parent theoretical discussion about the development of IT related public involvement tools, in order to turn to deeper issues that have been observed but neglected in that discipline, to then identify and explore what have previously been hypothesised as confounding factors in public involvement theory, policy and practice, to observe their interaction if revealed, and finally to make policy and research recommendations based on their analysis.

This is done by visiting both antecedent and current commentaries on democratic theory and public participation theory, and by making empirical observations and analyses in actual examples of public involvement projects. It is intended that the examination of these issues, when viewed from a particular theoretical framework will yield new information regarding the way that theory, policy, practice and perceptions interact in public involvement. This in turn is expected to contribute to our understanding of participatory dynamics, the phenomenon of non-participation and the problems associated with policy implementation in this arena.

Table 1A. sets out some of the practical and attitudinal barriers to public involvement encountered by practitioners, and various concerns expressed in the academic public involvement literature. They occur by type and are grouped here into logistical issues associated with organising involvement programs, technological issues associated with the use of IT in decision making in the public domain, democratic issues associated with power sharing, decision making, and meaningful participation, and other social aspects which complicate or otherwise sully public involvement projects. In later chapters, these initial factors are joined by additional phenomena as they arise in the literature.

Type	Factor	Author
LOGISTICAL	Ineffective local government	Fagence (1977)
	Citizen difficulty in organising themselves	Arnstein (1969)
	On-line costs (in non-specific participation)	Trench and O'Donnell
	Efficiency of participation	(1997)
		Simmons (1994)
TECHNOLOGICAL (in IT mediated public involvement)	Lack of computer literacy	Gill (1998), Trench and O'Donnell (1997)
	Lack of spatial appreciation	Gill (1998),
	Public image of IT	Smith (1996)
	Data issues	Gill (1998)
DEMOCRATIC	Establishment's resistance to redistribution of power	Arnstein (1969)
	Paternalism toward citizenry	Arnstein (1969)
	Citizen access to processes	Moote et al (1997)
	Explicit preference for non participation	Fagence (1977)
	Degree and representative ness of citizen involvement	Simmons (1994)
	Equity of participation	
	Elitist local planning infrastructures	Simmons (1994)
		Fagence (1977)
OTHER SOCIAL	Efficacy of project	Moote et al (1997)
	Distrust of collaborating authorities	Arnstein (1969)
	Perceived futility of project	Arnstein (1969)
	Lack of sustained involvement in longer term programs	Moote et al (1997)

Table 1A: Confounding Factors as Identified in the Literature

It would appear from the table and its typology that there are both material costs and conceptual issues involved in these experiences, as well as attitudinal and evaluative aspects based perhaps on previous experience or a belief on the part of authorities and participants. There seems to be a rationalisation process occurring at the level of the authority administering the public involvement project as well as at the level of the individual participant. This suggestion now shapes the majority of the thesis – how important are forms of rationality in public involvement, what factors are involved in such

rational behaviour, which factors are important to which groups in society, and finally, what can we learn about a civic society that is capable of acting 'rationally' when it comes to public involvement?

1.3   Defining Rationality

According to den Hartogh (2000) the current dominant view of rationality in economics and in many social sciences is that of *instrumental* rationality. This is an instrumental, individualistic and subjectivist phenomenon that highlights consequentialist and maximising actions of individuals. That is, it is a cognitive and calculative tool used by individuals or groups, dealing with subjective reasoning, drawing on perceptions of cause and effect to look forward and arrive at a decision about actions or conduct that bring about the most beneficial end for the individual or group concerned. It will be discussed that the existence of instrumental rationality in particular is (as informed by literature that is presented below) hypothesised in the arena of public involvement, particularly on the part of administrations who propose or implement public involvement programs, but also among participating (and non-participating) individuals.

Instrumental rationality differs from *value* rationality, where the former involves some measurement of tangible phenomena to arrive at a material value applied to an outcome, while the latter involves the preservation of intangible values and preferred states. In political activity (as opposed to economic practicality) value rationality would seem just as likely a phenomenon to observe. It is hypothesised below that both instrumental rationality *and* value rationality are both at work and observable in the conduct of individuals and authorities in public involvement scenarios, and conflict between the two types of rationality (and between the competing agendas of groups or individuals) is likely to confuse results and the evaluations of programs. Issues of value rationality that might affect the level of participation in public involvement might perhaps be based on the preference of individuals to defer to elected representatives and decline the

offer to participate in a community involvement program, or conversely, to take full advantage of the opportunity to take part in a direct democratic exercise when there are no particular tangible benefits.

Additionally there is the theory of *communicative* rationality (Habermas 1984), which is chiefly concerned with the justification of actions based on consensus and perceptions of 'truth'. According to Habermas, what is rational means what is communicatively, i. e. inter-subjectively justified or justifiable as rational. In other words, what is rational is what succeeds to give an intersubjectively, well grounded argument, and what is irrational is what fails to do so: *"The rationality of those who participate in ... communicative practice is determined by whether, if necessary, they could, under suitable circumstances, provide reasons for their expressions."* (Habermas 1984, p17)

This communicative rationality is reliant however on all inter-subject parties sharing communicative ground rules, modes of discursive behaviour and specific working definitions, as well as the ability to communicate ones own point via argument, and then understand the specific or detailed communications of others. It is considered that communicative rationality is a valid concept in homogeneous groups involved in debate, but is potentially outside the cognitive inclination (that is the willingness to acquire such communicative skills, then articulate or absorb detailed relevant information) of potential public participants who may be working from a maximising instrumental rationalist, or a deep rooted value rationalist position.

Cumulatively, the notions of instrumental, value and communicative rationality, when seen in the context of public involvement, have led to this thesis offering the term 'civic rationality' to group together the possible material, moral and cognitive issues involved in developing or participating in direct democracy or public participation schemes.

1.4 Key Research Questions

Considering the research aim of identifying the kind of confounding issues that are presented in Table 1A, and mapping to some degree the perceptual

pitfalls that need to be negotiated when designing, implementing, evaluating and promoting public involvement in both policy and practice, the central research questions in this thesis are stated as follows:

1. How important are instrumental and value rationality in the way that groups and individuals take part in public participation schemes, and what phenomena are associated with apparently rational choices that might be made by authorities and the public?

2. Are the mechanisms and methods used in public involvement projects seen by implementers, participants and potential participants to be appropriate and effective, and what implications are there for those that are not?

3. Are the competing agendas and assumptions of different groups in collaborative exercises linked to the perception of their effectiveness among them, and might these perceptions create additional barriers to the success of projects?

1.5   Research Questions in Context

1.5i   Public Participation and Public Involvement.

What are the roots of public participation theory? How and why did the notion of public involvement evolve, and are the concerns that originally brought about its development still driving the philosophy, or shaping the research?

It must be considered that there are a number of origins for calls for the public to become involved with decision making, and the US, UK and European models differ. The origin of the US position is characterised by concerns about socio-economic and (originally) racial equality in the development of the booming economy of the country in the mid-late Twentieth Century (Arnstein 1969). The European model is based upon the efficiency of resource management in economies with growing populations (Weiderman and Femers 1993) recovering after the vast physical disruption of the second world war, while the UK model is based on an ideal of de-

centralised, stakeholder decision making, in a pluralist and economy-building society. For the main part of the review, a general stakeholder principle is taken to be sufficient to describe the literature, due to the blurring of these origins through time and model transfer. However, strong elements of value rationality are expected to be observed in references to equity and fairness in decision making (similar to the US view), as well as aspects of shared instrumentalist or resource efficiency (the wider European view).

Janowski et al (1997) noted the observed and general current trends for flatter decision making structures in society, which involve stakeholder groups solving decision making problems together. The idea of stakeholder involvement and collaboration in public decision making and planning, is becoming more and more popular and acceptable.

To stretch a point, all private individuals can be seen as stakeholders in a whole range of issues, and public involvement is being seen as an explicit new step to be incorporated in decision making processes (Proctor 1995). This is considered by some to be the best strategy to ensure fair (Craig 1996), realistic (Weiner et al 1996), and good quality planning (Shiffer 1992). If followed through, this means that in future decision making / planning procedures, many more parties will be encouraged or expected to join in with decision making processes on issues that concern them. Local planning departments, consultants, developers, and environmental groups would then be joined by the *'citizenry'* (Pederson 1995), during meetings and debates.

 'The planners current nostrum is citizen participation. But within a very short time it will be shown that in truth it is a mere palliative for the ills of the planning profession.' - Broady (1969) in Fagence (1977) p1. However, much of the research and many of the case studies have either been carried out by planners themselves, or by bodies of computational geographers (such as those involved with the National Centre for Geographical Information and Analysis [NCGIA] or Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis [CASA]). The results, as Fagence forecast, have sometimes been accused of being overly

technical and naive studies (Reitsma 1996, Kidney 1996), often ignorant of the deeper dimensions of the topic.

How then, does public involvement manifest itself, and where does Information Technology enter the formula? In the current UK tradition, the public's 'role' in planning and local authority decision making (aside from the formalities of electing representatives to the decision making body) involves no more than a right to object to proposals: if there is a surge of objections a public inquiry can be set up, and if this does not satisfy objectors there are mechanisms available for litigation. In this tradition, members of the public sit squarely on Arnstein's rungs of tokenism at best (Arnstein 1969, p217) - better than non-participation, but somewhat mocking the public's rights to object or appeal. The Skeffington Report (1969) produced a number of recommendations, intended to promote public involvement strategies in the formulation of development plans. This was again a response to a *widely expressed public demand'* to contribute (HMSO 1969, p1). Once again, there is no real traceable record of this demand, however the ideal seems sound if it is considered in the context of quality decision making and stakeholder theory.

Arnstein (1969) concludes however, that such programs are commonly constrained by political and legal frameworks anyway, and the power of citizen involvement is rarely a match for the power of veto by the local or state power holders. Others have noted the power of established political influence as a possible confounding factor in public involvement (e.g. Carver 1997, Weiderman and Femers 1993, Fagence 1977), and the research will look for evidence of this threat or actuality in both case studies and theory. However, the mere recognition of real or perceived need for public involvement does not necessarily bring about meaningful public contact or resolution of the decision making problem.

1.5ii Understanding Non-Participation

The public's understanding of the issues and implications involved in participation will also be considered here. The idea that the public has a deficit of knowledge and understanding of the kind of important issues that might require or involve collaboration has led to the increased reliance on 'Experts' (Petts 1997). The knowledge deficit model has encouraged the techno-scientific attitude toward experts in various fields, but the acceptance of such scientific approaches creates pitfalls which could serve to frustrate collaborative processes and reduce their perceived efficacy. Identified issues include:

- That the public aren't that interested in science, so may become disenchanted;
- That objective science does not fit into many personal agendas;
- That specific scientific content often over-complicates discussion.

(Petts 1997)

It is suggested at this point that political knowledge might be considered in a similar way to scientific knowledge, and that overcoming political knowledge deficit would involve no small effort on the part of the public. However, it is also suggested that politics are of greater prominence in the mind of an electorate than science, making it a more familiar (yet still demanding) hurdle to negotiate. Hence communicative rationality and perhaps an additional instrumental consideration in acquiring the knowledge to participate in the collaborative process comes into the topic.

There may be various reasons for non-participation, and there are certainly differing accounts for low levels of participation from various disciplines. Some commentators express the view that non participation is a result of a lack of understanding of the issues involved, particularly in projects with a central IT element. Meanwhile, others suggest that it is the complex spatial nature of the planning issues being dealt with in many public involvement schemes that are difficult for non-experts to manage (Gill 1998, Potter et al 1994). However, these are rather simplified, technocratic and narcissistic views, and

account for no possible motives or reasons for a preference for non-participation other than public ignorance.

Fagence (1977) suggests instead that non-participation can be seen as a valid expression of preference. Just as there are many individuals who assert their right to abstain from voting in elections, there may well emerge a body of vociferous non-participants. This in turn must not be confused with political antipathy and indifference, as might be seen in US voting behaviour.

In his study of communities and communitarianism, Smith (1996) also introduces the idea that participation in democracy via the Internet is not necessarily seen as appropriate in some instances. Additionally, for various reasons (possibly reactions to levels of accessible violence, pornography or other inappropriate) the Internet itself is not well received in some Islamic states, with some even considering legal barriers to access to the web for its citizens. However, it is felt that the topic of denied access to this particular type of direct democracy (bearing in mind that active inclusivity in political and community matters is a feature of Islam itself) is outside the immediate scope of this thesis, and is only occasionally introduced into the discussions by way of comparison to the relative ease of access to e-democracy in the UK context.

1.5iii   The Importance of Perceived Efficacy.

At the start of the research there had been little discussion or appreciation of the pure public relations exercises involved in collaborative programs, and apart from the efforts of organisations such as the International Association for Public Participation (IAPP) there would seem to be little still. It is suggested that when this point is stated clearly, there will be an understanding that public participation needs a certain amount of marketing and promotion (Kidney 1996). If responsibility for making certain decisions is to be offered to the public, then there must be some attempt to dissect and analyse project components post-scheme, to ensure that some positive and

truthful reinforcement of the activity is passed to the participants. Without positive feedback and a feeling of effectiveness, participants in collaborative processes that make it into the real world might become uncertain at best or at worst disenchanted with the idea. Later sections will deal with the relevance and influence of meaningful feedback in public involvement, especially in the context of UK Best Value policies in local government.

Briefly, psychological research into the 'locus of control' (e.g. Aitken 1991), shows that an individual's own perceived effectiveness stems strongly from a feeling of control over the outcomes of their behaviour. Referring to this perception of self efficacy in her study of attitudes to pro-environmental behaviour and environmental activism, Eden (1993, p1748) argued that *'Where efficacy is not perceived, responsibility is weakened, because without impact, individual acts are futile.'* This has been a pivotal statement in the design of this research, as it encompasses rational decision making on the part of individuals, based on atomistic perceptions of self efficacy, and by extension also the efficacy of the general activities. In that wider context, Moote et al (1997) describe the efficacy of process in participatory democracies, rather than Eden's focus on individual action. Addressing effectiveness and efficacy is thus a priority in the case studies, and relates here to the appropriate achievement of results, where public needs and concerns have been both appreciated and satisfied by the implementing authority.

This point of promoting effectiveness in public involvement appears to have been overlooked somewhat in the literature, but will remain an important theme here. The literature review will pursue this issue and the effect of the promotion of successful program elements will be discussed. A lack of perceived efficacy could easily end up as an unconquerable obstacle in the steeplechase that is public involvement / participation.

Some of the research into public involvement seems to make other assumptions that could and probably should be challenged upon the failure of a collaborative project. Sherry Arnstein's ladder of public participation (1969)

has been used by many researchers (Weiderman and Femers 1993, Carver et al 1998) to illustrate levels of public influence in decision making. Arnstein's ladder provides an easily accessible and logical metaphor, showing us the steps to power sharing, from the lowest level of non-participation to the dizzy heights of Citizen Control. At first glance, it seems that the progress of the citizenry up this ladder is a goal worth pursuing, as if the ladder metaphor was a plan of action or a desired pathway for democracy. But this is most certainly not what the ladder was meant to show.

Arnstein's ladder is a snapshot of a very particular situation, that is, the state of public involvement in the US Model Cities program. It isn't a theoretical model, rather an evaluative account of actual situations in specific settings in 1960's American planning research. It also has very specific and practical roots, having being born out of the recognition of cultural and socio-economic barriers to democracy (one of the original roots of the US participatory model).

But can one model approach to public involvement such as Arnstein's be transferred to a multitude of other settings? Although this research does not examine decision making / planning situations in the 'third world', it is important to recognise international examples of inappropriate model transfer from 'Western' philosophies and methodologies, as the point could easily be applicable at smaller scales. Qadeer (1996) notes that local knowledge is routinely placed on a backburner while internationally accepted paradigms of planning or public participation are given priority by implementers who have been parachuted in to use established participatory models in an exotic context. According to Qadeer many Western methodologies are ahistorical and detached from local institutional contexts and are often found wanting when applied away from the culture in which they were originally devised. However, external model transfer issues are not confined to third world cases - distinctness based on internal cultural primacy (Qadeer) is persistently claimed by Canadians, Japanese, French, British and US citizens and administrations. In the light of this, how can public participation models be exported from one situation to another?

While accepting that many models are successful and have a valid role in certain settings, this research argues that these are not universally appropriate methods for securing and implementing public participation. It is suggested instead that the principles of public participation (which Qadeer reminds us are often culturally specific) are not always being served using universal methods and unquestioned assumptions, and that immediate local contexts and potentially confounding factors should be mapped and fully understood before introducing particularly IT based participatory methods into the equation. The literature and case studies will be examined for the theoretical bases to the methods and models used in public involvement programs, to ascertain whether transfer has indeed weakened or even negated the choice of approach by the facilitators of schemes.

However, if the aim of this work is to consider the perceived effectiveness of aspects of public involvement programs, any IT involved should also be scrutinised. There is almost certainly an over-reliance on the IT, to the point that it has been compared to a colonisation process by GIS into exotic disciplines (Obermeyer 1996). This brings forward the idea that IT elements could often be merely incidental to the issues being addressed in the participatory program, and thus inappropriate in terms of time, effort and financial expenditure (and thus, instrumentally irrational).

Craig (1996) points out that the provision of information with spatial relevance, which includes environmental hazards, planning and sustainability issues, is frustratingly sparse. This he sees as a result of the spatial data community (that is, the academic and commercial GIS community) being slow to develop useful systems for non-experts; the expense and logistics of acquiring really useful information; and in part, the lack of appreciation of these sophisticated data sets by the general public (Craig 1996).

Furthermore, in her case study of local waste management debates, Petts (1997) reminds us that there is no single expert or science for us to go to during collaborative programs. Members of the public are willing to attempt to make informed decisions when given the opportunity and enough information

(however, a discourse on reliability of data sources will be presented later). Petts also notes that we should strive to use rational communication and non-adversarial methods of discourse in collaborative projects, which will be discussed in the literature review with Fagence's (1977) comments on non-consensus resolution.

Thus the relationship between approaches and tools in public involvement schemes in the UK and the public's perception of their pertinence and effectiveness is a key aspect in the remainder of the thesis.

1.6   Theoretical approach and analytical tools

The research is based on a framework that is concerned with two central topics: rational activity amongst those who set up or participate in direct democratic exercises, and the cultural or behaviouralist view of political attitudes in society. It is assumed in this work that rational choices are in fact in operation during political activity at local levels, and also that there are patterns of general political activity that are observable in society. These assumptions are based on concurrence with literature concerning Public Choice theory (of James Buchannan, Gordon Tullock and others) and of Civic Culture Theory (Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba, 1963). These works will be discussed fully below.

This research methodology is in the tradition of critical realism: the individual methods used to collect empirical data are essentially positivist in that they deal with measurable, observed behaviour in well documented, public environments that are occurring more and more frequently, but it importantly recognises that social interpretations are then overlaid onto the 'real' world to arrive at a meaningful reading of results (Bhaskar 1998, Sayer 1984). The work also aims to make generalisable and predictive statements regarding public involvement, based on empirical observations of such events. It does however draw on issues that are not necessarily 'knowable' or are more abstract and perhaps less reliably measured. Again, these include the need to address values, perceptions and recollections as well as the natural science

approach of recording 'facts'. However, these same subjective (and ultimately possibly unreliable) phenomena are what individuals and decision making authorities also frequently use in making 'rational' choices.

Standing back from the strongest or most successful aspects of public involvement projects for a moment, the research focuses on those areas that are identified in Table 1A as potentially weakening the subject of public involvement. These issues will be traced through the literature in an attempt to understand both their nature and context. Armed with this increased appreciation for confounding factors, empirical data will then be examined carefully for the presence of these factors also. The literature review and the empirical work will therefore pin down the stated objectives of public involvement programs, and the explicit roles of those involved. However, it is not the intention here to present an exhaustive critique of the role of either interest groups or administrations in collaborative decision making, but these issues will be addressed in the literature review.

This draws the Introductory Chapter to a close, and we move on to an examination of the background theories and literatures that feature in the main thesis.

Chapter Two

Issue Backgrounds and Theoretical Perspectives

2.1   Introduction.

This chapter sets out the key theoretical areas that are spanned in this thesis, and presents literature to support the introductory arguments outlined in the previous chapter, and describes the development of a theoretical framework that guides the later empirical work.

Firstly, the key democratic theories that are cited as being at the heart of many public involvement viewpoints and models are presented. This takes the review of the literature from commentaries on the classical and Athenian democratic state, to notions of representative democracy, taking in both the elitist view on governance and participation and Marxist positions on citizen participation in political life. Later models and theoretical constructs relating to public involvement in democratic decision making that have emerged from these positions are then addressed, with a view to assessing their usefulness as platforms to build the research upon.

One such construct, Almond and Verba's Civic Culture model (1963) is then discussed as a suitable component part for the theoretical framework of the research. Its relevance to the research questions is discussed, as are the features of a civic state and civic individuals that make it suitable for taking them forward. An appreciation of its limitations and critics is also presented.

The use of civic culture theory introduces the acceptance of rational activity (in its various forms) as being observable in political behaviour. These points of individual rational decision making are then compared to those rational decision making steps that might be taken by administrations, and are in turn linked to the Public Choice school of political economics. At this stage of the literature review, the relevance of instrumental rationality and value rationality are compared in the political actions of administrations, as well as those of the public.

As the literature review starts to focus on public involvement policy, it begins to draw upon literature regarding the role of the general public in local government decision making. The use of public involvement as a planning 'tool' especially is traced through models of public involvement from the 1960's, and comes up to date with an assessment of the role of public involvement in the New Labour movement's Modernising Government agenda. There then follows a discussion of the mechanisms, particularly IT based methods of working with the public on collaborative decision making, whether on strategic, service based issues, or on land use planning matters. The theoretical and policy issues around the development of such tools over time, and their unproven relevance in certain situations is discussed, with a view to challenging the concentration of resources on their further development, in the face of other unresolved issues in public involvement research.

The review will thus aggregate a range of theoretical topics, policy areas and practical technical considerations, providing a framework with which the research questions can be answered, and the contribution to our understanding of local governance and participatory attitudes can be demonstrated.

2.2   Public Involvement and 'Democracy'.

There is a truly vast body of literature on political theory that to some degree touches upon the role of the individual in decision making and governance. It is unrealistic and unnecessary to discuss them all fully here, and much would stand outside the scope of this thesis. Therefore, some of the points raised here are not for prolonged discussion, but are mentioned principally to provide a context for the key issues of the thesis. It is essential here to concentrate on extracting points from the literature that are relevant to the primary aims and research questions within this thesis. The main theoretical stances considered at this point are classical democratic theories, elitist positions, Marxist perspectives, an overview of modern left and right public involvement theories and finally, (and in more depth) Civic Culture theory.

The aim of reviewing these is to provide a balanced image of what the literature means by 'The Public', 'Democracy', 'Involvement', 'Governance' and 'Decision Making'. The rest of the thesis will be informed by these images and any allegiances in this thesis to theory that are set down in this chapter.

2.2i   Representative Democracy and Direct Democracy

Fagence (1977) notes that the origins for the apparently increasing demand for more public involvement in political decision making are not necessarily clear, while Campbell and Marshall (2000b, p321) state that '*Most of the reasoning underlying current debate about public involvement seems to be founded on the belief that it is simply a good thing.*' However those in favour of democratic renewal or reform may suggest that the origin relates to a perceived failure of representative political systems by electorates. It might be said that increasing the amount of public activity in government creates a hybrid type of democracy, existing somewhere between direct democracy (with responsibility for decision making being shared formally between the whole population) and representative democracy (with responsibility for decision making being formally ascribed to elected advocates or mediators on behalf of an electorate). Dryzek (1984) suggests that a 'discursive' democracy is in place in this situation, an idea which is suggested here to be more realistic than the concept of participatory democracy (see Moote et al 1997), given the reported tokenism and low impact of public involvement in certain literatures discussed below.

Where elected individuals are given a mandate to represent pluralist groups of citizens (for example in constituencies), and then lobby to attempt to influence decision making, Willis (1995) sees the role of 'representative' eventually becoming that of a masseur of short term interests, moulding rather than responding to a more general interest or general will. This is despite the fact that in a representative democracy, our advocates are given the authority to forward our specific interests, and are accountable for

decisions that fail to achieve this. The character of individual representatives, with their own personal agendas and interests to pursue frequently influence their public activities. However, such personal agendas, characteristics and ideologies are usually overt in a potential representative's or candidates manifesto and can be observed by potential voters. As Healey (1997) and Smith and Blanc (1997) pointed out before the introduction of the Labour government's modernisation initiatives, this reflected the non-corporate nature of (particularly UK) government, reminding us that politicians are (or were) for the most part amateurs, supported by professional administrations and bureaucracies who drive the machine of government under the direction of a ruling body. This is true of central government, but is especially the case at the local government level. This machinery of administration is often glossed over in the public involvement literature, but it is suggested here that in a system of local and devolved government as seen in the UK, is seems entirely relevant that it should not just be elected members that should be considered in public involvement research, but also the bureaucracies that are charged with implementing policies.

Representatives take the concerns of the electorate into the public, political sphere. Habermas (1974, p.49) defined the Public Sphere as: *"...a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed"*. While Keane (1984, p.2) added that the public sphere *"..is brought into being whenever two or more individuals, who previously acted singularly, assemble to interrogate both their own interactions and the wider relations of social and political power within which they are always and always embedded."*

Schneider (1996) notes that the public sphere can operate either to legislate for and construct society, and debate upon public consensus opinion, or it can protect the citizenry from adverse social conditions and regulate conflict fairly. Rousseau recognised in the Social Contract that delegation and representation of citizens is inevitable at some point in society, but that the central pillar of legitimate government should be to follow the general 'will' of the people, with a need to distinguish the general will from the particular will (from Cole

1973, in Smith and Blanc 1997) In practice however, warnings about the complications of representation of the public in the public sphere also occur.

In the face of recent structural and political changes in local and central government in the UK, it is suggested here that the new more corporate political agenda (that is, unidirectional, mission driven, resource efficient, streamlined, accountable and audited) is evolving in an environment that will actually *require* more public involvement, accountability and public scrutiny as part of its strategic framework, rather than promoting citizen participation as a democratic enhancement. This of course alters our idea of the origin of public involvement, making it less likely in the UK context at least to occur in response to public demand, and more likely to be a part of the overall wider and rationalised plan.

If it is accepted here that taking on board the public view in political decision making is likely to become more frequent, then the thesis now needs to address also the classic Athenian case of direct democracy, and compare it with the conflicting idea of elitist governance, and also consider the Marxist notion of a certain civic duty to be politically aware or active.

2.2ii   Classical Democratic Commentaries.

'The People' in this thesis are taken to be the citizenry of the state. The political nature of citizens themselves is addressed later, and so this rather mechanical definition will serve for the remainder of this section.

Representative democracy is generally recognised in modern eras as a situation where the people consent to be governed by an executive body of elected representatives, who then act in the public's interest (Fagence 1977). The term and notion of 'democracy' itself is emotive, and has been a political ideal which many have aspired toward and is certainly a buzzword in popular politics. Individual freedom and dignity - two key ideals of democracy, are certainly elevating and inspiring sentiments, and have stimulated political thinking for many years (Almond and Verba 1963). Smith and Blanc (1997) remind us that democracy itself is not just a political process, but more of a

type of society, with particular social relationships. Fagence (1977 p31) adds that "*The ability of each citizen to appreciate and then adequately and appropriately articulate his or her own needs, beliefs, values and interests is the crucial factor in concepts of popular participation in community decision making.* "

The original Athenian experimental model of democracy ran from the sixth to fourth century BC, and the central pillars of this democracy were, according to Herodotus: equity of citizens before the law, popular deliberation and the development of popular consensus, public accountability of officials, and equality of speech (Herodotus[1] in Fagence 1977, p23). It is interesting to note the similarity of Herodotus' pillars, with some of the key principles in the UK Human Rights Act (2000), which takes a similar moralistic line, based on the accountability of authorities and the equal right of all citizens to a fair hearing. In the Athenian experiment, the citizens exercised this equity and responsibility via a system of public bodies. Firstly, an Assembly of citizens provided an opportunity for all policy matters to be aired and discussed. This was a demographically representative body of between three to six thousand citizens, but as Fagence (1977) points out, debate was dominated by groups of articulate middle class members and aspiring politicians. The second body of the Athenian democratic structure was the Council. Acting rather like a steering committee, the Council determined the Assembly's agenda, and consisted of around 500 members, chosen by lot every twelve months. The workload of the Council was set by an internal 50 member body, who in essence were the driving force within the system, and held the central power in the arrangement. The third aspect of Athenian democracy were the Juries. Here, around six thousand citizens were drawn annually to operate as law courts, acting in turn as popular guardians of the constitution, civil and criminal codes.

Fagence notes that the Athenian model showed a true level of de-facto equality, with no identifiable government or opposition, where citizens not

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[1] 'History, Book III' p81

only had rights, but political obligations and responsibilities. Indeed, on the Causes of Athenian Greatness, Pericles stated:

"...And this our form, as committed not to the few but to the whole body of the people, is called democracy...The offices of the State we go through without obstructions from one another and live together in mutual endearments of private life without suspicions; not angry with a neighbour for following the bent of his own humour, nor putting on that countenance of discontent, which pains though it cannot punish - so that in private life we converse without diffidence or damage, while we dare not on any account offend against the public, through the reverence we bear to the magistrates and the laws..."

This of course sounds like a worthy model for emulation (as many elements have been in practice) but it cannot be taken as the ideal without consideration of a number of issues. Firstly, the political environment in 4th Century BC Athens did not feature organised political parties, and was also isolated politically from other states, making it even less replicable in following models of democracy (Fagence 1977 p24). Aristotle, Cicero and Polybius all later proposed mixed government models to balance the non committal, the 'excesses' and the eventual bloody disorder of Athenian democracy (Almond, 1980). These mixed systems were already operating relatively successfully in the Carthaginian and Spartan administrations, and the earliest Roman-ite constitutions. Secondly, with a small population, the Athenian bodies were easy to organise and operate. Critically though, membership of the 'democratic' bodies was very exclusive – citizens were defined as free born (i.e. not slaves) Athenian male heads of households. Thirdly, the experiment lasted less than 200 years before it comprehensively collapsed.

2.2iii   Marxism and Public Involvement.

Political philosophers and commentators of the Enlightenment period began suggesting models of the state ranging from the omnipotent Leviathan -

sovereign decision maker, cementing and reinforcing social order (Hobbes) to dispersions of power through executives and legislatures and judiciaries (Montesquieu, 1748) and full equity and representation of society in government (Helvetius). These subsequent commentaries and other philosophies provided the backbone of the developing political sciences. The works of Rousseau, Madison, Calhoun and de Tocqueville, helped anchor political concepts into social contexts. The fruits and seeds of this conceptual political tree sprouted in the ground both to its political left and right - those to the left later bringing forth German Socialism, and inspiring Marx and Engels.

The Communist Manifesto urged individuals to move against 'oppressive' social orders, to actively oppose and challenge social elites, and to unite the working classes in that 'struggle' (Marx and Engels 1848). Elements of the Marxist position on public involvement seem to be carved out of ideas found in Rousseau's Social Contract, in that it also asserts that political activity is a duty for every citizen, and that involvement and participation is necessary to redress imbalances in various power struggles. In a practical sense, this would have to rely on a willing, capable citizenry, acting in a political system that would and could facilitate meaningful public involvement. After the early and volatile years of Communist thought, the role of advocacy by 'delegation' was considered by Marx. Previously, this had been the area where hard Marxist pre-requisites had fallen down, i.e. the need for the citizen's thorough understanding of political theory, with an organisation capable of articulating citizen aspirations and a 'will' to work to achieve goals were all in practice very difficult to achieve. But this notion was complicated by Marx's concern that an elite class of delegates would eventually emerge and become unrepresentative of the working classes they were designed to serve. To account for this possible scenario, the Marxist approach to public involvement also includes an ideological commitment to a comprehensive educative and instrumental revolution (Fagence 1977), not least of all to ensure that the citizenry are always able to understand their own social needs, and actively

seek to develop political systems that meet them (Miliband 1994, cited in Faulks 1999). When viewed in less radical terms, and as Rousseau or Hobbes suggest, this implies that to make public involvement meaningful there needs to be some commitment to training all potential participants in issues of civic responsibility, and the development of practicable techniques and mechanisms of participation. Indeed, the technical ability to 'be political', could be said to be a commodity in itself and should therefore be equally available to all citizens, and not just claimed by a self-selected political technocracy (Christians 1995). There are currently a range of ongoing initiatives within Europe and the US to educate the public in such citizenship skills even to the degree of including such issues in school curricula. The Citizens Advisory Group in the UK is a government sponsored body, designed to "...provide advice on effective education for citizenship in schools - to include the nature and practices of participation in democracy, the duties, responsibilities and rights of individuals as citizen; and the value to individuals and society of community activity" (Citizens Advisory Group, 1998, p1). Although these groups share the educative intentions of the political left, they are as likely to be in line with more millennial, Third Way type stances that currently pepper the UK political scene (Popple and Redmond, 2000).

However, if such training were to fail in its aims to educate, or if the educated public did not mobilise for some reason, administrative responsibility would again be in the hands of a decision making elite.

2.2iv   Elitism and Public Involvement.

As Fagence (1977) points out, Elitists such as Bacharach (1967) have taken as a starting point the re-examination of the ideas of 'governance' and of 'interests'. Elitist literature holds, in general, two main assumptions: that society as a mass is politically naïve, and that this mass is either passive and inert or volatile and antagonistic toward government. As a key theorist of the elitist school, and a fierce critic of socialism, Mosca (1939, cited in Faulkes)

feels that the reality of politics can be summarised thus; "*Those who exercise State power are always a minority, and that below them lies a numerous class of people who never participate in real terms in government, and are subject to the will of the former; we call them the ruled.*"

To manage such a society, elitists support the need for creative rule by dominant elites. A further common point in the majority of the Elitist literature is the existence of coherent, dominant, single elite bodies. Pareto (1968) even saw the softening and humanising of a strong and authoritative elite as a weakness that erodes its position and ability to defend its own interests. Such elite bodies have been conceptually proposed by various schools and as their leviathan heritage allows, not just of the right. Lenin's ideal elite was highly structured and disciplined, and dedicated to liberating the masses, while Ortega's elite body would be designed to further subdue and control an already passive and deferential mass (Fagence 1977 p35). However, both types of elitist structures assume a lack of organisation or ability among the citizenry, but it is only in the difference between the Marxist and Elitist schools' *remedies* for this decision making inability, that they become fundamentally opposed. In many models, the elite is elected, but then even the Elitist school recognises the inevitability of manipulation of the electorate by that elite, via bribery, propaganda, coercion or other means (Fagence 1977 p37). A cycle of deterioration and replacement of elite bodies was envisaged by Pareto as a process that maintains balance in social orders that are based on elitist rule over a subject population, while Mosca goes on to warn of the dangers of the legal powerholding class antagonising the ruled class. In Mosca's view, there needs to be a concession to the inferior ideal of representative democracy, to ameliorate the tensions between these two classes.

Schumpeter saw the role of the public as solely to elect the real political personalities to office, and to then step away from decision making totally, allowing all decisions, aspirations, and long term interests to be defined by the elected executive. "*Electors must understand that, once they have elected an individual, political action is his and not theirs.*" (Schumpeter 1943, p 295).

There exists in Schumpeter's model, a contract between the elected and the electorate - a manifesto that is endorsed by election and, if found to be acceptable by the electorate after a given term, will be re-endorsed at the next election. If at this stage the electorate decide that they are not satisfied however, they may elect a new administration. This introduces the notion of rationality of the electorate, in that they must make a voting choice; whether to stick with the current representatives, or move to elect another. However, elitist commentaries also highlight a certain passivity and non-active character amongst citizens in democracies, and commentators such as Almond and Verba (1970) and Arblaster (1987) have examined the rational activist model in the context of public involvement. In the following sections, Almond and Verba's Civic Culture theory (1963) will be examined and offered as the lens through which much of the research will be viewed.

Other Neo-Classical Models

There are other contributors to the representative / elite / direct participation debate, who rather than pit one against another, aim to bridge the gap with some alternative. Toward the political 'right', lies Communitarianism where participation is a core requirement of a democratic system but with a reduced normative role for the state itself, while to the political 'left' sits the idea of Radical Democracy (Mouffe 1992). As noted by Smith and Blanc (1997), Communitarianism rejects atomistic individualism due to what Etzioni (1988, 1995) sees as the moral inconsistency it brings to political debate, and its lack of appreciation of 'community'. This would apparently demonstrate that value based political thought and value rationalism is at the heart of communitarianism, as the ever pliable intricacies of instrumental rationalism are what commonly affect the floating voter or non-committal citizen, and thus create such inconsistencies in debate. Etzioni also sees the 'moral suasion' of community views to arrive at a community consensus as vital. However this suasion is distanced from coercion, and is described more as a way of suggesting ways to *conduct oneself*" (Etzioni 1995 p38). Communitarianism sees societies and communities as clotting around faiths

and creeds, and around shared activities or resources such as schools, museums and churches, to secure the collective well being of those entities (Campbell and Marshall 2000b) It also argues that communities are reinforced by involvement in local governance (involvement that again has to conform to the community consensus, otherwise moral suasion will be used). So the communitarian approach can be seen as a bottom-up community involvement ideal, which turns its back on traditional geographical interest groupings, creating instead a mosaic of sub-communities, which are based around some moral consensus and shared interest and, importantly, a duty to be active.

In contrast, the radical democracy approach encourages the strict accountability of a society for its stated principles and intentions. It is informed by and born out lessons in socialism, learned from the *"tragic experiences of totalitarianism"* (Mouffe 1992b p1). There is a central and necessary task for society to undertake in radical democracy, and that is to fuse together the concepts of the 'active citizen', the 'common good', and collective action in public involvement. The issue of common good crops up here once more, but Mouffe reformulates it to allow conflict and non-consensus, to retain passion and direct it as some sort of positive pluralist energy toward the political environment generally. In criticism of Communitarianism, Mouffe underlines the complexity of community interaction and association as being a solid barrier to their progress toward consensus on any 'common good', while radical democracy allows collectives of opinion which are rejected by Etzioni and others.

Hague and McCourt's (1974) model of participatory democracy is an additional alternative to democratic elitist systems. As in Communitarianism, there is an emphasis on the participation of communities in decision making, but as much for its own sake as for the end it serves. The result is to nurture the potential of the individual in society, with participatory elements surrounding and permeating every stage or phase of policy and decision making processes. This in turn influences the style and mechanisms of public

involvement, and aims to dissolve the boundaries between lay participants and experts.

These models were rejected as theoretical supports for the remainder of this thesis for a number of reasons. Firstly, radical democracy, for all its liberal and inclusive ideology, has a distinct tendency to criticise and ostracise 'free-riders' in political activity. The critical stance of radical democracy toward non-participation makes it unlikely that the right of the individual to make an informed decision to abstain from a political act would be respected or appreciated. At the parochial and atomistic level there are far more factors influencing the decision making processes of citizens than merely sharing the value rationality of radical democrats. This thesis aims to embrace the non-participant as a valued indicator of political environments and not exclude them by such criticism.

Similarly, participatory democracy impresses the notion of constant and direct democratic contact with the electorate. As was discussed above, such frequent dipping into the public pool of consent for approval demonstrates either the administrative body's insecurity in its mandate or an inability to make decisions and represent the public, or if consultation is in response to constant demand from the electorate, shows a distrust of the administration's ability to do those tasks. As Lipset suggests, such constant participation suggests a weak democracy, and not the converse.

2.3   Civic Culture Theory.

After examining the theoretical positions outlined above, and considering the evolving governmental and policy environment at the time of the start of the research, Almond and Verba's Civic Culture theory (1963) was considered to be the ideal perspective from which public involvement could be viewed. This theory allowed for rational decisions to be made by individuals as to whether or not they participate in political activity, and places no hard obligations on citizens to do so while recognising that individuals often feel duty bound to

participate. It also allows for the notion of cycles of participation, showing responses to democratic 'crises' and their resolution after participation. These were not satisfactorily accounted for in the models outlined above.

While studying the social structures that sustain democracy, Almond and Verba (1963) expanded upon the Athenian notion of civic virtue into a theory of civic culture, and produced what they later called a *'bold and incautious book'* (Verba 1980 p394). 'The Civic Culture' became one of the most widely quoted socio-political studies of the 1960's, having an extremely wide impact on the social sciences (Wiatr 1980). The work certainly has its critics, and these will be discussed below. However, the basic assumptions are still widely acceptable, and as Pateman (1980) considers, form a basis for various philosophical arguments. In this thesis, it is these assumptions that will form the lens through which public involvement in local government collaborative decision making will be viewed.

2.3i   The Civic State.

Arising from a consideration of both the appearance of fascism and communism in the 20th Century, and a recognisable spread of especially western culture globally, civic culture theory proposed that culture and society were both essentially political in character. Almond and Verba saw the idea of civic culture as close (in its intentions) to the classical Athenian democratic model and they defined a civic or participant political culture as *"...one in which the members of society tend to be explicitly oriented to the system as a whole and to both the political and administrative structures and processes...(and) tend to be oriented toward an activist role of the self in polity"* (Almond and Verba 1963 p18). This idea of 'orientation' was addressed again by Gabriel Almond in 1980, and was defined as being the existence of greater or lesser support for the system, based on a mix of *cognitive* aspects (beliefs, information or analyses), *affective* aspects (feelings of attachment,

aversion or indifference) or *evaluative* aspects such as moral judgements (Almond 1980, p28).

One aspect of the civic culture is discernible: it is a culture of participation. As a mixed political structure, the civic culture shares much with the rational-activist model, where there is stress upon the rational participation of the individual at the input end of politics. Citizens are expected to be politically aware and active, approaching decisions with reason, guided by the interests and principles that they have. The civic culture model is this rational activist model *'plus something else'* (Almond and Verba 1963 p29). This 'other' element is suggested to be the fact that a model civic culture has a political culture and a political structure that match - i.e., that the civic nature of the individual *can* be accommodated by the political system, and the system is able to meet the political input needs of the individual. It is important to note that Almond (1980) reiterates that this is a *congruence* of political structure and political culture, and that there is no causal link implied. This, importantly, differs from say Communitarianism, and recognises and allows for both political allegiance and parochialism in the rationalisation of individual behaviour.

2.3ii   The Civic Individual

Almond and Verba argued that a system amenable to participation allows the expansion and fusion of traditional and parochial interests with wider civic orientations. Indeed, revisiting the Civic Culture in 1980, Gabriel Almond underlines the point that democratic stability and viability is only possible when there is a degree of passivity, deference and trust in 'authority' or elites, to balance the rational activist side to the model. This point was originally discussed in Almond and Verba (1963), where it was stated that the heavier rationalist activist models of active citizenship can often fail in the presence of a population which is not well informed, deeply involved or particularly active.

Again, the rational activist point is accompanied by 'other' elements, to form a civic culture, and as such, the balance of passivity and activity is a feature of it, and the presence of non involvement does not weaken democracy. However, Lijphart (1980) states that non-participation can itself be a rational act: if costs, logistics and preference are oriented toward declining the opportunity for an individual to become politically active, the rational act could easily be to do nothing. This point will be expanded upon below.

In the empirical work that informed Almond and Verba's position (an exhaustive international attitudinal survey), there was found to be an identifiable gap between respondents' actual political behaviour and their perceptions of their own capacities and obligations to act. In the mid 1960's, the British component of this survey showed that a large proportion of respondents felt that they had some notable influence over both local and national government decision making. However, the data showed that only a small proportion of them had ever actually attempted to use such influence, and would probably be disappointed with the result if they did. There is another identifiable gap between perceptions of obligation and actual activity. Again, the empirical work showed a strong tendency for respondents to advocate activity, but not follow through (Almond and Verba 1963, p345). These gaps were consistent with the idea that in a civic culture there is a maintained balance of non-elite activity and non-elite passivity, working with governmental elite power, and governmental responsiveness. It can be said that the civic citizen has a reserve of influence, and has an activity potential. Fagence (1977 p29) notes that there is no one location on a public involvement continuum, where involvement is required, expected or meaningful, and there may be some mileage in Lipset (1960)'s idea that in fact, increased levels of public involvement or demands for it, are indicative of decreased democracy.

However, it is critical that the gap between stated ideals and eventual public action are seen to be bridged occasionally, to act as a reminder and reinforcer of the capacity of the non-elite public to act, and the elite government to respond. If significant issues arise and stimulate the public into real activity

sporadically, and an adequate response is made by the relevant organ of government, a civic balance can be maintained, and importantly, seen to be maintained. Such cycles of public involvement, elite response and citizen withdrawal, tend to reinforce the balance of the elements within civic culture. This occasional and genuine reinforcement prevents the fading of perceived individual competence:

"Within each cycle, a citizen's perception of his own effectiveness is reinforced: at the same time the system adjusts to new demands and thereby manifests its effectiveness. And the system may become generally more stable through the loyalty engendered by participation and effective performance." (Almond and Verba 1963, p 350).

In attempting to define the civic citizen, Almond and Verba also looked at the extent to which an individual feels the responsibility to become active in their community. Their research rationale led them to look closely at the local level, because it is here that political issues problems tend to be more familiar, the administrative body less distant, and the opportunity for individual participation greater than on the level of national government**.** It had previously been argued that a truly effective democracy is dependent upon the facility for individuals to participate locally, as this is the only place that a 'mastery' of political affairs can be developed *"...whether in connection with local government, trade unions, co-operatives and other forms of activity."* (Bryce 1921, p132).

In a civic culture there seems to be a willingness on the part of citizens to take the opportunity offered by governments to become active. On the face of it, a Civic Culture might not be an entirely robust structure with regard to public involvement. Democratic theorists have pointed out that democracies are maintained by: *"..active citizen participation in civic affairs, by a high level of information about public affairs, and by a widespread sense of civic responsibility. These doctrines tell us what the democratic citizen ought to be like".* (Almond and Verba 1963 p9).

2.3iii   Critiques of the Civic Culture Model

With Almond and Verba's model being a key aspect of the theoretical framework in this thesis, it is necessary to address its possible shortcomings, and recognise its critics. In 1980, Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba revisited the Civic Culture and edited a book of critical appraisals of the original piece. Those critiques which have relevance to the use of civic culture as a combined theoretical model of political behaviour, political culture and rational activity in this thesis are presented below.

Many of the critical comments about the book are concerned with Almond and Verba's methodology in gathering the empirical data that their conclusions were based upon. For example, Wiatr (1980) voiced concerns from a Marxist perspective that the indicators of civicness that the research used are over simplified and do not in fact allow the kind of inter-state comparisons to be made that were finally presented. Also, Lijphart (1980) examined the bases for making such inferences from the study itself and warns against the use of subjective, internalised attitudinal responses to surveys as a guide to a national political culture.

A second area of criticism is the nature of the democratic assumptions and the choice of 'classical' democratic theory referred to by Almond and Verba. Both Pateman (1980) and Wiatr felt that the work is firmly based in the twentieth century, western, liberal democratic tradition, and that it does not sufficiently address issues of class structure.

This introduces a third area of criticism, of the lack of discussion of the potential for variables other than the political culture (or the political structure that it is congruent with) to affect 'rational' political activity. Lijphart argues that socialisation is *crucial in the formation of political attitudes'* (p49), and is potentially an additional cause in the under examined area of cause and effect in the Civic Culture. Meanwhile Pateman asserts that variables such as gender, age, educational attainment and especially socio-economic group can also affect the propensity and ability to participate, and that these were neglected in the original study. However, Pateman also sees that there is an

exposure effect in micro politics, and that perceptions of participation are influenced by experience, independent of one's background and socialised inclination. Although this is presented as an argument against Civic Culture theory, Pateman's concession is in agreement with certain other literature (for example see Eden 1993) and with the research questions in the work presented here.

Other points that are raised in criticism include the uncertain impact of individual actions and notions of competence in political activity (Pateman) which again relate to the effectiveness of action discussed by Eden, and as will be seen below, of the Public Choice School. Additionally, Wiatr also sees the majority of the Civic Culture as describing states that accept the status quo, and that its emergence at a *pre-radical* time (Wiatr 1980, p116) preceding a significant change in western politics in the 1960s and 1970s, makes some of its assumptions and findings somewhat out of place since then.

The relevance of these critiques to this thesis is that the Civic Culture is being accused of being assumptive in its origin, with an empirical aspect that was highly prone to subjectivity, and providing conclusions that are not as transferable between states as the authors would hope. However, these criticisms do not reduce the relevance or applicability of the civic culture model to this current work. This is firstly because this thesis is looking at experiences of public involvement and public involvement policy that exist in the same western liberal tradition that the Civic Culture as a publication apparently favours. Secondly the use of attitudinal data in the original work (and legions of other competent works) was not felt to detract from the conclusions or new hypotheses it generated regarding rational activity and participatory orientation which this work follows through. Finally the issue of generalisability of the 1963 conclusions between states was certainly felt to be pertinent, but was less applicable at the intra-state level that is addressed here, and when the work was not essentially comparative.

This research does not explicitly address the myriad possible causes and effects of civicness in public involvement, but is instead exploring linkages between certain variables, aiming to move forward with information on reported perceptions. Neither is this work looking to provide a normative framework for further or deeper research on the political sociology of civic cultures or liberal democratic theory. It employs a similar empirical methodology to that of Almond and Verba, and shares an explicit assumption that there is a behavioural link between what is seen (and promoted in the UK) as a political culture and the participatory behaviour of a sample of the population. It is not assumed here however, that there are no links between participatory behaviour and other variables, such as early socialisation processes, that are not based on political experiences, but due to the exploratory nature of this work, these additional factors are not pursued. This is because participation is frequently reported to be a phenomenon associated with certain groups, and with no hammer to crack the nut of acquiring data on non-participation from non-participants, it was decided in this research to work with the data that was most likely to be collected. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the sample is likely to be biased in favour of regular participants, and regardless of the cause of this propensity to act locally, it is their perceptions (in the main) that form the basis of the analysis in this work. Lijphart concluded that one of the main strengths of the Civic Culture was its exploration and description of patterns of attitudes to micro and macro politics, and this is a tradition that this thesis takes into the area of public involvement, and aligns itself with. Thus, considering the positions outlined above, and the changing governmental and policy environment at the time of the start of the research, Almond and Verba's Civic Culture theory was considered to be a useful first component of a theoretical framework on which this research could be conducted.

2.4　Rationalist Perspectives on Public Involvement

Almond and Verba had recognised (if not fully) the effect of rational activity in political behaviour in the Civic Culture, developing it further in the light of the fact that citizens are not necessarily politically informed or active in many of the countries that they had studied in the book's preparation. They pointed out after consideration that the rationalist aspect of the civic culture is a vital component, but must be accompanied by a political system (in the context of this thesis, a local government or planning system) that accommodates participation. Before moving on to those systems as they appear in the UK, it is necessary at this point to introduce a discussion of the topic of rational choice in political activity.

2.4i　Public Choice Theory

Rationalist perspectives on public involvement in local government as considered here come from the Public Choice school of political economics, particularly the works of Gordon Tullock and James Buchannan. In various works over a number of years, Tullock, Buchannan and others explored the parallels that had been observed between political theory and economic theory into new positions on majority voting behaviour and political economics (Buchannan and Tullock 1962). The premise in these new works is that aside from obvious financial and cost-benefit issues, political activity at most scales involves making instrumentally rational choices based upon potential return of either amenity or income, that are often compared or traded against value rationalist choices regarding ideals and preferences. In the light of the streamlining of many governmental and administrative functions in the UK since the late 1980's, it is reasonable to address the decisions that are made by individuals but especially by administrations regarding collaborative processes, in the context of their own rationality (whether instrumental or value based).

Tullock (1962) points out that in a representative democracy the outcome of any election cannot be assumed to be fully representative of the electorate, and that by extension, the outcome of such a voting system cannot be asserted to be the social choice of the voters (Dowding 1996). For example, when it comes to political elections in the UK, this can manifest itself in the way that the 'first past the post' system often results in a candidate being returned to parliament or winning a seat on the local council, when the majority of the electorate did not vote for them. This can translate as a state of majority victory rather than consensus victory, possibly resulting from adherence to issues or political 'brands'. This offers the opportunity for suasion and lobbying, the intricacies of which may bring about a change in an individual's voting behaviour, depending on their perception of the message that is put to them.

2.4ii   Rents and Rent Seeking

This type of democratically inefficient shuffling and re-organisation of groups and their voting behaviours (and it is assumed here, their propensity to be politically active in the first place), was considered by Tullock and Buchannan as the public's way of securing a rent or political revenue for the existence of their preferences and interests. That is to say for example, that a political candidate (or potential representative at any level) can increase their share of the democratic vote among sections of the electorate, by committing to their cause or interests. The candidate will then adjust their manifesto to appeal (or manage any lack of appeal) to the widest range of voters. In return for a secured vote, the representative theoretically champions the voters' interests once a position among an elite has been gained. For the electorate then, the fact that that their representative pursues their interest is a gain, or rent; they have secured a situation or resource by virtue and promotion of their preferences.

The term 'rent seeking' was used by Gordon Tullock to describe the outlay of resources in the pursuit of these and similar benefits. Other rents that can be secured in this way include a share of a public or collective resource, either material (such as a fuel or amenity) or more abstract (such as a policy or a vote). This rush for a piece of the action is seen by Tullock and the Public Choice school, as likely to continue until a state is reached where any available rents are gained equally by all-comers (rent dissipation) or until no more of the resource can be attained by available or viable means. Importantly, the public choice literature extends this logic to finally argue that the costs of securing rents can reach a point where they out-strip any potential benefits that could be gained from securing that rent (Buchannan 1978). In which case, the purely instrumental rationalist might withdraw from the process (deeming it irrational to continue), while depending on the resource being sought, value rationalists might remain to pursue less material ends (considering them irrational to abandon).

In the context of public participation in local authorities and decision making, the inclusion of rent-seeking and the pursuit of utilitarian or other revenues via political activity offers an opportunity to consider the rational decisions of multi-interest local groups. Are there points at which the public see no potential return for their investment in participating in a local collaborative project? Are there factors at work that could persuade them that their input will not secure any return? Conversely, are utilitarian factors seen by those exercising value rationality as being incidental to the pursuit of the participatory opportunity? Indeed, are there similar phenomena at work at the administrative level?

It is assumed here that answering these specific questions will help us account for many of the reported short comings of public participation schemes, and that a rational decision making approach to becoming involved in either local or national political activities would account for what is commonly termed voter apathy, and what authors including Lijphart (1980),

Fagence (1977), Almond and Verba (1963) and Eden (1993) describe as a rational act not to participate.

As described in Chapter One of this thesis, Habermas' notion of communicative rationalism also becomes involved in the subject of public involvement in local government, and there is an extensive body of literature regarding this point in planning. In their deconstruction of communicative rationality Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger (1998) note that John Forester's concepts of communicative planning (1989) and argumentative planning (1993), and Patsy Healey's concepts of planning through debate (1992), inclusionary discourse (1994) and collaborative planning (1997), have all been used to describe how communicative rationality might operate in planning itself. Aspects of such discussions on communicative rationality are indeed pertinent to this thesis, and will appear when relevant in the text in later chapters. However this is an additional aspect to the forms of rationality in public involvement rather than a central theme, and this work does not undertake a full discussion of the intricacies of the pure planning philosophy in those works cited above. In their conclusions, Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger state that the success of such theoretical positions is in the generation of criticism of existing traditions and the realisation of new questions to ask of them. In public involvement in planning for instance, addressing points of communicative rationality has raised issues '...*about how common values can be forged and applied in a field of differences and power plays...How does* [communicative planning] *deal with the complex configuration of power relations in which planners and participants are enmeshed? These questions seem to have been pushed into the background, possibly because they are too difficult to consider under present circumstances.*' (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 1998, p1988). Again, a full discussion of those issues is not within the scope of this work, but Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger's points are acknowledged.

2.5   Public Involvement in Local Governance and Planning

The focus of this research then, is the participation of the public in local government decision making and planning (both land use planning and strategic planning in local services). This section will introduce literature that builds upon the above issues of rational activity on the part of administrations and individuals, in a political culture that is apparently changing to increasingly incorporate it.

There are a number of working definitions of public participation and involvement; Blahna and Yonts-Shepard (1989) see it as working with non-represented or non-aligned members of the public while Fagence (1977) states that participation is action that reduces the gulf between the governors and the governed. Great care should always be taken to remember that public participation should always be a means to an end, and not solely a solution in itself (although radical and participatory democracy theorists may disagree with that position, see above). Much of the literature refers to a desire by the public for involvement in decision making, but few authors clearly articulate any solid reasons for it. In fact, Fagence (1977) stated that there was traditionally no *'...communication of evidence to support the contentions that the public wishes to meaningfully participate.'* (Fagence 1977, p18) Indeed, other than from the official channels and economic commentaries of rationalising administrations, there is still no such firm evidence offered or referred to in the UK literature to date, and there is merely a general assumption that public involvement is desirable, effective and appropriate. At this point, it is worth referring to the way that the inclusion of the public in planning has altered over time, to arrive at the current policy and aspirations of public involvement.

2.5i   Models of Public Input in Local Strategic and Land Use Planning

How could planning involve the public? What models have been offered to accommodate public input in the planning arena, and how is public involvement seen to sit in a traditionally professional and elitist decision making environment? Early in his commentary on planning theories and models, Fagence draws attention to the problematic issue of transferability of models in public involvement in planning. Also, Thomas (1996, p175) states that: *"The very idea of a recipe book for success is a dangerous one in as much as it suggests there might be a formula that can be applied irrespective of circumstances".*

More comments on the transferability of such models and approaches come from Almond and Verba (1963, p7): *"How can a set of arrangements and attitudes so fragile, so intricate, and so subtle be transplanted out of historical and cultural context?"*

However, a short discussion of such planning models is necessary to appreciate at least the attempts to model the role of the public in planning, and the planning attitudes that are revealed within. In tracing the role of public input as incorporated in planning models, Fagence sees one of the root models in planning method as the Geddesian triad (Figure 2.1).

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┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐
│   SURVEY    │ ───> │  ANALYSIS   │ ───> │    PLAN     │
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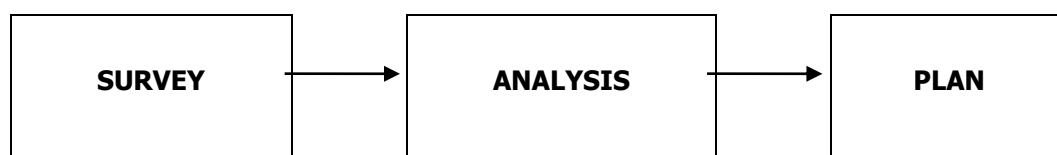
Figure 2.1: The Geddesian Triad (Geddes 1915, in Fagence 1977 p103)

Fagence saw the Geddesian form as <u>the</u> basic pattern, around which other frameworks could be constructed, but was wary of the importation of methodologies, assumptions and concepts, and the transfer or translation of practices from one planning scenario to another (Fagence 1977 p99), and sympathetic to frameworks which espoused creativity and innovation in methodology and process (for example Van de Ven and Delbecq 1972)

Geddes discussed three main methods of public involvement: by education of intention through public exhibition; public involvement in the collection of decision making data; and participation via alternative / option generation. The Geddes' rationale for public involvement was to secure and develop a sympathetic public attitude toward planning, (fitting both liberal democratic or elitist placating rationales for public involvement) by opening up the decision making process slightly, and by allowing the expression of community concerns.

Planning models of the late 1960's and the 1970's began to develop elements of public involvement in theory development. Kozlowski (1970) held that planning processes should be integrated and exist within a context of public interest and participation (Figure 2.2). Here, four key points of public influence in the planning process were identified:

1) Goal formulation
2) Goal verification and option selection
3) Choice of preferred option
4) Final plan sanction

Fagence points out that this is just about the minimum of really meaningful public involvement, and although Kozlowski's structure aims to appreciate planning contexts, it does little toward securing meaningful participation. Meanwhile, Roberts (1974) demonstrates that there could be two 'spaces' in the planning process for the public to operate within. Tasks and roles either take place in the public space, or in the planner's space, with certain relevant phases spanning both (Figure 2.3). Roberts described public involvement as a relevant technique, whether by direct community activity or via a representative.

Communicative action between Roberts' spaces however are restricted to specific cross space tasks, and do not pervade the whole system as in the Kozlowski model.

However, the goal management and feedback roles of public involvement in both Kozlowski and Roberts are repeated again in McConnell (1969), but with the inclusion of a negotiation and consultation role for the public (Figure 2.4).
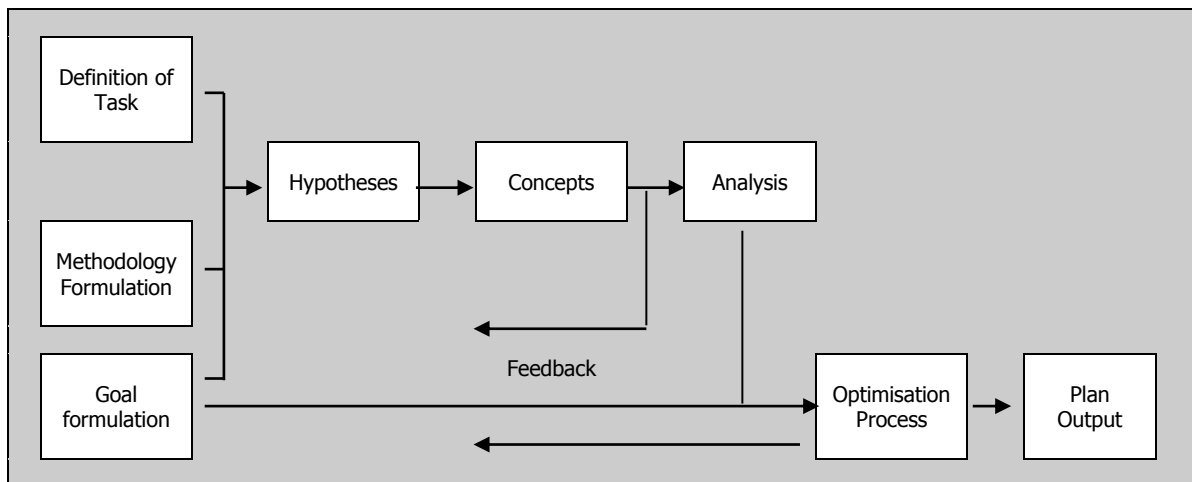
Fig 2.2 Public interest and mutual interaction envelope (Kozlowski 1970)

Fagence comments that the flexibility of McConnell's process, to include the critical and evaluative input of the public at key planning stages, has been undervalued (Fagence 1977, p109). In the same year, McDonald (1969) also draws into the process structure, the views and aspirations of 'interest groups', while Van de Ven and Delbecq (1972) suggested the de-structuring of existing processes to re-assemble as a set of operational tasks, where relevant groups (laity, planners or expert participants) provide the required inputs to the process, to fit the individual planning scenario.

So to some degree, public involvement has become recognised, rationalised and incorporated into certain planning models for some time. But how has this fared in practice?

2.5ii   Use of Models

Moote et al (1997) states that it is common for agencies / authorities to follow participatory programs up to, but not exceeding their minimum statutory requirements. This ultimately results in no power sharing at all, and such authorities continue to dispense decisions as before (p887). This, Moote (et

al) say, can result in an administrative standstill, while appeals, inquiries and litigation hold up the implementation of any decision made. This thesis agrees in part with Moote et al's point that the strengths and weaknesses of participatory approaches, and the applicability of underlying premises, need to be thoroughly examined.

The literature commonly deals with public involvement in what Almond and Verba see as local or parochial participatory structures, rather than parochial subject or subject participatory structures. For this system to work, the local decision making body must believe in the democratic 'myth' - that ordinary citizens ought to participate in local politics, and that they are in fact influential (Almond and Verba 1963). This recognition of influence and influence potential then leads to the more structured practical issues of power shifts. In various scenarios policy has adjusted to both accommodate and call for, public involvement, with varying rationales and intentions. Governments, mandarins, academics, commerce, and professionals all attach and pass on a wide range of meanings for terms such as participation and involvement and community (Willis 1995).
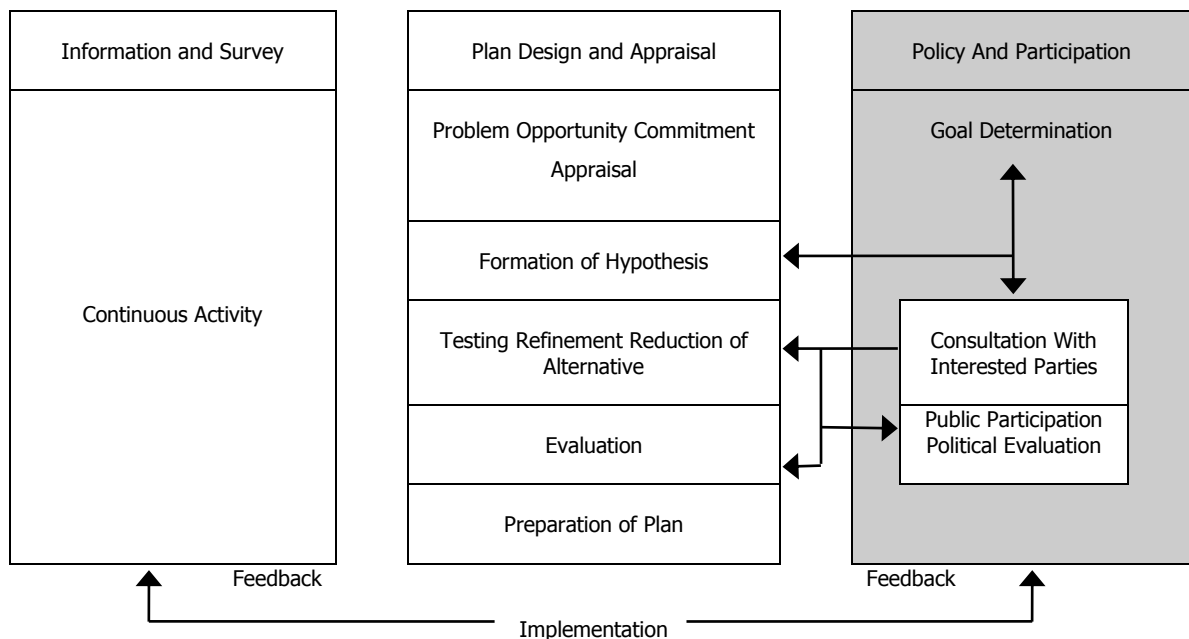
Figure 2.4: The McConnell Model 1969, (from Fagence 1977, p108)

Planners

| | 1 - 3 Assessment of framework - broad goals | | 4 - 6 data assembly and analysis | | 7 Refinement of goals | | 8 Setting of standards | | 9 Evaluation |

Community

...*continues*

| 9a Preparation of alternatives | | 11, 12 Commencement Monitoring | |
| 10 Preference selection | | 12a Revision of Goals | |

Feedback and Recycle
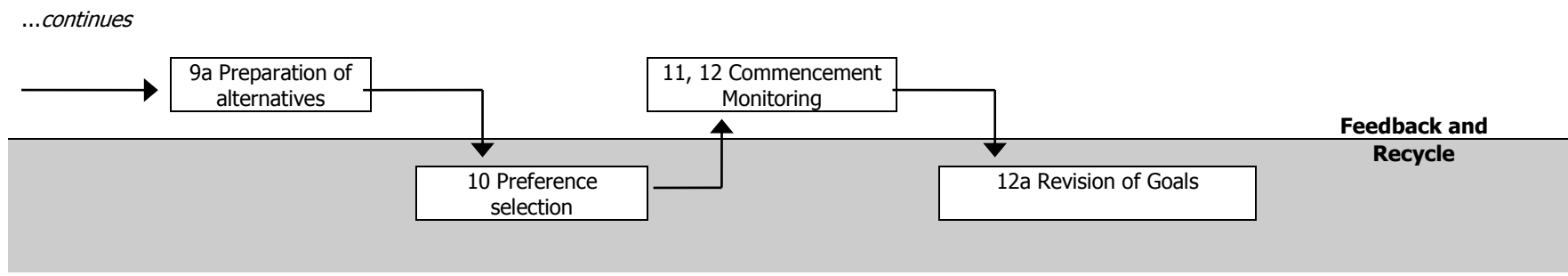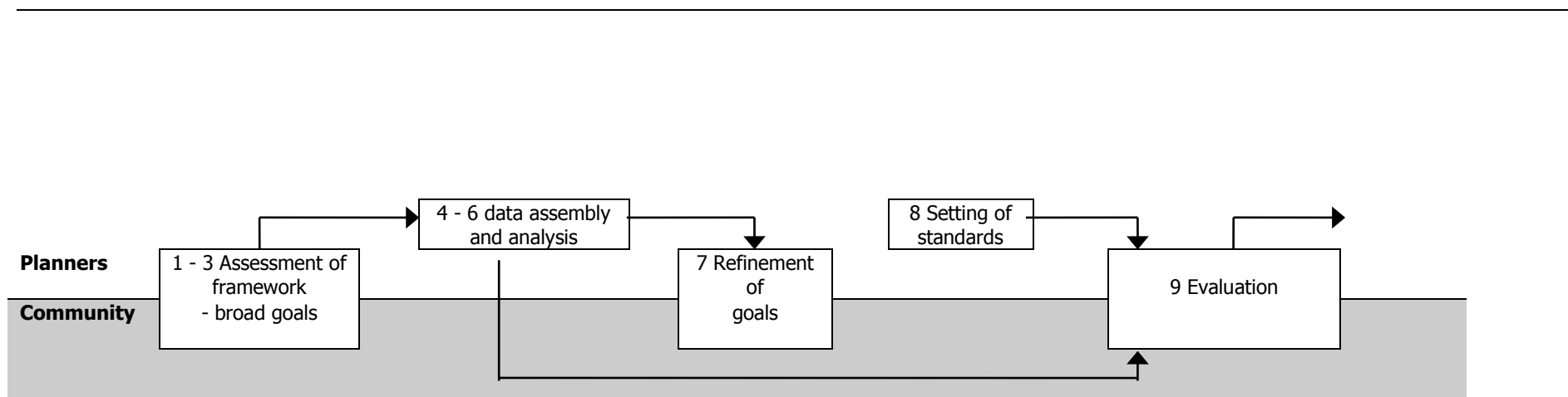
Figure 2.3: The Roberts Model 1974 (from Fagence 1977 p108)

Healey (1997) argues that governance is the legitimate management of collective affairs, and as such local governance is done in the name of the local public good or interest. The formal task is usually divided territorially, but local administrative boundaries cannot hold all interests within, and the public frequently have allegiances outside the territory unit (again, confounding Communitarianism). This along with the recognition of the value of transferring responsibility for certain public roles to private bodies or individuals, has led to a partnership or stakeholder approach to some aspects of especially British society (Healey 1997, Giddens 1998). But Healey also sees local rather than national decision making, and degrees of local autonomy as negotiated and achieved and not at all fixed. Both private and public bodies involved in such civic activities are subject to scrutiny and examination, even formal audit under the modernising government initiatives. Openness is an aspect of the activities in local governance that is both a requirement and a tool. But such openness could also seen as a symptom of perceived mistrust on the part of local citizens, with the local authority and central government pre-empting conflict by offering information or participatory opportunities. To illustrate, Healey mentions the influence of capital interests in development, and latent partnerships between local government and commerce, and the fact that such dubious marriages can go unnoticed for years. Openness about such a partnership may come about due to a legal requirement for disclosure at certain points, or as a pacifier to ameliorate criticisms of covert allegiances outside the community. However, as Simmons (1994) points out, although effective public participation has been difficult to achieve, it is often guaranteed to at least some degree by law in certain areas of government, and in the US, UK and Europe there are formal requirements for particular levels of disclosure, consultation and public involvement in planning.

2.6   Public Involvement and Policy in the UK

The Town and Country Planning Act 1968 introduced a statutory requirement for some level of public participation in development plans. Later, the Skeffington Report on Public Participation in Planning (HMSO, 1969) recommended that there be meetings, fora, and the promotion of other opportunities for citizen involvement. The report also recommended set points in the preparation of structure plans, where the process would pause to allow specific participation from the public. However, there has been some concern that since then the levels and types of statutory involvement outlined have been either ineffective, or poorly devised (Anderson et al 1994; Barlow 1995; Thomas 1996). In the light of this, the Department of the Environment examined the issue of public involvement in 1995 and confirmed that the public's knowledge of, and interest in, the role of the development plan needed to be improved, and that the key to this was the increased availability and access to development plans and planning information generally.

Thomas (1996, p171) is mindful of the fact that a) participation is an ambiguous term; b) that political philosophy governs interpretations of participation; and c) that these interpretations mould what are deemed to be appropriate public involvement techniques. It is anticipated here that all of these characteristics will be observable in the field. Thomas further comments that the distribution of power as seen in the UK planning system reflects the power distribution of society in general. Large corporations and organisations can easily have more influence on the planning system than, say, smaller tenants' organisations or fringe interest groups. The biggest influences on UK planning in the 1980's (according to Healey et al 1988, p 245) were:

- the agriculture industry

- mineral extraction industries

- established and familiar industrial firms

- knowledgeable, well connected property developers

- property owners with appreciation priorities

- well organised and recognised environmental pressure groups

(cited in Thomas 1996 p 169)

In the face of such organised commercial and economic influence and the ensuing politics that surround such interests, it is tempting to suggest that the public will inevitably have a very quiet voice in the UK planning system, even when formally invited into the process.

Access to such decision making has been an issue for some time. Arnstein (1969) posed the question of who are the disempowered in decision making and planning, and how are they brought into the fold? Arnstein also noted that some collaborative programs have been worse than futile, if the underlying decision making power is not at least partly handed to the public. In her classic paper in the discipline, she quotes a poster seen during a French student demonstration in the 1960's, which could be still seen as relevant thirty years on.

Arnstein gauged the power of the citizen by locating public involvement scenarios on a Ladder of Participation (Figure 2.5). The work proposes a conceptual ladder structure, where the 'rungs' accommodate increasing levels of public involvement in planning or decision making, ranging from non-participation on the lower rungs, to levels of token involvement of the public, ending with levels of citizen power in decision making and planning.

I PARTICIPATE

YOU PARTICIPATE

WE PARTICIPATE

YOU PARTICIPATE

THEY PROFIT
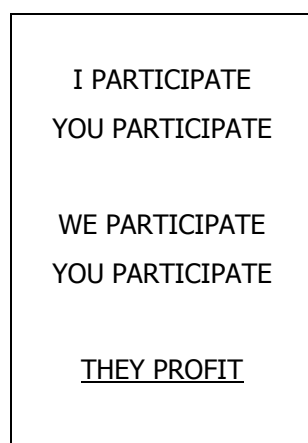
Adapted from Arnstein (1969) p216.

It is often implied by those who cite this ladder, or similar structures, that with the right political will and infrastructure, and a mobilised and aware public, the ladder may be scaled, and degrees of citizen power achieved (Arnstein 1969; Carver et al 1998; Fagence 1977; Heckman 1998; Rocha 1997; Thomas 1996; Weiderman and Femers 1993; Wondolleck et al 1996). Despite some uncertainties about Arnstein's assumptions and the ladder metaphor generally, as a snap-shot of 1960's US power relations, the analogy is still of value, with strata of involvement recognisable in the case study literature. However, Arnstein's paper concludes by stating that planning oriented public involvement programs have been severely constrained by political and legal environments, and the citizens' power in practice is rarely a match for the power of veto by the local or state powerholders. Others have considered the power of political veto as true confounding factor in public involvement (e.g. Carver 1998, Weiderman and Femers 1993, Fagence 1977). Campbell and Marshall (2000a, p297) note that 'Planning, as a form of state intervention administered at the local level, is inevitably subject to the pressures and vagaries of governmental and societal changes.' With a range of party affiliations and political philosophies, there is also likely to be a range of rationales and designs for public involvement in the UK, especially at the local level. With the influence of the successive Conservative government policies of the last 25 years, the national position has for some time been of the philosophical right (elitist, non-interventionist, instrumentalist and traditionalist).

This has meant that moves to reduce regulation on corporate development and streamline local government have eclipsed moves toward developed or more considered public involvement. In 1996, a year before the New Labour administration came to power in the UK, Thomas noted that there was still no formal requirement for public involvement in the preparation of development plans, other than the opportunity for comment and feedback on the deposit stage of the process. Indeed, the national legislative framework judged such reactive comments from the public to the development plan as adequate input (Thomas 1996, p177).

8	**Citizen Control**	
7	**Delegated Power**	*Degrees of Citizen Power*
6	**Partnership**	
5	**Placation**	
4	**Consultation**	*Degrees of Tokenism*
3	**Informing**	
2	**Therapy**	*Non-Participation*
1	**Manipulation**	
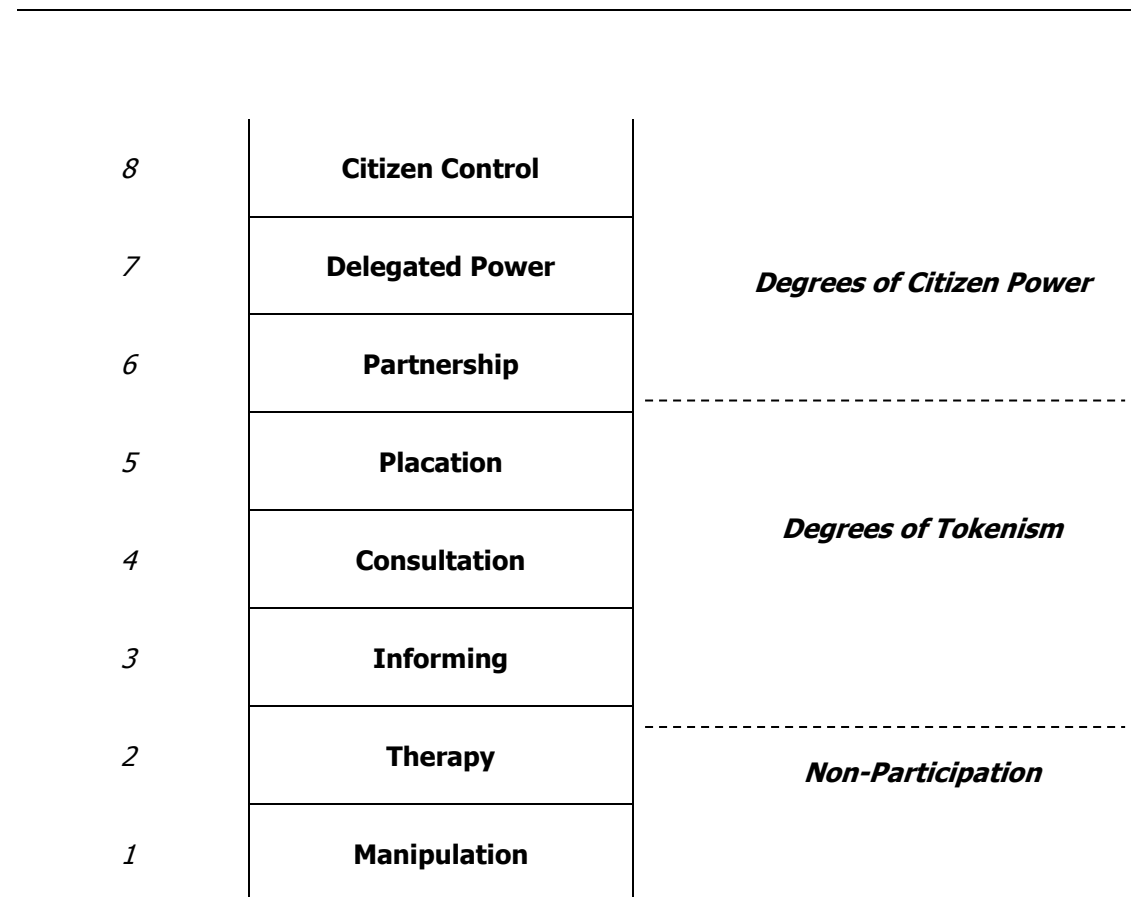
Fig 2.5. The Ladder of Citizen Participation. (Arnstein 1969 p 217)

It seems that the Conservative governments paid only lip service to their sentiment of the public influencing the planning process (Thompson 1987). Planning Policy Guidelines (PPGs) are of particular interest when looking at this apparent inconsistency of stated intention. It is implicit in these guidelines to planning officers that the elitist tenets of consultation and opinion management are central in the planning process. Furthermore, the main comment opportunity was traditionally afforded to those bodies who already had influence on Conservative Party policy. No new players were admitted to the game in this policy, and as Thompson argued, the emphasis on speed and efficiency in process regularly excludes the entry of the laity and reinforces the elitist-expert orchestration or planning - especially in development control decision making (Healey 1990).

In March 1999 the New Labour Government produced its Modernising Government White Paper (HMSO 1999). It sets out in some detail the way that the government wished to challenge the old politics and policy making of previous administrations, and be more open, inclusive and effective. It opens however with Tony Blair's thoughts on a modernised democratic framework, and follows with Dr Jack Cunningham's introduction, exalting the virtues of a citizen consumer stance. From the outset, this document is strongly utilitarian and instrumentalist. In its promotion, the document is said to concentrate on democratic enhancement and democratic access. But in the light of many of the points above, and in its own internal statements, it is about providing the opportunity to do little more than observe government – and is thus open to comparisons with Schumpterian models of manipulative elitism. Granted, this transparency allows the electorate to see (in fact, it creates a requirement for public accountability) where policies might have failed, or where mechanisms of delivery may have room to improve, so that a voting choice can be made if ever they are dis-satisfied with New Labour. But it is in essence an account of the government's plans to rationalise, to decentralise and delegate to others, and how they intend to monitor and evaluate the work of outside, contributory sectors.

One of these is the voluntary sector. The intention to develop and use this sector in the administration of particularly local government owes much to the Conservative traditions of the 1980's, and in some part to the American Clinton administrations of the 1990's. It is seen by Glennster (1999) and Popple and Redmond (2000) as a means by which government can reinvent itself on a more focussed local scale, and to allocate funding more fairly and efficiently. The White Paper is riddled with terminology that would seem to satisfy those who would seek greater democracy in UK politics, but on careful consideration there are many points at which they would sit some way down (for example) Arnstein's ladder model. 'Listening to people', 'having a say', 'consultation', and 'information' are mentioned frequently, as are 'quality', 'service', 'delivery' and 'value'. None of these would place the modernising government proposals even in their internally most satisfied and thoroughly

audited criteria, any higher than the rungs of Consultation or Placation on Arnstein's ladder. Modernised consultation in the UK as Arnstein would see it, would be a situation where participation takes place for its own sake, with little or no commitment to its spirit or any outcome from the process (p220). It is only at the next rung (placation) that actual public influence could be recognised. However, this is tokenistic also, in that the so-called public are actually selected, 'representative' worthy community members with often incomplete experience and resources, or with easily influenced agendas, who are only acting in advisory roles anyway. This equates squarely with many of the participatory bodies discussed in the White Paper.

It is noted in the most recently emerging literature on the effects of modernising initiatives that there is a danger of using the public involvement aspects of modernising government as a tool to dissipate disharmony and placate disaffected communities (Popple and Redmond 2000, p394). Community development commentators are already looking sceptically at the essence of the third sector approach, seeing it as a governmental response to its own needs if it is to carry out wider policy, and that the public involvement policy is itself an aside. This in turn, but not entirely to New Labour's discredit, is likely to be a response to the widespread failings of a previous administration. This would be consistent with Lipset's comments of 1960; that an increased level of (or call for) public involvement can be a manifestation of democratic failings in general. In this instance, the failing could be said to be that of the previous administration, and resonates strongly with the experiences of public involvement in former Communist states (see Pálvölgyi and Herbai 1997).

The current national agenda is basically to improve the quality of government. According to this aspiration, a more modern and more rationalised government gets things right first time, and the public involvement policies within (remembering of course that the public involvement aspects are just part of the whole agenda of modernisation) should help inform and then streamline local decision making. Many of the stated policies on public collaboration have also stepped forward from a background of sustainable

development, guided by sound Agenda 21 commitments. Indeed, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales are obliged to consider such public involvement policies via their environment divisions, who have key devolved policy responsibilities under Agenda 21. It is now required that at least the essence of the public contact initiatives included in the modernising government document are adhered to by UK local authorities and incorporated into partnership working between the private, public and voluntary sectors. Not only are they required to feature in local policy making, but they are to be pursued in audit under best value regulations and inspection. These will be discussed more fully in later chapters.

2.7   Information Technology in Planning

Just as policies are developing to accommodate apparently meaningful public involvement, there are also initiatives to enhance democratic access to government. For a number of years, various bodies in the UK and US have sought to develop 'e-democracy' and other technological tools, to supposedly further this aim, or could at least enable it. For this reason, the review now draws in the role of information technology in public involvement in planning and decision making.

The planning system itself could be seen as a technocracy, and thus open to accusations of unequal access and elitism (Thomas 1996). The use of IT mediated planning support, especially in the securing and implementation of public involvement for collaborative projects, makes this another area of contentious assumptions and vague boundaries, which are evolving and changing at their own pace.

Klosterman's (1997) summary of the use of IT in the US planning system appears in Table 2A. The descriptions used may not be universally applicable or match the UK experience exactly, but are very useful in illustrating the changing roles and emphasis on IT in planning over the past few decades.

1960's	System Optimisation	"Planning as Applied Science"	IT provides information, needed for value and politically neutral process of rational planning
1970's	Politics	"Planning as Politics"	IT seen as political - reinforcing elite structures, concealing choice and changing policy making processes
1980's	Discourse	"Planning as Communication"	IT as a planning tool, and less important than the communication and application of results
1990's	Collective Design	"Planning as Reasoning Together"	IT providing an information infrastructure, facilitating social interaction and debate, to move toward collective goals and concerns

Table 2A, Evolving Views of IT in Planning (adapted from Klosterman 1997, p 47)

There have also been shifts in the actual concern of the IT elements in planning over the years, and in Table 2B Klosterman summarises the US experience again. It can be seen that the role of IT has not been fixed within planning or planning support systems, and as Klosterman suggests, it could now be focused practically upon intelligent use of data, in the collective design of decision problems, thus a potential asset to multi-party public involvement in planning.

1960's	Data	"Cleaned, coded and stored for use"	Data processing promoting efficient transaction processing and improved **operational tasks**
1970's	Information	"Organisation and analysis into meaningful forms"	Used in management information systems to serve **management needs**
1980's	Knowledge	"Information brings understanding"	Primarily concerned with decision support for **executive decision making**.
1990's	Intelligence	"Applying knowledge and experience to novel situations"	Planning support systems promoting discourse and interaction, toward **collective design**

Table 2B - Evolving concerns of IT in planning (adapted from Klosterman 1997, p49 - Klosterman's own emphasis)

2.7i   Geographical Information Technology in Planning

One strong branch of the IT research into public involvement has come out of the arena of computational geography and spatial analysis. For a number of years, geographical information systems (GIS) have been aimed at resolving spatially referenced problems (Horita 1999). These became known as Spatial Decision Support Systems (SDSS), and upon their merger with Group Decision Support Systems (GDSS) and computer supported collaborative (CSCW) research themes, the field is often now seen as one of Collaborative Spatial Decision Making (CSDM). The collaborative aspects of the spatial decision making addressed in that research environment are also aided by specific types of software. One of the IT areas being propounded in CSDM is termed 'GroupWare' (Laurini 1998). Laurini's position is that if the planning (especially urban planning) process is truly collaborative and is generating large volumes of written and graphical statements and outputs, it is potentially more practical and effective for it to take place in a computational arena. Laurini discusses various definitions of GroupWare but in general sees it as any technology that supports person to person collaboration and is used to make the work of a collaborative group more effective (Nunamaker et al 1995). Laurini also categorises such software technologies by potential task. These are not GIS elements per se, but are being examined closely and developed into praxis by spatial practitioners:

- group calendaring and scheduling
- electronic meeting support
- project management software
- workflow software.

The general proposition here is that through the use of sophisticated models in collaborative decision making, and representations of spatial relationships, a valuable contribution can be made by placing these systems to multi interest or multi party decision making. This of course makes the discipline a prime candidate to be developed and pushed forward to become a community based public involvement tool.

The role of GIS - based systems in decision support is to record attributes and transactions in a spatial dimension (Aangeenbrug 1991). Data processing and manipulation using ranks, weights and scores applied to attributes and events (Godschalk et al 1992), results in thematic, graphic outputs describing the effects of given actions or the interaction of certain variables, in certain planning scenarios (Bennett 1995). Combined with an historical record of area characteristics and change, these systems have both a predictive and recollective ability (Shiffer 1995a) when applied to decision making or planning (for example in demographics or property prices). GIS can also accurately describe present situations by using rapid processing of timely (not to be confused with temporal) data and comprehensive thematic map outputs. When used in partnership with forecasting methods and archival data such systems can provide valuable decision support tools for decision makers. Armstrong and Densham (1990) describe Spatial Decision Support Systems (SDSS) as tools to help decision makers solve semi-structured problems, supporting a variety of decision making styles, and using alternative models and inputs to provide a variety of solutions to problems (Densham 1991). Now used in both governmental and commercial planning departments alike (Armstrong 1994), these decision support tools are valued for their ability to reinforce proposed actions by providing comprehensive ranges of logical solutions to spatial questions (Shiffer 1995b). This technology is being aimed at the collaborative decision making research community, and is now being edged toward the Internet with the intention of creating a public decision making arena. Two of the main centres of GIS and CSDM related research are at CASA, and the NCGIA.

Based mainly at University College London, the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (CASA) is at the cutting edge of spatial information technology in the UK. Their focus is upon the internal analytical aspects of geographical information technologies, and their application (typically to planning scenarios). However there are questions about the destination of CASA's output.

CASA's Online Planning Journal has published many innovative articles regarding the use of IT in planning. These range from structuring the use of newsgroups, e-mail, public information web sites and online questionnaires in public involvement endeavours, to deep theory based virtual reality constructions and modelling (Ingram 1998), and hypermedia development plans (Hall 1998). But it is the developments in areas such as population or pollution (Dodge et al 1998) modelling, that resemble more closely other international research contributing to online data provision, and secondly, are of more meaningful public use. However, the development of multimedia local plans (Hall 1995, 1997) has generated interest from various local authorities. Wandsworth Borough Council, Devon County Council and North Wiltshire District Council are held up as standard bearers in the use of publicly accessible planning information in the UK (Smith and Dodge 1997). However, the Association of County Councils Environment Committee stated that centralisation of these initiatives is the exception to the rule that they are commonly the fruit of one enthusiastic individual's labour in the planning department, and are generally informal and exploratory.

So in the context of public involvement and planning, the work at CASA is developing technical and innovative tools, potentially for planning departments, but is passing the burden of practical translation over to them also. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the urban form, which could result in a sense of exclusion or of renewed periphery in rural areas. There seems to be a reasonable argument that these aspects of CASA research are technology led, and working to identify outlets for innovations, rather than computational solutions to spatial or planning problems. This would lend weight to the idea that such developments only aid the work of the established decision making elite, and offer little in practice to the general public.

The National Centre for Geographical Information and Analysis (NCGIA) is a research body funded by the US National Science Foundation. Its various research objectives centre around the use and development of GIS

technology and theory, in spatially oriented and environmental topics. The organisation does have some international contributors, but is generally US centred, which, as mentioned previously does colour some of the approaches, rationale and theory (see discussion in Chapter One of the various rationales and models behind public involvement in the US, UK and Europe). The NCGIA research Initiatives have addressed various internal technical GIS issues, as well as the theoretical social issues of such spatial information systems, but two of the research initiatives (I-17 and I-19) are of significance in the background to this thesis.

NCGIA research initiative I-17 (Collaborative Spatial Decision Making) was mainly concerned with the development of knowledgeable software systems, methods of interaction between users and systems, and the development of evaluative methods for generated solutions in decision making scenarios. Of relevance in this thesis are the concerns that were raised at the time, of data level and appropriateness for (public) participating groups in collaborative land use planning (Gottsegen 1995), non specialist interface design (Carver et al 1995), and communication through IT media (Shiffer 1995b).

These unresolved issues were then taken forward and addressed in the I-19 research initiative (GIS and Society). Here the central research issues addressed how (if at all) the public might use GIS and whether their needs were being met by the technology, what GIS really might offer democracy, and neglected ethical issues of spatial IT. However these issues were mostly regarded as challenges in terms of the spatial modelling within the software, rather than adding to the NCGIA's appreciation of democracy or political sociology.

Meanwhile the NCGIA's Varenius Project encompassed the new goal of advancing geographical information science through research and education. It took, as one element, the notions of public participation GIS (PPGIS) that had been discussed since I-19, and formally introduced PPGIS into the research environment at the 1998 Santa Barbara Conference on Empowerment, Marginalisation and PPGIS (NCGIA 1998).

Also in 1998, the NCGIA summarised the results of all of their previous research initiatives and highlighted the following central issues in the field of IT mediated group decision making:

1. Software technology and mathematical modelling is capable of describing the spatial attributes and relationships within given decision making scenarios.

2. Although GIS are hindered by the quality of the data they use, generalisation, scale and *'endless other factors'* (NCGIA 1998, p1), they can incorporate error modelling to cope with data uncertainty in decision making.

3. The high cost of designing, creating and implementing GIS has resulted in a concentration of use at the government and commercial levels, and the relative exclusion of community or interest groups. This prompted the NCGIA to look at PPGIS (public participation GIS), and the testing of theoretical PPGIS designs in the field.

4. Interdisciplinary approaches to GIS design can produce systems that are easier to both use and understand by the non-GIS expert, than the original software of the 1980's.

5. GIS offer more applicable and accurate representations of the real world than hard copy maps ever could or will, due to their capacity to animate, represent 3 dimensions, and use multi-media.

6. Although the data and mathematical components within GIS do not fit neatly with the statistical methods of the social sciences generally, the NCGIA and software developers are distributing the necessary integration packages to bridge any analytical gaps.

(NCGIA 1998)

So in the NCGIA's own words, GIS are extremely complex, hindered by basic data issues, and '*endless other factors'*, expensive and excluding, need dumbing down for community uptake, IT intensive, antagonistic to traditional mapping techniques, and incongruent with other analytical methods. These

are not encouraging conclusions to draw about the technology that was originally seen as one of the greatest potential aids to public involvement.

The NCGIA conclusions No. 1, 2 & 3 (above) are key in the decisions that were made about the direction of this thesis. The software produced by NCGIA or CASA is highly suitable for the complexities of spatial decision making, but are confounded by '*endless other factors'* in its application and success, and it use is disproportionately concentrated at the governmental and corporate level.

Furthermore, it was the range of candid questions that the NCGIA asked of its own discipline that generated the agnostic attitude toward public involvement oriented IT that the reader may detect in this thesis. Key examples of such issues include the accessibility, equity and relevance of spatial data as perceived by community groups (Craig 1996), and questions regarding the democratisation of decision making using GIS, and the very real concern of software imperialism in super-technocratic CSDM programs (Obermeyer 1996, Wegener and Julius 1993).

2.7ii   Public Domain GIS and Cyberdemocracy

Carver et al (1998a & 1998b) set out their ideas for placing publicly accessible GIS onto the World Wide Web, aiming to develop web-based decision support systems which concentrate on environmental issues in planning. Others have proposed such developments (for example, Shiffer 1995d; Carver et al 1997; Dodge et al 1998; Lotov et al 1997, McCauley et al 1996); however unlike much of the GIS and CSDM community, this Leeds University based team has been concentrating on the opening up of the decision making process to the public, rather than striving to actually get the public to make decisions online. The philosophy here seems to be that there are national, regional and local decision making issues that should involve the public to a greater degree than is offered, and that a publicly interrogatable and transparent process is a sound first step toward such involvement. This research was funded by the

ESRC's Virtual Society? Project, and resonates with the tone of the Modernising Government agenda to some degree and unfortunately again, such a development would sit on a pretty low rung on Arnstein's ladder.

Up to this point in the literature, most experiments and developments in cyberdemocracy were seen to share 3 central characteristics:

- They were conceived as a means of reviving democratic politics, which were perceived to have lost dynamism;

- They were local or regional in character, especially relating to urban or suburban issues and communities;

- They were based on very similar technical infrastructures.

(Tsagarousianou 1998, p186)

At one end of the scale of cyberdemocracy might be exercises such as electronic elections, or referenda that could be potentially rapid, accurate and cheap (Smith 1996). This means there could be more of them, plus referenda or local elections, and all done (ideally) from the home. However if this method became the norm or the favoured means of eliciting participation and input, sections of the community without access to such IT would certainly become excluded.

Any argument that home-based IT access need not be an issue, as workplace or public access could be developed, is also flawed. Firstly because voting at one's place of work requires the voter to actually have a job, and one where IT access is available, and secondly because any public access IT voting facility would merely be a polling station by another name. However, as noted in Kidney (1996), one possible solution to these issues (in the eventuality that home-voting became a reality) that would allow greater access to this kind of electronic democracy could be the use of interactive Videotext systems in the home. The development of Digital TV technology is now making this a more realistic option, but again, subscribers to Digital TV services would not be representative of the wider electorate. Another major concern regards the trivialisation of voting due to over exposure and voter exhaustion. Smith (1996) expresses a concern that voting on complex or consequential issues

will be treated with the same regard as choosing the winner of the Eurovision Song Contest (Chapter 8: p7).

This thesis does not aim to discuss the far wider topic of Information Society, but certain general points might be made here. Aside from ethical or theoretical arguments, Smith reminds us that there are glaring practical security and identification considerations for developers of cyberdemocracy. There is also the issue that (especially) Internet users tend to be more relaxed about the accuracy of their self presentation. Smith notes that users '...*need not disclose the truth; there are many accounts of participants with aliases, and fantasy identities in cyberspace...*' (Ch 8: p3). Furthermore, with the potential for abuse of the Internet, there is an ongoing need for copyright and data security regulation. Subscription fees and restrictions to access once freely available data are becoming more and more common, and legislation which outlaws both computer 'hacking' and 'cracking' is criminalising more laterally thinking users. It is also conceivable that what was called the zero-settlements policy on the Internet whereby most commercial user-provider costs and charges cancel each other out, will crumble as the notion of charging for access becomes the norm (Flower 1995). This is especially likely when we consider that developments in such IT projects are software market led rather than needs or project led (Kidney 1996, Smith 1996). Carver (1998a,1998b) noted that these types of Internet based issues will be of significant importance in the development of online decision making software, because there will be significant commercial influence involved at some stage or another. It is argued in this thesis that such issues could extend to e-democracy developments in UK local authorities – developments that are required of all authorities under the Modernisation Agenda.

There has been some work done to assess the appropriateness of decision making in a virtual setting. Various works out of CASA have highlighted many opportunities for multi-user virtual reality (VR or VT) planning fora, but there are still questions regarding social implications and commitment to VR decision making. For example, a participant observation study by Schroeder

(1997) into a number of web based virtual 'worlds', revealed that there is a certain stratification within multi-user VR, with well defined (if transitory) classes of individuals 'insiders' and 'outsiders', where the 'outsiders' become only superficially involved in the events in the cyber-world, while scenarios are driven by experienced and knowledgeable 'insiders'. Spatial concentrations of individuals also occur in certain popular virtual locations in these worlds, with strong user identification with place, creating a sense of cyber-parochialism.

Schroeder suggests that such stratification and segregation/concentration goes against the notion of equality and community in VR, and casts a long shadow on the appropriateness of certain potential, virtually set, public involvement mechanisms.

It has also been suggested that there is little perceived commitment to decisions made in virtual environments (Smith 1996, Ch 8: p5), which would certainly threaten the idea of virtual online collaborative decision making. It is also curious that as a network originally designed by the military, which is supposed to be able to operate almost perfectly even in the event of a nuclear war, the Internet is subject to so many bugs, gremlins and acts of sabotage. When it comes to virtual deliberation and decision making, there are significant issues of 'netiquette' that are often completely disregarded by users (Smith 1996). There are extremists, anarchists, assorted saboteurs and pranksters eager to wreck the smallest forum, but eerily none of this is '...*beyond human and political control'* (Smith 1996, Ch 8: p4).

Trench and O'Donnell (1997) have also closely examined the applied use of IT by the Irish public, coming up with some further statements of note. Their findings suggest that Irish voluntary or community groups have had some major difficulties in realising the benefits of the kind of IT put forward by Shiffer, Carver and the on-line CSDM fraternity. These difficulties arise from the usual technical, financial, cultural and organisational factors that crop up elsewhere and have been summarised in Table 1A.

2.7iii   Appropriate Technologies in Public Involvement

These selected commentaries and arguments beg the question - is web based GIS and related IT missing the point of public involvement in decision making? Aside from access and public user issues, there are concerns over whether GIS are appropriate tools for the job anyway. CSDM in particular often requires systems incorporating operational elements of multi-criteria decision making (see Carver 1991, Jankowski 1995, or Heywood et al 1995). However, another school of GIS research rejects the operational approach of multi criteria decision making, due to its limited applicability to uncertain or complex conditions in the real world system that is being modelled (Horita 1999). Again, the question of model transferability is introduced, as the technically sophisticated models of such research tend to take the whole discipline away from the non-expert, and reduce the number of potential collaborating parties. This is counter to the democratising intentions of the SDSS and CSDM schools, but is criticised by Horita as an inherent feature of it. Plus, Heywood and Carver (1994) suggest that SDSS are not intrinsically powerful democratic tools, given the political nature of decision making, thus making the entire literature look susceptible to political veto when it comes to the crunch. Meanwhile, Reitsma (1995) expresses his nervousness about 'the whole thing' openly, and questions the entire thrown together family of disciplines (p167).

There have been some shifts over time within the GIS community toward a focus of decision exploration, and problem understanding, as opposed to decision making and problem solving (Horita 1999, Couclelis and Monmonier 1995, Heywood and Carver 1995, Jankowski 1998). The Co-ordinator of Rational Arguments for Neighbourhood Environment initiative (CRANE) is based on the theory of spatial understanding support systems (SUSS) (Horita 1999) and does involve the integration of structured and unstructured data, and can account for 'social judgement' involved in data collection. This sits well with the idea generation system approach of Heywood and Carver (1995), in that the decision making is not the main priority, but rather the

exploration and understanding of the decision making issue, its context and the complexity of the decision making process. The CRANE system, it seems, is one possible practical approach to the rather frustratingly general and optimistic CSDM ideals of public involvement. It is suggested here that this is by far the strongest position for the GIS community, and that initiatives such as the CRANE information system are the ones most likely to be most successful in the light of the IT centred confounding factors in the literature.

As mentioned earlier, there is enough evidence to suggest that certain sections of the GIS community could be accused of colonialism - or at least opportunist extension into new disciplines. The language of Gill (1998) typifies the expansive tendencies of many in the GIS community. When offering potential solutions to the low levels public response to the deposit stage of local land use plans (for example, where only 0.09% of the public responded to the deposit Birmingham Unitary Development Plan in 1997-8) he suggests *'...a GIS approach, which could offer a fresh innovative medium for presenting the complex set of spatial information contained in the development plan. Kiosk type terminals running a hypermedia GIS could allow the public to access, explore and comment upon planning related information.'* (Gill 1998, p2). Previously, Wang (1995) had called the Internet the most promising solution to the growth problem of GIS. The NCGIA, CASA and others, also have a rather predictable focus on the need for the public to grasp the spatiality of issues, and the penetration of GIS into new disciplines, as well as a clear interest in the promotion of certain software developments. Critically, the vast majority of available proprietary GIS packages are supplied by the same software developer - ESRI (ARCView, ARCInfo etc). This has led to accusations that the research discipline is at best software led and at worst, a centrally manipulated, imperialist technocracy (Obermeyer 1995). Indeed, considerable funding has been provided to the subject, and spawned an extensive literature, sophisticated modelling and software, and theoretical and computational developments, but achieved only fragmented traceable practical success.

When it comes to the appropriateness and effectiveness of general approaches and models of public involvement, time should be taken to consider transfers of 'softer' technologies also. Should more technically naïve approaches be taken rather than highly sophisticated ones? Appropriate use of soft technology (that is, relevant, efficient and affordable program management, administrative structures, resource management, logistics and working methods) should be a consideration when deciding upon consultation methods in the planning or collaborative decision making process. As Thomas (1996) implied, global or national templates are not always acceptable, and Qadeer (1996) states that implementers of appropriate technology should consider the following conundrums:

- Should the (public involvement) process be based on generalised theories and concepts, or be more relevant to specifics in the local context?

- Should the process be comprehensive in scope and conform to approved models, or focus instead on what is achievable and implementable?

- Should institutional value conflicts and shortfalls (underground economies etc.) be ignored, or recognised, modelled and incorporated in problem solving?

- Should processes and methods be aligned with global and national thoughts and trends, or focus on empirical local situations?

Klosterman (1997) gently warns against developing a reliance upon IT and GIS to 'produce' strategic plans. He states that GIS based planning support systems are easy to define, but difficult to implement (p52) and considers that the computational needs of planners will not be fully satisfied by the mainstream families of GIS. For example, Gill (1998) acknowledges that the sheer volume of data needed to create an effective planning GIS for use in collaborative or public fora, would make the whole idea barely viable, whether economically or practically. It is also noted that in many planning GIS, the user is frequently directed by help files to the development plan written statement, kept close at hand in hard copy (Gill 1998).

There must be questions then, regarding the rationality of local authorities in acquiring and using such unproven, potentially inappropriate, and occasionally quite incidental tools for public involvement, in the face of a public that is not in the current general experience, particularly active in local participatory projects. This will also therefore be addressed in the empirical work.

2.8   Toward a Methodology

The literature has shown that there are both opportunities for, and impediments to, effective public involvement in decision making. The democratic implications of public involvement, logistical issues of delivering it, the phenomena of rationality in participation, and the relationship between perceptions of civic obligation and action are also worthy of further examination. The aim of this thesis now is to explore real cases of public involvement on the ground, to look for the existence of such impediments, and consider their impact (if any) on the topic of public involvement.

This research is ultimately centred on the following research questions, which are rooted in the issues highlighted in this and the previous chapter (particularly the confounding factors highlighted in Table 1A). The three central research questions are:

1. How important are instrumental and value rationality in the way that groups and individuals take part in public participation schemes, and what phenomena are associated with apparently rational choices that might be made by authorities and the public?
2. Are the mechanisms and methods used in public involvement projects seen by implementers, participants and potential participants to be appropriate and effective, and what implications are there for those that are not?
3. Are the competing agendas and assumptions of different groups in collaborative exercises linked to the perception of their effectiveness

among them, and might these perceptions create additional barriers to the success of projects?

The review has collated a range of theoretical topics, policy areas and practical technical considerations, providing a framework with which the research questions can be answered, and the contribution to our understanding of local governance and participatory attitudes can be demonstrated.

The conceptual framework supporting this thesis is based primarily on the assumption that aspects of Civic Culture theory will be identifiable in practice, and that the propensity for rationalised decision making (in terms of instrumental and value rationality) that is clearly displayed by administrations in terms of developing public involvement policies and actions is also shared by the public. The following chapter will demonstrate how these research questions, assumptions and an understanding of the antecedent literature were incorporated into the empirical research design.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will set out the ways that the central research questions were operationalised, and the reasons for selecting and using the specific data acquisition and analytical methods.

The chapter begins by addressing the need for an appropriate research design, based upon a methodology that is congruent with the nature of the topic and the original aims of the work itself. It then continues by first recognising and then discussing the types of data that will have to be gathered to satisfy the research questions set out in the previous chapter and contribute to our knowledge of the topic.

There then follows an account of the suitability of Case Study as a methodology in the area of public involvement, before introducing the two specific cases that are analysed in this research.

The data collection methods within the case study approach are then considered – the survey, semi structured interviews, and archival and documentary research. For each method, their advantages and potential drawbacks are presented in the context of the selected cases, before a detailed account is given of their preparation as data collection instruments, and their eventual implementation in the field. The following chapter presents the results of this empirical work.

It seems necessary at this point to set out the meaning of some of the central terms that this research is addressing. There is some discussion as to the precise meanings of the terms *'effective'* and *'efficacy'*, but addressing the socio-linguistics and semantics is outside the scope of this thesis. So for a consistent and working definition, it will be taken from this point forward

(recognising the non-uniformity of definition) that *'effective'* refers to producing the desired effect, while *'efficacy'* refers to the power to produce that effect. Subjectivity is introduced here, with discussion about whether or not to group all outcomes of a process, whether desired or not, into the realm of *'effective'*, and of course whether *'effective'* is a term that is used only after certain value judgements have been made about a process's outcomes. So it will be important in the research design to pin down as neatly as possible, what the *intended* outcomes are (as stated by those formally or professionally involved in the public involvement schemes) of the public involvement processes that are under examination. The terms 'effective' and 'efficacy' will then be applied with those intentions in mind, and data will be gathered in such a way that the intended effects of public involvement schemes or methods are discussed before the effectiveness of any particular method is questioned.

The concept of *'satisfaction'* is linked but secondary to that of effectiveness and efficacy in this research. However, the methods commonly used to measure satisfaction of users with a service or process (for example García-Peña et al. 1999, Gerba and Prince 1999, or Ware and Hayes 1988) are comparable to those used to measure efficacy of oneself in public involvement and perceptions of the effectiveness of process, and this research design will take advantage of the experience in that literature. Indeed, if the provision of public involvement schemes is seen as a community service, satisfaction could become more far prominent in future evaluative work, especially as policies of best practice become established. In Whelan (1994), patient satisfaction is seen as one sound indicator of service delivery and service quality in pre and ante natal care in the NHS. It is also seen as an indicator of the service structure, process and outcome, and then as a potential predictive tool in patient-consumer behaviour models. *'A dissatisfied customer may choose not to become a patient. Hence results from customer satisfaction surveys are important because they may be useful in forecasting how customers will behave in the future'* (Ware and Davies

1983, p291 - in Whelan 1994, p97). Much of the 'satisfaction' literature comes from the field of health care provision, and it would be quite straight forward to substitute the terms 'patient' and 'customer' for 'citizen' and 'participant' in many similar statements. Inevitably, subjectivity comes into the discussion again with the use of the term satisfaction, particularly in the kind of pluralistic decision making under examination in this research. This was recognised and appreciated, and the research design will have to accommodate such subjectivity in the data.

3.2 An Appropriate Research Design

To identify and understand what the image of public involvement and public involvement schemes is, and how the way that projects work (or do not work) is associated with that image and with an individual's inclination to participate, it was crucial to understand what this work was trying to find out. To be 'effective' itself, this thesis needs to identify and acquire the data that will answer the research questions, then analyse and apply it in a meaningful way. The previous chapter set out *what* is being asked in the research, and this chapter will present *how.*

A positivist approach to this research might have been a sound epistemology to follow if the aim was to explain phenomena or address causality in public involvement, working with definitive, scientific 'facts' that might be observed in the field. Alternatively, the political and democratic aspects of the topic could be viewed from the interpretative perspective, emphasising the inductive, subjective nature of personal beliefs. The author's intellectual preference however was to take the critical realist approach, as it was considered that there are quantifiable, natural science elements to address in the type of data that would need to be gathered to answer the research questions, but also a need to recognise the manipulative and subjective nature of tangible and formal political structures and the constant and influential conflicts that drive political environments (Sarantakos 1996, May 1997). This will be the mix of quantifiable and more interpretive phenomena

that the work is looking at, and for that reason the critical realist perspective was eventually selected. This work seeks to explore and explain certain issues within the traditional field of public participation, and to use deductive methods to test hypotheses and make informed generalisations, which importantly, are also strongly linked to subjective phenomena outside the 'reality' of positivism.

3.2i   Recognising Data Types.

The data needed to address the research questions are of two main types - attitudinal data, and policy data. The research design debate would traditionally open up at this point into the use of *either* quantitative *or* qualitative methods when applied to particular research rationales. However, the current view in the literature seems to be that mixed or diverse methods are both acceptable and preferable in social research (Sarantakos 1996, May 1997, Philip 1998). The use of varied approaches can also assist the minimisation of error, with results from one type of analysis being used to check the results of another. Such inter-method triangulation can serve to either reinforce results, or if error or ambiguity is the result of that check, to then trace and examine anomalies.

The patient satisfaction literature mentioned above deals chiefly with quantitative data, and uses measurements of opinion or attitude of service users. This approach to data, i.e. - the measurement or quantification of stated opinion or attitude, has proved useful in that literature and will be used here. However, the analysis of the public involvement policies of the local authorities and the public involvement interests of the academic GIS community will require a different approach. Here the data will be less readily 'measured', but rather textual or verbal in nature, with potentially less objectivity than the quantitative or numerical data, and no straightforward way of converting phenomena into a quantifiable form. Hence, the study of

public involvement image and policy also needs to incorporate methods from the qualitative tradition.

This mixture of a qualitative method with quantitative methods in this research is not incompatible. As Philip (1998) points out, this is an argument in the epistemology-methodology discussion, asserting that certain research paradigms demand certain and set methods of data collection. But here, the idea that quantitative methodologies can only satisfy positivist research, and that all quantitative research is therefore positivist in intention is offset when the terms 'method' and 'methodology' are considered separately. *'A distinction may be drawn between 'methodology' and 'method', although they both refer to 'doing' research....methodology may be equated with research design, encompassing the many processes involved in conducting, analysing/interpreting, and reporting research. 'Method' refers to particular ways of gaining information, for example, conducting a focus group discussion or circulating a household survey'* (Philip 1998, p263). So in this research, although the overall the methodology is not essentially positivist, the methods include a mixture of quantitative and qualitative elements, and this partially naturalist approach is in keeping with the critical realist position.

3.3   Case Study Theory

As a critical realist, Sayer (1992) states that the difference between an intensive and an extensive research design is more than just a question of depth or breadth of study. The main differences identified by Sayer helped consolidate the strategy chosen in this thesis, and identified this work as an extensive piece of research. Firstly, this work is looking for links between the perceived effectiveness of public involvement mechanisms and the propensity for the public to take up opportunities to become involved. An intensive strategy would have been applicable if the thesis was attempting to *explain* the phenomena creating those patterns, or looking for *causality* between variables. Secondly, the chosen case studies deal with taxonomic groups, that is, where the individuals studied are classed by attribute rather than

interaction between them (here, the groups would be participant or non-participant, resident in the first case study area, or resident of the second). Third, the thesis aims to produce an account of the state of certain areas of public involvement in the UK today, rather than any account of the causes of any successes or failures in any particular project. Finally, the results of an extensive piece of research will be robustly representative of the population studied, especially when the issues of data triangulation are considered. It must be added here that the extensive study increases the importance of the attitudinal survey, and subsequent inferential statistical analyses (Sayer 1992).

Public involvement schemes exist as discrete projects, each with an inception stage, development stage, implementation stage, interpretative stage and a response or action stage. As such, they have specific target populations, knowable project life spans, organised operators, aims, objectives, outcomes and mechanisms. All of these characteristics lend themselves to the case study method of research. Yin (1994, p13) asserts that as an empirical line of investigation, the case study is used to examine contemporary phenomena in real life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its contexts is not clear. It also relies on multiple data types, allowing triangulation, and allows the use of theoretical propositions made earlier in the research to guide data collection. The intention in this research design is for these multiple data sources and types to converge, to arrive at robustly suggested phenomenon or a positivist 'fact' which will then be addressed in terms of subjective rationalised reaction to such tangible realities.

The case study methodology is not an empirical form of data collection in itself, but uses a range of qualitative and quantitative methods discussed above, within a set case study structure, or 'protocol' (Yin 1994, Stake 1995) to address the research questions. Analysis of case study data itself will not produce results that are strictly generalisable to the entire population. The method is instead more conducive to verifying theoretical propositions. The

protocol is one of the tools that ensure external validity in case study method - which will be shown later to be vital in this particular thesis.

Addressing this generalisability issue, Yin notes that a general applicability can certainly be established in case study method, if the case study objectives and processes are rigorously designed and adhered to. In discussing this, Tellis (1997a) compares the use of the term 'case' in medicine and social research. Medical cases are individual reports of patient histories, current symptoms, treatments and outcomes - accounts upon which medical practitioners base diagnosis or treatment if, in the future, they encounter a patient presenting similar characteristics. There is therefore a replicated strategy, whether implicit or explicit, for addressing and reporting cases in this way, which allows a robust working generalisation to be used in future encounters, to make diagnoses and explanations valid next time around. By making my own case study strategy explicit via a case study protocol, the results of the overall research will also have that generalisability.

The protocol is even more important, because in this thesis more than one case will be studied. The protocol therefore creates a framework for replication, which boosts both construct validity and external validity in the research. Two cases conducted with the same protocol will yield more widely generalisable results, relevant to the theoretical framework of the whole thesis, based on the core elements under examination, within each case's unique circumstances. In other words, although the two case study areas have their own individual characteristics, there is a commonality between them which strongly serves the aim of this PhD research, and that is the public's perception of public involvement in local decision making. This is my unit of analysis.

The following chapters will examine the case studies in greater detail, and the Case Study Protocol itself will open the next chapter. However, in order to give the rest of this chapter some case study context, the two final cases in this research are outlined briefly below.

3.3i   The Shaping Slaithwaite scheme.

The Shaping Slaithwaite project was a collaborative decision making and planning scheme, addressing issues arising from the proposed regeneration of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, running through the centre of the village of Slaithwaite, near Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. The main facilitators and actors in the scheme were the Colne Valley Trust (CVT), Slaithwaite Residents Association and Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council Planning Services Department. The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (NIF) also had a consultative and facilitating role, and a number of other community based organisations such as the South Kirklees Rural Partnership Project also had organisational input.

The scheme took the form of a Planning for Real© (PfR) exercise, incorporated into a day of events in the village publicised as the Slaithwaite 'Bit of a Do' on July 6th 1998. The residents of the village and surrounding area who attended the events were also invited to utilise a virtual version of the PfR approach, which was set up by the Virtual Decision Making in Spatial Planning (VDMISP) research group from the School of Geography, University of Leeds, led by Steve Carver and Richard Kingston. The public opinions and views regarding the canal regeneration and its effects on the village were collated after PfR exercise and examined by Kirklees Planning Services, who reported back to the community in a round of proposal meetings at the 'Prioritisation' event the following October.

The key reasons for selecting this case study were that the project was based around a local development control issue, that was taken up by a local interest or grassroots organisation, where there were issues of policy and funding on the part of the local authority, where a private consultant was involved to advise, train and mediate in proceedings, and a very specific and well studied academic IT element to the scheme. This range of features allowed the examination of rationality in project design, project implementation, methods and mechanisms and project appraisal, as well as

an examination of policy, while also allowing a study of local perceptions of public involvement, all within the context of a single discrete scheme.

3.3ii   City of York Council.

City of York council regards itself as a flagship authority in regard to the use and development of a number of public involvement methods. Rather than look at any one project, the case is the authority itself, and the data will pertain to a number of programs. These programs include Neighbourhood Forums, the York Speak-Up Scheme, and Household Surveys, all of which aim to gather data for use in decision making in local planning issues. The main facilitators in these regular and organised schemes are the Chief Executive's Department and Environmental and Development Services at City of York, and a number of neighbourhood level community groups. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has lent its ear in an unofficial capacity in a number of smaller one off schemes, but has been more active in the larger Metcalfe Lane and Osbaldwick regeneration schemes (which are ongoing at the time of writing).

These programs operate on a regular basis, and include more strategic aspects of local planning than the single development Slaithwaite case. There is as yet no significant use of IT at the public or front-end of the initiatives. Gathered opinion is used by planning officers and elected councillors as a decision making aid, but there is no obligation to follow the wishes of the public in the (present) committee stages of local authority business.

The key reasons for selecting this second case, include the fact that the range of projects sit within a specific set of policies at the local authority, at a time of policy transition in the UK generally, with an opportunity once more to study the instrumentally and politically (value) rational behaviour of the authority, as well as the perceptions of local residents and their participatory behaviour. In contrast to the Slaithwaite case, the public involvement activities in York are not necessarily discrete, and are instead used both in

series and in conjunction with other schemes. This allows the examination of agendas and attitudes in public participation (Research Question 3) in a setting where a more corporate, top-down approach is the norm, as opposed to the more responsive, single issue case study of the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme.

3.4   Survey Design

So where will the data come from to answer the research questions, and how is it collected? The opinion and attitudinal data that will address Research Questions 2 and 3 will come from those who are supposedly being catered for in public involvement theory and practice – that is by examining the perceptions of the public itself. It is this public who are affected by decisions made by local authorities, and who are now apparently being encouraged to take part in making those decisions. Their view of participation, and links between that view and reported participatory behaviour is the key to this research. Similarly, if rational activity is in action data must be collected that can uncover it. In which case, data to address Research Question 1 will be gathered in the same way, but will be collected in a manner which specifically deals with the kinds of 'rational' (in terms of value, instrumental and communicative rationality) phenomenon encountered in the literature cited in Chapters 1.3 & 2.4i. of this thesis.

As outlined above, one of the tried and tested methods of measuring opinion and attitude is the survey. The survey needs to translate the research questions into statistically testable hypotheses, ask direct questions that will provide relevant and quantifiable responses, test those hypotheses, either supporting or rejecting them, and then finally make generalisations about the phenomena under investigation. For all this to be logically connected to the public, the survey needs a sampling strategy.

The public involvement schemes mentioned so far in this thesis have been conducted at the local level, either by local authorities, or by agencies with delegated or ascribed responsibility for securing public involvement, such as

consultants or community associations. This link with local authorities makes the sampling frame and the statistical population fairly basic – that is, residents within an active authority. It was decided that a random sampling method would be used to generate a probability sample of households, the precise details of which will be discussed later. Representativeness was regarded as important in the survey, as the research questions were aimed at exploring a general picture of public involvement in the population. The logistics of carrying out this type of survey are considerable, and the sampling units are often widely scattered (Sarantakos 1996), but again, the research questions are targeted at the general public and it is these opinions that are sought.

The random sample can be generated in a number of ways, but considering the impending logistics of the survey it was decided that if it was at all possible, random address datasets would be purchased from an external source, most likely the chosen local authorities. Failing this, the next favoured method would be a hybrid of area and random sampling (Sarantakos 1996), where a random selection of addresses, from a random collection of residential areas, were selected. The sizes of the actual samples would be derived from the population within the local authority boundary. A reference table was acquired (Krejcie and Morgan 1970), which would determine the sample size from whichever public involvement schemes and local authorities that would be finally studied.

According to the sample size table in Krejcie and Morgan, the size of the two case study samples are derived from the populations of the areas themselves. With a population of around 6,000 Slaithwaite's sample size is determined to be 361. The population covered by City of York Council is around 175,000 giving a sample size by that same method, of 385. The addresses for the York postal survey were generated and printed onto postal labels by the Electoral Services Department at City of York Council, for a fee. This is a service widely available in local authorities and is based on a random selection of a set number of addresses from a city-wide database. Unfortunately, the same

service was not offered by Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council, and the alternative hybrid method of obtaining the addresses for the postal survey was used.

An on-line postal code service was used to its full potential, possibly stretching the service that was actually on offer from the provider (however no fee or registration was required to access and use the information in this database). From this dataset, a list was generated of all streets in the Slaithwaite district, each having a full list of the postcodes by house number in that street. This was the first part of the area-random hybrid sampling method. The second element called for the sample to be made up of houses from each of these streets, with each street being represented proportionally, but with addresses within those streets taken from a table of randomly generated numbers. Some of the streets and roads were particularly long, especially Manchester Road, which had a large number of addresses selected and included in the sample. Meanwhile, others were exceptionally short lanes or bridleways, having maybe two or three cottages or a farm address. Industrial and commercial addresses were also encountered, but were rejected in favour of the nearest residential addresses in those streets or roads.

Both of the address datasets were larger than the sample sizes required, in case of any logistical problems, such as delivery to a condemned property, or an inaccurate address in the source databases. Out of 746 questionnaires mailed, only two were returned by the Royal Mail with such postal difficulties.

3.4i   Questionnaire Design

It was decided that questionnaires would be sent to householders and occupants, to gather their opinions on public involvement in decision making, and on their recollected experiences, if they had any. Sarantakos provides a range of advantages and limitations in using postal questionnaires in social research, which are summarised in Table 4A. Meanwhile, May (1997) adds

that without some incentive (either a direct interest in the topic, or even some financial incentive) response rates in postal surveys will be low. May sees this as a feature of the target population more than any other factor in survey or questionnaire design, and that non-response will mainly relate to the number of individuals in the sample that do not have enough interest in the subject to return a completed questionnaire. This will almost certainly mean that those who do finally choose to respond are not necessarily representative of the target population, i.e. - the sample is now biased. This propensity to participate will be discussed fully, in terms of rational choice in the following chapters.

It is important here to direct the reader to the fact that an imperfect, possibly low response rate was therefore *expected* in this survey. Any of the chosen case studies might have a higher *reported* level of interest in public involvement, possibly due to their exposure to such schemes, or reports of schemes. The cases in this work were after all chosen on the basis of local public involvement experiences, but the literature discussed in Chapter 2 has created an uncertainty about interest levels in public involvement.

Advantages	Limitations
• they are inexpensive (compared with other methods of wide ranging data collection) • they are quick • they can be completed in the respondents own time • they can assure anonymity • they are less prone to error or bias associated with researcher intimidation of respondents • they are of a standard and consistent format for each respondent • they can be extremely structured and considered - i.e. focused • they can cover a physically large area for the price of postage	• they are taken at face value, with no opportunity for the researcher to prompt, clarify, probe or motivate response • the identity of the respondent is uncertain - has the right person answered the questions? • the answering sequence cannot be verified • partial completion and response are a possibility, due to the lack of supervision during completion.

Table 3A. Advantages and limitations of postal questionnaires (after Sarantakos 1996, p.159)

If May's points hold and the interest in public involvement is at best inconsistent, and at worst weak, it might follow that the response rate to a questionnaire about it will also be low. In that case, every care should be taken to ensure that the best possible questionnaire went out to the sample, so that as far as possible the only issue in non response was the level of interest in the subject.

It must be noted also, that there is a particular skill and craft involved in questionnaire design. According to a discussion group on a now defunct social sciences bulletin board (discovered during a web search for 'questionnaire design'), the hard-core of survey-masters can report regular response rates of 70-90% with their postal questionnaires. However, these are designed professionally, targeted immaculately, and followed up repeatedly with significant access to resources, occasionally with additional financial incentives to respond. Even the widely cited specialist in this field, Don Dillman, recognises that these very high response rates are salient and mainly associated with particularly homogenous samples, such as professional or commercial organisations, and that even excellent design will not guarantee a high response rate (Dillman 1978). The questionnaire in this research was the best that could be designed with the resources available, and aimed at a widely heterogeneous and potentially only vaguely interested population.

3.4ii   Questionnaire design in practice

The central research questions were broken down into hypotheses, which in turn were operationalised and translated into questions to include in the questionnaire. To do this, the response format had to be considered, especially how to make replies or answers both analytically manageable and meaningful. A Likert scale of response was chosen (May 1997). Here respondents are given a choice of (commonly) five possible responses to a question, in a unidimensional response set in each case. These were verbal and textual responses that were assigned a 'tag' to be used in the

quantitative analysis of the response in the sample (Figure 3.1). Also, it was important to decide whether to allow for any nonsubstantive response - that is a central response, or a 'don't know' (Frey and Oishi 1995). After considering that some response options are still far from the opinion the respondent wishes to convey, and that it is possible that respondent might not have a full knowledge of the topic of public involvement, it was decided that such a nonsubstantive option should be incorporated into the response sets in most questions. However, the use of the term 'don't know' was avoided in favour of less intimidating terms such as 'undecided' or 'unsure'.

Question: Do you think that public participation achieves greater local democracy?

A. *strongly agree*

Tags

labels that will provide the quantification of response

B. *agree*

C. **undecided** ← **Nonsubstantive Provision**

D. *disagree*

E. *strongly disagree*

Unidirectional Response dealing only with the term 'agree'
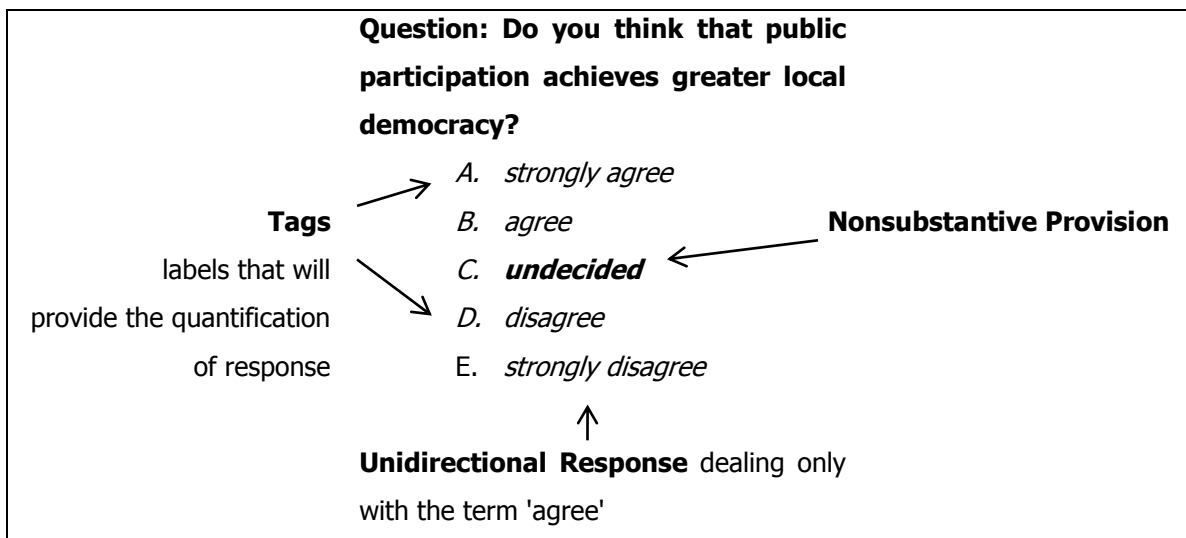
Fig 3.1 Main Response Structure

Three main texts were consulted when designing the actual questionnaire (Sarantakos 1996, May 1997, and Frey and Oishi 1995), these texts having already drawn from both classic guidelines on survey design and more innovative techniques. Most of the points were common to all three texts (only those that are mainly associated with one author are attributed individually below) and these central suggestions were incorporated to a greater or lesser extent in the initial design, with fine tuning and subtleties left until after the pilot stage.

Broadly, the questionnaire was designed to flow in three sections, each addressing certain aspects of Civic Culture theory or perceptions of

effectiveness. The aim of the first section was to ascertain whether the respondent had any first hand experience of public involvement, how the respondent viewed the idea of public involvement, and how interested the respondent is in political issues in general. The second section dealt with those respondents who had reported some first hand experience of a public involvement scheme. Here, the respondents views of the aims, visible mechanisms and outcomes of the project were collected, leading them to express opinions about the value and effectiveness of the scheme itself and their own role in it. The third and final section dealt with the respondents propensity for involvement in such schemes in the future.

One of the reasons for such a sectional approach was to ease the response burden on those individuals who had not been active, because as discussed above, participants tend to be 'of a type', and those who have not participated in schemes may well be the 'type' who do not complete and return questionnaires either. By using these sections, there was a minimum response demand from non-participants, with a more lengthy section for those who are more willing to discuss whatever experiences they might have.

The individual questions were of two types, with attitudes and opinions sought in most cases, and more factual information in others. These included the recollection of group sizes, frequency of voting in national and local elections, or recollection of the individual public involvement methods. Care was taken to avoid ambiguity in all the questions asked, and as far as the terminology allowed, the questions were unidirectional. This would help reduce ambiguity, dealing exclusively (in each question) with ideas such as 'confidence' in procedure, 'expectations' of group sizes, 'enough' opportunities for involvement, or on a number of occasions, 'effectiveness'. It is recognised that these are terms that require interpretation before an opinion can be formed and reported in a response, but using funnelling and filtering techniques, all respondents would hopefully be working around understood (if not necessarily shared) meanings.

Funnel techniques (as discussed by Frey and Oishi, 1995) were used occasionally in the questionnaires to help respondents get to the main question of interest. This practice was especially important when dealing with the previous point, regarding the subjective interpretation and meanings of certain key terms. By moving from the general to the specific in a series (though not always a consecutive set) of questions, it was hoped that an understanding of my use of the term in the questionnaire could be seen, and then worked with by the respondent. Also, if there is a subjective element to the question, a interpretative funnel might be of use (see Figure 3.2).

These 'funnels' were kept short, as it was observed that the list of central questions was growing. The funnel questions were originally seen as incidental and potentially of less importance in the final research, however the analysis of these would possibly be of interest later on. A filter technique was also used on a number of occasions, and its first appearance in Part One served as an indicator to the respondent as to how far to go with the questionnaire, as well as being one of the most central questions in the survey; the question being, *'Have you ever taken part in a public exercise, organised by the council or local authority?'.*

Funnel Question	Question: How would you personally have decided if the project was effective?
Interpretative Opportunity	A. If the issues were resolved in good time at a reasonable cost B. If the issues were resolved quickly C. If the issues were resolved fairly D. If the proposed developments went ahead E. If the proposed developments were turned down.
Central Question	Question: So how effective did you think it was in the end?
Response based on known interpretation	A. Very effective B. Quite effective C. Undecided D. Not that effective E. Not at all effective

Fig 3.2 Example of an Interpretative Question Funnel.

There was a need to appreciate the fact that many of the questions demanded the recall of past events and opinions formed around them. Frey and Oishi discuss a group of techniques that can be used to aid recall in this situation, but the most commonly used here was aided recall. This technique is not at all complex, it merely offers the respondent a list of events or issues contemporary with the public involvement scheme, that may not necessarily have been recalled if not prompted. For example, a respondent in Slaithwaite might not have recalled all of the methods used in the Slaithwaite 'Bit of a Do' event, and might completely miss out their use of the VDMISP software, or forget who else attended the meetings or exhibitions. Another aspect of aided recall is to anchor the response set in the event under examination (here the public involvement scheme) by referring to it in the question. Such lists of options can also act as a visual aid to recall.

The next important issue was the authority and credibility of the questionnaire. The guiding texts agreed that a covering letter and instructions are especially important in a postal questionnaire, where there is no personal contact between respondent and researcher. Certain minimum points were advised by Sarantakos (1996), and in view of these the covering letter explained who I was, what the research is about, why response was important and how the data would be used. A short instructional section also preceded the questionnaire proper. The covering letter was tailored to the case study areas, with direct reference either to the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme, or to the activities at City of York Council included in the final versions. A stamped addressed envelope would also ensure a direct return.

The questionnaire was then drafted and distributed in pilot form to colleagues, friends and family. The main feedback from the pilot stage was that the flow of the sections was not entirely clear, making the relevance of questions less obvious. This was rectified by marking and separating the sections more clearly, and using instruction to guide respondents who had not participated in any scheme to skip Part Two and continue straight to Part Three after completing Part One. Another issue raised during the pilot stage

was that there could be more space for additional comment from respondents. This was eventually provided, but was not originally intended in the design. There would now be options in the response sets for a more open reply (for example, the inclusion of the option 'other, please specify'). There would therefore be a more qualitative element included in the questionnaire and its analysis. This was accepted as an additional data type that could potentially become part of the triangulation of results, but this was an incidental and speculative afterthought and not an original part of the research design. Its value as a data collection method will be discussed more fully in later chapters. The third point arising at the pilot stage was that a return date should be provided, and repeated in the covering letter, the instructions and the body of the questionnaire. This would let the respondents know that there is some time limit on returning their questionnaires, and as well as providing a logistical cut-off point for stragglers after the main body of responses was received. The final re-drafted version of the questionnaire was mailed to a total of 746 addresses in the York and Slaithwaite case study areas early in January 2000, with a requested return date of March 1st 2000. Samples of the final questionnaire and covering letters are included in Appendix A.

The gathered survey data was finally analysed using the chi-square (χ^2) goodness of fit test, and the χ^2 test for independence to test hypotheses, and in certain cases the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was applied to appropriate data to identify positive or negative links between collected data and the strength of those relationships.

No further statistical tests were applied to examine *causality* between phenomena however, as the case study approach was designed to be exploratory rather than explanatory in nature (Yin 1994). Various theoretical associations between perceptions and behaviour in public involvement scenarios had been suggested in Chapter 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4, and the statistical tests applied in this work seek to test whether these were in fact occurring in the field, and address the degree of any observed association, but not to

examine causality itself. It is felt that a meaningful study of the causes of rationalised participatory behaviour, based on perceptions of mechanisms and participatory culture, required firstly a stronger indication that such combinations of rationalised participatory behaviour and political cultures actually exist - the search for such a combination is one of the aims of this research.

A second reason for the abstention from examining causality was the nature of the data collection method itself. If the critical realist line is taken, we should necessarily rely on the concept of cause and effect in social sciences anyway (Sayer, 2000), and that particular naturalist method of looking at phenomena (which are also affected by more subjective rational choice) is potentially going to miss the point or get bogged down in hermeneutics. In her discussion of Sayer (1992)'s attitude to the naturalist elements in critical realism, Zeuner (2001) summarises that concepts of what we regard as 'true' in our social world can be changed when they do not lead to an expected practical result, and that in Sayer's view concepts should be used to change what we see as the social world as well as represent it; '*...it may be wise to avoid thinking of knowledge as attempting to represent or mirror the world like a photograph.*' (Sayer 1992, p59). It is felt here that this allows for the results of this empirical work to be valid without a reliance on causality in its discussions.

The questionnaire and the postal survey design (and their potential for biased data and a low response rate [May 1997]) also made the potential validity of eventual statements regarding causality uncertain. Although the design could have been developed to reduce further the risk of missing data and interpretative error, it was felt once more that exploration was the priority in this work rather than explanation.

On the topic of error, the interpretation of the statistical outcomes of the above tests was subject to risk. In the case of the χ^2 tests of significance and independence, the risk of making a Type I error (rejecting the H_o when it is true) or a Type II error (not rejecting the H_o when it is false) varied, as the level of significance used was varied in the analysis of *some* of the survey

questions, to allow rejection of the null hypothesis. Howell (1999, p129) suggests that this is not unacceptable, and argues that it allows the notion of 'more' or 'less' significant to be applied to outcomes, rather than restricting the outcomes to 'significant' and 'non-significant'. This requires however, that the change in the level of significance is presented to the reader and thus the recognition of the greater likelihood of a Type I error in the interpretation. With this in mind, the level of significance for the majority of the χ^2 tests was set to be $p = 0.01$, with the occasional use of $p = 0.05$ and $p = 0.1$. When testing the significance of the correlation coefficient (r), the following t test was first applied to the calculated value of r :

$$ t = \frac{r \sqrt{N-2}}{\sqrt{1-r^2}} $$

Calculating t_{crit} for Testing the Significance of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) (Howell 1997)

The calculated value of t was then compared against the percentage points of the t distribution, in a one-tailed test for significance. In a similar method as outlined for the χ^2 tests, the level of significance was generally set at $p = 0.1$, although other significance levels were used occasionally, and these instances are noted and their implications addressed in the discussion. The criterion for altering the significance level was whether the significance level was more lenient than $p = 0.25$. This is based on a subjective decision made during analysis, based on the degree to which it might be acceptable to speak in terms of 'more' or 'less' significant. That is, it was decided that $p = 0.25$ was as far toward non-significant as one might reasonably accept in an exploratory analysis. As will be discussed later, calculated values of r that did not allow rejection of the null hypothesis at that level were eventually found to in the majority. This apparent absence of correlation in certain phenomena will also be discussed in later chapters.

3.4iii Semi-Structured Interviews

'Interviews yield rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, aspirations, attitudes and feelings.' (May 1997, p.109). According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995), over 90% of social research employs interviewing in some capacity. Again, the method uses a standardised set of questions, on the same group of topics as the questionnaire, but the hypothesis bearing questions are shaped into more probing open questions. This second element to the data collection is an opportunity to explore public involvement policy as interpreted by the second group of individuals that will help answer the research questions. These are the professionals and voluntary workers who administer, initiate or otherwise assist in public involvement programs, and who have the more informed views on both the policy and practicalities of schemes, and can speak for their organisations as well as offer a personal opinion.

This non-probability sample would be purposive, with specific roles in a public involvement scheme represented. Hence, local planning officers, members of community organisations, consultants and relevant academics (bearing in mind the IT development aspect of public involvement) would have to be contacted as potential interviewees.

The chosen interview method would depend heavily on logistics once more. When the research methodology was first being designed, the potential case studies included a third scheme in Seattle. A uniform approach with face to face interviews did not seem viable if this case were included, although telephone interviews were possible, despite logistical difficulties (such as an eight hour time difference or the prohibitive cost of calls). In time the U.S. case study was rejected due to a lack of substantial material, and difficulties securing resources to maintain the interview schedule. The remaining cases were U.K. based, making telephone interviews even more attractive to those funding this thesis. Sarantakos (1996) again provides a list of the advantages and limitations in the use of telephone interviews in research (Table 3B).

Advantages	Limitations
• the results are immediately available, and collectable in one's own office • it is a relatively economical process - with call-time as the only outlay • allows a relaxed environment, as the respondent is not confronted with the interviewer • removes the threat of any latent prejudice that the respondent might have toward the interviewers age, race, ethnicity etc.	• There is no guaranteed way to identify the respondent as the one sought • does not allow non-verbal communications to be recorded • a threat of interruption, even in pre-arranged interviews • more time consuming for respondents

Table 3B Advantages and limitations of telephone interviews (paraphrased from Sarantakos 1996 p.197)

3.4iv   Interview design in practice

The same approach was used in the design of the structured interviews as was used in the operationalisation of the questionnaire. That is, the main research questions were considered, then translated and broken down into askable and operationally meaningful questions. There were a number of core analytical themes that the questions were going to address. These were slightly more sophisticated and explicit than those aimed at the general public in the questionnaire, reflecting the fact that this is a more informed and accountable sample. The themes were:

- the interviewees' knowledge of the ideals and meaning of public involvement
- the rationale for public involvement in their case area
- the interviewees' perception of case scheme effectiveness
- the interviewees' feelings toward the use of IT in public involvement
- the interviewees' image of the strengths and weaknesses of public involvement schemes

The questions again had a definite sequence and flow to them, taking the interviewee from an initial enquiry regarding their interpretation of the notion of public involvement, and how their personal definitions fit in with the official

line that they either work with (for example as planning officers) or have encountered (for example as community group members). So, in effect, a version of the interpretative funnel technique, that was designed originally for the questionnaire, was employed in the interviews to help appreciate both subjective and shared meanings of public involvement. Subsequently, there was a reference to central or local government policy regarding public involvement, within a question addressing the origin of demand for such schemes. In addition to these more interpretative and attitudinal questions, there were (as in the questionnaire) more recollective and factual aspects to the interview, in particular in the next section, where the interviewees own role in the case studies was stated.

As the main unit of analysis is the perception of effectiveness, the following questions turned to the interviewees' opinions on the case study specifics. This involved enquiring about the schemes themselves, the local authorities' use of the information gathered, the feedback from the schemes and the interviewees' impressions of each phase. The first references to empowerment were made at this point, and the interviewees were hopefully in the frame of mind to recall and discuss these ideas while being mentally anchored in the cases specifics. Unlike the questionnaires, there could be no opportunity for visual aids for recall purposes in the interviews, which made the subtle guidance of the interviewees by question placing even more important.

The potential for the use of IT in public involvement and collaborative decision making was addressed directly in the next section. A pilot interview revealed that it was not immediately obvious what that meant exactly, so it was decided that a brief outline of the VDMISP work could be provided, as a careful introduction to the question. There was room in the interview schedule for this to be explored or explained as necessary. This was almost expected, as the role of IT in public involvement is not widely appreciated, and it seemed justifiable to give some measured guidance through this section if necessary.

The final section dealt with the public's perceptions of scheme effectiveness. This section would probably invite a biased response from these individuals. In the documents pertaining to the case studies, there was rarely any form of self criticism or self evaluation that made schemes look anything less than effective. For this reason, I decided to 'load' the question. If bias and subjectivity was about to arise, it may as well be focussed on an emotive enquiry, which would make any interviewee bias more interesting and useful for analysis than a simple, self congratulatory reply. The wording of the question changed with the general atmosphere and emerging relationship with the interviewee but on paper it asked, *'Do the problems and barriers encountered in public involvement programmes damage the public's image of them?'* The loaded aspect of the question being of course that there are any problems and barriers in public involvement schemes at all. As it will be seen in later discussion, the interviewees weren't necessarily influenced by this feint, and if they disagreed with the assumption in the question, they made it known. Finally, the interviewees were asked if there were any other points they might like to raise that might not have been covered. It was expected that the responses would expand beyond the specified list of questions, into informal elaboration, asides and anecdotal material that just could not be collected using a postal survey. However, informality and banter could not distract from the objectivity and basic structure of the interview, and the framework and consistency of the coverage of topics had to be a priority. The product of this interview phase was a set of codeable and comparable answers, to take forward to a qualitative analytical phase.

The selection of interviewees for this phase of the research was based on a purposive and diverse sample as described above. The initial contact with the Colne Valley Trust - the organisers of the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme, was made some time before the data collection strategy was designed. Also, as my own former institution, an academic link already existed with the Leeds School of Geography VDMISP group - the developers of the IT based exercises in that scheme. This list of potential interviewees for the Slaithwaite

case also included members of Planning Services at Kirklees, and the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation who acted as consultants in the Planning For Real© exercise in the Shaping Slaithwaite program. Another body on the list was the South Kirklees Rural Partnership Project, which is a co-operative partnership organisation, closely associated with and co-funded by Kirklees, but not formally part of the authority itself.

In the City of York case study, potential candidates were considered from the Citizen Support Unit at the Chief Executive's Department. This group actively works on the policy and logistics of community involvement across the service departments at City of York, and were the source of the York Citizen's Charter. Discussion with a key informant at City of York identified some individuals who had direct front-line experience in both public involvement scheme implementation and the processing of gathered information. Furthermore, some internal communications were acquired, which again identified potential interviewees, this time in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in York, who had become involved in (among other programs) a regeneration project in the Osbaldwick and Metcalfe Lane areas of the city. Although the JRF is a charitable and community oriented body, it did not meet the criteria of a community or residential group, which was needed to mirror the sample in the Slaithwaite case. An interviewee from this group was hard to find, not least because the literature form City of York Council does not mention any such group, or a contact for it. Frustratingly, the ample resources of the Internet, various telephone directories and library CD ROMs only provided one single listing of a residents association in the York area. Through this lone contact, I was eventually directed to the Federation of York Residents Associations, an umbrella group for the 24 other (un-listed) residents associations in the York area.

The final selection of interviewees from the identified groups and departments was based for the most part on the availability of the individual with most authority. This aimed to interview those individuals with both responsibility and knowledge, while recognising their own limited availability for interview.

This was relatively straightforward for the senior members of the community groups, as they were keen to participate in the research and made themselves available despite apparently heavy schedules. The senior members of the local authority departments were far more elusive, and after a number of failed contacts with unresponsive officers, second choice interviewees with possibly less scheme relevance had to be considered. The first choice NIF representative in the Slaithwaite scheme was very keen to participate in the research also, as was the City of York officer with the front-line experience, who had since taken employment elsewhere.

The Slaithwaite interviewees were Dr Steve Carver, Dr Richard Kingston and Dr Andy Evans (Leeds University, School of Geography), Bob Edinburgh (Kirklees Planning Services), Linda Crayton (South Kirklees Rural Partnership Project), and Edward Walker (Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation). Unfortunately, after the initial and very helpful contact with David Littlewood, members of the Colne Valley Trust declined to take any further part in this research, even after repeated requests. The implications of this for the research and speculated reasons for this abstention are offered in later chapters. The City of York interviewees were Andrew Gillespie (City of York Citizen Support Services), Roy Hearn (Chair of the Federation of York Residents Associations), Joanna Lee (former Local Plan Development Officer at City of York) and Peter Marcus (Joseph Rowntree Foundation). Each interviewee had an individual of more or less equivalent role in the other case, except those from the University of Leeds, who although originally from the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme, were representing the UK CSDM - VDMISP - GIS community in general.

Apart from Carver et al, who were interviewed in a face to face group session at the School of Geography in Leeds, each interviewee was approached with a telephone pre-call to introduce myself and the research. If interested and available, the interviewee was given the interview outline (if requested) and was informed about the duration of the interview (no more than forty minutes), and that the call would be recorded for transcription. Each was

assured that the information exchanged would be used only for this work, and that any criticism and contentious points would be used in a constructive way, and that discretion would be used in attributing potentially delicate statements to individuals. All the interviewees consented to this arrangement and no corrections, objections or questions were raised by those who were sent a copy of their interview transcripts. A copy of the interview questions appears in Appendix B.

3.4v   Documents and Secondary Data

As a collection of public exercises, informing administration, and guided by policy, there will be a significant number of documents that can be visited to help answer the research questions. There will be personal documents, memos, proposals, publicity materials, academic evaluations, agendas and minutes, newspaper articles, guidelines, internal reports, maps, photographs and more. These are sometimes contemporary with the events studied, or could equally be retrospective, either generated on the spot by eyewitness to the phenomena under examination, or secondary reports and accounts of events (Sarantakos 1996). Whatever the type, documents are *'...sedimentations of social practices'* telling us about *'...the aspirations and intentions of the period to which they refer, and describe places and social relationships...when we might not have been present'* (May 1997, p.157-8). Furthermore, as Stake (1995, p68) points out, *'Quite often, documents serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly. Sometimes, of course, the recorder is a more expert observer than the researcher'*. Table 3C summarises Yin's (1994) advantages and limitations of documentary and archival research.

Scott (1990) sets four areas that should be addressed in the interpretative analysis of documents: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. Document authenticity can be verified generally in this research by the nature of the documents that are addressed, their source and their route

from that source. In all cases, documents were provided by either the actual authors or obtained by formal correspondence with departments or officers.

Advantages	Limitations
• stable - can be visited repeatedly • unobtrusive • exact - clearly stated names, dates, references etc • broad coverage - spanning events, settings and interpretations • precise and well collected data (when from a professional source)	• retrievability - can be awkward • biased selectivity if the collection is incomplete • reporting bias from an unknown author • access could be blocked from certain sensitive sources

Table 3C Advantages and Limitations of Documentary and Archival Methods (adapted from Yin 1994, p80)

Credibility is an issue in the interpretation of the documents considered in this research, as the conflicting agendas and disparate backgrounds of document authors, and the political nature of many of the documents gathered, can potentially result in uncertain or possibly disingenuous content. This is addressed in later discussions. Representativeness it is felt, has been achieved in the selection of documents used, in that they are generally either organisational, governmental or local authority statements agreed and released by committee. Of main interest is the issue of meaning.

Scott reminds us that even focussed readings of such documents will give only literal meanings, and that interpretations are also needed to perform meaningful analyses. *'Interpretive understanding is the end-product of a hermeneutic process in which the researcher relates the literal meanings to the contexts in which they were produced in order to assess the meaning of the text as a whole.'* (Scott 1990, p30). The context in which the documents addressed in this work were originally prepared is of particular importance, and there needs to be an appreciation of the presentation style and intended audience, especially in the exploration of policy documents. For example, it is notable that the Modernising Government initiatives being prepared by the

two case study authorities were at the time of the field work and the time of the development of the specific public involvement schemes, responding to early consultation documents regarding modernisation and not to the later White Paper. There are notable differences between the style and intended audience in these documents, which are identified and discussed in later chapters.

Examining these differences in their contemporary settings may reveal far more than the aspirations, commitments and statements listed within. Academic papers relating to the Shaping Slaithwaite programme from the University of Leeds School of Geography have a different but knowable audience again, as do the reports of the Colne Valley Trust, and the communications between the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and City of York Council, and all require considered interpretation.

The interpretative method used to aid this hermeneutic approach was again content analysis, where the frequency of concepts, statements or ideas presented in the document text was noted and formed a basis for interpretation. However, unlike in the analysis of interview data, the use of content analysis in the documentary section of the case studies was more basic and restricted to one coding level only, rather than the three levels of coding and sub-coding that featured in the interview analyses. The reason for this decision was that (returning to the research aims and research questions) the primary interest here was the perception of policy and methods in the case studies, and not the policies themselves.

Secondary analysis is defined as '*...any further analysis of an existing data set which present interpretations, conclusion of knowledge additional to, or different from, those presented in the first report on the enquiry as a whole and its main results.*' (Hakim 1982, p1). The documents examined in the research are one such secondary data source, another being official and published statistics. These may either be from market research, government sources, or from figures published in other reputable documents. This can yield significant amounts of relevant and good quality information, which was

originally carefully collected and professionally analysed (Hakim 1982). Using this rationale, data from secondary market research sources such as MORI and NOP also appear periodically throughout this thesis.

The Slaithwaite documents included the publicity materials of the 'Bit of a Do', the Planning For Real resources from the NIF, press releases, discussion and position papers form Kirklees Metropolitan Council, the Shaping Slaithwaite Process Report and the follow up Shaping Slaithwaite Proposals Report. There were also a number of academic papers coming out of the Leeds VDMISP group, which discussed the specific IT experience in detail, along with antecedents and later developments in the academic theory and the software it uses.

For the City of York case, the materials included the York Citizen's Charter, a number of internal and personal memos regarding specific processes and schemes, The York Citizen online newspaper, policy directives and discussions within the authority and public invitations and guidelines on participation.

3.5   The Case Study Protocol

The field-work, drawing upon the above methods, within the stated methodology was carried out using a case study protocol as advocated by Yin (1994). The specifically designed protocol guiding this stage of the research is now presented. Not only did this sequence of practical and analytical steps shape the data collection, but it also provides the framework for the presentation of results in ensuing chapters.

A. **Ideals and general case rationales**

   Contextual Examination – at what political or temporal point does the kind of public involvement discussed in this work actually take place?

   This requires data to be gathered to appreciate the general:

   Policies involved in the case study

Bodies involved in the case study

Timing of public involvement in the case study

Stated intentions and rationales – what is the intention and reasoning behind the involvement of different parties in public involvement?

This requires data regarding general public involvement motives in the case study from:

The relevant authorities

Interviewees

Survey sample

B. <u>**Specific given reasons for public involvement**</u>

The individual case in detail – what are the specific issues involved in the collaborative project under examination, and how do they sit in the context of the above data?

Entry point / aspirations of key actors – which groups or key individuals enter the process, and at what point, and to what stated end?

Entry point / aspirations of survey sample – how do the local populations in the case study areas enter such a process, what do they hope to gain, and how do these aspirations fit with the theoretical, policy and practical contexts?

C. <u>**Scheme effectiveness**</u>

Official feedback – how effective was the scheme under study seen to be? How did it relate to the stages examined above?

Using evaluative recollective data from:

The Guiding Authority

Interest groups involved

And also from non-official sources:

Interviewee opinion of the effectiveness of the scheme

Survey responses regarding perceptions of effectiveness

D. <u>IT in public involvement (mostly relevant for Slaithwaite case)</u>

Centrally, the position of VDMISP group – the motives, rationale and aspirations of an IT focussed research interest. Plus:

Interviewee perception of the role of IT in public involvement

Recollective Comments from the survey on IT

E. <u>Empowerment issues</u>

Aspirations and policy – what sort of influence would the public have in the decision making involved in the studied projects?

Taking the aspirational statements of:

The Local Authority

Relevant interest groups

Interviewees

Sample.

Post-scheme perceptions – how much influence did the public actually have, or perceive that they had? Was it congruent with what was intended or hoped for?

Drawing on the stated views of;

The Local Authority

Interest groups

Interviewees

Sample.

F. <u>Exploration of views on public involvement</u>

Officially documented perceptions – how do those charged with designing and implementing public involvement policy consider the public sees the topic? How do they state that this perception of public opinion affects policy?

Interviewees' views of public perception – are they in line with what those addressed above consider the public's opinion to be? What experience do these individuals have to base such views?

Perception of sample – how do the public actually see the matter? Do those mentioned above accurately articulate the public view? What are the differences or similarities?

G. **<u>Overview of pertinence and effectiveness</u>**
The final drawing together by comparison of the perceptions, criticisms and supportive comments of the parties involved in each case. Comprising:
> *Official claims and conclusions*
> *Interviewee conclusions*
> *Sample conclusions*

The thesis now goes forward to present the results of each case study, following this format.

4.1 Introduction

The field data will now be presented in terms of the main research issues, that is - following the case study protocol. Data gathered in the Slaithwaite case on each component of the protocol is presented, and each section is summarised before moving onto the next. At the end of this chapter, a broader summary and conclusion is presented for the case study.

In this and the following chapter the smaller scale hypotheses and questions will be translated back into a textual presentation. The data presented here come from the analysis of pertinent documents, structured interviews and the postal survey in the Slaithwaite area. This chapter will deal with Slaithwaite data only, and no comparisons will be made yet to the data from the York case, nor will be discussed in the context of wider theory until the next chapter.

4.2 Ideals and general rationale for public involvement

The first task in the Slaithwaite case study was to examine what the various bodies involved in the Shaping Slaithwaite project were aiming to accomplish. Understanding the end point of the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme required a full understanding of the general initiating forces, the origins of this type of project and the stated rationales of the facilitators, their supporters and the participants. For example, did all these groups have similar intentions? Were those involved chiefly concerned with process or outcome? Were the driving forces reactive and Slaithwaite based, or pro-active and Kirklees based?

4.2i   Statements From Key Bodies

In the position paper 'Community Leadership and Involvement', Kirklees Metropolitan Council outlined its support for the principles of community involvement in local decision making. Many of the points raised are very similar to those which eventually appeared in the Modernising Government White Paper in 1999. The Kirklees document dates from 1998 and repeatedly refers to the government's consultations that preceded the White Paper itself. Selected points from the Kirklees position paper are presented here.

In the introduction to the document, KMC stated that, *'We want to develop new and clearer ways of working with local people that allow them, if they wish to contribute to decisions on issues and policies that affect them, their families and their neighbourhoods. We need methods that work well and are designed to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to participate.'* Kirklees then lists in its objectives a commitment to, *'expand citizen involvement in local decision making without making platforms which disadvantage the least powerful or articulate in society.'*

The remainder of the document refers to the consumer role of citizens, and the necessity for the public to be able to influence policy. There is also a section on Participation in Elections and Education for Citizenship, in which Kirklees recognised the traditionally low electoral turnout in the area. It does not however refer to the role of the public in less strategic matters, such as development control.

Meanwhile, in the pre-amble to the virtual decision making demonstration (which was based on the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme), the VDMISP group from the University of Leeds stated that their own aims were:

- To critically examine how new communication technologies and infrastructures can be used to improve public participation in local environmental decision making

- To examine the role of GIS and the Internet in enhancing current decision making processes and infrastructures.

- To solicit opinions from the public on their role in decision making and the usefulness of Virtual Decision Making Environments.

Furthermore, the Colne Valley Trust, in its publication 'Shaping Slaithwaite: Part 1 - Process' (CVT 1998a) stated that its key aims were to *'provide a foundation for the people of Slaithwaite to be heard, and to take effective action on issues which concern us all…to help individuals express their opinions on social, economic and environmental issues that concern them, and to help the community work towards a consensus on those issues.'*

Initial interpretation of the official documentation in the Slaithwaite case suggests that firstly, Kirklees Metropolitan Council's central reason for funding and encouraging the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme was to appease central government and conform to emerging policy on the inclusion of a third, voluntary sector in its activities, rather than offering a real sea change in its view of the public's role in local government. Meanwhile the VDMISP group have repeatedly (see Carver et al 1997, Carver et al 1998a, 1998b) *stated* that their aim in Slaithwaite was to test their software in the field, and not as they *imply*, advance the subject of democratic participation in local government. Finally, only the documentation from the CVT gave a value based summary of its rationale for public involvement in the canal re-development project. As will be discussed later, the differing public involvement motives seen in these documents create issues of incompatibility, and of potential friction at the interfaces between them.

4.2ii   Attitudes of key actors / interviewees

There were no openly negative or even sceptical views offered regarding the deeper ideals or motives for public involvement in the interviews for the Slaithwaite case study. It seems that the potential democratic benefits of public involvement in decision making were not disputed by the interviewees,

and that it was accepted as a logical and desirable state of democracy. In fact, the Kirklees planning officer, the community worker and the public involvement specialist in the Slaithwaite case, all shared some expressly positive views on the ideals of this kind of democratic program. For example Edward (Edi) Walker, the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation consultant on the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme, stated plainly; *"We're talking about ideals here aren't we – it's a human right as it were. Its just a natural thing to do as far as I'm concerned in any facet of life"*

Linda Crayton of the SKRPP agrees with Edi Walker that public involvement in decision making has a social and ethical basis, although this view was not repeated in the remaining Slaithwaite interviews. Public involvement was also seen by both Linda Crayton and Bob Edinburgh (Kirklees Planning Services) as a tool to help craft practical, consensus-building decision making environments at the local level; *"...there is always a need to inform the public, and on many occasions* [it] *can bring useful information which can lead to a better plan or a better project"* (Bob Edinburgh).

None of the interviewees suggested that local public involvement in general is a result of a central government that might be failing local communities, nor a result of a public reaction against unresponsive local authorities. The latter point was not entirely unexpected in the case of interviewees who work for or with the local authority, however it does raise another issue. The literature has suggested many driving forces for public involvement and so-called grass-roots action, however, if even the local community groups have not raised issues of unsatisfactory service from central government or the local authority, then the identification of the driving forces becomes difficult. The SKRPP and Kirklees Planning Services certainly raise the point that there is a local desire for public involvement, but whatever rationale there may be for this desire for involvement, this was neither obvious nor explained.

Edi Walker seemed to be the individual with the greatest practical and background knowledge of public involvement in the Shaping Slaithwaite case, and offered an encouraging note regarding the democratisation that public involvement in decision making can bring to communities. He considered,

after his significant practical experiences, that public involvement is the basis of a possible new democratic structure. This is an interesting opinion, bearing in mind that it was expressed (and based on experiences gained) before the publication of the Labour Government's White Paper on Modernising Government, where this kind of community level involvement is promoted as just that. It would be interesting also, in a theoretical sense, to follow up whether the NIF shares the Labour government's interests in developing the voluntary (third) sector to assist the work of administrations, but this is outside the scope of this thesis. Linda Crayton and Bob Edinburgh did however allude to directives from central government for local authorities to increasingly involve the public; *"I think basically it's because they are told to from above. As soon as central government says this is what we want to see, everyone starts running about..."* (Linda Crayton). *"...Its quite a clinical process on the part of the local authority, who are directed to involve them* [the public] *"* (Bob Edinburgh).

However, it was mentioned by both Kirklees Planning Services and the SKRPP that the main use for this kind of democratising programme was to raise awareness and inform, rather than include the public in actual local decision making. From the point of the thesis, demonstrating this point is encouraging, as it seems that notions and definitions of participation and involvement are still not necessarily clear and are not commonly shared. Indeed in the series of interviews, only Edi Walker showed significant experience and a background knowledge of public involvement and its ideals, and despite the enthusiasm of the other interviewees, it became clear that the subject was somewhat of a grey area to them.

4.2iii   Survey results

When asked what the origins of public involvement might be, the survey respondents in Slaithwaite maintained that it was mainly a result of public demand (39.2%). However, a close second to this, was the idea that public

involvement programs are council or local authority initiated (32.4%). A response offer was available, that the chief public involvement driving force at the time was central government, but this option was taken by only 8.8% of the respondents.

When respondents were asked whether they considered that public involvement brings about greater democracy a significant number (39.2%) agreed, but 29.4% were uncertain about whether or not it did.

Furthermore, when this study was carried out, the respondents in Slaithwaite were unsure (35.3%) whether the UK political system was prepared to accept public involvement in decision making at all. The next most popular reply here was that the political system and culture was totally unprepared (24.5%) for such public input in politics.

However, those respondents who stated that they had become involved in one or any public involvement schemes, went on to say that there was not enough (42.1%) or certainly not enough (31.6%) opportunity for public involvement in local government. Crucially, that body of respondents was the minority in the Slaithwaite sample; only 37.3% of respondents in this case study had become involved with any such scheme, with 62.8% not participating.

4.2iv   Summary

The popularity of more pragmatic and efficiency-based (instrumental) rationales for public involvement, as expressed in the interviews of key actors in the Slaithwaite case, suggests that a deeper participatory ideology is not ultimately at the head of the agenda. It is certainly possible that these utilitarian reasons for public involvement are the product of some original deeper, value-based consideration of democracy, but the views expressed in the interviews rarely suggested it.

It was evident from the survey results that the forces driving public involvement in the Slaithwaite case are generally seen to be local in nature

(that is, initiated by some call from the public, or initiated by a pro-active local authority) rather than imposed from an external body, such as central government. There was some agreement that this brings about democratic benefits, but also some uncertainty about its democratic impact, and significantly, whether the UK political system was ready for such inputs from the public.

Of greatest note, is the mis-match between expected use of public involvement opportunities, and actual uptake in Slaithwaite. The interviews and the documented statements from Kirklees Metropolitan Council made claims about the need and desire for the involvement of the public in local decision making, yet when offered the opportunity, only 37.3% of residents (according to the survey, and as will be shown later, far fewer in the records of the facilitators) mobilised. However these claims of local desire were not followed up with claims about any national desire for public involvement, which lends weight to the idea that many of the responses, and ideological frameworks that policy makers and interviewees are working to, are essentially recollective and subjective. This point could account for over-estimation of public interest when public involvement schemes are on offer. The close relationship between this point and civic culture theory will be examined in the next chapter.

4.3 Specific reasons for public involvement

The criteria for choosing Slaithwaite as a case to study have been outlined in earlier sections. The specific criteria for getting the public involved in decisions that needed to be made around the canal restoration in the village must also be teased out, to appreciate the motives of those participating and facilitating, and to understand the choice of methods used to gather public input on the ground. Why did the Colne Valley Trust initiate the Shaping Slaithwaite 'Bit of a Do'? Why did Kirklees MC help facilitate it? Why was the Leeds VDMISP group there? What was the role of the NIF? And finally, what reasons did the public give for becoming (or not becoming) involved?

4.3i   The Shaping Slaithwaite programme.

No published material from Kirklees Metropolitan Council was provided or uncovered to add to this section of the case study account. However the CVT saw the main relevance of this project in its potential to, '...co-ordinate and report on action taken, so that change in Slaithwaite is effected and managed as much as possible by the community itself.' The project itself was presented by them as a response to the issue of incorporating sustainability into the area. 'Slaithwaite has problems and concerns in common with other villages in the area (and throughout the country) but additionally faces disruption from the restoration of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, and serious traffic difficulties.' (CVT 1998a, p4).

Meanwhile, the specific reason for the involvement of the Leeds University VDMISP group was that they considered the Slaithwaite program as an excellent opportunity to test new virtual decision making software, in a real world context, in order to gauge the response of the public to the technology itself, and to observe two way flows of spatially referenced data and information. The relatively small physical area covered by the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme (that is the village centre) also offered the research group an opportunity to use their software at a local scale, to complement associated research which was taking place on the regional and national level.

4.3ii   Rationale and justifications of key actors

There was little pattern or trend in the responses of the interviewees to questions regarding the specific rationale for seeking public input in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme. This is where the contribution of David Littlewood or any member of the Colne Valley Trust would have been greatly

appreciated. However, no member of the CVT ever made themselves available for interview.

Kirklees Planning Services, via Bob Edinburgh, acknowledged the policies contained within the Modernising Government agenda, though made no statement of commitment to them. The White Paper itself, as far as can be gauged by the response, may well have been used as a guiding structure, even if its early detail, ideals and direction were not accepted by all members of Kirklees MC - which at the time of both the fieldwork and the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme was a local authority with no overall political control. Also, Bob Edinburgh acknowledged that it is often perceived that local authorities' attempts at public involvement are the result of a minimum statutory requirement and no more, though he offered no further statements on that point.

Linda Crayton re-iterated the influence of central policy in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme, but also mentioned the significant and wider local interest in the canal restoration and in its implications for the village and surrounding area. However, neither Edi Walker nor the team from the University of Leeds brought up the same points. The fact that a consensus or any other convergence of opinion was absent from this part of the data is of great interest. Although the CVT had apparently solid reasons to initiate the Shaping Slaithwaite programme, it seems to only barely fit, possibly opportunistically, with the rationales and reasons of the other linked agencies regarding public involvement. Certainly, the inclusion of the VDMISP research group at the University of Leeds was certainly opportunistic. Richard Kingston from the VDMISP group said in interview, that the Slaithwaite case was, *"...not a technology led project at all. The planning for real stuff was in place and we just tagged along....what we did was approach an existing project."* Steve Carver added that it was Kirklees Metropolitan Council that put them in touch with the newly mobilising Colne Valley Trust.

4.3iii Survey results

After asserting that public involvement initiatives are generally local in nature, the Slaithwaite respondents stated that there were quite interested (64.7%) or very interested (11.8%) in local politics and local issues. Of the respondents who had taken part in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme, 57.9% specified that their main reason for getting involved was a direct interest in the canal restoration and its implications, while 42.1% said that they had a general interest in public input into local government. However, the participant respondents revealed that they felt that the main reason that the public were invited to get involved, was that the local authority didn't want any complaints (42.1%) from local residents after any developments associated with the canal regeneration. Only 5.3% responded that the local authority really cared about the public's view on the matter.

As well as the rationales given for becoming involved in the scheme, it is also of great interest as to why members of the public stated that they *did not* get involved. There were a number of specific reasons given for non-participation among the 62.8% of respondents who had not been involved in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme. There was a large number who stated that they were simply unaware of the project (42.2% of the non-participants), another body that claimed to never have been invited to participate (28.1%), those who were unavailable to take part (17.2%), those who found it too much trouble (7.8%), and finally, a group that simply preferred not to become involved at all (4.7%).

4.3iv Summary

The specific reasons given by different groups for becoming involved in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme were often ambiguous with an apparent lack of direction. There seems to have been no convergence of motive or intention between Kirklees Planning Services, the wider community groups, the IT

group at the University of Leeds, the NIF and the CVT, with each demonstrating perhaps a different type of rational act, or combination of rationalities.

The participatory motives of the public are clearer in the survey, with the main body of scheme participants claiming a general interest in local issues, and a specific interest in the canal restoration scheme in Slaithwaite. If data on voting behaviour in local elections are also considered it would also appear that the returning respondents have biased the gathered data in favour of regular voters and thus 'active citizens' (Almond and Verba 1963).

Those respondents who specify their reasons for non participation, actually contradict the stated efforts of the facilitators and organisers of the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme. Despite the various publicity and marketing efforts of the CVT, the SKRPP and the publicity suggestions of the widely experienced NIF, the level of participation in the first and second phases of the Shaping Slaithwaite project was low. However, as will be discussed fully later, the self reported participation rate (that is, the survey respondents who claimed they had been involved) in Slaithwaite was 37.3%.

There may be further differentiation within the groupings of non-participants, the full examination of which is outside the scope of this research. But it is a definite indicator of the need to step away from the insistence that non-participation in schemes is merely a show of apathy on the part of the public. As expected, this study shows that there is almost certainly a set of rational decisions being made by the non-participating public, that need to be identified, appreciated and addressed if they are to be brought into the participatory arena (assuming of course that the public want to). It is also of great interest that the public's low participatory level in Slaithwaite is at variance with the returning sample's own expression of interest in local issues. Further undermining the idea of apathy, is the data collected on voting behaviour in the sample. Nearly two thirds (60.8%) of all Slaithwaite respondents claimed to always vote in local elections, and 84.31% stated that they always voted in national elections. These figures are higher than the average turnouts recorded for the Colne Valley in local and national elections,

where the actual figures are closer to 35% and 75% for local and national elections respectively. This will be discussed more fully when theory is returned to later on in the thesis.

4.4   Scheme effectiveness

The evaluation of the effectiveness of such a scheme and its feedback to those involved should be of great importance to those concerned. It will be especially vital as Best Value develops its auditing tradition on service provision in local authorities. As an exploratory rather than evaluative work, this chapter now addresses the proclaimed and perceived effectiveness of actions and appropriateness of attitudes and structures in the Slaithwaite project, by looking at the feedback documentation from the facilitators, by the direct questioning of participants in the survey, and by interviewing some of the main actors involved in the scheme. The definitions of effectiveness that are outlined in the previous chapter are adhered to in this section, and are considered in terms of project outcome as compared to project aim, and in the case of the survey, as compared to respondents' expectations before involvement.

4.4i   Official feedback on effectiveness

According to the Shaping Slaithwaite publications, the event of June 6th 1998 attracted around 700 people to the PfR model and many more to the surrounding events. *'At the very least this shows the interest which local people took in the event, and the concern you have for what's to come. At a more significant level it provides a mandate for action'.* (CVT 1998a, p20).

A rough evaluation of the PfR programme, carried out by the CVT using exit questionnaires was frustrated by an exceptionally low return rate, with only 29 individuals completing and returning an evaluative form. The virtual version of the PfR generated 35 questionnaire responses. The results of these were still deemed to be valid by the CVT, and appeared in the Shaping

Slaithwaite publication (p22), the most interesting here being the fact that 31% (9 individuals – the most popular reply) felt that they had voiced their opinion but had no power to make any changes in Slaithwaite.

4.4ii   Interviewee opinion on effectiveness

Interviewees' opinion on effectiveness, as gauged from feedback from the scheme, is difficult to address in this section. It was certainly not felt that the topics of effectiveness and feedback were particularly popular when the telephone interviews were taking place. For example, it took four attempts at one question to get Edi Walker to finally reveal that as far as he was concerned, project evaluation was done centrally in the research arm of the NIF, and that those results were not known to him. It then took two attempts with Linda Crayton to find out that evaluation was being handed over to a community worker at Kirklees, while Bob Edinburgh contradicted himself with comments about encouraging feedback and then about having no feedback at all.

What was common in the responses was the lack of expressly negative feedback when asked about the effectiveness of the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme. This raised suspicion, particularly in the light of the evaded questions. Edi Walker was keen to point out the effectiveness and successes of other projects that he had worked on as an NIF consultant, while Linda Crayton had positive points to offer regarding other work done by the SKRPP.

Bob Edinburgh put his own view of Kirklees' evaluations of the Shaping Slaithwaite as follows: *"Well, there has been a document produced as you know* [referring to CVT 1998a/b], *which has identified the problems and looked at the solutions. Let me just try and be realistic about this, as to what sort of evaluations have taken place. My own view is that it hasn't been carefully gone through by the council, and evaluated problem by problem, and solution by solution, so the results haven't been integrated in the normal day to day work in that sense with council officers."* This was the only clear

statement regarding evaluation and effectiveness from the interviewees in Slaithwaite.

4.4iii   Survey results – perceptions of effectiveness

The survey found that there were mixed feelings about whether the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme would actually do anything for the village. The most popular response was a feeling of uncertainty (34.2%) that this public involvement project would make any difference to proposals and activities associated with the canal restoration, while 26.3% stated that they were quite confident. During the scheme, 34.2% of the participants were unsure whether their opinion on this had changed, while 26.3% said that they had lost some confidence in the scheme.

When asked which of the public involvement methods seemed most appropriate for the tasks and job they were supposed to be helping with, the favoured options were exhibitions (42.1%) and the PfR exercise (18.4%). There was no statistical difference between the replies to the next question, which asked which methods were the least appropriate.

The central questions in the survey that dealt with the effectiveness of the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme asked firstly what the respondents' criteria were for the effectiveness of the project, then whether they regarded it as effective using their own criteria. The most popular response to the first part was 'if the issues were resolved fairly' (39.5%), followed by 'if the issues were resolved in good time at a reasonable cost.' (23.7%). When asked if their own effectiveness criteria had been met, 31.6% stated that they were unsure, while 23.7% said that the project had not been that effective after all. 10.5% said that the scheme was not at all effective, and only 5.3% said that the scheme was very effective.

4.4iv   Summary

No sound idea of 'effectiveness' among those involved in the Shaping Slaithwaite program can be gauged here. Also any indication of *actual* effectiveness is difficult to uncover, considering the lack of commentary on it in the interview section of the research, and the self congratulatory tone of the CVT, University of Leeds, and Kirklees. This makes the robustness and candour of the survey responses on *perceived* effectiveness attractive. However, even the statistically significant responses of the sample could only provide evidence of a luke warm opinion of the effectiveness of the Shaping Slaithwaite project.

The VDMISP group stated that they had hoped for a final and more formal evaluation of the scheme from the CVT, and in the original contact with the CVT, David Littlewood had implied that one of the volunteers had begun organising such an evaluation. This information was pursued but as with the rest of the contact with the CVT, it provided no useful outcome. The implications for the lack of a substantial formal evaluation and its dissemination to the public that the project was aimed at serving will be discussed later.

4.5   IT issues in the Shaping Slaithwaite Programme

The Shaping Slaithwaite programme also included an experimental, parallel, virtual version of Planning for Real. This was an innovative step in public involvement practice in the UK and offered opportunities for both the Leeds University research team and local facilitators to look at the potential for using IT in further community participation schemes. Here, the specifics of the VDMISP software brought to the Shaping Slaithwaite day are addressed, along with the attitudes of the local community and key actors toward the use of IT in public participation.

4.5i   University of Leeds Results

The use of the VDME software, running parallel with the planning for real model, was monitored by the Leeds team. Their summary of results includes the following points:

- There was a strong male to female bias (around 70% male users and 30% female) among those who used the software
- The stated occupation of users suggested that professionals and managers were the groups most interested in the facility
- The age distribution of users was heavily skewed toward school children (over 50% of users stated they were at school)
- There is a suggestion from the data that the online version of PfR was felt to be potentially more influential when put to decision makers.

There are also conclusions drawn that the VDMISP exercise helped users realise that they were not alone in their aspirations for the village and views on the development that was proposed there. This could be due to the advantage of having more immediately accessible results and information online, with the commonly lengthy PfR analysis stage speeded up considerably by the team's software.

4.5ii   Interviewee comments on IT in decision making

Kirklees Planning Services, the SKRPP and the NIF all mentioned that IT is an uncertain, possibly extravagant addition to public involvement programmes. When Edi Walker was asked about the VDMISP element in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme, he said, *'I wish we (the NIF) could get these sort of resources, because we'd spend them in a very different way'.* Edi Walker said that in the eighteen months that the Virtual Slaithwaite site had been running, he had been able to use it only once, due to its rather sophisticated hardware and software requirements. *'...It didn't seem to be working quite right when I*

finally got it open...the lack of local input disappointed me.' Meanwhile, Bob Edinburgh recalled that, *'...a lot of people don't want to spend a lot of time trying to understand'* IT aspects within decision making tasks anyway, and his perception was that *'...the public want to see something on a piece of paper at an exhibition with a map or a photograph.'*

Interestingly, in terms of the concerns in the literature about the potential inequity of cyberdemocracy none of the Slaithwaite interviewees saw anything divisive in the field of IT (especially web-based) decision making. There were points raised about the levels of IT skills needed to deal with these collaborative decision making tools by the lay public, and how this could be a factor to consider when designing schemes, and that access to such technology is a further issue. In interview, Andy Evans (Leeds School of Geography), noted that some local authorities have been explicitly against the funding of public IT based decision support in the past, which when combined with Linda Crayton's point that it is very difficult to secure funding for most types of public IT based initiative, creates a potential division between types of IT user in virtual decision making. That is to say, that private, potentially more affluent users might be the main audience for the online schemes, and not a representative cross section of the public at all. None of the interviewees took these points forward toward the more divisive concerns that have arisen in the literature, nor to consider that the disempowered in communities, particularly in IT terms, are often also the disenfranchised.

4.5iii Survey results

It was noted in the interviews (whether as an individually held opinion, or an interviewee's perception of the opinion of others) that the digital and IT based aspects of the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme were not always regarded as particularly appropriate in this public involvement scheme. This was reinforced by the fact that only 28.9% of the participant respondents recalled their use in the events that summer anyway. The most appropriate methods

used in the Shaping Slaithwaite project and associated elements were seen to be general exhibitions (42.1%), the PfR exercise (18.4%), followed by other surveys and interviews (2.6% each). Computer based maps and surveys (the lay term used in the survey instead of 'VDMISP' software) did not feature in the responses here. A question was also put to the sample as to which method was deemed least appropriate. However the response was found to be statistically insignificant.

4.5iv   Summary

The successes of the VDMISP elements in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme, as reported by the group at the School of Geography at the University of Leeds, do not match with the view of the public as expressed in the survey. The interviewees felt that there is a place for such innovative IT in public involvement schemes, but that their appropriateness should be scrutinised fully before resources are released to procure and implement them and analyse their results.

What is important to remember, is that the success of the Slaithwaite project was not on the list of criteria for declaring project success according to the Leeds group. It was in fact an experimental research exercise into the dynamics of public IT use in a specific context (i.e. conflict resolution and multi-criteria decision making in land use planning on a local scale). When seen in that particular context, the successful conclusions of the project from Carver et al are not refuted.

However, the particular context of academic and software development was unlikely to have been fully appreciated by the groups or the public involved on the day. The image of this software and the application of it would have benefited from explicit statements about the team's aspirations in bringing it to the event – a missing element of transparency that the team had stated was central to such projects.

4.6   Empowerment Issues in the Shaping Slaithwaite Case.

The Shaping Slaithwaite project was initially envisaged by the CVT to be a community empowerment exercise. Local people would be having a say in the decision making that was being made about developments in the heart of their village. The redevelopment of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal was likely to bring about significant disturbance to the transport infrastructure, local environmental quality and potentially property prices. This would seem the basic set of instrumental or utility considerations - reasons for offering the local residents some sort of opportunity to make a contribution to the decision making in the area. But how much power was actually handed to the residents of Slaithwaite in the exercise, and how empowered did the people of the village ultimately feel?

4.6i   Documented empowerment gestures and aspirations

It has already been noted that Kirklees Metropolitan Council based its rationale for community participation around the required policy frameworks in the Modernising Government literature. The Leeds VDMISP group sees the software it is working with as a potential democratising tool, to open up decision making and take it to a wider, possibly Internet based audience. The Colne Valley Trust, as noted earlier, saw this as a chance for local voices and concerns to be heard, to arrive at consensus and derive a strategy for sustainable development in the local area. These notions of community influence are repeated in the textual output from these groups, and are even claimed to be reinforced in the more 'evaluative' sections of the documents, even though the data in the interviews and the survey do not necessarily concur with this.

4.6ii   Interviewees hopes and opinions for empowerment

Of interest in the interviews, was the fact that when discussing community empowerment in local authority decision making, none of the Slaithwaite

interviewees stated that there was a real power exchange occurring. Edi Walker of the NIF was the only interviewee who thought that there was any power at all handed to the public, but referred very briefly to it, even when asked directly for an opinion. Bob Edinburgh of Kirklees Planning Services raised the point that the power being used is of a deferred, representative nature, and not direct citizen power in the decision making process. He did however offer a view that some mechanism for a more direct input from the public could be found, even though the terminology he chose to use is reminiscent of an older school of public administration, *'Generally speaking, its not the man in the street that gets to speak...its their representatives, so there could be some methodology that allows the man in the street to be involved.'* Meanwhile, Linda Crayton of the SKRPP plainly stated that empowerment was *'...too strong a word'* for what was happening not only in Slaithwaite, but in all of the other schemes she had experienced.

Apart from these three comments, and even though the structured interview included a direct enquiry as to whether citizens become empowered by such projects and initiatives, there was no mention of the central civic culture points regarding power. None of the interviewees mentioned the short term empowerment that is delivered to citizens in true public involvement schemes, and none of the interviewees recognised the reserve of citizens' electoral power that could be exercised by a dis-satisfied population. Furthermore, these experienced professionals, implementers and consultants, did not put forward any view, when offered the opportunity, that the public is in fact becoming more democratically served by public involvement initiatives.

4.6iii   Survey results

Early in the postal questionnaire, the Slaithwaite sample was asked if they agreed that public participation achieves greater local democracy. In total, 49.9% either strongly agreed or agreed, another 29.4% were undecided, with only 19.6% disagreeing. Later, participant respondents were asked how much

influence the public actually had (in their view) in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme. This time the feeling was less positive, with 39.5% stating that there was not much influence, 23.7% feeling they had some influence, and 15.8% feeling that the public had no influence at all in proceedings. Later again, just as in the interviews, the participant section of the sample was directly asked if it felt empowered. Exactly half of the respondents said 'not particularly', 18.4% said 'definitely not', a further 18.4% feeling 'quite' empowered, and only 5.3% feeling 'very' empowered. The sample was then asked what (on reflection and in their opinion) the public involvement scheme actually meant to Slaithwaite. The most popular response was that 39.5% felt that they had helped the local authority decision makers by giving them the local view. However, 36.8% felt that the final decisions made really had nothing to do with the public's involvement. A further 13.2% felt that although the final decisions went against the perceived local view, they were fair and understandable. Only 2.6% of the Slaithwaite participants felt that they had fully participated in the actual decision making.

4.6iv   Summary

As mentioned above the effectiveness of the public involvement in the Shaping Slaithwaite project was in doubt, and no group offered either a calculated evaluation or any strong opinion either way. This lack (or perceived) lack of clarity could have been a result of failing logistics, ambiguous project delivery, or a low quality input from facilitators and the public. But looking back at the original intentions and aspirations for the project, the one factor that should still be identifiable even in a practically less effective project, should be the actual degree of influence or decision making power that was being offered to the public by the established decision makers.

Feeling of empowerment of citizenry in decision making is vital in the reinforcement of useful public mobilisation (Eden 1993), as it is in the

consolidation of the belief that the public can effectively use its reserve of influence, and be competent in doing so, where and when necessary (Almond and Verba 1969). However, there was only a minimal feeling of empowerment in the returning sample. The interviewees recalled that empowerment was not occurring, or if it was, it was of a representative nature, not necessarily translated down to the public.

Arguably, it would seem that the scheme had over-promised on what it could deliver. It would also appear on closer inspection that the Shaping Slaithwaite project was sending over optimistic messages to the local residents on the amount of influence their views could ultimately have on the canal re-development and in later strategic planning in the area. It seems plausible that the public realised this under achievement in hindsight, and associated it with the fact that they saw the scheme as less than effective. The most popular view of the scheme among the respondents - that the involvement of the public merely assisted the existing decision makers job - suggests that at that time the public mainly saw its input as a resource for others to use. This might have been an accurate and realistic view, and it could be argued that statements regarding power sharing should be reined-in (as Carver et al 1998 suggested) but mainly for the sake of a wider image of public competence in their involvement in local decision making.

4.7   Actual view, and perceived public view, of public involvement

So, clear or positive statements regarding effectiveness and community empowerment seem to be lacking in the Slaithwaite case. Possible reasons for this can be identified from the survey and the interviews, and from careful consideration of the scant official reports of the events, the research conclusions and the planning outcomes. One of the factors being pursued in the fieldwork was the identification of links between perceptions of effectiveness, and community influence in local authority decision making. Are these perceptions 'real' and based on first hand experience, or are they false,

based on pre-conceptions of the topic? And is there in fact any relationship between direct participation experiences and the inclination to participate?

4.7i   Documented and reported perceptions of public involvement.

As noted above, the Leeds University group suggested that the use of the IT version of PfR had made the users feel that their input had more influence upon the decision makers at Kirklees. However the group did acknowledge that the software was of a particularly sophisticated nature, and had certain computing requirements that might delay its wider on-line use by the general public for some time. The group's findings also suggests that there was an identifiable preference for some participants in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme to move away from the option of using the virtual IT version of PfR, in favour of the locally made three dimensional paper maché and cardboard model from the NIF.

The perception here (as described the VDMISP group) would seem to be that the sophisticated and experimental nature of the software was less attractive than the analogue PfR available at the same venue. It will be argued later that this demonstrates a type of communicative rationality, in that the cognitive and communicative effort in utilising the digital model brought no more return to individuals in their public involvement experience, than did the parallel analogue model nearby.

The CVT also published some of its initial thoughts on the way the scheme was received on the day. One of the key qualifying statements in CVT 1998a was that the event took place in bad weather, with heavy rainstorms during the activities. It is stated that the effect of the weather on the event as a whole are a matter for debate (p16), but it seems likely that the turnout will have been affected significantly, unless of course, the events were perceived to be crucial to the interests of the village, and turnout, even in bad weather, would have been high. The CVT also noted the 'lively debate' (p19) around

the PfR model, between planning officers and the public, and conceded that at times the facilitators were over-stretched and missed some of the points being offered by the participants.

The CVT is then implying that the public perceived that the participatory opportunity was less of a consideration to them than was the bad weather, and that those who attended may have sensed a lack of attention from facilitators.

4.7ii   Interviewee opinions of public perception

All but one of the Slaithwaite interviewees raised the point that local authorities and planning officers are seen by the public to be reluctant to include the views of citizens in their decision making, or even dismissive of the views put forward. A number of the interviewees seemed to share this perception.

For example, Bob Edinburgh suggested that the public seem to think that planning officers and local authorities only include the public in the planning process as a matter of obligation under legislation and planning guidance, and that comments from the public had little real impact on decisions made. Richard Kingston also noted that public involvement sessions, particularly meetings, are regularly evaluated as being successful by officers even where there has been little favourable public input. Richard Kingston also suggested that comments made at the deposit stage are often perceived to have been ignored. Edi Walker spoke plainly about the perception that many public involvement projects are just paying lip service to the ideal of social inclusion, and that local authorities see the public consultation act as *"...a waste of time and a pain in the arse and still do whatever they wanted to do anyway."* Meanwhile, Linda Crayton added that, *"In anything, if you feel you haven't been listened to two or three times, you wonder what the point of saying anything is...You do get fed up of people giving views and nobody listening...I think that is a real problem."*

There were also issues of information level and information delivery to the public, either at the instigation and preparatory stages of the public involvement project (i.e., the laying out of the decision making 'stall' by the local authority, and distributing invitations to participate), or at the public involvement events themselves (meetings and exhibitions etc). Edi Walker noted that there is often a real communicative problem in translating data into information, and putting information into lay terms for the public. He also added that the local authorities are not the only confounding bodies in this. Following his comments of the difficulties often experienced by the public in getting to grips with council reports and census data, he added, *"Getting access to Ordnance Survey maps is a problem too. I think it's scandalous that community groups have to pay a license to copy them for a community planning exercise."*

Linda Crayton also made the point that information is often less than useful when finally accessed by interested or mobilised members of the public, and that this perception becomes a barrier to additional or continued participation. The lack of user friendly information available to those who might want to become involved in a local decision making process (in her view) leads to a lack of confidence when lay participants finally come face to face with the planning officers or developers in either an inquiry meeting or other public involvement situation. Linda Crayton suggested that the skills needed for effective participation in such unfamiliar environments are missing in many non-professionals or volunteer representatives, and that this communicative hurdle is an additional barrier to inclusion, both perceived and real.

4.7iii   Survey Results

The perception of the potency of becoming involved in decision making or planning at the local level in Slaithwaite may be gleaned from certain direct and indirect survey questions. Only 0.9% of the Slaithwaite respondents

perceived that the UK political system was 'fully prepared' for the inclusion of public involvement in local government, with only an additional 15.7% considering it 'almost ready'. Exactly 50% of the respondents who had taken part in any public involvement scheme felt that proceedings were dominated (rather than led) by planning officers from the local authority. At the end of the public involvement project and its activities, only 15.8% of participant respondents retained the confidence they had in the overall scheme when it started. Only 14.7% of respondents in Slaithwaite said that they would definitely take the opportunity become involved in such a project again if it arose, with the most popular reason for declining the opportunity being the perception that their views would probably not count (17.3%).

4.7iv   Summary

The survey and interview data do not present a particularly good image of the real motives or the chosen methods for public involvement in Slaithwaite. It does seem from data in other sections that although some scepticism was certainly felt, this was not the only opinion presented in the returning sample, and that at least some local residents were willing to approach the opportunity for involvement in the decision making associated with the canal restoration. However, any preconceptions of futility, of tokenism, of non-impact and of dismissal of public input, seem to have been reinforced by either direct experience in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme, or after digesting reportage of it. In addition, the interviewees and the documentation were commonly explicit that they were working with a view that the public has an unfavourable perception of public involvement, although the interviewees showed some consternation and frustration at this.

None of the interviewees referred to the opportunity to reinforce the slightest successes of public involvement with publicity, nor the fact that success could be gauged as a function of scheme appropriateness. This is a discouraging finding that was not expected, and could arguably be seen as a sign of

organisational fatigue and a loss of momentum, akin to the dis-inclination to participate that they imagine occurring in the general public. This vicious circle will have to be broken as best value commitments and partnership working begin to bite in local authorities.

4.8 Pertinence and effectiveness in the Slaithwaite public involvement case

If community empowerment was not felt in Slaithwaite, nor the scheme felt to be generally effective by those taking part (rather than those reporting on it), was its relevance in doubt? Despite reported successes, some Eden-esque attitudinal damage may have already been done in the opinion of those frustrated by the scheme. In this section, the issues that were said to affect the relevance and validity of this or any such scheme are collated from various points in the documentation, interviews and survey.

4.8i   Official claims and concerns from Kirklees and Leeds

In terms of policy making aspirations and the fact that the planning authority followed the lead of the Modernising Government agenda, relevance and effectiveness in the Slaithwaite case could have been of secondary importance. Of greater importance, judging by the Kirklees literature preceding the Slaithwaite event, could have been the fact that it occurred at all. As an experimental gathering of residents, with a new IT based approach to demonstrate, and a planning application that was all but approved, the specific data gathered on the day could only really feed into later, non-canal related decision making. In terms of empowerment, this would make the 'collaborative action' in the case somewhat irrelevant.

The experimental approach of the VDMISP group can be best evaluated by Carver and Kingston from their data and their agenda, and from their later reports it might be suggested that as a tool for decision exploration, idea generation or decision support, the software may have done very well. The

actual use it was put to and the participating groups that used it may not have been expected when they designed the system, and the relevance of the recorded views on the canal restoration scheme might have been dubious, but as a virtual version of PfR, on a local scale, the conclusions of the Leeds team that the day was successful are not challenged. Outside the case and the specifics of their Slaithwaite experiment however, the relevance of these systems could (and indeed should) still be challenged.

4.8ii   Interviewee responses

Richard Kingston from the Leeds School of Geography noted that the physical logistics of many public involvement schemes, especially where a physical transfer of equipment or materials is involved (such as moving exhibitions around a district) immediately challenge their viability. On the process side, Bob Edinburgh added that; *"most planners will say that the statutory* [consultation] *process is very cumbersome and time consuming, and that's one of the reasons it takes six years to produce a development plan."* . It perhaps should be noted that this statement is not necessarily representative of all planning officers views, as consultation only in fact takes up a small percentage of the planning process. This may be referring to Mr Edinburgh's personal experiences in Kirklees, that might not be generalisable to the wider planning profession.

The uptake of this sort of public involvement opportunity, that has used precious local authority resources to facilitate, is traditionally limited. The joint-second most common point raised independently in the Slaithwaite interviews (joint second with the point that public opinion is often dismissed by decision makers), was that the public do not seem to care that the participatory opportunity is offered. This perception is not necessarily borne out by survey results as presented in this chapter, and there are more reasons for non-involvement in these schemes than the popularly given reason of 'apathy'. However, leaving the specific reasons for non-uptake of

the involvement opportunity aside for one moment, we come to another popular interview comment – that as a rule the general public just do not take up the involvement opportunity.

It seems logical to assume that public involvement programmes, with their consumption of public resources in time consuming and labour intensive processes, that only a small proportion of the public use, and generating few new or helpful alternatives or planning options, will be unpopular with instrumentally rational local authorities. If this truly is the case, it should come as no surprise that local authority planning departments have not routinely spent more time and resources than the statutory planning requirement for public consultation demands. Despite their ideals and aspirations these are still not seen by authorities to be regularly successful, pertinent or effective pursuits. In other words, the interviewees are implying that value rationality is in conflict with instrumental rationality. The transition from this state to the more participatory culture envisaged by the New Labour Government will be interesting to observe.

4.8iii   Survey results

The less than positive points raised above are to some degree exacerbated by the results of the survey in Slaithwaite. When asked specifically asked about how personally effective they felt in the public involvement scheme, the most popular reply was that the individual respondents did not feel very effective (31.6%), and only 2.6% of participants felt 'very' effective in their involvement. From the most popular responses from selected relevant questions across the survey, it can be reported that:

- the public involvement exercise in Slaithwaite was perceived to have been initiated to reduce complaints about the canal re-development (as stated by 42.1% of participant respondents);

- public involvement was not felt to be vital in the decision making that was needed on this project (36.8%);

- the sample did not feel they had much influence in those decisions anyway (39.5%);
- proceedings were apparently dominated by planning officers (50.0%);
- the participants felt personally ineffective (31.6%);
- the sample felt that the involvement exercise as a whole was not very effective (34.2%);
- the sample did not feel particularly empowered (50.0%) and;
- the sample would no more than 'possibly' consider involvement in any other project (55.9%).

4.8iv   Summary

The Slaithwaite scheme seems to have been regarded as less than effective, possibly even irrelevant as a real involvement opportunity. The interviewees and survey respondents, when asked directly, did not offer many success stories regarding its output, but neither did they have many specific criticisms. With a low survey response rate, which may or may not link to a low participation rate in the Shaping Slaithwaite project, in which the participants felt less than effective and not newly empowered, in a project where their input seemed less than relevant, it seems supportable that the Shaping Slaithwaite programme made little positive impact on the local residents at all.

4.9   Chapter conclusion

The data suggests that the Shaping Slaithwaite programme firstly did not meet its own aspirations, and secondly that the resident opinion seems to be that the scheme was not particularly effective nor relevant, and that their inclusion was somewhat tokenistic.

It is appropriate to remind the reader here that the aim of this research was not to evaluate individual schemes, or the bodies that facilitate or use them. Instead, the aim was to locate the factors that influence feelings of effectiveness in the outcomes of projects, to observe the perceptions of public

involvement from the point of view of those associated with it, the appropriateness of the methods and tools used, the degree to which rational decision making may have been involved in practice, and the implications of those issues for the general field of public participation research itself.

However, far from being a failed project, the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme did demonstrate some elements that can be seen as positive and contributory to the topic. It showed that even at a basic level, at least a proportion of the public will mobilise when a collaborative decision making issue arises, and that there were various reports of the community preparing in some numbers for the event (by building the PfR model, erecting bunting for the general events of the day and so-on) and feeling positive about at least the lead up to the Bit of a Do event. The extent to which that has occurred, and what it might mean in terms of civic culture theory and other participatory theories will be explored later.

Another aspect that cannot be seen as wholly negative, is the way that the VDMISP research tested itself in the field. The contribution of the Leeds University based IT elements into the actual Shaping Slaithwaite scheme was slight, and the data gathered was possibly less valuable than it may have seemed. But the fact that the virtual decision making software had been used in a real world, hands-on local context was invaluable to the research field itself. It is essential that if such systems finally find a home online (as the NCGIA, CASA and Carver et al hope), that they work in the real world first. The introduction of such IT mediated support in planning was expected at some point by the interviewees, and this was possibly as good (or inoffensive) a start as could be hoped for. It is felt here that both the VDMISP group, and the planning and community professionals, will benefit from that particular experience.

In Slaithwaite, the exploratory approach that this research has taken has in fact identified and located some of the confounding phenomena that are discussed in the wider literature and has certainly observed rationalised decision making in local political activity (evidence of public choice in

operation), support for the political culture that allows participation and the relationship between perceptions of effectiveness and propensity to participate (civic culture in operation). In short, the research questions have been addressed and answered to a greater or lesser degree for the Slaithwaite case. In addition, it has delivered important and new information on the subject of non-participation.

Using the same format and to the same ends, the next chapter explores the contemporary public contact environment at City of York Council.

5.1   Introduction

There now follows a presentation of the results of the case study of City of York Council's public involvement programmes. The case study protocol is once more followed closely as a framework for this chapter, with the data in this instance relating only to the study of York. It is left to the following chapter to draw together the results for comparison and discussion in the context of the central theoretical constructs of the thesis, and in terms of the formal research questions.

5.2   Ideals and general rationale for public involvement

City of York Council has its own mixture of methods for gathering local opinion and local input into decision making. It also uses them to a number of ends in a range of different stages of planning. On the face of it this seems like a culture of substantial participation, but one must look carefully to see the motives and objectives in widening the decision making process at the time of the fieldwork. The first task then in the York case study was to identify the origins of its public involvement initiatives that were in place. Who was calling for public involvement, who was being included, and why?

5.2i   Policy statements - City of York

As a Labour controlled authority, City of York Council states an explicit allegiance to the Government's Modernisation initiatives, and its intentions to

implement policies within. Its mission statement also includes the following comments:

"In creating a future for York that respects and builds upon its unique traditions and heritage, City of York Council will work with and for the people of York to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to lead a full, healthy and satisfying life. In pursuing this mission the council will:

- *respect the priorities and interests of different communities, groups and individuals, while ensuring that it responds in a coherent and integrated way to the need of the area as a whole;*

- *involve people fully in taking decisions that affect them;*

- *work in partnership with all those who can contribute toward securing a high quality of life for people in the area."*

The mission was thus to become a city with a culture that decentralises resources, streamlines decision making and listens to the public it serves. (City of York Council 1998). The main mechanisms that City of York was using at the time to attain this status include:

- An Annual Residents Opinion Survey - an interview survey of 1,450 local residents, designed to be a corporate monitoring vehicle for various council services;

- The Talk About Scheme - a representative panel of local people, gathering views on council-wide issues;

- Neighbourhood Fora - as the name suggests, more concentrated residential scale discussion groups, mainly feeding opinion back to elected members at the ward and sub-ward level.

These and other initiatives have combined to create the 'York Way' (City of York 1999), which was apparently gaining a UK wide reputation for co-management of local affairs with citizens. With this status as a beacon authority (at that time), City of York published a number of policy documents and strategies which have assisted this exploration of the scene in York itself.

5.2ii   Attitudes of selected public involvement actors

The interviewees in the York case study offered a mixture of pragmatic / instrumental and ethical / value based motives for the involvement of the public in decision making. For example Peter Marcus of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation stated firstly that morally, decisions that impact upon people's lives should be made with those people on board, and secondly that decision making with such groups is more effective and practical than any other option. Meanwhile, Andrew Gillespie of the Citizen Support Unit at City of York Council both stated and implied that participation is a moral obligation for individuals, and that it is a *'practical demonstration of effective democracy'*, then went on to say that decision quality is improved with the public view included.

The York interviewees expressed no firmly negative views on public involvement, and the consensus was that it was a democratising process in itself. However, slightly less approving responses were recorded, with Peter Marcus also recognising (rather than stating it as his own opinion) that public involvement can certainly be used cynically but effectively to head off contention in difficult planning situations. This was also the actual view of Roy Hearn, Chair of the Federation of York Residents and Community Associations, although his general view on public involvement in York was very positive. Meanwhile, Joanna Lee, a former planning and development officer at City of York saw the role of public involvement in local government decision making as *'...not to get them (the public) on board particularly, or necessarily to support it, but just to make them aware of what's happening.'*

5.2iii   Survey results

When asked where the idea of public involvement mainly comes from, the respondents in the York survey said in the main that it was from the local council (31.6%) and the public itself (30.6%). The least popular response was

that the idea comes from central government (15.3%). The sample generally felt in agreement with the statement that public involvement brings about greater local democracy, a response chosen by 46.9% of the respondents. Only 5.1% of respondents strongly disagreed. However, only 4.1% of the York sample considered the UK political system to be fully prepared for the inclusion of the public in local government, with the majority feeling unsure (43.8%) of the fact. A full 59.1% of the respondents considered that there was not enough public involvement in local governance, and not a single response was offered that there was either more than enough, nor just about enough, public involvement in their view.

5.2iv   Summary

It would seem at first glance that those facilitating or promoting public involvement in York were doing so with the Modernising Government initiatives in mind. This was evident in the city literature and noted by interviewees, but not necessarily expressed by the general public in the survey. Those respondents who did not align themselves with that view, offered a range of ethical or moral reasons for the general ideals of public involvement, or pragmatic and practical reasons.

Interviewees provided a range of rationales for the involvement of the public in the activities of the authority, with some seeing the key task as informing the public of the work of the council (Joanna Lee) and others promoting a direct participatory approach (Andrew Gillespie). What seemed to be common across the interviewees, (and was borne out by the responses of the survey in York), was the view that the inclusion of the public in council decision making and planning activities is a sound and democratic move. It was however suggested that there is not enough public involvement opportunity by the survey respondents, yet there are also frustrations about low participation rates from the interviewees. It is seductive to conclude from this, that the returning members of the public are once again the more active citizens,

expressing a desire for additional participatory opportunities, and thus giving this survey a biased response.

5.3   Specific reasons for public involvement

Unlike the Slaithwaite case study, there was no single project under examination in the York case. Instead, a series of schemes and initiatives are in place in York, which although are not always discussed in terms of specific projects, have particular types of issues associated with them. Again the reader is reminded that the aim of the research is not to evaluate different types of scheme, but to examine the attitudinal impact of perceived success or failure in the minds of facilitators and potential participants, whose inclination to mobilise and become involved may be linked to that perception. So in the case of York, what kinds of public involvement methods are in place, who is participating (or not participating) and why?

5.3i   Various programmes.

City of York Council saw a number of key issues driving its work on public involvement at the time of the study. Enhancing democracy, modernising government, economic development, sustainable development and citizen security and equity were seen as the issues that these mechanisms would serve. In practical terms this translated down to projects regarding budget allocation in residential areas, gathering evaluative opinion on specific local services, preserving the city's considerable cultural heritage, housing schemes, school catchment policy, opening up opportunities for public input into council procedure, retail planning and a range of other specific areas (all of which are more utilitarian and process enhancing, than explicitly democratic).

5.3ii Motives and justifications of key actors

The individuals that were interviewed in the York case, as in the Slaithwaite case, were selected for their professional or otherwise organisational role in the public involvement schemes in their area. Peter Marcus of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation was mainly involved in the housing projects associated with developments or proposed developments, as part of a charitable trust with a central interest in housing. Andrew Gillespie was a development officer with the Citizen Support Unit at City of York Council, with responsibility for the running and co-ordination of neighbourhood fora and a wider public involvement brief. Joanna Lee is a former planning and development officer at City of York, concerned with preparing the local plan and with public consultation responsibilities. Roy Hearn is the Chairman of the Federation of York Residents Associations, with regular and detailed involvement at the ward level in York.

The York interviewees repeated that the council was committed to the policy of community involvement and consultation, and this party line became the main identifiable reason for initiating schemes and projects. Oddly, although Modernising Government was mentioned as a template for the corporate approach of City of York Council (Peter Marcus), it was not cited as a driver in the organisation of the various methods of consultation in the interviews, when it is in fact a key policy driver in the council itself. As well as noting the corporate rationale Andrew Gillespie also pointed out the resulting reputation as a council that is *'heralding and championing'* the notion of citizen involvement in its workings.

When asked where the drive for initiatives was coming from in York, the general response was that there is a mix of policy pushed programmes and locally identified need. Joanna Lee expressed that York has *'...quite a well educated population in relative terms.'* who seem to be issue aware and regularly informed by the local media and the council about various issues. Meanwhile Roy Hearn saw the participation act itself as a driver for the council, regarding it as an ongoing, burdensome pledge that has to be

delivered upon to satisfy the new (at the time) best value commitments. Despite Roy Hearn's earlier positive attitude to many of the aspects covered in interview, he makes a second sceptical point in mentioning (on more than one occasion) the feeling that '*...there always seems to be an agenda in the background that the public are perhaps not made fully aware of*'. The next chapter will discuss the burden upon local authorities to perform in terms of best value that Mr Hearn mentioned, along with the possible latent agenda he may feel exists.

5.3iii   Survey results

In the York sample, only 22.4% of those who returned completed questionnaires stated that they had participated in any of the various schemes run by or with City of York Council. When asked why they had become involved in the decision making in York, the most common response in the sample was that they had a direct interest in the situations that were being addressed (63.6% of those who had participated). The next most popular response was that they had a more general interest in public involvement schemes (45.4%). However, the most popular response to the question of why did the council invite the public into the process, was that it didn't want complaints after development or actions went ahead (36.3%).

By contrast, 77.5% of the returning respondents stated that they had not been part of any of the schemes in York. 52.6% of these people stated their main reason for non-involvement was that they were unaware of any such project, while 23.6% said that they were never invited to participate. Of the remainder, 9.2% said they found it logistically too difficult to get involved, 7.8% preferred not to get involved at all, and 5.2% stated that they were unavailable to participate.

5.3iv   Summary

Less than a quarter of the sample who returned their questionnaires said that they had taken part in one of the public involvement projects in York. Over 63% of the fraction of the sample who had become involved in schemes, said they had done so out of direct interest in the specific issues of the project. Of the proportion who had not taken part in the schemes, over half said that they were unaware of their existence. This is counter to the image that is being put forward by the authority, of a heralding council, championing public involvement right across the city, with the 'York Way' of public participation.

5.4   Scheme Effectiveness

What are the criteria for gauging effectiveness in the public involvement activities in York? Has there been any attempt to marry the aims and objectives of the council with the outcomes and post-project opinions, and if so, what became of them? Here, the facilitators and actors that were interviewed share their opinion of the effectiveness of the York Way of the time, and what they see as the implications for whatever level of success was experienced. These points are finally augmented by the survey data showing how lay participants feel about the practical effectiveness of the public involvement environment in York.

5.4i   Official Reportage

In February 1999, the York Citizen newspaper ran a story on the satisfaction of York residents with the way their city was managed, based on the results of the latest Resident Opinion Polls. In the article Rod Hills, the then Leader of City of York Council, stated that "*The survey is one of the ways in which we encourage local residents to play a vital role in local democracy. It is designed to help us find out what is important to residents and where we can improve*".

The article states further, that local policy will be based on the findings of these surveys and the public's view expressed within them. *"We will continue to listen and respond to peoples concerns and the Residents Opinion Survey is an important tool in this process."* Between that statement and the drafting of this work, there have been no further direct published references to the evaluation of the schemes in York.

5.4ii   Interviewee opinion on programme effectiveness

There were surprisingly few comments offered by the interviewees regarding the effectiveness of the public involvement schemes in operation in York. In fact, across the York interviews there were only six comments about how effective they felt the schemes were.

Andrew Gillespie was *'...not aware of any individual consultations being collated and summarised'* for evaluation, and did not know of evaluations of the cases outside of York that he had mentioned in the interview. However, he was keen to point out that (to his knowledge) around 70% of respondents to the Residents Opinion Survey reportedly 'approve of' and 'value' the public involvement activities in York.

In a surprising addition to the list of comments were Joanna Lee's points about the apparently absent institutional need for evaluation at City of York. Ms Lee stated *'I don't necessarily think it* [City of York Council] *needed to decide whether things were going well...really it was just getting people to be aware of the plan for York...I don't think it necessarily had to go well.'* When asked directly how effective the schemes in York are, Ms Lee's eventual response was that *'I don't think the local plan ones were particularly effective, and I think you would have gotten most of the comments anyway, because they* [the participants] *were concerned parties. In terms of getting more or better quality comments I don't know if it was effective. In terms of making people aware of what was going on, it was quite good.'*

The responses to a later group of questions introduced an interesting and new element to the data - the fact that public involvement in budget planning or funding issues is extremely popular. Joanna Lee was in fact the only interviewee in York that did not mention the fact that the residents in York mobilise significantly at certain times of the council's financial year. In the private housing sector (residents from which form the main body of the Neighbourhood Fora) there are regular budgets available for local 'improvements' amounting to the equivalent of £3 per head for the residents. These funds are supplemented by York Challenge monies, and support for parish councils. Andrew Gillespie points out that numbers of participants are, *'...cyclical and seasonal. It tails off in the winter and increases again when its time to discuss spending the budget.'* In the other housing sectors, York's Resident's Associations also become wholeheartedly involved in budgeting decisions. Roy Hearn and the Federation of Resident's Associations are *'...deeply involved'* in the housing department's annual capital spending rounds and hold two public meetings per year to address the budget. He continues, *'...when the meeting starts for that kind of thing, you need Securicor on the door because there are so many people. But there, they have something to gain you see.'*

It is important to note that these points about the financial interests of the participating public in York were all raised in response to questions regarding the effectiveness of the City of York programmes. Effectiveness is associated here with financial gain or efficiency. The following chapter will take up the issue of financial incentives to participate more fully.

5.4iii   Survey Results

The York sample was asked how confident they were that the public involvement schemes they had become involved in would be effective. There was no statistically significant difference between the number of respondents who expressed a significant lack of confidence and those responding that they

were very confident. However, there were equal numbers of participants (36.3% each) who stated that they lost no confidence during their contact with the Council, or that they were still unsure about their feelings of confidence.

When asked directly if the numbers of participants in the scheme was more or less what they expected, the York sample could once more give no statistically relevant consensus. Neither could any statement be made about the most appropriate methods that are employed by City of York to involve the public. However, when asked, the sample gave a significant response that exhibitions were in their opinion the least appropriate mechanisms for involvement (22.7%).

When asked what their personal criteria might be for a successful public involvement project, the York sample's most popular response was if issues were resolved in good time at a reasonable cost (36.3%). When asked the sister question of if, when using their own criteria, they believed the schemes they were involved in were in fact effective, the response was once again statistically insignificant. The respondents also felt personally 'quite' effective in their schemes, and these schemes were 'quite effective' at addressing which ever issues were involved.

5.4iv   Summary

Plainly, there is a lack of scheme evaluation in York. With no full evaluation of process and outcomes, effectiveness cannot be seen. This is surely contrary to the council's commitment to best value and best practice, which demand evaluation and examination of successes and failures. It is also contrary to City of York's clear Consultation Programme, which sets out the most appropriate schemes for given scenarios. The entry on 'Feedback' in City of York Council's circular on consultation, states that, *'The importance of feedback should not be understated.'* (City of York Council 1998, p2) This essential feedback had not found its way to the interviewees who were all

active in the local schemes, the local press nor the public at the time of the fieldwork. This, coupled with the statements of commitment to public involvement ideals and process, does not cast a favourable light on the institutional importance of actual results, and clearly places the importance of the policy and the process above the outcome, just as Joanna Lee stated.

It also seems clear that those individuals who responded in the survey that they had participated in various schemes, had little knowledge of what to expect, or how they felt about it, and the sample came to no consensus on many of the key questions regarding effectiveness. Furthermore, it seems that most mobilising in York was based around expectations of financial gain from the participation, or at least the opportunity to influence council spending in participants' own interests.

5.5   IT issues in the City of York case

There were no specific roles for IT in the public involvement schemes in the York case study. At the time of the field work, the city also had no explicit IT policies in the area of public consultation, and there are no references to either GroupWare or GIS in their background literature of the time. However, the topic is not irrelevant in York, as discussions earlier in this thesis regarding the use of IT in planning and local authority decision making (see Chapter 2) argue that there will be cases where public involvement schemes will not include any IT elements. Also, following from literature reviewed in that chapter, there was still a need to examine the attitudes of the public and the planning officers to this topic, whether any initiatives were in place at the time or not.

5.5i   Interviewee comments on IT in decision making

With no relevant direct experience of the use of planning IT, particularly in the field of public involvement, the interviewees in York could not provide particularly informed opinions on the subject. However, such opinions and

perceptions, even if based in anecdotal or second hand experience, could in the future help shape the way that IT might be used and developed in the planning and public involvement context at the authority.

It is noted here for the reader, that with the lack of any explicit IT role at City of York to refer to, the interviewees were all given some background information about the types of IT already used in public involvement schemes, and about the VDMISP research at the University of Leeds. Their responses to questions at this point refer to the types of IT initiatives outlined in that discussion. The most popular points raised in the York interviews regarding such IT were:

- that the motives of those involved in IT aided decision making are rather ambiguous;

- that IT developments to this end are considered to be an unwise use of community resources;

- and that the hardware and software requirements involved are prohibitive to their increased use.

Joanna Lee's statements also included however that there was *'Definitely, without question'* a role for IT in public involvement schemes in local planning. She expressed an idea that public terminals could facilitate examination of planning intentions, using GIS software, supervised by planning officers. Such a scheme did not exist in York at that time. When asked whether the best use of such technology was in addressing social, communicative and democratic issues, or if it was in gathering, analysing and presenting data for decision makers, she opted for the data management role, *'...because people could then make their own decisions and assumptions, and if you try to filter that as well as what they are saying it gets quite complicated.'*

Joanna Lee also noted that from her novice point of view the biggest barrier to implementing such IT tools would be the cost for local authorities, and a certain concern about data security, and data reliability; *'...you could*

manipulate the information...it could be deceptive, you need to be quite aware of that'.

Andrew Gillespie shared Joanna Lee's view that the was a place for at least some IT in planning and public involvement; *'Absolutely, yes...if nothing else to cut down on the paperwork that whizzes around the city.'* The point was also raised more than once in this interview, that impersonation would be an issue when it came to IT involvement in community participation. Andrew Gillespie suggested that there could be, *'...the introduction of some smart-card technology to start staging local referenda...philosophically that's where we are, but financially and technologically I think we're a little way off that yet.'* At the end of the section regarding IT in planning, Andrew Gillespie offered that, *'The council has a political commitment to make a PC available to every infant school entrant, so there is a recognition that access and availability needs to be tackled and we are keen to do that.'*

A discussion of the political power of five to seven year olds in York is outside the scope of this thesis.

Peter Marcus of the JRF had a number of incisive points to make about the role of IT in decision making with the public. Firstly, he stated that, *'...we are talking about empowering disempowered people. Those disempowered people tend to be the poorest and thus least able to afford say, computers, let alone spend time on the Internet.'* Next, he suggested that the council officers in York were, *'...so far behind in their attitudes toward public involvement that we are a long way off using computers to fine tune consultation, we've got to do much more basic work.'* Mr Marcus concluded that the motives of using such IT are also uncertain; *'Are you using it to broaden the consultation and add to your repertoire of public involvement methods, or are you doing it instead of, so that planners can stay in their offices and don't have to meet so many members of the public?'*

Some observers might imagine that Roy Hearn had missed the references to IT and potential use of the Internet for online decision making with the public. *'There is a place for it. It sort of just moved up from using an A-frame with a sheet of paper on it.'* Conversely, it might be said that he sees the topic more pragmatically, as a data or information exercise without the decision making or democratic embellishments. He states that, *'...the whole point of getting information across to citizens of York is a matter of great debate at the moment...I think the* [City of York Council] *web site is quite good, packed with information, and yes you can virtually find out anything that's happening.'*

No interviewee suggested that the public would need at least some training to get the most out of some types of public involvement software, nor explicitly questioned the appropriateness of higher technologies in social decision making partnerships. Neither did any interviewee offer that local knowledge should inform the development of such packages.

5.5ii   Survey results

It was found that the standard questionnaire (which included references to IT experiences) solicited recollections of using computer based maps and surveys in York. As many as 18.2% of those who stated that they had participated in the schemes run by City of York recalled their use. No such scheme was found to be in place in York before the field work began. Interestingly, the sample rated the use of computer based maps and surveys as the joint second least appropriate method of approaching the issues in the individual projects the respondents were recollecting. There are possibly questions regarding the recall assistance technique that was built into the response frames of the questionnaire, but it is felt here that the issue of respondent enthusiasm might account for this unexpected phenomenon.

5.5iii Summary

It was never anticipated that the survey would provide such responses from York residents concerning the use of IT in the public involvement schemes they had become part of. The data that was gathered from the sample in this instance has to be treated carefully, as there was no account in the official documentation nor the reports of the interviewees that any scheme had used novel or specific IT or ICT in its process.

Instead, the main information was expected to come from the attitudes of the interviewees. This information was forthcoming, if inconsistent. There were certainly enthusiastic points raised about the potential for IT, however these were tempered by issues regarding intentions of those implementing it, and concerns about access, resources and security. This was at the time of the fieldwork, an area where City of York Council could have done well to enlighten itself.

5.6 Empowerment issues in the York example.

How was power being shared at City of York? What empowerment options were on offer to citizens, and were they actually delivering this power to those who traditionally have been governed? Equally importantly perhaps, there is the question of *perceived* power sharing - are the council's methods seen to be both genuine and effective? Citizen empowerment is a term that has been used extensively in the York literature, and by looking at the gathered data, the translation of that apparent value into practice can be explored.

5.6i Empowerment gestures and aspirations

The White Paper on Modernising Government, which City of York Council explicitly state as a driver for some of its public involvement activities, states

that, *'If public services are to serve people better, the Government needs to know more about what people want. Rather than imposing solutions we must consult and work with people.'* (HMSO / Cabinet Office, 1999)

Reading the White Paper in depth reveals that it is still a document about efficiency, about quality decision making, streamlined service provision, choice and partnership for citizens as consumers. At best it is a statement of the government's commitment to respond, inform and serve the public. It is not a guide for the emancipation of the disenfranchised, nor a statement of power sharing intentions. It is in effect an instrumentally rationalised and decentralised approach to providing government that gives value for public money. Any extrapolations from it involving power transfer between government and the citizenry or democratic epiphanies are likely to be overly optimistic and certainly very difficult to deliver.

The York Citizen's Charter (City of York Council, 1999) insists however that it believes in *'enhancing democracy and increasing participation wherever possible.'* The same document additionally sets out an explicit policy (under the heading of 'Citizen Power'), *'To expand and enhance local democracy and to involve people in the government, protection and development of their community and York as a whole.'*

5.6ii   Interviewees aspirations and opinions for empowerment

The issue of whether this policy of Citizen Power was actually being achieved was addressed directly in the interviews with one specific question; is it being served by the public involvement structures and methods that are in place?

Joanna Lee's response was guarded; *'I wouldn't go that far...I don't know that it actually gives them* [the public] *any power in reality. I think its more an airing of views.'* One of the biggest problems, according to Ms Lee, was that the Residents Survey for example was distributed to a self-selected sample of the population, who apply to the council to be included. She added as a general point about York that, *'you have to be careful with participation*

in that you take it as the truth about the whole of the citizens of York, which it definitely wouldn't be.'

Roy Hearn's response to the same direct question was positive, but with an additional point of interest; *'Yes I do. I think that the city council, by the way they work with residents associations and other groups, empower the people to have a good say.'* The arguments about residents 'having a say' and actually acquiring decision making power have already been presented earlier in this thesis.

Andrew Gillespie, who stated that he was the officer responsible for drafting the Citizen Power policy entry in the Citizen's Charter, responded less directly to that same question; *'I can only answer in general terms. What we are trying to do is indicate the direction in which we are moving and indicate the ideals that the council has.'* One has to ask in the light of that response, just what was the role of these statements in the charter?

One point raised by both Andrew Gillespie and Roy Hearn, was that the administrative power lay ultimately with the elected members serving the populations, and that these elected members are informed by the advice and input of local people. None of the interviewees suggested that there was any increasing perception of empowerment in York, neither did any interviewee mention the electoral power of the population to change situations that did not suit them.

5.6iii   Survey results – public views on empowerment

The returning sample from York agreed (46.9% of all respondents) with the statement that public participation achieves greater local democracy, with the next most popular response being that they unsure of that statement (25.5%). However, when those respondents who had participated in schemes were asked how much influence the public eventually had, there was no significant consensus in response, between a 'great deal' of influence and 'no influence at all'. Again, even with a direct question about feelings of

empowerment, no statistical inference could be made from the survey response. Eventually there was a definite statement made when 45.4% of the participant respondents reported that they had helped those making the decisions, by giving them the local view. However, the next most popular response here (31.8%) was that the final decisions and outcomes had no relation to the public's involvement at all.

5.6iv   Summary

It seems that City of York Council had taken the Modernising Government initiatives and added some possibly locally supported values of citizen power, to arrive at a service-based democratic aspiration. Their idea of citizen power was not then seen to exist in reality by the interviewees, and those with praise for the system eventually revealed that their satisfaction criterion was whether or not the public was given the opportunity to speak. There are indeed many formal opportunities to speak, within the processes of the council itself, and the initiatives are not criticised here. Immediate (if brief) one to one contact between councillors and the public would perhaps impact more on the elected members and decision makers themselves than say, a committee report of a prior consultation.

The lack of tangible power sharing as described by the interviewees, was compounded by the fact that very few statements can be made using the survey responses from York on this topic. The variety of responses from the sample on empowerment issues, demonstrates perhaps the perceived lack of uniform direction or participatory purpose in the council, in the view of the respondents. In this mixture of feelings however there were two observable perceptions: that public involvement can bring about greater democracy, but that in the end, participation does no more than inform the elected decision makers at the council, who were seen by 31.8% of those surveyed to have ignored their input anyway (indeed, the Modernising City of York Council document calls councillors the 'Champions' and advocates of the people).

5.7   Actual view, and perceived public view, of public involvement

How did policy and the key players imagine the public viewed public involvement? How was the topic of public involvement actually seen by the people of York? Did that view marry with the view of the council itself, or with the view of the public involvement facilitators and actors that were interviewed? Was that view based on direct experience, or on second hand reports from others? Where, if at all, do these views converge, or where might they deviate?

5.7i   Documentary and reported perceptions.

As outlined above, the various schemes run by City of York Council were regarded as important aspects in the policy formulation and in service review stages of local government. However, there was no view put forward as to whether the public think this is a valuable appropriate or relevant activity or not, other than the newspaper article mentioned in section 5.4i (above). The perception of the public in regard to the public involvement schemes in York seems to be of low priority in its documentation of the time. The impression one gets is that they will be afforded these 'opportunities', regardless of levels of interest, in keeping with the authority's intolerance of 'free riders' in society.

5.7ii   Interviewee opinions of public's perception of public involvement

The York interviewees made a number of comments about the popular image of public involvement. Two points in particular were repeated in the interviews. Firstly, a point mentioned by all the York interviewees was that consultation and information are badly targeted, and not delivering to the right people at the right time. Roy Hearn repeated this point three times,

saying that the council puts out insufficient information, and that at the time of the fieldwork this was a pressing issue for the residents associations. Joanna Lee also made the point on three occasions, stating that consultation is badly targeted and publicised, and that most information is gathered from a self selected group of regular participants, or groups of individuals who at some stage were identified as making particular types of statements in open consultation. Meanwhile Peter Marcus raised the point that regular facility users are overlooked in some of the surveys, in favour of the set panels. The example he quotes is that of the transport department's decision making with the survey panel, but not including any representative from transport related industries in York. Finally, Andrew Gillespie concedes that expert or regular participants can bias the consultation process; *'I think what can happen is that certain people are very keen on participating...and become expert at it, and if you go along with that too much, there is a danger that you could exclude other people that might develop an interest.'* He also added that regular participants raise the level of expertise in consultations, which can lead to an exclusive atmosphere in proceedings.

The second most popular point raised independently in the interviews was the perceived dismissal of any gathered public opinion by the authority. Peter Marcus noted that, *'...people think its a good thing, but they are simultaneously wary that their views are often ignored...there's a public perception that involvement is apparent, but not real.'* Meanwhile Joanna Lee brought the point up three times; *'...its very difficult to get across the point that you* [the council] *haven't made up your mind if you are going in* [to consultation] *with a proposal...normally in planning we go in with a proposal and they think you've made a decision anyway and the public view won't make any difference.'* Later, she added during a response to a question on potential barriers to success in public involvement that, *'It will certainly be people's past experience with authorities, whether they've been ignored...they might have individual prejudices about the next participation scheme.'* Ms Lee reported direct experience of people saying that their views were ignored in

previous schemes, so why should the council listen this time? Furthermore, Roy Hearn noted with concern that during one development where there was an identifiable and *'massive opposition across the city'*, the council went ahead with what it wanted to do anyway. When asked what might put the public off participating in local schemes, Roy Hearn added, *'I think its the thought that the council have already made their minds up.'*

Other points raised in the interviews about the perception of public involvement included the fact that the public do not like closed decision making processes (Roy Hearn and Peter Marcus), that clear statements of objectives and commitment are needed at the outset of a public involvement project to ensure a wholehearted response (Joanna Lee and Peter Marcus) and that public involvement can be seen as a waste of time in the light of all of the above (Joanna Lee and Peter Marcus).

5.7iii   Survey Results

In the York sample, 43.8% of respondents felt unsure as to whether the UK political system was prepared to accept public involvement in decision making. For whatever personal reasons, 7.8% of the whole of the York sample stated that they had preferred not to take up the opportunity to participate in any of the schemes in the city. When asked whether with all they know either directly or indirectly of public involvement and how it has developed in York, they would take part in any similar schemes in the future, 14.2% of the sample said *'definitely'*, 56.1% said *'possibly'* and 17.3% said *'probably not'*. The follow up question asked 'If not definitely, why?', and the top answer was *'my views probably won't count'*.

5.7iv   Summary

There seems to have been a mismatch between the importance placed on the views of the public by City of York Council, and how the public feel their views are regarded by the very same people. The council seems to have had no statement to make on how its activities are perceived by local residents, while the interviewees seemed to be both aware of an existing perception and concerned about its impact in later activities. Unfortunately for City of York Council, the impression the results create out of the interview and survey data, is that the wrong people are consulted on most issues, and that the views of the wider public are often ignored anyway.

5.8   Pertinence and effectiveness in public involvement in York

Considering the fact that empowerment is not clearly felt, and that the public feel at times ignored, that the model is very much a corporate top-down way to include the public, and that there is no reliable feedback on the effectiveness of programs in York, the question is this - how relevant are these schemes in the end, and can they be at all effective?

5.8i   Official claims and concerns from City of York

Modernising Government, as argued in Chapter 2 is essentially a rationalised and citizen-consumer centred way of addressing the decision making needs of the government. The documentation from York seems to imply a desire to use it as a starting point for stronger, citizen-input type policies and decision making. However, it would seem that City of York was over optimistic in suggesting that this aspiration is in fact a real and tangible entity. The key policy of citizen power was seen as unrealised, and that very policy underpinned many other objectives at the council regarding shared decision making with the public. These schemes, developed and presented on the apparent platform of enhanced democracy, but ultimately conforming to the

modernisation agenda, are unavoidably disingenuous, and will be seen as such in the longer term.

5.8ii   Interviewees claims or concerns

The point that the involvement exercise is the real achievement in York, and not the hard results of any particular scheme, was brought up six times in the interviews - four times by Andrew Gillespie himself. His comments were in response to questions regarding whether the York Citizens Charter was delivering real empowerment to residents, as well as questions regarding the authority's rationale for it's participatory approach, and the effectiveness of the methods used in York. These comments were contextualised by Mr Gillespie into points regarding the Modern York initiatives (with local assemblies involving local people), and of an overtly leftist view of citizen duty to become involved in local politics. Joanna Lee made it clear that this situation of participation for participation's sake is rather obvious to some, and that statements about '...*doing it because we've been told to by government...*' are not uncommon in her experience.

A second point, just as commonly raised was that the public do not care about the public involvement opportunities on offer. Joanna Lee notes that, *'the majority of the public don't feel the need for it and are quite happy not to bother...I think there is a big overestimation of those who want to be involved....you shouldn't be surprised when people don't want to comment.'*

Meanwhile Andrew Gillespie sees the act of non participation as morally unsound, and rationalises it as an act of abstention. Roy Hearn is less philosophical about non-participation, and feels that the public think, '...*that if it isn't going to affect them they're not bothered...as a public we are lazy, but it really is true, I think we are lazy.*' The rational decision making involved in the public's choice to mobilise is discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Marketing and motivation in public involvement schemes were suggested by all of the York interviewees as possible routes around low participation rates,

but interestingly, none of the interviewees suggested that the public was unsure of its public involvement needs (if any) and might thus only mobilise on topics that affect them significantly.

Other comments in this area include three references to clear tokenism in public involvement, but more positively that even minimal involvement opens up the decision making process which in itself is valuable and fosters propriety and accountability.

5.8iii Survey results

Relevance and effectiveness can be addressed by looking across the survey questions for chief responses. In York the view was that public involvement schemes are mainly initiated by the local council (31.6%), but that the public input was going to be vital in the decision making around the issues of the scheme. Proceedings were dominated by planning officers (54.5%) and in general, the public felt that they had merely helped inform those who eventually did make decisions (45.4%), without actually helping make those decisions themselves. However, a contingent response of 'possibly' (56.1%) was most common when asked if they would ever participate in the future. The survey responses from the York sample did not allow statements to be made on feelings of personal effectiveness in public involvement schemes, nor on the general feelings of scheme effectiveness.

5.8iv Summary

The relevance of the various types of schemes in York is not a straightforward topic to address. The agenda of the city council, to follow the Modernising Government policies and develop its inclusive culture, is apparently being followed. However, relevance and adherence to this agenda is not the same as democratic power sharing, and the two agendas cannot be merged in the way that is attempted in York, to produce effective participation, nor feelings

of potency in the public. The interview data suggests, and the survey supports, that the public are more astute than the City Council realise, and that repeated and possibly irrelevant schemes are starting to vex the public in this respect.

The fact that effectiveness is not easily gauged here, suggests that it is a subject that has been considered by neither the council (compounded by the lack of scheme evaluations) nor the public. This would logically follow if the participation schemes of that time existed as ends in themselves, and not as a means to a more democratic end.

5.9   Chapter conclusion

This summary of the various data gathered in the York case study shows a local authority with an aim, a set of processes, and an apparently enlightened population. This would suggest an ideal situation to develop the participatory culture that City of York describe in their mission statement.

However, the York aim is now displaced by a central government agenda which is implemented vigorously, and processes are being grafted onto a traditional local government framework (a challenge in itself) and the 'enlightened population' actually refers mainly to a self selected, unrepresentative minority group of York citizens.

Steering clear of an evaluation of the York case, the task now is to look at these points, in the light of the literature covered in Chapter 2 of this thesis, looking through a lens of civic culture theory, and considering the rationalisation of actions that have been seen in the data in the final arguments. As has been seen in the earlier chapters of this thesis, there are recurring features of inconsistent ideals and rationales in initiating public involvement, occasionally intransigent officers, dismissal of public views, ulterior motives, tokenism, feigned democracy and statutory minimum actions. The next chapter will explore whether these are shared by the Slaithwaite case study, where there may be differences, and what that says

about the common features of the public involvement environment of the early years of Local Government Modernisation.

Chapter Six

Analyses, Discussions and Observations.

'Where efficacy is not perceived, responsibility is weakened because, without impact, individual acts are futile' (Eden, 1993, p1748)

'When individuals feel that their actions are representative of some larger social entity, the perceived impact of those actions is magnified and the individual's sense of personal responsibility for collective outcomes is enhanced' (Messick and Brewer 1983, p28)

* * * * *

6.1 Introduction

This chapter now takes the case study data presented in the previous chapter, and interprets it within the theoretical framework constructed from the elements of civic culture theory and rational choice that were discussed in Chapter 2. Reiteration (rather than repetition) is a feature of this Chapter.

The format of this discussion once more broadly follows the stages of the case study protocol. It procedes through what those in the two cases feel to be the general background to public involvement, the specific motivations behind the various projects and schemes studied in York and Slaithwaite, the perceived and stated effectiveness (or lack of) in these schemes, views on the use of IT mediated public involvement mechanisms and power sharing in the case studies, an examination of the public's view of the public involvement opportunity as perceived by others, to an eventual overview of the perceived relevance and pertinence of the public involvement schemes studied.

Unlike the two preceding chapters this section undertakes the discussion, analysis and comparison of the individual case studies to the background literature. Furthermore, whereas the individual case study chapters only considered data from their own area, this discussion will also present combined results, that bring together the policy, survey and interview data to

offer a less parochial view of the field of public involvement at the time of study. Also, the goodness of fit tests applied to the combined survey data are supplemented by χ^2 tests of independence to highlight similarities or differences between the two case study scenarios.

This section additionally refers in more detail than in previous sections to the influence of the Modernising Government agenda in the UK Government, in the context of rent seeking and civic culture in the public involvement initiatives it espouses. This is relevant because the two case study authorities are committed to the aims of modernisation (whether they wanted to be or not), and have drawn heavily on them in their official literature and their comments regarding public involvement itself. The terms 'Policy Rent' and 'Praxis Rent' are used here to refer respectively to the social and political 'value' of the theoretical or as yet un-attained political resource of a policy, and to the tangible or instrumental desirability in terms of either revenue or efficiency of that policy in action.

In this thesis, I explicitly advance the following new arguments to the reader:

- That potential 'rents' gained by the public and by administrations from engaging in public participation activities are dissipated by the social transaction costs of overcoming a range of logistical, attitudinal, cognitive and institutional barriers, encountered in the implementation of programs, in the act of participation, and in the utilisation of results. *It is argued that the various costs of overcoming the differences in expectations and perceptions in public involvement between key groups is commonly (but with certain exceptions) beyond the resources of groups, administrations or individuals involved.* This helps answer Research Questions 1 and 3, in that it addresses the general theme of rationality in public involvement, and the issue of competing agendas in collaborative projects.

- That the mobilisation of the public to participate in such schemes is linked to a range of factors other than the popularly cited issues of access to such direct democratic processes or the logistical ease of participation. *The perceived relevance, effectiveness and efficacy of public involvement*

programmes are such additional factors. This argument covers more specific issues of instrumental rationality, and perceived effectiveness of public involvement methods (Research Questions 1 and 2), as well as confirming the existence of a number of the confounding factors that were originally outlined in Table 1A.

- That with a range of agendas, interests, abilities, remits and perceptions when it comes to cases of public involvement, there is a significant amount of uncertainty and subjectivity about the effectiveness and relevance of the tools used (such as IT mediated approaches) and occasionally of public involvement itself. *It is argued finally that this uncertainty over effectiveness in public participation has been demonstrable, and makes the political tool of public involvement an unproved option for risk averse authorities to invest in wholeheartedly, and for the public to utilise with any faith.* It is felt that this point covers the range of methods and mechanisms that are considered in Research Question 2, and also covers Research Question 3.

These central arguments are brought in to the summaries of each section as the discussion once more follows the case study protocol, in order to illustrate regularly how the research questions have been answered and how this thesis thus adds to our knowledge of the subject.

Before presenting those sections however, it seems appropriate to set out a number of key theoretical points that have emerged from the literature that have been accepted as useful in understanding the notion of rationalised decision making and in an appreciation of civic-ness. Some of these theoretical foundations have been developed into a more conceptual or illustrative format, references to which feature regularly in the ensuing commentary.

6.1i   Policy rents and revealed income

In producing the Modernising Government initiatives, the UK government has introduced apparently formal elements of public engagement in certain aspects of administration. Whether the issues concern policy making, or the streamlining and efficiency of government services, local authorities and administrations will outwardly regard the initiatives as empowering the citizenry. It is suggested here that this 'offer' of power is (at least partly aimed at) generating non-fiscal policy rents. These are similar to the notion of 'ex-ante' rents as described by Gifford (1997, in Lai 1997) which describes politicians' investment of resources to secure political or material rents through regulation. In this discussion, it is suggested that such income can be considered as 'policy rent', that is, securing political support and approval from developing populist policies. It is suggested also the UK Government could not initiate the development of a resource (such as public involvement policy) that generated political income, if it did not have the potential to generate or secure significant amounts of it within a parliamentary term (see figure 6.1).

Dissipation of policy rents

An administration that generates sound 'democratic' policies will seek to secure rents associated with them. However, early on in the process this income will start to erode and dissipate. The translation of intended policy into final projects and strategies will usually result in the dilution of its purer elements into more palatable themes via compromise. On both the ethical and practical level the act of policy consultation is (or should be) aimed at ensuring that all pertinent information has been either included or thoroughly considered in policy making, confirming that there is at least some public consent and acceptance of the stated intention of the authority, and to create a transparency of process.
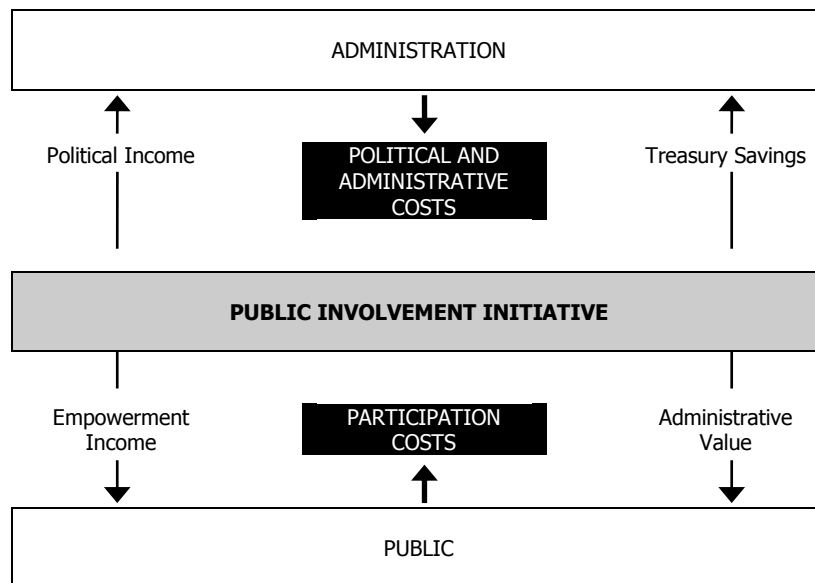
Figure 6.1 Possible rents and costs in a hypothetical public involvement initiative.

By opening up the decision making process to groups outside the policy making body the opportunity for critical scrutiny arises. If consultation generates responses that bring forward new information that had been previously overlooked, or a strength of feeling that is felt not to have been considered thoroughly in the policy preparation, there is opportunity to accuse the central body of insufficient knowledge, incompetence or even duplicity. Furthermore, by claiming that the consultation process is aiming for some consensus, policy makers imply a commitment to compromise, and acknowledge the existence of other views that could skew the policy away from its origins.

Thus the policy rents and political incomes generated by the existence of the consultative and 'empowering' modernising government agenda are immediately offset by the democratic processes that it claims to complement.

6.1ii   Rents secured by praxis

An administration may reap what it has sown with public involvement initiatives in a number of ways, but the most likely new income might come from the physical implementation of schemes rather than from the existence of less tangible policy itself. The modernising government agenda aims to maximise process and resource efficiency in national and local government and in the services that they are responsible for. Such efficiency aims to bring about better value, reduced wastage, and more timely and appropriate decision making. In theory these could bring both pecuniary and political rents to the administrative body, in that administrative resources would be targeted efficiently and spent in an appropriate manner. This reduces costs in the organisational context, swelling the administrative coffers in the short term, and allowing additional funding for more popular aspects of administration, such as education, health and other social services in the medium or long term. Thus both political and financial rents are potentially secured by the administration that engages with the public in this way.

Implementation of public involvement initiatives would however involve dissipation risk. The resourcing of schemes at either national or local levels is bound to be a drain on the perceived potential income from the more effective or streamlined decision making that might result. Publicity, exhibitions, facilitating meetings, gathering and processing responses, responding to public input and finally adapting and implementing the result, would all detract to some degree from the benefits that could be expected to come out of the involvement of the public in the first place. The securable rents would surely need to be substantial and long lasting to offset the costs to the administration involved in the public involvement scheme. At the national level, there may well be an economy of scale in public contact as envisaged by the modernisation agenda, but this seems unlikely to translate to the local level. With a commonly far lower turnout in local government elections compared to national ballots (with an average turnout of 29% in the

1999 UK local government elections, as compared with a turnout of 71.5% in the 1997 general election), the percentage turnout or uptake of the public involvement opportunity in local authorities is also likely to be lower than in any national scheme.

It is argued here that the logistical costs of public involvement schemes where there is also a risk of low turnout (and thus potential political costs for the image of an un-representative or ineffectual scheme) are in an extremely delicate balance. These points do not as yet include any actual rent-seeking activities of other individuals or groups in the public involvement process, which could exacerbate this situation further.

6.1iii   Civic state and civic individual

It is worth re-iterating the place of Civic Culture Theory in this thesis. The civic culture model is one of a number that are concerned with the political sociology of participatory society and its citizens (see Chapter 2.2). Almond and Verba's observations in 1963 led them to describe the UK as a civic culture. The atomistic perceptions and political interests of the public, and their propensity to participate in governance, were compatible with the existing political system, and the individual's sense of competence in schemes and their propensity to participate in them were seen to be linked to that situation. This was a feature in the 1963 work, and this current thesis examines association between these phenomena today. Despite the criticisms levelled at civic culture theory that are described in Chapter 2.3iii of this thesis, these two key assumptions within civic culture theory (compatibility of the political system with participatory aspiration, and feelings of individual participatory competence) have been used as a lens through which the state of participatory policy and participatory experiences in the UK at the end of the Twentieth Century have been examined.

The aspects of civic culture that were addressed in the fieldwork included the propensity of individuals to participate in local governance, in the context of

public involvement schemes in local authorities, while addressing residents or citizens' perception of their own competence in those schemes and examining the competence or efficacy of the projects on offer. If as Almond and Verba suggest, the civic state is one that accommodates public involvement, or one in which the citizenry are able to use their political power within lawful process to bring about change if they desire, then does the UK (or at least the case areas studied) still fit the bill, as it did at the time of the empirical work of the Civic Culture? Initiatives such as those found in Modernising Government may be increasing such 'civic-ness' on the face of it, but that is of course if the initiatives, programmes and actions proposed in the modernising government agenda are actually about democracy.

It is again put forward here that the agenda is consumer based, with citizens consuming governance and services. Even the Local Government Association expressed a concern in its response to the Modernising Government White Paper that it felt that the full agenda is more consumer based than it would have wished to see (LGA 1998), and strongly suggests that discretion must be permitted in the implementation of its participatory policies in local authorities. In fact there are no references at all to democracy or power sharing in either the Three Aims of Modernising Government (joined-up and strategic policy making, a public service focus, and high quality and efficient services), nor in the Five Key Commitments (forward looking policy, responsive public service, quality public service, information age government, and valued public service) which appear in the White Paper (DETR 1999). This begs the question of the democratic implications of such initiatives; is a more efficient system of government a more democratic system of government?

The rents and costs that are to be experienced on the part of the civic individual need to be considered in this context. The income that an individual can potentially gain from a streamlined and effective system of government may seem obvious - quality public services, an efficient treasury, and other public benefits. But if these are to be secured in the modernising government process, they are apparently to be based on public involvement in the key

stages. However, civic individuals are just as likely to rationally abstain from the process as they are to participate (Fagence 1977). This situation seems even more likely when the rent seeking argument is applied, with those feeling that they will gain from joining in with government on a decision making exercise becoming involved, and those who are not consumers of the target service or who feel they have less to gain from direct participation, simply not taking up the opportunity. This, it is argued, negates the 'civic-ness' of the activity as (according to public choice theory and political economics) it is then a rational, rent seeking, income maximising, self interested group, who will eventually gain more than they will expend during participation, that mobilises to become involved. That is, the type of public involvement envisaged in that agenda will either be unrepresentative, or it will have to be a requirement upon citizens to participate, akin to jury service. The complications to local initiatives that the Government policy brings, and the politically oriented yet rationalising public that it aims to serve, will feature in the following discussions.

6.2   Ideals and General Rationale for Public Involvement

Both the case study authorities were and still are tied to the modernising government agenda, and were following its original draft proposals, and later the consultation White Paper. Kirklees' own consultation paper on 'Community Leadership and Involvement' (KMC 1998), follows directly the call and direction of the modernising government initiatives and participation, and thus apparently offered the Colne Valley Trust a way into the decision making processes of the authority.

It would also seem that City of York Council was following the agenda from an early stage, but grafting the public involvement elements within the initiative onto an existing ethos of public involvement in council activities. The Marketing and Communications Group had been discussing the pilot of its 'Speak Up' scheme from March 1997, a system whereby members of the public were allocated slots at committee sessions of the council in which to

make a presentation on an issue of concern. This project was initiated (as was the mission statement and citizens charter) before the election of the Labour Government in May 1997, and thus predates the modernising government agenda. The council had also been building a framework for public involvement via residents surveys and neighbourhood fora etc. since its installation as a unitary authority in 1996.

6.2i   Attitudes of key public involvement actors

Nearly two thirds of the interviewees felt that public involvement in decision making is based on pragmatism and a need for efficiency (that is, based on instrumentally rational arguments), but half of the interviewees also flagged-up moral or ethical reasons that are helping drive the issue. Public involvement was seen by half of the interviewees as a democratising process. It is interesting to note this apparent balance between pragmatism and democracy: with a knowledge of the literature that the authorities were working to it seems that the interviewees have blurred the distinction between consumption of government and democracy, as have many others. This is the type of ambiguity between agendas that Research Question 3 seeks to address, and will be discussed below. Another possible contradiction might be that 62% of the interviewees also felt that programmes respond to some local desire for input, while 50% see public involvement schemes only as part of a corporate approach by the local authority. Cynicism was not a feature of the interviewee responses to questions relating to general rationales for engaging the public, and no interviewee suggested that central or local government failings had made the input of the public necessary, as might have been expected in perhaps a study of more reactive public involvement situations. However, the positive responses at this early stage of the interviews were actually giving mixed signals about the whole idea of public involvement and where it originates. There is a demonstrable top-down versus bottom-up public involvement debate.

So how would rents appear to these key actors in the case study? In the case of local authority planning officers the rents are based in policy rather than praxis, with audited best value (and other) targets under modernising government being a feature of them. Income for local authorities would possibly then be as Figure 6.1, based on possible treasury benefits resulting from more streamlined local service provision. Rents may also be secured by the existence of such policies in the opinion of the local electorate. Whether originating from central or local government it is the local authority that is seen to implement the policy or scheme, and as Almond and Verba note, it is events at the local level that have most salience when it comes to participatory politics. Local authorities will seek to maximise these rents, and if the investment is potentially 'risky' they may well revert to the statutory minimum levels of public contact.

Interviewees from bodies outside the local authority structure may see rents in the fact that the groups they represent could benefit directly in financial or amenity terms from public involvement in decision making. The most telling comment regarding the rent seeking activities of local residents came from Roy Hearn (York), who plainly said that there is such a large turnout at council budget allocation meetings, that a security company needs to be employed to help control the numbers of participants.

In the Slaithwaite case the rents associated with the decision making scheme were associated with amenity, and competing priorities were a definite feature of the programme. One faction of residents sought to maintain the character of village life, perceiving that the re-development of the canal would damage this public good. Others saw the removal of traffic from the centre of the village after development as the greatest income available, and sought to secure that with their participation. The NIF consultant drafted in by the Colne Valley Trust to facilitate the Planning for Real© exercise in Slaithwaite, did not explicitly favour any one of the various interests expressed. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the NIF have a view of such rents that cannot be easily categorised here. As bodies concerned with social equity, the rents they seek to maximise are less tangible and more conceptual, and

although value rationality in non-governmental or community based organisations in public involvement is linked to the subject discussed here, it is outside of the main focus of this thesis.

6.2ii   Survey results

Respondents in the survey as a whole did not articulate particularly strong views when asked questions regarding the origins of public involvement. The most common view (35% of respondents) was that public involvement is driven forward by the public itself. There was a popular view across the survey (43% overall) that public involvement achieves greater democracy, but with the second most popular response being 'undecided' as to that fact (27%). Uncertainty was shown further by the sample when asked if the UK political system was ready to accept the public's involvement in local government. Only 2.5% of respondents across the survey felt that the system was fully prepared, but the most popular response was again 'unsure' with 39% of responses. It can be safely summarised, that the sample felt that the public drives or calls for public involvement in decision making, that it is in broad terms a democratising activity, but that there is no real belief that the system is currently prepared to develop it.

These points, if expressed by the population as a whole, may have formed a mandate for national public involvement policies. However, the results of questions about voting behaviour in local elections, suggest that these views are not reliably representative of the rest of the population. Table 6a compares the responses of the sample, with the overall response rate to the survey, and the national turnout for the 1999 local elections.

Survey response rate	31%
Individuals reporting participation in local case schemes	30%
1999 UK local election turnout	29%
Returning individuals reporting that they 'Always' vote in local elections	**57%**

Table 6a: Non representativeness in the returning sample.

Thirty one percent of the overall sample completed and returned the postal questionnaire. Of those 30% stated that they had taken part in a public involvement exercise organised by the council or local authority. This compares to the 29% average turnout in the UK local elections of 1999. However, 57% of respondents stated that they 'always' voted in local elections, demonstrating for the first time that the survey response was biased in favour of regular locally active individuals.

6.2iii   Associations and Links Between Variables

A number of correlations and associations were noted in the data that was gathered in the survey. As mentioned in Chapter 3, it was deemed preferable to address associations rather than causality, as these are more in tune with the exploratory nature of the wider research design. A description of the association between variables might yield a more robust generalisation than a statement regarding causality in such an attitudinal recollective data collection method.

In the context of examining the public's given reasons for participation, and the kinds of attitudes that are described by respondents when considering the topic as a whole there were five significant relationships noted in the data. The strongest positive associations between variables was discovered between respondents (both scheme participants and non-participants) who felt that public involvement was good for local democracy, and respondents who were prepared to take part in further schemes if offered the opportunity (again, *p=0.01* unless otherwise stated):

Slaithwaite	$r = 0.7707$	$t_{crit} = 2.095$	Significant positive correlation
York	$r = 0.8851$	$t_{crit} = 3.295$	Significant positive correlation
Total	$r = 0.8357$	$t_{crit} = 2.636$	Significant positive correlation

When restricting that same examination of variables to the fraction of the sample with <u>no participatory experience</u> in the case studies, the relationship is again strongly positive:

Slaithwaite	$r = 0.7676$	$t_{crit} = 2.075$	Significant positive correlation
York	$r = 0.8528$	$t_{crit} = 2.828$	Significant positive correlation
Total	$r = 0.8162$	$t_{crit} = 2.447$	Significant positive correlation

When restricting the examination of the same variables once more, but to the views of participant respondents (that is, those <u>with</u> a participatory experience) in the survey, the same relationship was seen to be weaker, and in the case of Slaithwaite, ceased to feature:

| York | $r = 0.6862$ | $t_{crit} = 1.633$ | Significant positive correlation |
| Total | $r = 0.5171$ | $t_{crit} = 1.046$ | Significant positive correlation |

No significant correlation found in Slaithwaite

$$[p=0.05]$$

There is (according to this data) a positive link between those that are in favour of participation and those who state an inclination to participate in the future, but this link is less strong among those that <u>have</u> participated and experienced schemes already, and has even been severed completely in the case of Slaithwaite.

In addition to these positive relationships, there are negative associations between certain other variables. The first of these is the link between those participant respondents who felt that public involvement achieves greater local democracy, and those with a stated propensity to vote regularly in general elections:

Slaithwaite r = -0.53 t_{crit} = 1.082   Significant negative correlation

Total r = -0.4425 t_{crit} = 0.854   Significant negative correlation

No significant correlation found in York

This negative relationship between stated support for local or direct democracy and voting in general elections was not found in York. As for suggestions that there is a link between participants who have a greater general interest in local politics, and regular voting in local elections, the following positive relationship was also found across the survey as a whole, and specifically in York, but not in Slaithwaite:

York r = 0.4985 t_{crit} = 0.996   Significant positive correlation

Total r = 0.435 t_{crit} = 0.836   Significant positive correlation

No significant correlation found in Slaithwaite

What emerges from this group of relationships is support for the arguments that the participatory experience is linked to the propensity to repeat one's involvement in future schemes, and that voting behaviour in local elections is linked to participation in the type of public involvement schemes discussed here.

6.2iv   Summary

There is a difference between the survey data and the interview data in respect of the origins and rationale for public involvement. Interviewees mainly highlighted the pragmatic decision making efficiency models for community engagement, but also moralistic and democratic views on why it should be developed. The shifting emphasis that is seen when moving from one interviewee to the other shows that there is still some debate as to what public involvement really means. The survey results showed that the public felt that they were the originators and drivers of public involvement, and that

it is a grassroots phenomenon. But after that, with no certainty coming from the various bodies that might implement such schemes, the public view like those of the interviewees became mixed.

At this stage, before a discussion of how things actually roll out during a public involvement programme, the respondents and the interviewees were generally positive, and no significant note of cynicism was detected. It could be that potential benefits were brought to mind by addressing the topic in the interview and questionnaire for both groups. Certainly the literature was developing a tone that implied political rents were starting to accrue from the development of public involvement.

However, the same literature reveals that Kirklees was holding back somewhat, possibly due to its status as an authority under no overall political control. Meanwhile, City of York was moving on with its initiatives to meet the potential requirements of modernising government, and as the data was regarded and prepared for discussion, it began to look as if the political rents of their activities since 1996 had been secured. It took Kirklees until 1998 to produce a document to take it into the corporate or council-wide public involvement arena, and it is likely that apart from its community programmes under its Agenda 21 commitments, it had no great affinity with the CVT's activities in 1997.

Some caution was applied when addressing the survey data due to the probable over representation of regular voters in the returning sample. It was expected that the type of person to respond to postal questionnaires would be a probable candidate for a participant in schemes - an assumption made after Verba and Nie (1972) Fagence (1977) and Dillman (1978) all noted that respondents and participants are often of very similar 'types'. This was borne out in the analysis of the survey results and the observed relationships between regular local voters and participants. Unless of course the regular voters in this sample were over-stating their electoral activities to appear more civic minded in their responses (perhaps a phenomenon encountered by Almond and Verba themselves – certainly Pateman [1980] and Wiatr [1980] point out that there are missing participants when it comes to translating

stated support into political activity or participation). Following that, it must be borne in mind that the official figures for the actual participation rates in the cases were not available or credibly estimable, and it is equally possible that the participant respondent rate in the survey, of 30% was considerably higher than the actual rate in the schemes, and the data is biased in that way. Care was taken to consider this point throughout the data, and the issue is discussed again below.

A point also needs to be made here about the relationships described in section 6.2iii (above), in that any differences in the results between York and Slaithwaite are unlikely to be solely due to differences in the participatory experience, as the programmes studied were of differing rationales, covering different issues and run by different authorities. Again, this illustrates the benefit of describing the relationships between variables of interest (such as experience of participation, propensity to repeat ones involvement, and propensity to become involved in local issues generally), rather than attempting to identify causal links.

Research Question 1 addresses the importance of rationality in public participation, and it can be seen that when it comes to the background of the subject and the motivations of administrations and individuals to become involved, the picture is mixed. Value rationality is implied to be important in the case of those who regularly participate in local issues (Almond and Verba's, or Verba and Nie's politically oriented citizens), as it is for the administration at City of York, who have staunchly favoured more direct democratic initiatives in the past. On the other hand, and as public choice theory would support, instrumentally rational opinion is also observable, in the streamlining approach of Modernising Government, and the sceptical adherence to policy by non-sympathetic authorities averse to sanction from central government.

Rationality then, in terms of deciding whether or not to pursue either values or physical benefits by the public or administrations, is deemed to be a real feature of the public involvement in these cases, but that the costs of

securing both of these types of benefits/rents are going to be influenced by the difficulties that might be encountered when these rationales come together. Perceptions gained at that point, and their further association with rationales will be discussed below.

Responses from those who have participated in the schemes that have been addressed in this research have additionally suggested that the inclination to participate in later schemes was diminished. This reduced likelihood of involvement occurs despite the given opportunity to participate, or any perceived difficulty in accessing the democratic process. This helps answer Research Question 2.

6.3   Specific Reasons for Public Involvement in the Case Study Programmes.

There were two main types of forces driving engagement with the public in the case study areas. Firstly, there was the requirement for councils and unitary authorities in the UK to familiarise themselves and comply with emerging central government policy, in the shape of the modernising government agenda. Discussions with officers at the local authorities under examination, and others, revealed that local and devolved authorities have a similar approach to absorbing new or emerging policy, which involves a need to almost pre-empt change, by monitoring and analysing even the slightest suggestion of it. Kitchen (1997) also notes that across authorities there is a need to be aware of potential change and policy conflicts, especially in land use planning where areas of greatly differing technical or practical considerations might be significantly affected by a relatively minor change in one field or another (for example, imported changes in waste management policy can result in a requirement for significant local alterations to land-use planning on waste related matters). Also during the preparation or revision of development plans, this need to keep abreast of policy change becomes even more acute, particularly if there have been alterations to the 'moving targets'

that are planning guidance documents (Quinn 1996), or in Wales, Technical Advice Notes.

This need for vigilance and observation of policy was especially prominent in the City of York case, where the new modernised local authority system was being incorporated quickly, and where the new public involvement elements (of for instance public involvement in best value reviews, or people's panels in service decision making) happened to coincide with a general citizen contact agenda that already existed within this Labour controlled authority. As will be discussed below, the similarities and differences between the existing ethos and the framework being promoted by central government have made the York case a mix of reported successes, failures and contradictions. In the Slaithwaite case, where the council was in no overall political control, the use of the modernising government initiatives was possibly more restrained, and they were used with the citizen-consumer in mind. The driving consumer in this case being the Colne Valley Trust, reacting to the proposed redevelopment of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, and capitalising on the opportunity for authority / public collaboration.

The second type of force driving the schemes in the cases is the pursuit of the perceived benefits that could come from the involvement of the public. As has been discussed previously, these will be regarded subjectively by the authority, the community groups, the developers, and in a spectrum of opinion among the general public. For the authority, the income is again likely to be in the policy, and to a lesser extent in this local scale, in the practice. For the community groups, it could be argued that the involvement in the Slaithwaite case is a show of activity to justify funding (a hypothetical point offered here after a reading of Hinshelwood [2001], suggesting that funding considerations are capable of over-riding issue based activity in community development) as much as for any civic, moral or democratic reason, especially in widely recognised tokenistic schemes. Unfortunately again, the Colne Valley Trust did not make themselves available to discuss the issue, but if that cynical point were to be proven, rent sought by such bodies might be also associated with increasing their prominence among the public and in the type

of output which secures patrons. On a less sceptical note, perhaps the rents sought by community groups are attitudinal, or illustrative; that they seek to demonstrate that decision making really *can* be done with the public, and even if the actions and processes currently being used are just going through the motions, one change in direction or intention on the part of authorities could transform these 'games' into real decision making events.

Rents that could be sought by the general public are probably legion in type and detail. However, if as is argued here, rational decisions are being made by individuals regarding their participation or non-participation, there may well be a filtering system at work, reducing the number of interests that eventually fully mobilise and become involved in the participatory scheme. It is suggested here that such a filter can be viewed in parallel with the dissipation of available rents, and would be linked with the logistics of involvement in schemes (Fagence [1977], Arnstein [1969], Simmons [1994]), the perceived efficacy of proposed schemes (Almond and Verba [1963], Moote et al [1997], Arnstein [1969], Smith [1996], Fagence [1977]), the individual's own feelings of efficacy (Eden [1993], Arnstein [1969]), and the perceived pertinence of their involvement (Almond and Verba [1963], Arnstein [1969], Fagence [1977]). Figure 6.3 attempts to put this suggested hypothetical filter into a graphical form:

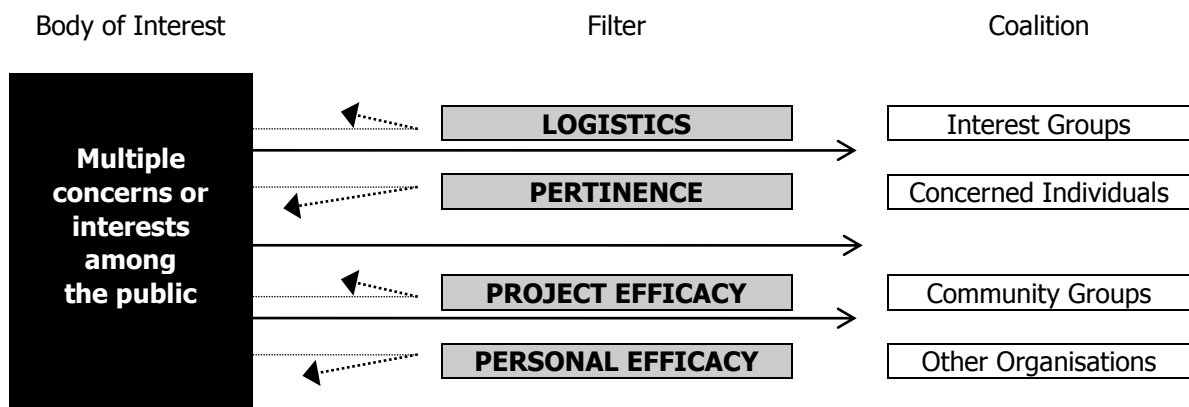| Body of Interest	Filter	Coalition
	LOGISTICS	Interest Groups
Multiple concerns or interests among the public	PERTINENCE	Concerned Individuals
	PROJECT EFFICACY	Community Groups
	PERSONAL EFFICACY	Other Organisations

Figure 6.3: The hypothetical fall-away of individuals, and eventual coalition by filtering.

It was felt during the research that no single work had previously attempted to bring these issues together to address their impact on public involvement in the face of a rationally acting public. These filters may be actual or indeed only perceived, but classic rent dissipation already suggests that along the way, certain bodies or individuals will fall away from the public involvement project, and either the strongest swimmers (that is those with significant resources to invest in involvement), or the interests that happen to slip through the filters are finally incorporated into the scheme. However, the one group that (in theory at least) could not fall away is the local authority, as it is currently bound by policy. In a civic culture context this would also make sense - with a strongly motivated interest (the strong swimmer) or the interest that falls though the filter (possibly one that has been inadvertently overlooked, or the interest that has been suppressed and is reacting) being *able* to get into the process. The perception of efficacy accounted for in civic culture theory is also served by this idea, in that the filters will be of a less fine grading next time around, widened by the success of the last incursion of the public into the decision making process.

6.3i   Rationale and justifications of key actors

In 62% of the interviews across the case studies, the interviewees asserted that the public involvement projects they had experienced had been set up in response to the modernising government agenda, but the same number identified a local desire for greater input into decision making. However, it must be remembered that the interviewees were not all representatives of local government. In which case the references to the modernising government aspects could have a range of meanings. Referral to the agenda by the council officers might be almost expected, as one of their everyday working references, however the comment upon it by the locally active community groups could possibly be seen as an criticism of a top down approach, insensitive to local need and mirroring a corporate view. For

example, when Linda Crayton of the SKRPP was asked why she thought the authority engaged with the Slaithwaite public in the first place, she replied, *'I think basically because they are told to from above. As soon as central government says "this is what we want to see" everyone runs about saying "we'll do that".'* Meanwhile, Roy Hearn of the Federation of York Residents Associations, feels that*, '...they [City of York] have got another agenda to be honest. They have to keep to their promise of best value in the community and things like this.'* Furthermore, Peter Marcus of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in York noted that the activity of the Citizen Support Unit at City of York was a corporate approach by definition, and wholly driven by the modernising government agenda.

It would seem that those organisations who have experienced public involvement schemes in both case studies are wise to the less than wholeheartedly democratic angle that the authorities are coming from, even if they are not overly critical of it. The question then is, are the public also aware of this corporate approach, applying this new consumerist democracy in opportunistic circumstances?

6.3ii   Survey results

Respondents across the survey who had reported that they had participated in the schemes being addressed here, stated most commonly (60% of responses) that their reason for getting involved was a direct interest in the situation. A further 43% stated that they had a general interest in public involvement issues, implying that they might have become involved whatever the scenario. When asked why they thought the authority or council wanted the public involved in these particular activities, the opinion across the survey was that it did not want complaints after decisions had been made (40% of responses). Only 10% of the sample stated that the authority really cared what the public had to say on that particular issue. The sample were also asked how interested they were in local issues and local politics, and the most

popular response across the survey was 'quite interested' (62%). The next most popular response was not particularly interested (14%).

The respondents reveal their hand in these responses - they are for the most part individuals interested in the specific issues, interested in local politics and interested in participation. It is accepted here that respondents can over-state their civic minded-ness in questionnaires, and a note of caution could be made about the 62% of respondents who stated that they were 'quite' interested in local politics, possibly because they did not want to seem un-interested. However, it is not clear what the benefits might be of falsely claiming to hold a specific interest in the public participation scheme, or falsely claiming to have an interest in participation, and the point is felt to stand. Furthermore, only one of the questions in this hypothesis group appeared before the point in the questionnaire where those who had not participated in any schemes were separated from those who had. This means that these were in the main the views of participants. It is suggested here that for many of this group, rents are derived from the act of involvement itself (Verba and Nie 1972), and that value rationality is again observable. This is a phenomenon that can also be seen in the response rate to the postal survey itself - those who were interested, those who were able logistically, and those felt they had to share their opinion, replied.

But what of non-participants? How is it that this involvement resource is not valued in the same way by the 70% of the responding sample who had not participated in any scheme? What filters were reducing the numbers finally involved? Table 6b shows the reasons given by respondents as to why they had not become involved with the schemes in the case studies.

Unaware of projects	47.86%
Not invited	25.7%
Unavailable to participate	10.71%
Logistical difficulties	8.57%
Preferred not to participate	6.43%
Other	1.43%
(χ^2 = 124.489 df = 5 p = 0.01)	

Table 6b: Reported reasons for non-participation (entire survey).

It is plausible that the public were not as unaware as they claim, and that ignorance would be a convenient excuse for non-participation. However this table itself generates new hypotheses and until the details are followed-up in other works it is suggested here that these can only be seen as the 'best' answer the respondent had, given the response range available on the Likert scale that was used (May 1997, Sarantakos 1996). The fact that there are a range of replies that have been used by the respondents, confirms that the ubiquitously quoted idea of public apathy towards participation is insufficient for explaining low turnouts or low participation rates. It is accepted that some citizens will actually be unaware of the opportunity to participate, but it is also suggested here that a more prominent reason that participation rates are seen to be low is that the 'costs' involved in participating for many respondents are too high a price to pay for what they will finally get out of it – a form of rent dissipation, resulting in a rational act to not participate. These are:

- The costs (whether cognitive or logistical) of acquainting one-self with local participatory opportunities, by reading and responding to circulars or newspaper features on local schemes (see questionnaire responses in Table 6b regarding respondents' awareness of projects);

- The logistical costs of participation in terms of time expended or physical difficulties in attendance (authorities do not as a rule offer assistance to attend for the disabled or elderly, nor offer childcare facilities to encourage attendance – a point made by Linda Crayton of the SKRPP);

- The costs (again either cognitive or logistical) of sustaining participation in ongoing schemes (as seen in CVT 1998b's report of reduced turnout to the October sessions of the Shaping Slaithwaite Scheme, and Joanna Lee's reference to over-estimation of interest based on early support for participation)

This is not an exhaustive list, but a first illustration of the points that lead one to regard 'apathetic' as an inexact and negative label for non participants to wear.

A lack of knowledge about the participatory opportunity stemming from an actual lack of promotion of the schemes is possible, but maybe more so in the City of York case than in Slaithwaite. In York, the residential opinion survey is completed by a panel of individuals who have (or had at the time of study) to apply for membership to it, the panel being thus more or less self selecting, and only the results are made public. Furthermore, the neighbourhood fora and the residents associations that are used represent very different groups across the city, and interactions between the bodies of private residents and council tenants (which is basically how they are differentiated) may be imperfect, with groups being unaware of all of the other groups' activities.

Might the reported lack of awareness of the Shaping Slaithwaite project be less credible? Possibly, given the small population of the village and surrounding settlements, the awareness raising activities of groups like the SKRPP, and the publicity surrounding the events which included a leafleting network (which distributed 6000 items), street banners, posters, media packs and newspaper coverage (Colne Valley Trust, 1998). However, of a population of around 6000 people, a reported number of around 700 attended the PfR and associated sessions in Slaithwaite - just over 11% of the population of the area. Nearly 90% of the population declined to participate. It might be suggested at this point that only the adult population should be included in this part of the discussion; however the PfR sessions and the parallel software version from the University of Leeds reported that they had a significant input from school children of all ages. Indeed, according to Evans et al (1999), over 50% of users of the IT version of the model were school children aged between 9 and 15 years.

It is asserted here that participation filters such as those suggested in Figure 6.3 are at work somewhere in both case studies, but although the responses listed in Table 6b give a starting point for further discussion on non-participation, they do not yet satisfactorily account for low participation rates in such well publicised projects.

6.3iii   Summary

It was noted that in the Shaping Slaithwaite project Kirklees was holding back on their involvement in the scheme. It seems that the contact that the authority did have with the public satisfied its (at that time, pre-statute) modernisation requirements, but it was mainly complying with the more consumer-citizen elements within. There were certainly a range of interests held in the area, and various rents to be secured by the residents, the authority, the CVT, and the developers in the area (not just the Huddersfield Narrow Canal Company, but also those involved in associated road construction and car parks for the re-designed sections of the village centre).

It was noted in the interviews that a key reason for the initiation of the public involvement schemes in these cases was the need to comply with central policy. Considering the range of interviewees it was not surprising that this point was not necessarily always made as a positive comment. The idea of a corporate approach to local democracy (that is, what is seen as a constant top-down insistence on public input as part of an authority wide mission, rather than responsive issue based involvement) was not entirely popular, and in the context of civic culture theory, it is suggested that it is actually damaging. In fact Almond and Verba (1963) suggest that a system that routinely requires or requests that the public assists with decision making is on the back-foot democratically. Whether that point is applicable or not, there is still a required move away from the leftist origins of the public involvement in York toward the consumer-citizen ideals of the modernising government agenda, and the discontinuity is noted in the data.

If in fact, the range of interests that might have finally been brought to the table in the case studies were filtered by the nature of the participatory system that they fell into (by for example the logistics of offering an opinion and sustaining voluntary input, and the perceptual filters associated with efficacy, relevance and worth) this arguably is just as civic culture theory predicts. Certainly there were a range of statistically unmanageable responses

made at various invalid points on the returned questionnaire, even in the case of respondents who had not participated in any case study schemes.

Additional differences between the attitude of the public, interviewees and the official documentation emerged as the survey respondents suggested that their main reason for involvement was a specific interest in the particular issues. This does not coincide with the rationale of either Kirklees or York, and many of the respondents seemed aware of that fact, and the first notes of cynicism were detected. This brought us to the respondents stated reasons for non-participation, and although a lack of awareness of the opportunity to participate is offered as the main reason for not becoming involved, it was the fact that there were a range of reasons offered at all in the responses that was most illuminating. Again, returning to the idea of filters and the dissipation of potential rents, it is suggested that filtering might follow the cognition of the rent-seeking stage as follows;

1. An individual or group sees a possible benefit in a potential public involvement scheme;

2. then moves toward a position from where such income might be secured if all other aspects of the situation allow;

3. then experiences an obstacle (i.e., an element of the participatory filter);

4. the individual or group either negotiate the obstacle using disposable resources (i.e. invests in getting involved) and continue their involvement, or;

5. the individual or group considers that negotiating the obstacle is outside the available resources, or even ultimately contrary to other key interests it has, and retreats from the situation

This sequence of course assumes perfect knowledge, as with all rational-activist models. Furthermore, moral codes might not traditionally be seen as a rationalist consideration, but with some literature (for example see Verba and Nie or Dillman) and the current data suggesting that there are habitual participants emerging at every opportunity, and the fact that certain political circumstances might be seen as ethically unsustainable by the public, it is

appropriate that such values should be included as a true 'rent' in such discussions and that value rationality might be as critical in public involvement as any instrumental or utilitarian consideration.

Research Question 1 is addressed directly in this section, as rationality is once more shown to be of great significance in the cases as far as both the public and administrations are concerned. Both value rationality and instrumental rationality have been observed in the responses to questions regarding specific motives in the public involvement schemes in Slaithwaite and York, and surprisingly perhaps, they came from both the public and the local authorities. The combination of both types of rationalised decision making is again observed, and might be said to imply a rational step that is a hybrid of both value and instrumental rationality. This thesis offers the term 'civic rationality' to describe this hybrid form, in that it describes the orientation of individuals to become involved locally in politics or decision making, but also accommodates their propensity to rationalise their participation (or non participation) based on their own mixture of material considerations and personally held values.

The filter metaphor is useful in that it demonstrates (if crudely), the possible points at which rational decisions are taken during the earlier stages of mobilisation. If overcoming the encountered obstacle or filtering element incurs excessive costs, the individual or group makes a rational choice regarding the potential returns for their involvement in terms of secured rent for their expenditure, and either falls away, or continues with their involvement. These barriers may be perceived (such as feelings of distrust toward the local authority's motives, the apparent complexity of the issue, or its relevance to the individual) or they may be physical (such as logistical hindrances or a lack of access to the process, for example in the exclusive, self selected panels in York). However, if the promise of benefits is great enough, or the value of the act itself is grand enough, the barrier will be negotiated. This thesis considers that the groups of people identified in the

literature as eager to participate on which ever issue is currently available (Verba and Nie) or those that crowd community centres in York at housing budget allocation meetings, are examples of these determined rent seekers in action.

Barriers will also be negotiated by those with the greatest resources to continue (the strongest swimmers), and the pursuit of the eventual values or goods will continue until it is no longer 'rational' to do so. That is, when the prospect of attaining them is diminished either by their dissipation or by their elusiveness. This might be the case in land use planning, where (as Thomas [1996] noted) the biggest influences on planning policy are also those with the greatest financial and political clout. Hence also, the policy of frequent and top-down public involvement in aspects of modernisation will continue to be favoured by resource rich central government, until it is deemed to bring insufficient political value, or repeated financial failure for the expenditure it demands. There could perhaps be a point in the future where Best Value eventually find its own public involvement mechanisms a failure, and deems it necessary to challenge them.

6.4   Scheme Effectiveness

Best Value and service performance in authorities will be auditable under the modernising government developments. Additionally, community level organisations are funded by rational (potentially rent conscious) patrons (Hinshelwood 2001). There is therefore inevitable pressure upon both types of bodies to deliver effective public involvement schemes under the threat of either infraction or withdrawal of support from above. Furthermore, as a commercial activity with at least some importance placed on popular success, academic research also has an interest in delivering a practical and effective product. In this context, it can come as no surprise that the case study schemes were officially reported as successes by the authorities, the community and voluntary groups and the VDMISP group.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, newspaper articles in York reporting the results of the Resident Opinion Polls have side-stepped the issue of relevance and effectiveness, and concentrated instead on the democratic desirability of the process itself, and the potential uses of resident survey data. It was also noted in the City of York materials that feedback with which to evaluate the various public contact schemes was in very short supply, and (contrary to the authority's commitments to best value) was of seemingly little importance. When this feature is compared with the points presented in the preceding paragraph, it could be argued that there was (at the time of research at least) an uncertainty as to whether full reportage of the results of schemes was prudent.

Was City of York Council attempting to restrict the loss of political rents that might be associated with low impact results in its public involvement schemes? It is not suggested here that the various schemes operating in York are ineffective, but the over exposure of what could be seen as mundane, low magnitude, or inconsequential participatory programs, or those with a vociferous group of critics ready to contest the irrelevant output of self-serving, unrepresentative citizen groupings, could potentially result in damaging negative public perceptions or indifferent dismissal (see Eden 1993 for a commentary on the propensity of the public to continue with or support activities that are not perceived to be effective).

In the Slaithwaite case, the Colne Valley Trust's own reporting of events (as seen in CVT 1998a) claimed that their turnout and participation rate showed the level of interest in the topic of public involvement in the area, and gave a mandate for action. This is unsafe, as only around 11% (an estimate based on the CVT's figures) of the local population attended the main events. Also uncertain were the statements made in the CVT documents on the basis of the returned evaluation questionnaire, which was completed by 29 of the 700+ participating individuals (4%). The terminology used by the CVT in its first report suggests that it was ultimately seeking such a mandate, and claimed that it was secured whether or not it actually was.

6.4i   Interviewee opinion on effectiveness

It was noted in the preceding chapters that effectiveness was difficult to gauge in the absence of shared criteria and without a body of feedback data to address. It would seem that the first such data to be gathered are contained in this thesis, a fact which has to be viewed as an indicator of the authorities' prevailing attitude toward the schemes under examination. Interviewees were at best uncertain about their own feelings toward the effectiveness of the programs in York and Slaithwaite, and at worst they were evasive. Quite why this should occur could not be gleaned from the interviews themselves, and the less formal and more candid survey results were awaited with interest.

It would appear that some of the public contact aspects put forward in Modernising Government had been attempted in the cases but without any clear effort being made regarding the best value requirements of it. Evaluation of the schemes, and of any alternative approach to public involvement in council business is essential in the Challenging and Comparing steps of the best value process. With no evaluation, these could not be addressed adequately. The policy of public contact and its delivery and its appropriateness was unchallenged in both Kirklees and City of York and there was no available official comparison between what was intended or promised, and what was finally delivered in the case schemes, nor was any such comparison said to be imminent at the time of the fieldwork.

One aspect that was held up as effective was the annual budget allocation round of public meetings in York. As mentioned above, these meetings are heavily attended, with crowds needing some degree of marshalling. It is suggested here that this is a plain example of financial rent seeking in a public involvement scheme; these residents know that there are funds available, to be spent in a way that they can influence, probably in a way that they (or theirs) will benefit from directly. Furthermore as these meetings are primarily at ward and neighbourhood level, the participants need not incur travelling costs as the council comes to them, they do not need to grapple

with unfamiliar language or procedures (a concern voiced repeatedly by Linda Crayton of the SKRPP), and they are at a numerical advantage when it comes to encounters with the council representatives at the round meetings. In such a position there would appear to be significant income to be gained by public participants, and few risks for its dissipation.

6.4ii   Survey Results

Confusion (or rather a lack of a consensus view on the effectiveness of the schemes in York and Slaithwaite) can also be seen to some degree in the survey results. Across the survey as a whole, when asked how the respondent would have decided whether the project was successful, the most common response was 'if issues were resolved fairly', with 36%. However there was a significant difference between the responses of York and the responses of Slaithwaite. The most popular response to this question in the York case was 'if issues are resolved in good time, at a reasonable cost' (36% of respondents), while the Slaithwaite sample responded most popularly 'if the issues were resolved fairly' (39%). This is quite possibly a result of the difference between the nature of the public involvement experiences in the case studies - the Slaithwaite example being one of a specific and contentious development issue, and the York case being one of a range of programmes on policy and budgetary issues.

However, the very next question of this sequence asked whether in hindsight and after expressing their own criteria, the respondents felt that the scheme was actually effective. Differences within the York sample were not found to be statistically significant using the uniform chi square test, but the Slaithwaite sample just about made a significant statement [$p=0.25$] with the predominant response being that they were 'unsure' whether it was effective. Across the survey, 'unsure' was again the most popular response (28%), and 'very effective' the least popular (6%).

After addressing respondents' subjective criteria for gauging effectiveness the survey then asked about perceptions of their own individual effectiveness. The total survey results produced a tie for the most popular response, with 'quite effective', and 'not very effective' sharing the honours with 28% each. The least popular answer given was 'very effective' with 5%.

The final question in this section concerned the respondents' views on the efficacy of the programme itself. Neither Slaithwaite nor York provided a statistically meaningful response to this question. However, there was a response option of 'other' on this question, which gave an interesting range of evenly distributed views (that is with no significant pattern to add to this discussion) as to why the schemes might not necessarily be seen as effective. These 'other' responses included:

- a widely perceived dismissal of the public input by the local council
- ongoing schemes, which had not been evaluated at the time of the survey
- an absence of feedback to evaluate completed schemes
- obstructive local political attitudes experienced during participation
- perceived tokenistic and cosmetic involvement
- the overall vagueness of the schemes encountered

6.4iii   Relationships and Associations Between Effectiveness Variables

There were two key variables of interest with significant relationships to describe between them in terms of perceptions of effectiveness. Firstly, a significant positive association was found to exist in Slaithwaite and across the study as a whole, between participant respondents who considered themselves to have been 'effective participants' in the scheme they took part in, and the overall effectiveness of that scheme:

Slaithwaite $r = 0.6211$ $t_{crit} = 1.372$ Significant positive correlation

Total $r = 0.5427$ $t_{crit} = 1.133$ Significant positive correlation

No significant correlation found in York

Secondly, there was a significant positive association found in York and across the survey as a whole, between participant respondents who considered their schemes to be effective, with those who stated that they would participate in later schemes if offered the chance:

York	$r = 0.7114$	$t_{crit} = 1.753$	Significant positive correlation
Total	$r = 0.4019$	$t_{crit} = 0.76$	Significant positive correlation

No significant correlation found in Slaithwaite.

From these points it can be seen that there is a positive link between respondents' own feeling of participatory effectiveness and the perception of effectiveness of projects, and also that there is a link between increased perception of scheme effectiveness, and the propensity to repeat one's participation in the future. The data gathered in the field thus supports the argument that rational choices about whether or not to participate in future schemes are linked to the perception of the effectiveness of schemes already experienced.

6.4iv   Summary

With no real pattern emerging from outside the survey data, what might be said about the effectiveness of the public involvement initiatives in York and Slaithwaite? At first reading of the data, it was supposed that a lack of consensus on scheme effectiveness meant that effectiveness was lacking itself. Instead of this however, this thesis now entertains the idea that an absence of consensus creates an *apparent* lack of effectiveness, and that in such a soup of motives and interests, it is extremely difficult to extract any objective measure of success. An evaluative approach to these cases (which this thesis is not) would be a demanding piece of work, however as Best Value polices begin to bite in UK local authorities, evaluations will be a key requirement in participatory activities.

From the point of view of both the rational choice and civic culture elements of this research, the effectiveness of public involvement schemes will become an important factor in civic individuals' loyalty to (or consumption of) the administrative or governmental system (Almond and Verba 1963). Also from civic culture theory, is the acceptance of just this kind of ambiguity of perceived effectiveness, associated with plurality of agendas and motivations in society. These apparent contradictions, or 'balanced disparities', according to Eckstein (1958) help a democratic state to function. Also, Breton (1978) notes that when this balance is compromised and genuine political disequilibrium is either experienced or threatened, citizens will act. He states (p57) that *'...If the benefits, measured in utility, from moving to an equilibrium position exceed the costs of such a move, citizens will use the instruments at their disposal and seek to affect the move.'* The political instruments at citizens' disposal will in the future include methods of engaging with administrations, in order to influence policy or to affect responsive decision making to ensure that their personal balance is restored. The perceived effectiveness of this instrument will influence its uptake when offered, or ominously, if needed.

Research Questions 2 & 3 in this thesis concern the impact of perceived effectiveness in public involvement. However, in the gathered data there was little clear sign of any shared view of the effectiveness of the projects and schemes encountered. With no certainty over their effectiveness or their efficacy, the public choice literature would suggest that there is little use for such games as far as the public are concerned, and civic culture theory might suggest that the feelings of competence that the civic individual holds so dear would not be reinforced by such an ineffective experience. With this uncertainty over effectiveness in public participation being demonstrated, it surely makes the political tool of public involvement an unproved option for risk averse authorities to invest in wholeheartedly, and for the public to utilise with any faith.

6.5   Information Technology in the Case Study Programmes

This thesis addressed the use of IT in public involvement as an additional tool in the operational kit that local authorities can use in participatory exercises. The use of Information Technology in planning has been addressed in Chapters One and Two of this thesis, as has the use of IT in spatial problem solving and in multi criteria evaluative techniques, and information dissemination using the Internet. Certainly, the GIS community and its research has contributed to the computational tools that are needed in certain aspects of decision making, possibly more than any other software discipline. However, the technology cannot help but be less effective and less cost beneficial at the local scale than it is on the strategic or regional scale. Indeed, issues that would require such computational capability would probably not be pursued at the local level anyway - the outlay in terms of tendering for the software, actual procurement, implementation of the project, staffing and the eventual analysis of data would certainly be out of the reach of community or town councils, and even some unitary authorities.

Klosterman (1997) had already considered how IT was perceived and being used in planning in the 1990's, and the intentions of the University of Leeds VDMISP group in the Slaithwaite case seems to support his generalisation. Klosterman suggested that in the 1990s, collaborative IT was viewed as a tool to enable group reasoning, and a way of facilitating interaction and debate toward collective goals and collective design. This would place the University of Leeds work in the area of expert assisted collaborative facilitation rather than decision support, which was the topic area that it was originally devised in and the area that also inspired this current work. Their research however came under the remit of the Economic and Social Research Council's 'Virtual Society?' programme, which introduced possibly incidental democratic aspects into the IT being developed at Leeds, which were addressed with naïvely considered Internet based solutions that were not ultimately satisfied by the Slaithwaite phase of their research. Further research has been done by the VDMISP group on a larger scale (not strictly regional, although they refer to it

as such), regarding multiple user decision making in reforestation issues in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

Of course, not all of the IT that might be available to authorities to utilise in public involvement is based on GIS. There are also opportunities for GroupWare and IT facilitated logistics to be used during public involvement rounds, as well as information dissemination opportunities. The attitudes to the actual and potential use of various IT and ICT mediated public involvement methods was addressed in both the interviews and the survey.

6.5i   Interviewee comments on IT in decision making

The use of community resources to secure participation by relatively novel means such as the Virtual Slaithwaite model was considered to be wasteful in 62% of the interviews, and this point was raised by as often by York interviewees as Slaithwaite interviewees. In exactly half of the interviews, the issue of unequal access to such IT was recognised as a major issue. The same number of interviews included concerns about the ambiguous motives for administrations using IT in public involvement, and half again noted the high specification of hardware needed to fully appreciate the IT tools. What was not mentioned in the interviews, was the possibility that certain aspects of IT based public involvement, such as on-line decision making, could actually be seen as divisive.

Positive points were raised in the interviews regarding the use of IT in planning and decision making, but they were few in number, had no identifiable pattern regarding their sources and they were of relatively low statistical impact. For instance, two interviewees suggested that the use of computing in planning and decision making was inevitable and positive, although the views they offered were somewhat unstructured and rather ambitious. There were also comments regarding the definite usefulness of IT when used in the 'right' situation, and that IT can provide a helpful decision making context, the latter point being made by the VDMISP group itself,

voicing an opinion that started to emerge in the collaborative spatial decision making literature some time earlier (Heywood and Carver 1995).

The main non-expert opinion on IT in the public involvement process was expected to come from the survey results, but before visiting that data, it might be useful to present the feelings of the VDMISP group about the process and its outcomes. Steve Carver of Leeds University stated in interview that in the Slaithwaite project the group was chiefly evaluating potential roles for IT tools, and that in time the main problems that the topic faced (which were said to be political) would be overcome eventually. It was noted that groups such as Friends of the Earth are suspicious of IT mediated democratic schemes and are wary of the political use of the term 'democracy'. In the interview, Dr Carver voiced a concern that the language and epistemology surrounding the social science and theoretical issues of the discipline is actually constraining research, and acting as a barrier to interdisciplinary work on IT in public involvement.

Richard Kingston of the same research group added that they had approached an existing project in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme, additionally introducing non-GIS based IT to the area, *'...incidental stuff, such as faxes and PCs etc.'* He also added that the Colne Valley Trust were *'...about the best village based organisation in England. Lots of people turned up.'* The first of these points seems rather irrelevant to the GIS and public involvement discussion, and the second has already been shown to be inaccurate.

It was agreed by the group that as a public involvement tool, Planning for Real was extremely good on the ground, but that an IT version of it would be faster and more interrogatable than the analogue model. As might be expected from the IT based group (and especially one aligned with the cheerfully extreme polemics of Professor Stan Openshaw, also at Leeds University School of Geography) there was a hope that the breed of citizen with a preference for not participating in the IT revolution, will *'die out'*. However, as noted by other interviewees, there is a potential issue of deliberate misuse of such software by the public, especially by unsupervised

remote users if it were eventually available on the Internet. Apart from that however, as Andy Evans put it, *'The sky is the limit',* and all non-IT issues are for others to resolve. Richard Kingston and Andy Evans both concluded with examples of non-IT barriers to public involvement; the perceived belittling of public input by (planning) officers, and the un-representativeness of those members of the public who become involved in the first instance.

6.5ii Survey results

When the participant sample was asked what methods had been used to gather their views and opinions in the schemes they had taken part in, only 25% even recalled the use of IT. The use of computerised maps or surveys was not a feature of the York case study at all; however a significant and surprising 18% of the respondents recalled them, which casts a doubt over the results from York on this question. The most readily recalled method was exhibitions, with 68% of respondents listing them in their responses. Furthermore, when asked directly which method respondents felt was most appropriate for the task, no-one in the Slaithwaite sample responded with the IT option, and only 3% of the overall sample offered it. The null hypothesis for the next question in this section had to be accepted, which meant that no statement could be made about which method was seen to be least appropriate across the case studies.

The gathered survey data on the IT issues was disappointing because of the lack of significant response, and the forced acceptance of the null hypothesis on the question of inappropriate methods of public involvement (one of the original concerns in the literature). However, by looking at the other questions relevant to the wider hypothesis (that IT based methods of public involvement are not always perceived to be relevant or appropriate in public involvement scenarios), it is argued here that the combination of a lack of prominence of the IT available in the Slaithwaite programme as recalled by

participants, and the low numbers regarding it as the best tool for the job, that the wider hypothesis might be deemed agreeable.

6.5iii   Summary

This research shares much background literature with the Leeds group. Indeed, the initial research questions were guided by the author's own knowledge of the misgivings within parts of the GIS community regarding the appropriateness of the discipline as used in public involvement projects (Kidney 1996, Reitsma 1995, Obermeyer 1995). Aside from the arguments regarding software imperialism, or the colonialist attitude of the GIS fraternity that were highlighted in those works, the main issues here regard the applicability of such systems in smaller scale public involvement projects. The US based NCGIA seems to have had little appreciation of the planning aspects of the topic they were working in, and certainly not of the UK planning system. For instance, at the unitary authority level, the software and its acquisition and eventual or sustained use can be prohibitively expensive, especially the type of system devised by the Leeds University team.

Indeed many (but by no means all) local authorities have geographic information systems, but it would be the resource outlay associated with implementing an IT based public involvement scheme, and then analysing and using the data that would be prohibitive. Furthermore, access to a computer in the home is one thing, but home access to hardware of the specification that can cope with the VDMISP software is another, thus impacting on the notion of participating from home, and wider claims of democracy with it. The interviewees seem to have picked up on the expense of developing such IT initiatives, and voiced concerns about the appropriateness of such a drain on resources.

ESRC's Virtual Society? programme may have been one of the last chances to promote such software to public involvement facilitators. Carver and others in the field had already looked toward the idea generation capabilities of their

software rather than decision support or even decision making tools (Heywood and Carver 1995). It is possible that the work done as part of the Virtual Society program highlighted the capabilities of the computational elements of these GIS, but also as Andy Evans noted in interview, and as the VDMISP research group repeated in publications, on the local level there were issues outside the IT that may need to be addressed (Carver et al 1998a, Carver et al 1998b, Kingston 1998.) For example, there is again no obligation for the results of such expensive decision support projects to be used in the formal decision making process anyway.

Research Question 2 asked whether the tools and mechanisms (in this case IT mediated methods) in public involvement are perceived to be effective and appropriate, and what might the implications be for those that are not. It would seem that the IT involved in the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme was a success in its own academic right, but that as a political tool for the public to warm to or rely on, it lacked any charisma. In addition, those charged with using such technologies in their professional capacity in public involvement (officers, consultants etc) were also ambivalent as to its appropriateness and unproven effectiveness. It is felt that this links directly with section 6.3 and 6.4, in that the effectiveness of the tool, and the perceptual barrier to its wholehearted acceptance as an additional viable mechanism of public involvement, are perhaps damaging to the wider image of participation.

6.6   Empowerment Issues in the York and Slaithwaite Cases.

It has already been argued that an authority that is following the modernising government agenda is not necessarily adding to democracy in any strict sense. Any power that is being exchanged in the implementation of this or similar policies is primarily in respect of the opening up of the decision making framework, to include more variables, more data, and more options to be considered by those legally empowered with decision making. What is critically important to realise, is that as enlightening as such steps can be for

decision making, there is no obligation at all upon decision makers in councils or other authorities to actually use this information. At the time of writing, approaches such as the 'York Way', and possibly some of the modernising government issues were still informal, politically unrecognised, token democratic experiments.

Are these types of democracy deliberately ambiguous, even intentionally misleading? There is certainly capacity in the machinations of an experienced administration to feign democracy. Less 'savvy' administrations would perhaps unintentionally offer more than they can deliver, as the literature has repeatedly shown. There is also the possibility that experienced local administrations, who are strong in areas of local democracy, can be frustrated when following central policy which is at odds (in essence) with its own local intentions. It is postulated here that Kirklees Metropolitan Council, as illustrated by its sanction and majority funding of the Shaping Slaithwaite project, is an example of an authority 'over promising' on local democratic impact, and that City of York Council is an example of an authority that has been developing a strong tradition of public engagement, but is now being somewhat frustrated by the friction between this and its binding commitment to the more consumerist policies of central government.

In this short section it is concluded that the public involvement aspects of the modernising government initiatives, as products of an experienced body of policy makers who are fully aware of the democratic implications of such statements, who are also greatly experienced in public relations and so called 'spin', must be regarded as dis-ingenuous. The almost total absence of the term 'democracy' in the text of the original White Paper, and its reliance on the efficiency based, decision making quality and service accountability arguments, leads one to assume that this particularly astute body of policy makers has consciously avoided direct reference to it. What it has also done however, is allowed and even nurtured the blurring of the notions of democracy with citizen consumption of government, hence the apparition of new democratic intent.

As the council literature, the interview analysis, and the survey data will show, this type of empowerment is not charming as many of the public as central government might be hoping for.

6.6i   Empowerment gestures and aspirations

The community empowerment events and activities in both York and Slaithwaite were based around the promise of 'having a say'. In just what precisely people are having a say, and to what end, have been rather vague, despite being focused on specific decision making tasks. What, for instance could the local residents of Slaithwaite do to either encourage or discourage the re-development of the canal, and what contribution could they make to the way decisions were made by Kirklees for the village? In York, how could the gathering of opinion in surveys affect the way that decisions would be made? With decision making in authorities a legal responsibility for elected members only, and with formal policies favouring or presuming against certain developments or actions, and the existence of the option of 'calling-in' a planning application to the then DETR or devolved administrations if it is deemed particularly novel or contrary to policy, at this stage the public really can do no more than inform or express concern.

For example, a local interest group might aim to obstruct or oppose a certain type of development, and mobilise strongly to lobby the local decision makers (in this context for instance, the local planning authority) to turn down a particular planning application. The group may have what they see as real and substantive concerns about the development, its operation or function, or the developers themselves, but any refusal of the application can only be done within the legal and policy use of the regulatory planning framework. The point being, that despite organised and legitimate public involvement, the decision to refuse a proposal, or for that matter adapt policy, or instigate certain activities is not necessarily within the power of the authority that is in contact with that public. Any public view gathered must therefore be

compatible with the working regulatory framework that the authority works within, and anything outside of that is unlikely to deliver. Thus the actual civicness (in terms of its ability or inclination to accommodate meaningful participation) of local government is crucial to public involvement in decision making.

With that in mind, City of York's budget allocation rounds (for example) are compatible with its regulatory powers, but are not super-civic (that is, over and above its ability or inclination) to them; no more is offered than can be delivered. However, its implied promise to include community involvement in council decision making, as gathered by opinion surveys, neighbourhood fora and the like, is not deliverable. Neither in reality were the aspirations of the Colne Valley Trust, who seemed to initially imply that they could influence policy in Kirklees. In both the York and Slaithwaite case studies, the input of the public (as usual and legal) went to the elected members, who made their decisions 'considering' the views expressed by the public.

6.6ii   Interviewees hopes and opinions

In the semi-structured interview phase of the case studies, each interviewee was asked directly about citizen empowerment, and how it was being served in their area by these particular schemes. Responses to this direct question and additional comments from other questions provided remarkably little reinforcement for the claims of empowerment for the populations of the two case study areas. The most commonly raised point was that the public already has an element of deferred or representative power, in the shape of elected members sitting in the council chambers. This is a realistic response, possibly an acceptance (or even promotion) of the elitist view that the public has its main political role in electing its representatives, and then stepping back. This view after all was offered by the current planning officers in the case study authorities.

One quarter of the interviewees responded that they did feel positively about the kind of power sharing that was occurring in the cases, although reservations and qualifications followed. For example, Roy Hearn praised City of York for letting the residents of the city 'have a say', while Edi Walker was positive yet cautionary about the common situation of authorities 'parachuting in' and then leaving the area again soon after the scheme was 'over'.

Another quarter of the interviewees mentioned that there was no real sense of empowerment in their experience of the self same cases. For example, Linda Crayton plainly stated that empowerment was too strong a word for what had happened in Slaithwaite, and later suggested that in general there should be an obligation upon elected members to list the factors that influence their decision making. Meanwhile, Joanna Lee tentatively offered that using the term empowerment was going too far, and that the work in York only gave people an opportunity to air their views. Ms Lee's views on the non-representativeness of the types of groups used in public involvement programmes in York have already been mentioned.

After the initial review of civic culture theory, it was loosely hypothesised that the public would recognise that it has a certain electoral power that can be used if and when they felt necessary – that is, a certain amount of belief in the power of the vote to alter undesirable political circumstances This was later reinforced by the idea of the use of political instruments by the public to secure rents on public resources. The interviewees did not mention any such reserve of power, nor did they seem to recognise that the public is aware of such a potential to bring about change. The interviewees also neglected to mention the positive impact on the public's perception of the political process that can be made in an effective short term project. Furthermore, no interviewee suggested that community empowerment increases with the initiation of such public involvement schemes.

6.6iii   Survey results

When asked whether public participation in decision making at the local level achieves greater local democracy, the most popular response across the postal survey was that respondents 'agreed' (43%). However, when asked how much influence the public had in the decisions made in their case scheme 30% felt that they didn't have much influence at all. Pursuing this issue, the respondents were asked whether they felt empowered by their experience of community involvement, the top responses being 'not particularly' (41%) and 'definitely not' (23%). Across the survey, there was a consensus among the participant sample that they had helped those making the decisions by giving the local view (41%). The next most popular feeling was that the final decisions made in the case study programmes, had no relation to the public consultation that took place (35%). Only 5% of participant respondents felt that they had participated in the actual decision making.

The survey results suggest that although public involvement is seen as a step in the right direction for democracy, the experiences of the individuals in the case studies were that they didn't have much influence in practice, that they did not feel particularly empowered in the projects, and that the involvement of the public mainly helped the formal decision makers by giving a range of local perspectives on the issues.

These were the views of the people on the ground, citizens with enough interest to maintain involvement and feel able to comment on the schemes at the end (for the most part) of the public involvement process. In the next section, these feelings were examined to see what impact any lack of empowerment and influence had on their perceptions of public involvement.

6.6iv   Summary

The projects in these case studies could be said to be adding to the practicalities of modernising local government, but not to any sense of democracy itself. It is suggested that a UK electorate that feels disenchanted by the undeliverable promises of increased direct democracy could result, if public involvement does not show itself to be more issue based and less of an imposed strategic, policy-based mission. Rather than sharing power, the authority and the local residents are currently sharing information. This itself may have been seen as some sort of democratic element in public involvement (Weiderman and Femers 1993), that is until the direction of the information flow is considered - it is toward the authority, for use in authority decision making.

From these cases, it does not seem as if modernising government can be assisting democracy, in fact it could even be argued that it is playing on the parallels between efficient government and democracy, stopping short of claiming that they are one and the same thing. But the scrutiny with which the resource-wary citizenry might regard the initiatives from central government, might be more potent than expected. The public and the interviewees seem to know that initiatives commonly come out of policy compliance, and are not necessarily duped into thinking that this is democracy in action. It is argued that the public will become wise to the ways of public involvement and that immediate local relevance and realistic objectives will become far more important criteria than they are at present when individuals consider participating. It is vital then that authorities only promise what they can actually deliver in terms of power sharing. If there is no legal entry point for public involvement in certain decision taking scenarios, the offer of inclusion or implications of influence should surely not be made.

A number of the interviewees noted that the public already has elected representatives to work on such decision making tasks. However, the public's power to replace those individuals at local elections if they do not suit them

was not recognised explicitly. This is a key part of the civicness of the culture - the ability of the political system of a state to accommodate such public actions. This point did not seem to come out of the survey either, with respondents stating that public involvement can indeed bring about greater local democracy, even though they did not feel newly empowered in the schemes they participated in. Instead, respondents felt that they had done some of the footwork in the decision making, thus aiding the authority, rather than being empowered themselves.

This information helps answer Research Question 1, in that it (in conjunction once again with civic culture and public choice theories) suggests a key stage where a rationally acting individual might make a decision whether to participate or not in an ensuing scheme. Perceptions of self competence in a civic culture sense must surely be affected if one has been involved in a completely tokenistic project, and again, if the method or scheme is not robust and proven, it will not necessarily be attractive to those who the authority might want to engage with.

6.7   Perceptions of Public Involvement

The picture that is building up so far from these cases is of a public involvement environment that was just missing the mark in terms of empowerment, effectiveness and representativeness, as experienced by the participants and the associated facilitators. But are these real failings or are they just perceived problems? Why is it that the documentary data doesn't always tally with the interview data, and the interview data not necessarily follow the survey data on these points? Where do the differences in subjective perception and objective actuality lie in these case studies, and what impact might that have on the image of the topic as a whole to those involved?

It is not presumed that the data collection methods or the analyses in this work were entirely faultless, but certainly with regard to the quantitative data

the use of appropriate levels of significance in the chi square analyses should have reduced the likelihood of the erroneous acceptance or rejection of any null hypotheses. Documentary and interview data were also viewed with great objectivity of their content (see Chapter Three), even though there were definite elements that were being rooted out using the questions and structure.

Furthermore, one of the rationales behind the multi-method approach was to triangulate the various data types, and reinforce objectivity using a system that checked each data type against the next. So instead of looking to any research error, it is suggested here that there is a second and third reason for the differences observed between the data types in this work:

1. there are strongly held, possibly irreconcilable political and social opinions and prejudices expressed in the collected data;

2. which are combining with actual differences between the agendas, definitions and capabilities of the parties involved.

These are combining to produce the picture of non-consensus, mistrust of the administration, and dismissal of the value the public's input. These particular observations in themselves are neither new or surprising, as the authors cited in Table 1a have discussed in various contexts. What this thesis brings to the debate however, is the argument that these perceptual and real features muddy the waters so very much, that any possible rents, advantages or incomes that might be gained from participating in such schemes, are indistinguishable. In turn, the lack of credible and substantial appraisal and evaluation of public involvement schemes, deprives parties of a way of looking though this uncertainty, thus perpetuating the unsettled and unproven nature of public involvement, and preventing the uptake of the opportunity to use it as a political tool by the public.

6.7i   Interviewee opinions of the public's perception

The single most commonly made point across the interviews (being brought up independently of questioning on thirteen separate occasions) was that the public's input is both perceived to be and actually is, dismissed by the authority that collects it. All except one interviewee made this observation, the exception being Andrew Gillespie, of the Citizen Support Unit of City of York Council. Roy Hearn noted that residents often had the attitude that the council had already *'made their mind up'* about issues before even initiating consultation. Joanna Lee pointed out that it is very difficult to get across to the public that you (the council) haven't *'made up your mind'* before consulting on a proposal. Edi Walker noted that many planning officers feel that public involvement and consultation is a *'pain in the arse'* and they do whatever they wanted to do anyway afterwards. Linda Crayton added that *'if you feel you haven't been listened to two or three times, you wonder what the point of saying anything is.'* Meanwhile, Peter Marcus offered that people think that public involvement is a good thing, but are simultaneously worried that their views are often ignored. Fagence (1977) and Arnstein (1969) envisaged recalcitrant officers in local authority structures as being seen by the public as a bureaucratic stumbling block when it comes to developing public involvement, and the interviewees concurred.

The second most common point raised by interviewees, and arising almost exclusively in the York interviews was that consultation and participation opportunities are particularly badly targeted. It was felt that the wrong groups were being approached about the wrong topics, and that the self selected resident panels were rarely representative. Joanna Lee made reference to a policy of taking the contact details of members of the public who came to view additional mobile exhibitions relating to a planned development proposal, so that they could be added to the council's database of desirable (rather than statutory) contacts in further consultations. This was originally done in order to focus or target consultation 'better' in the future, but when it was   suggested   that   this   might   result   in   merely   developing   an

unrepresentative body of contacts, she agreed with some surprise and implied that this idea had not occurred to anyone else during her time with City of York Council.

None of the interviewees suggested however that the image of public involvement could benefit from the positive reinforcement of genuine successes. Neither did any interviewee suggest that success in public involvement schemes can be a function of their appropriateness in the first place. It was mentioned by a number of the York interviewees especially, that feedback and evaluation was not a priority in the public involvement schemes that were being run, and with the absence of any comments about appropriateness or reinforcement it seems logical to assume and put forward again that the existence of the schemes is the real achievement in the view of the facilitators, and not the results. Perhaps the public involvement truly is a real achievement in itself. Certainly as Pálvölgyi and Herbai (1997) outlined in their Hungarian case study, New Democracies may not be particularly pre-occupied with effective results in public involvement, after decades of non-participation and no access to democracy. But this thesis is not addressing former communist eastern Europe, this is Yorkshire, and there has been no similar denial of democracy to the public. The aim should be to use the political tools at our disposal creatively and effectively, and not just be content with their mere existence.

Returning to thoughts on perceived efficacy of one's own actions (Eden 1993) and the effectiveness of schemes (Simmons 1994, Moote et al 1997) it can be argued that by not reinforcing the aspects of projects that went well, and by not considering the appropriateness of the methods and mechanisms used, facilitators of schemes are damaging the chances of ever achieving a positive image for public involvement. If there is nothing coming out of schemes of substantial worth to be presented to the public, why should they conclude that the schemes were effective at all? If the appropriateness of certain types of public involvement methods in certain decision making scenarios is not an issue, are administrations not in danger of just using the wrong tool for the job over and over again, and inviting even more criticism when outcomes

don't match intentions or resourcing? In a way, by not making efforts to ensure that appropriate methods are used and that positive reinforcement is maintained, and by taking the easy sampling option of targeting public engagement at regular and experienced participants, and by allowing both the perception and the reality of the dismissal of public input to continue, administrations are allowing leakage, seepage and the general dissipation of any income they might have gained from public contact policies. This is one area where the kind of best value policies envisaged in the modernising government initiatives must have a considerable impact.

6.7ii   Survey Results

Survey respondents were also asked questions regarding obstacles or barriers to participation itself, and to the effectiveness of programmes and how that affects their attitude toward them. The first barrier noted in the survey data was the fact that so many respondents (apparently) had no knowledge of the schemes available to them (47% across the survey). Another 25% considered that an invitation was needed to participate, which they did not receive.

Later in the survey data, it was found that in total only 16% of respondents felt that there was any state of readiness in the UK political system to accept public involvement in local decision making. Additionally, 40% of respondents felt that their local council wanted public involvement in the decision making scenario in question, because it did not want complaints after whichever decision had been made or the development had been approved. A further 23% considered that it was done because it was a statutory requirement to consult with the public. It was also found that the majority of respondents considered that public contact was dominated by planning officers (51% across the survey).

Finally, all respondents whether participants in the case study schemes or not, were asked whether given the opportunity, they would participate in another project. The majority (56%) responded with a contingent 'possibly',

and 19% responded with 'probably not', while only 14% replied 'definitely'. If the response was not 'definitely' respondents were asked why. The most popular response was that 'my views probably won't count' (32%).

This collection of top responses in the questionnaire demonstrates the points made above, that there are highly subjective opinions being offered which are not necessarily based on experience in public involvement schemes (i.e., those offered by non-participants), and conclusions drawn subjectively from experience (i.e., responses on the specific cases by participants). In brief, there seems to have been a lack of awareness of the public involvement opportunity, doubts over the readiness for regular or meaningful public involvement in the UK generally, a cynicism about the motives for involving the public, a concern about the dominance of planning officers, and a large number of respondents who are non committal about participation in the future, most commonly citing dismissal of their input as a reason not to become involved again.

These are the most popular responses, given by a cross section of participants and non-participants in the two case study areas, and it would be difficult to conclude that they equate to a positive image of public involvement.

6.7iii   Summary

There are differences between the data types that when considered in context appear to be linked with the range of agendas and expectations of the various parties in the schemes under examination here. Non-consensus on these points (as seen in the interview and survey data), and a reported scepticism among the public about the intentions of the authority or even their own relevance in collaborative schemes (in both the antecedent literature and in the survey responses), are generating such a perceptual fog that the 'real' points (whatever they might be) of their arguments are in danger of being lost or wrongly identified by each other. Many of the survey

respondents also claimed that they were unaware of the public involvement opportunity, and others were unaware of how to become involved. There was also a suggestion in the data that the general perception was that the local authority did not in fact want the public involved in the decision making task. Indeed the participant respondents reported that at meetings and fora, the planning professionals and other local authority representatives generally dominated proceedings.

The value then of these fogged projects is so difficult to gauge that it could be impossible for individuals with multiple interests or various priorities to consider getting involved in a participation scheme. A general lack of appraisal and evaluation (at least at the time these schemes were being studied) was depriving the public and the authority of the clarity they need to decide whether it is worth mobilising, but as mentioned above, the authorities had policy commitments that they could not evade, no matter how rational the case seemed to be against extended consultation.

From the data it would seem that the 70% non-participation rate (not to mention the 75% non-return rate of the postal survey) are indicative of some large scale impedance to 'open' public participation schemes. The majority of the survey respondents stated that they might only 'possibly' become involved in another public involvement scheme if the opportunity arose again. The main reason for not saying that they definitely would, was that they expected their views to be dismissed by the decision making body.

Research Question 3 addresses the various assumptions and agendas of groups involved in public participation, and what impact these differences might have on their perceptions of each other and of the participatory process. The data showed that there was a common perception among the interviewees that the public are not enthused, and they linked that with a perception that the public imagines that their views are dismissed by local authorities in participatory projects. The information from the survey respondents broadly agreed with this view, and they linked their inclination to participate in later schemes to it. As regards any rational choice they might

then make as to whether they participate in later projects (as addressed in Research Question 1), the expected dismissal of views that they report did not fully equate with a definite preference to opt out of the participatory opportunity – it was only said to influence it. It is argued here again that this demonstrates a sense of interest in local political activity, that is tempered by rational decision making, based on a balance of expectations and perceived potential gains. This concurs with the aspects of civic culture and public choice theories that this thesis was built upon.

6.8   Pertinence and Effectiveness in the Public Involvement Cases

Finally we come to the actual revealed attitude of the interviewees and the sample toward public involvement, as distinguished from the attitudes that each group perceives the other to have. As suggested above the perceived relevance of schemes, is one of the filtering factors in the public's decision to become involved in a project in the first instance, while it has to be less of a consideration for administrations who either have to conform to policy or legal minimum requirements to consult. Aside from the attitudes toward the individual public involvement schemes studied here, how did the respondents and interviewees regard the general topic area after exposure to the process? What was the impact of less than effective schemes? Was the involvement of the public necessary in the particular decision making situation after all? Or is the corporate approach as espoused in certain sections of the modernising government literature saturating decision making with a merely apparent need for public involvement? Or indeed, can it be said that despite the negative points mentioned here, the image of public involvement is not under threat, and it is (as we are often told) flourishing after all?

6.8i   Official claims

In CVT (1998b) the October sessions of the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme are summarised and presented. These expanded on the outcomes of the PfR

exercise and other events of the summer, and sought to design proposals to take forward, on such topics as transport, footpaths and bridleways, community facilities, and of course the canal restoration itself. However, just who these proposals would be passed on to is not made explicit in the report, neither is the mandate of the local group nor the relevance of the outcomes of the activities or meetings. In effect, the report is an extended minute of a series of meetings following on from the comments made in the summer, with no clearly stated intention. At the back of the document is a list of organisations one could contact, *'who may be willing to be involved in bringing realisation to the aims and objectives of Shaping Slaithwaite.'* (CVT 1998b, p39). It looks rather like the organisation driving the program was handing over responsibility for any further activity to the rest of the villagers. Certainly in the middle and latter stages of this research the CVT was in less than good spirits and not keen to assist, and no member of the group made themselves available for interview even after numerous calls and requests. It should also be noted that the planning decision had already been made on the canal redevelopment, and the Shaping Slaithwaite programme could be seen as rather superfluous to that, despite the CVT's original activities and aims.

The official documentation in the York case does not really allow for a similar point about irrelevance to be made. Whether or not the schemes there are really effective or relevant is obscured by the professional and well organised way that they are put forward. This is to be expected in a larger organisation, with an experienced and well resourced professional unit to produce reports. What is awkwardly clear in the Slaithwaite case, is that there really wasn't too much the CVT could do to influence the decision making within Kirklees Metropolitan Council, a position that is not as clear in the York literature. This doesn't allow us to conclude however, that the schemes in York are in fact more effective, or carry more weight in the decision making of the authority. Another point to consider in the York case is that the public involvement schemes (fora, surveys and such) are run by the authority itself, via the

Citizen Support Unit, while the Shaping Slaithwaite scheme was organised by volunteers and community based groups, with an independent consultant from the NIF drafted in to assist. It is not suggested here then that one organisation could be described as 'better' than the other at public involvement, but it is argued that larger organisations or administrations might be able to play down ineffective or irrelevant examples more astutely than smaller volunteer outfits. This might also account for the salience of less 'successful' one-off local schemes

6.8ii   Interviewee responses

The third most commonly made point in the interviews relates to this area. This point was that the public do not seem to care that they have the option to participate in public involvement schemes. Another point, mentioned slightly less frequently, but still mentioned in every single interview (in fact the *only* point that was independently raised in every interview), was that the public just do not take the opportunity to participate when offered. These points are seductive, especially as an agnostic and sceptical line has been taken through much of this discussion, but the data does not support them. Despite the low participation rates experienced in these and other cases, there usually is an eventual turnout, suggesting that someone somewhere is being served by the current methods. The interviewees were plainly making a generalisation, but the source of the confidence with which they say so often that the public does not care might be deduced from previous responses. That source seems likely to be their experience of previous public involvement projects, and a negative perception of their effectiveness and validity, stemming either from frustration over the outcomes of schemes (perhaps an inability to implement them, or a realised conflict between the newly gathered public opinion and the preference or policy of the authority), or from a lack of significant input to form a mandate for action. If these types of experiences were to follow for example a significant resource outlay to implement the

consultation scheme, or if it was initiated after political pressure to engage the public, such scepticism may be understandable. The perception of relevance is coloured by previous experience and implementers of public involvement, authorities and community organisations are just as susceptible to this effect as the public themselves.

Half of the interviewees felt that there was obvious tokenism at work in many of the public involvement schemes they knew of either directly or indirectly. Mostly different interviewees, but still half of the group, stated that there was a desperate need for evaluation and feedback from schemes. Another point made was that the public involvement was in fact the end and not the means in certain instances. Edi Walker, speaking generally and not referring directly to the Slaithwaite case brought all of these points together in one statement; *'You can't get funding* [for community projects] *without public involvement, but if you look at it its fairly token* [sic.] *There's no evaluation of it, that's the problem, there's no independent rigorous monitoring of whether a process is credible.'*

The idea of public involvement for its own sake was not mentioned in the Slaithwaite case. However, Andrew Gillespie of City of York Council, referred four times to the need for public involvement in local government, but never once referred to it as having any immediate practical benefit to the individual citizen. Mr Gillespie spoke of the carrot and stick approach to engaging the public, of obligations to participate and the removal of 'free riders' in the political economy, and finally the political profile that is gained by elected members of the council who support public involvement. The reader is reminded here that Mr Gillespie was one of the officers at City of York who drafted the 'Citizen Power' section of the 'Citizen's Charter' document. Andrew Gillespie was speaking in his official capacity in the interview, and whether representative of the whole of the authority or not, for this officer (charged with publicising and implementing citizen participation) public involvement is seen as a citizen's moral duty, but with no consistently described or beneficial end. If this were in fact the prevailing view at City of York the arguments of

irrelevance, efficacy and perceived non-representativeness were looming large over the very corporate 'York Way' in particular.

6.8iii   Survey results

As discussed above, the returning sample is potentially biased in favour of regular participants in at least local elections. As a result, one might expect there to be an associated bias toward positive responses in terms of validity and general attitudes toward public involvement in the survey. It was surprising to find that even with the biased sample, this simply was not the case.

Overall, the greatest proportion (62%) of the returning sample said that they were 'quite' interested in local issues and local politics, with only 6% stating that they were not at all interested. Immediately there is a conflict between this and the numbers of respondents claiming to have participated in schemes (30%). The answers to questions on voting behaviour also cloud any link between propensity to vote and propensity to participate, with high (reported) rates of voting in elections, not matched by high participation rates (hence once more the hesitation in suggesting causality above, but recognising bias). It cannot be argued from this dataset that voting behaviour is the sole guide to any propensity to participate in projects locally, but as mentioned above, there is an observable relationship between the two.

It has already been mentioned here that there are also observable links between those who have experienced participation and the propensity to repeat their involvement, and there is one key relationship to add that was seen in the data that regards the individual's perception of their own effectiveness in projects. Across the study in both case studies, a significant positive correlation was found between respondents who (although few in actual number in the data) felt themselves to be personally effective in schemes, and those who stated that they were prepared to participate in other later schemes:

Slaithwaite	$r = 0.5904$	$t_{crit} = 1.267$	Significant positive correlation
York	$r = 0.6945$	$t_{crit} = 1.672$	Significant positive correlation
Total	$r = 0.61641$	$t_{crit} = 1.355$	Significant positive correlation

As in the previous chapter, a collated list of most popular survey responses may summarise what the sample felt about the overall relevance of the public involvement schemes they had encountered in the case study areas:

- 40% said that the local authority engaged with the public to reduce complaints post-development or post decision;

- 33% said that the involvement of the public in the local issue might have been important but was not vital;

- 56% said that they effectively had 'not much' or only 'some' influence in the project they became involved in;

- 48% said that at meetings, their opinions were made clearly, but then apparently not recorded;

- 51% said that planning officers dominated those sessions;

- 28% said they did not personally feel very effective in the scheme they joined;

- 28% again said that the scheme was not very effective at addressing the issues they were aimed at;

- and finally, 41% and 23% said respectively that they didn't particularly or definitely didn't feel 'empowered' after their involvement.

6.8iv Summary

There are undoubtedly concerns about the perceived relevance and effectiveness of the public involvement that was taking place in the case study areas. Whether it was the validity or potency of the approach, the methods, the whole rationale of engaging with the public or, the issue itself does not seem to make a difference to the opinion formed after the

experience. These perceptions, held by both the general non-expert public and those who are expected to be professional facilitators and decision makers, impact on the whole topic of public involvement, in that they create such discontinuities in expectation and aspiration that conflicts arise. These may be significant conflicts which as Breton suggests can act as incentives to participate, such as a major difference between local authority policy and the view of a group of residents, or they may be slight conflicts which can act as lingering disincentives to participate, such as a vague perception that the public's view does not really count for much.

All three of the central research questions are pulled together in this last section on relevance and pertinence. Unsatisfactory methods, resulting in little feeling of empowerment or efficacy among the public, where the broad feeling prevailed that the local authority had already made up its mind on many of the issues under discussion in the schemes, where officers held the perception that the public were dis-interested anyway, all contributed to a commonly aired view that public involvement was a less than popular pursuit.

As will be considered in the following and final chapter, these perceptions may be regarded as the main challenge in public involvement research. The topic itself requires such a breakdown as this work offers, to illustrate where they are rooted, whether they interact and what that means for local collaborative projects.

It is clear that facets of both civic culture and rationality or rent dissipation or public choice theories are observable in the case studies, and the approach to this discussion that was framed by those theoretical positions has generated additional hypotheses after addressing the field data. This work will now remain focussed on the three theses and arguments presented at the top of this chapter, and will allow other work to address those new issues.

7.1   Introduction

This concluding chapter will compare the original aims and questions of the research with the analyses and discussion that feature in Chapter 6, and with the wider literature discussed throughout the thesis. To put the remainder of this chapter in context, those aims are reiterated, as are the three central research questions and the main arguments in the thesis that originally appear at Chapter 6.1.

The progression of this chapter essentially follows the sequence of the research questions. Firstly the importance of value and instrumental rationality in public involvement is addressed drawing on all the information presented previously in the thesis. Secondly, the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of methods and mechanisms of public involvement, and their impact on the topic are summarised in the same way. Thirdly, a detailed consideration of the conflicting agendas and motivations in public involvement is presented.

The chapter ends with an evaluation of the research itself, pointing out to the reader its original contribution to the subject and potential future hypotheses to address. It also sets out some of the problematic issues encountered in the work, and considers their impact on the thesis as a whole.

The aims of this work were to explore the topic of public involvement policy and practice in the field for the existence of various confounding phenomena reported in the theoretical literature. It also aimed to develop an understanding of any such practical confounding factors, and how they might affect the image and thus the success and development of public participation

as a political tool. To achieve these aims the work considered the topic in the light of civic culture theory and public choice theories.

Three key questions operationalised these aims into a working piece of research. Firstly, how important are instrumental and value rationality in the way that groups and individuals take part in public participation schemes, and what phenomena are associated with apparently rational choices that might be made by authorities and the public? Secondly are the mechanisms and methods used in public involvement projects seen by implementers, participants and potential participants to be appropriate and effective, and what implications are there for those that are not? Finally, are the competing agendas and assumptions of different groups in collaborative exercises linked to the perception of their effectiveness among them, and might these perceptions create additional barriers to the success of projects?

Chapter 6 then sets out the main arguments that this thesis offers, based on the empirical work, as informed by the literature and guiding theory. It argues that the various economic and social costs of effectively overcoming the differences in expectations between authorities, organisations and the public in public involvement schemes are commonly beyond the resources available to those concerned. Also, that the perceived relevance, effectiveness and efficacy of public involvement programmes are linked to the mobilisation rationale of the public, and is additional to any issues of democratic access or individually held interests. And finally, that ultimately, and despite central UK policy, the observed uncertainty regarding the usefulness of public involvement makes it an unproved political tool for use by risk averse authorities and potentially civic individuals.

In practice, this work eventually observed both the way that public involvement methods have been used by two local authorities and perceived by the general public there. This has allowed it to make inferences about U.K. public contact policies in the late 20th Century, and to make practical recommendations for emerging policy in this popular, emotive and complex area. It is essential to note here, that the policy environment of this period

(that is from1998 the present day) has been extremely dynamic, and that the research itself could not be realistically concerned with simultaneously updating its aims to keep up. Instead it is rooted in the policy environment at the time of the latter consultation drafts of the Modernisation agenda, and must be seen as a picture of the pre-statute environment (that is, before the Local Government Act 2000). The final section of this chapter will address the current issues in UK public involvement policy, and consider the outcomes of this research in the current post-statute context. The wider issues and theories as well as the empirical results need less qualification, as it is felt that they stand independently from Government policy.

The work was undertaken with particular reference to public choice and civic culture theories, in an attempt to understand some of the negative features previously observed in public involvement theory and practice, and to assess whether these might have been the result of flawed approaches, or perhaps instead a feature of the political nature of both rational public individuals and rational public bodies.

In order to make logical and meaningful comments on the general topic, the research had to address the policy frameworks of the time, the available tools and mechanisms, the facilitation and logistics of public involvement exercises and the political background to any project that was studied. After gathering data on these, the more subjective attitudinal aspects of the topic were addressed, and in combination with this more factual baseline, a discursive comparison between the two types of data was possible. The sound case study approach, taking in two discrete areas linked only by contemporary projects and a common set of policy requirements from central government has provided an illuminating insight into the topics under examination, and has answered the key research questions.

The literature discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, noted a number of areas that were asking questions of public participation in decision making. There is a wide body of relevant literature to cover in this work, involving the

democratic potential of public involvement, the practicalities of delivery in public contact programmes, the propensity of political or professional systems to truly collaborate with the public, the appropriateness of certain information technologies in the implementation of public involvement projects, the role of the public in the land use planning process, the role of IT in land use planning and the role of participants in public-authority interactions (see Table 1A for references).

There were few works that attempted to tie two or more of these issues together, but those that did originated in the main from the U.S based National Center for Geographic Information and Analysis (NCGIA), and the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (CASA) in London. Both of these bodies worked with a remit to advance computational and software capabilities rather than make any purely democratic enhancements; limitations that were recognised by themselves and their contemporaries. Yet in fine tuning the software and analytical tools that might eventually be used in IT mediated public involvement, these groups had overtaken developments in political science and community involvement that they had originally sought to assist. By investigating the grey areas that are highlighted in the wider literature listed above, it is intended that this research will also provide more tangible links to the practice of public involvement for other IT based research to follow.

7.2   Rationality and public involvement

The first central research question asked how important value and instrumental rationality is in public involvement, and what phenomena could affect the rational choices of individuals and authorities? There were indeed aspects of both participatory democratic theory and radical democratic theory identified in the York case (as seen in the frequent and almost routine nature of public involvement), and more communitarian elements to the Slaithwaite situation (with the focus for action and interest being on the parochial, village centred issues), but the civic culture arguments and aspects of public choice

theory remain the most compelling. Almond and Verba's comments on rationality in participatory civic cultures placed a shared emphasis on rational action by the public as well as by the state, while the work of the Public Choice School helps us understand the rational motives of the state especially (Buchanan 1978, Tullock 1959).

7.2i   The Rational Civic State?

Rationality (if operating) in a civic state as seen by Almond and Verba would be identifiable in either the periodic (regular) or episodic (infrequent or unique) ways that it invites public input into decision making or into the political system. Periodic involvement, such as a general or local election, is itself governed by schedules and timescales set down in law, and diversions from these requires considerable procedural outlay and even legislation. This means that any change made to the accepted timetables of local and general elections would have to be the result of either a national disaster or a calculated political reaction to a lesser emergency. The decision of Tony Blair to put back the date for the 2001 UK general election from May to June (which involved a legislative stage to allow local elections to be delayed also) was not based on a rule of policy or a pre-determined schedule. It was instead a conscious and calculated decision which (depending on one's political sympathies – as voices of cynicism and dissent arose over the appropriateness of such a delay) was based on the highly political demands of the UK foot and mouth epidemic. Calling a general election on the originally expected date in May, would have not allowed time for the government to secure a potential political income from managing or even controlling the disease, nor the opportunity for rural voters to express their opinion on the matter due to mobility restrictions. This political income or rent was only realised in the light of the national crisis, and may possibly only even be a relative income, when compared to the extreme political cost of the outbreak itself. This is suggested as a timely and relevant illustration of both value and

instrumental rationality in governance, in polls and elections in the UK - one of Almond and Verba's civic states (Almond and Verba 1963).

This of course also follows the public choice and rent-seeking arguments of Tullock or Buchannan, with the Labour Party being in the position to secure an income (that is, the political gain of steering the country through crisis), which will be of enormous salience value at the time of election. In the governmental efforts to bring about the end of the epidemic, no additional or unusual funds were likely to be diverted into the issue, as they are generally catered for by emergency measures and contingency budgetary holdings within Her Majesty's Treasury, the Ministry of Defence, the (former) Department of Environment Transport and the Regions and the (former) Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, which at the time of writing, are all noted to be in very good health. This means that the main potential cost to the government would be the political risks of mis-management or apparent dismissal of public and agricultural concerns. Any such political cost could be significantly damaging to the government with a general election imminent, far more than the actual financial burden of managing the disease.

Returning to the empirical case study data however, there is a possible imbalance between a rationalisation policy that indirectly secures political rents by promoting inclusion in local decision making, and the rationality of making public involvement work on the ground. The modernising government initiatives hold local authorities to inclusive decision making and the development of a voluntary / non-professional / community approach to some aspects of local authority service provision. Emerging best value performance indicators and other standards of service will require demonstrable efforts to be made by local authorities to implement these policies. However the experiences of the authorities in this study, working toward these same national intentions, suggest that the practicalities of public involvement are such that returns for outlay are not as central government might hope, that turnout is moderate to low, susceptible to accusations of un-

representativeness and producing results that really should be qualified by reference to those facts.

Decision making quality, whether achieved by opening the process directly to non-executives or by gathering public opinion in each case, is accepted as being crucial in a streamlined public sector. The intention is clear, but so too is the potential paradox; the practicalities of this public sector rationalisation make the public involvement process commonly non-viable, and thus pursuing them could be said to be irrational. This paradox could be solved with an appreciation of the rational behaviour of the very group the processes are meant to serve - the public.

7.2ii   The Rational Civic Public?

Almond and Verba (1963) claim that the civic citizen in a civic culture is essentially politically oriented in nature, and that the wider civic culture would be one that can accommodate any political actions that such citizens would be prepared to take. The decision of a citizen to take political action was said to involve elements of rationality that were based on feelings of readiness to participate in public issues, on the citizen's perception of their own participatory efficacy within the formal system, and on a satisfaction aspect associated with allegiance to the political environment and administration of the day (Almond and Verba 1963, p 473). If this thesis follows Almond and Verba's position, then as mentioned in the previous chapter, the existence of these potential rational aspects immediately sets up a framework for filtering participation before a public involvement project has even begun.

Operating beneath these higher civic arguments, more attitudinal and subjective phenomena might then feed additional value or instrumental (or even communicative) rationality into the individual's decision to become politically mobile (see discussion in section 6.3ii). If the main tenets of public choice are then considered, there might then be an additional set of rationales used in an individual's reasoning about their own participation. A

note of caution is added here, in that although public choice and resource maximising theories feature strongly in these discussions, it is still only a working suggestion that they are in operation *at the level of the citizen or private individual*. It is recognised that it is contentious to assume that the public are fully rational in their approach to public involvement (Jordan and Maloney 1996, Popple and Redmond 2000). However, as an illustrative and theoretical tool to examine the constitutional or administrative aspects of the general topic it has proved both relevant and extremely useful to include, and it seems acceptable now to view such rationality at the level of the citizen in a similar way.

When the rationality of individuals is considered, it could be argued from the empirical data and the antecedent literature, that there is indeed imperfect and sparse knowledge available upon which the public can base a reasoned decision as to whether to participate in a public involvement scheme anyway. Alternatively, it can be argued that the observed lack of information about or confidence in public involvement mechanisms is a crucial piece of meta-data in itself, sound enough to be material in the public's rational decision to not participate (as demonstrated in the field). Certainly, it was communicated in the interview phase of the fieldwork that the public were somewhat sceptical about the methods and even the motives behind public involvement schemes in the case study areas, and the results of the postal survey bore those points out. It is suggested here that the potential income or rents that could be secured by citizens participating in such schemes at the local level, are susceptible to significant dissipation due to the logistical costs of involvement and sustaining that involvement, and the cognitive costs (in terms of understanding the issues, methods and process, which may be seen as a form of communicative rationality) of involvement. The latter set of costs being perhaps more relevant in the case studies presented here, as non-professional involvement can require training and research (as in the Slaithwaite case with its analogue and digital versions of Planning for Real). This of course is where the role of advocacy comes into the equation. However when advocacy on behalf of non-expert interests is introduced into

public involvement projects, the point of direct democratic input is rather lost. Also, aren't elected decision making members of authorities the intended advocates of the citizenry already? Almond and Verba (1963, p179) suggest what could be seen as a middle ground between periodically electing advocates and frequent public involvement in decision making, is the real (and possibly key) feature of a civic culture; that it is a society where citizens know that they can participate, and know how to go about it. This ties in neatly with Breton (1978), where it is noted that tried and tested political instruments are used by the public to maintain or return to what they feel is a personal level of satisfaction or equilibrium. In a civic culture such a cycle of citizen action and administrative response, once seen to be effective would then reinforce the perception of the civicness of the political system (Almond and Verba 1963).

7.2iii   Conclusion: Frustrated Civic-Rationalism?

As set out in section 6.3iii, this thesis introduces to the subject an notion of 'civic rationality'; a hybrid form of rational activity that takes into account the value rationality of policy and moral positions on political activity, the instrumentalist aspects of public choice and the cognitive aspects of communicative rationality. An individual may be said to be exhibiting civic rationalism when supporting a proposed public involvement scheme, actually participating in it, or if after a series of internal decision making processes based on their held values, material interests and cognitive appreciation of the issues, they finally decide to reject the offer of participation. It is argued that the data from the field, showing values and material interests in conflict with each other (as demonstrated by the given reasons for non-participation, the conflict between agendas among parties and the apparent reduction in interest as actions are perceived to have little impact) shows that civic

rationality is potentially a very robust description of the complex decision making processes involved on the ground.‡

Almond and Verba's original empirical work on the Civic Culture noted that there was a definite mismatch between the stated civicness of the public, and their actual civic activities. The fieldwork that guides this present discussion shows a similar trend, nearly forty years later. It would be reasonable for the reader at this point to wonder whether there is any civic-ness in existence in the cases in the research, and whether the luxury of rationality is available to those involved, and if any attempt to decide for themselves might be frustrated by the lack of credibility. In answer to the research question regarding the importance of the various forms of rationality in UK public involvement at the end of the 1990's, it is offered here that there is demonstrable uncertainty over the usefulness of public participation as a political instrument for a rational civic public or state to use. This uncertainty was seen in the data to have an effect on those considering using public involvement (or proposed elements of public involvement) as a political option at the local level. Furthermore, as Tullock (1959) and Buchannan (1978) suggest, the costs of proving its worth (in terms of its promotion and clarification) and *then* implementing a public involvement scheme would be such that an administration or authority would over extend itself in trying, and negate any of the intended rationalisation or streamlining aspects of the activity. However, the central governmental policy at the time of the research,

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‡ *Civic Rationalism itself must however be distinguished from Civic Voluntarism, which also deals with rationalised action in local political activity. In this, Verba et al (2000) state that individual political activity (that is at the citizen participation level) depends on the individual's motivations, their resources and their recruitment to the participatory process. Their work was initially concerned with the reasons for political behaviour where the rationally acting citizen would classically take a free ride, and thus put the validity of the rational actor model in question in this subject area. This thesis argues that civic voluntarism, in its concession that a model will soon be devised that will be broad enough to accommodate the traditionally considered 'irrational' behaviour of voters into political theory, paves the way for the serious consideration of the contribution of Civic Rationalism.*

as set out in the Modernising Government agenda, is to do just that; promote and develop public involvement in local authorities. Quite how that will feedback into a democratic loop that already includes cynical authorities and a sceptical public is for later works to address.

7.3   Appropriate methods and efficacy in public involvement.

The second central research question then demanded that the empirical work should ask whether contemporary available public involvement tools and methods are seen to be effective and appropriate? Much of the detail that could be presented in this short section ties closely with other arguments in this chapter. To avoid un-necessary repetition of these points, this section is kept relatively brief. Previously, Fagence (1977) and Thomas (1996) and others had noted that there is a certain danger in transferring methods and tools between different public involvement scenarios, and before that, Sydney Verba (1965) had asked how can something as delicate and extremely contextual as a public involvement experience, be taken into another setting and still be expected to be effective. However, community development researchers and practitioners in the UK and US have also sought to do precisely this, and have occasionally arrived at detailed procedural manuals for public participation exercises (see for example Wilcox 1994, and Moote 1997). The literature had additionally raised points that the case studies could explore, about the appropriateness of the hard and soft technologies that are used to implement the policy and practice of community involvement. Are the administrative processes and mandarins at local levels capable of implementing public involvement, and are the mosaics of exhibitions, citizen juries, public meetings, fora or surveys or any digital equivalent of these methods, appropriate as harder technologies in the delivery of meaningful public participation?

7.3i   Soft technologies

Qadeer (1996) advises that implementers of public involvement policies should consider a number of questions to address the appropriateness of their methods, in the context of the bureaucratic system they are working in, and the ideas or interests that they are working with. When the two cases in this research are briefly held up to these general questions, their adherence to Qadeer's notions of appropriateness can be roughly gauged.

Firstly, were the projects in case studies based on generalised modes of public involvement and local governance or were they tied to specific local issues? At first glance it would seem that the Slaithwaite scheme was tied to direct local interest more than the rather generic issues found in the York case, despite its apparent lack of effectiveness. Secondly, did the processes in the cases stick to approved models, or were they focussed instead on what is achievable and implementable? The results of the Slaithwaite PfR process were in the main unachievable and not implementable, as the Colne Valley Trust had no real weight of opinion to take to Kirklees Metropolitan Council and lobby on any particular issue. In York, the budget allocation sessions were seen to be effective and their intentions were seen to be achievable, but the remainder of the programmes were seen to be vague in intention, thus difficult to gauge in terms of their success. Finally on Qadeer's list, were processes and methods based on national trends and policy, or did they focus on local situations? Again, the Slaithwaite case was based around an immediate local interest, but with limited opportunity to influence the situation, the project began to look more like an opportunity for the authority to try out its inclusive, modernising policies from a distance. The York case again, seems to have been more of a demonstration of national policies being applied in a local context, than local issues being satisfied using available soft technologies. If it is possible to gauge appropriateness in such terms (which it is not necessarily assumed here) it could be argued that the soft technologies featured in the Shaping Slaithwaite project had the potential to be more appropriate than those in place in York, mainly due to the fact that it centred

around a local development control issue, and as such had to be based on more local policy, and utilise more local information and specifics on the development issue. This does not however allow us to say that the project was either relevant or effective.

7.3ii   Hard Technologies (IT, ICT)

The concerns and questions over the appropriateness and relevance of IT and other hard technologies in public involvement projects as encountered in the literature, were addressed in the field. The main comments on the topic came (as expected) from the interviewees, with secondary and more general points from the survey respondents.

In general the interviewees were not particularly familiar with the IT opportunities of public participation GIS or the type of GroupWare available to help facilitate such interactions. The lack of exposure to these technologies was not entirely surprising as the literature has suggested that there is a concentration of use at the governmental and corporate level – and those interviewees with an idea of GIS opportunities were those linked to the local authorities (Joanna Lee, Bob Edinburgh and Andrew Gillespie). Most of the interviewees had positive comments about the perceived inevitability of the use of IT in public involvement, or at least in planning, although there were reservations about the use of online decision support systems themselves, which centred on security and access issues.

The respondents in the survey had a lower recollection of the use of the IT in the Slaithwaite scheme than had originally been expected. This was most likely due to the author's over-estimation of the turnout at the events, and the enthusiastic persuasiveness of the CVT members on initial contact back in 1998/9. The analyses of the survey results did not allow any concrete statements to be made about whether or not the IT was felt to be an appropriate tool for inclusion in the Slaithwaite scheme, and this was a disappointment. However, in the light of meta data about the subject, such as

the fact that it was recalled by few, and those few had an even distribution of opinions on its effectiveness in the field and its appropriateness in the practical exercise, and that even the York residents had some views to offer on it, it is argued that at the time there could be no significant view identified either for or against the use of IT in public involvement. This is congruent with the key argument here that many hard and soft public involvement technologies are unproved, and are not as yet seen as reliable, effective or relevant political tools, and that a rational civic public might not expend resources on using them.

7.4   Plural Agendas and Ambiguous Schemes.

The third central research question asked how plural agendas affect the perception of community involvement in the view of the public and of authorities, and whether they create barriers to the success of schemes? It was noted early on in the literature that there are varying rationales and motives that are behind the initiation of public involvement programmes. Schemes may be bottom-up, grassroots, citizen initiated action, or they might be top-down, authority led exercises. In turn, these types might be in response to a perceived democratic imbalance or inequity (as described by Arnstein 1969), or to maximise efficiency in resource planning (as described by Weiderman and Femers 1993) or as part of a stakeholder approach. The literature also notes that there are commonly mixed agendas among those who are involved, with perhaps an authority working to one rationale, and the public working with a range of others. Almond and Verba had already noted that such plurality was a feature of the civic culture and that it was a democratic foundation of the UK as a civic state. The empirical research sought to examine such plurality in order to better understand what happens at the interfaces of authorities and the public in collaborative decision making projects.

7.4i   Stated Policy Agendas.

National policy is moving local authorities swiftly toward a position of public input into decision making on local public service provision. It is still uncertain as to the democratic intent of such a set of policies, and this research is not seduced by the quasi-democratic tone of the modernising government agenda, as others have been (such as Popple and Redmond 2000, or Powell 2000). However, as a range of policies for improved services and resource efficiency in a widely berated local government system (Day et al 1998) the modernising government initiatives are not entirely without merit. Many of the stated policies on public collaboration have also stepped forward from a background of sustainable development, guided by sound Agenda 21 commitments. Indeed, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales currently consider such public involvement policies via their environment divisions, who have key devolved policy responsibilities under Agenda 21. However such executive divisions may not always be the most fitting home for publicly inclusive policies, and the joint working of the National Assembly for Wales' Local Government, Social Inclusion, Planning, Health and Environment divisions to produce the Communities First consultation paper (The National Assembly For Wales 1999) may show the future, cross-disciplinary nature of public involvement policy.

The national agenda is basically to improve the quality of government. In the foreword to the Modernising Government White Paper, Tony Blair states that, *'Modernising Government is a vital part of our programme of renewal for Britain. The old arguments about government are now outdated - big government against small government, interventionalism against laissez-faire. The new issues are the right issues: modernising government, better government, getting government right.'* (HMSO 1999, p1). According to this, a more modern and more rationalised government gets things right first time, and the public involvement policies within (remembering of course that the public involvement aspects are just part of the whole agenda of modernisation) should help inform and then streamline local decision making. Is this to be applauded? Is it appropriate to immediately equate such

intentions with increased democracy? The reliance on a third sector, a voluntary sector in delivering local services is open to criticism also - are authorities distancing themselves from contentious decision making, are there opportunities for new quangos to emerge, and is the rationalisation of government as if it were a commercial venture logical anyway? Without going into a full discussion of Giddens and Third Way positions here, Powell (2000) has noted that the ideals of third-way type approaches are far more indebted to conservative rationalist thinking than socialist doctrines, and Popple and Redmond additionally note that community development in this style (and by implication, public involvement) is becoming nothing more than an urban management mechanism (Popple and Redmond 2000, p395). The application of best value performance indicators in local authorities is also likely to affect the way that authorities approach public involvement, a point which was recognised by some interviewees in the case studies. Services in local authorities (including community development) will now have to meet agreed standards and criteria, and will often compete by tender with other providers. In such a funding environment, there is certainly scope for local authorities and devolved administrations to fund public involvement projects on purely pragmatic and resource led grounds, and not on the basis of community need or democratic innovation. The arguments regarding the marketisation of public involvement with consumer citizens as they encounter the modernised government are currently building in the community development literature. Much of that discourse is outside the scope of this work, as it relates mainly to professional community workers in the field of citizen education, but the reader is directed to Shaw and Martin (2000) for a discussion and further references.

In the local case studies in this research, the agendas of Kirklees Metropolitan Council and City of York Council were informed by the national policy, but were not referring back to identical rationales. As has been noted, the work of the officers and members at York have been concentrating on the development of the role of citizens in aspects of decision making for some

time, and possibly to a more socialist template than is currently imposed upon them by national policy. Minutes of the City of York's Policy and Resource Committee meeting (22nd July 1997) detail the implementation of a proposed extension to their policy of public speaking to all council committees and sub-committees. *"The proposed extension of public speaking is part of the Council's wider approach to open government. The Council's Mission Statement and Citizens Charter contain commitments to enhance democracy and increase participation wherever possible. This proposal together with other initiatives to open up the council, put into practice the commitment to involve people fully in taking decisions which affect them.'* (City of York Council minute, 1997). This was an existing policy that had run since well before the inception of the unitary authority in 1996, thus pre-dating both the New Labour government and the modernising government process itself.

Meanwhile, Kirklees Metropolitan Council's documentation of the same period is more in line with the consumer citizen approach, with their own consultation document on the modernisation of local government (KMC 1998) calling for the establishment of partnerships in the area to build prosperity and guarantee quality public services. This differs from the York approach, and is further separated by the fact that it recognises that local people may not necessarily want to work with the authority, whereas the modernising government agenda and York literature implies an obligation to participate. This is most readily explained by the fact that Kirklees was (at the time of the empirical work and the introduction of the modernising government literature) under no overall political control, possibly experiencing less internal pressure (Kitchen 1997) to graft the subtleties of the Labour government line onto its existing policies than did the Labour controlled York. Thus, the two case authorities were seen to be working to the same central policy but had identifiably different views on implementing them, and thus slightly different agendas in practice. One (York) grafting pre-existing, left of centre, citizen obligation elements to their priorities, and the other (Kirklees) perhaps allowing partnerships to develop in a more laissez-faire manner.

7.4ii   Community and public agendas

Linked to the qualifying point made above, fully detailing and analysing the agendas of community or voluntary organisations may be outside the scope of this discussion. Instead, their wider stated aims and intentions are generalised and noted as education for citizenship, the establishment of democratic equity and the assurance of democratic access. The latter two of these traditional backgrounds in community based groups do not seem to immediately satisfy the criteria for the voluntary sector that the current government might like to work with in service delivery, and at first glance are potentially likely to be antagonistic toward the system. However, Popple and Redmond (2000) addressed this and note the 'poacher-turned-gamekeeper' analogy in the way that more militant voices and organisations are now absorbed into processes that they might have railed against in an apparently less socially inclusive time, say before 1997.

The case studies in this research were not dealing with any explicit democratic deficit as such, but instead were involved in decision making on a development control issue (in the Slaithwaite case) and wider service delivery, policy and budgetary issues (in the York case). Of the participant respondents to the postal survey, 60% stated that their main reason for becoming involved was a direct interest in the situation or decision making scenario. More detailed data was not gathered on the specific point that they wished to get across by their involvement (that is, their own position on the issues in York or Slaithwaite) as such a direct question may have jeopardised the response rate. However it is reasonable to expect a significant degree of plurality in the attitudes of those who became involved in the case study schemes. Participants' likely motivations in mobilising (as indicated by the literature, the interviews and the surveys) would have included the potential to gain financially in budgetary decision making, or concern about the preservation of aspects of their local community, or the desire to have their views on local transport issues listened to, or because they felt they could help direct funding better in service planning, or simply that they were keen

to see more public involvement in local decision making itself. All of these agendas and more were entirely possible in the case studies, and they do not necessarily complement each other. These agendas would have to compete with each other in the public involvement arena and in the decision making process - precisely what the software and IT side of the subject tries to address. The multi-criteria decision making research of the Leeds based group that became involved in the Slaithwaite case study, had its own agenda once again, as discussed previously.

7.4iii   Agenda Interfaces

It is clear that even with a set of binding national policies, there are a range of philosophies and motives at work in the implementation of public involvement. These variations in intent and aspiration may be slight and easily managed, or equally they might be substantial and extremely difficult to surmount. The case studies demonstrate that there is some tension at the interfaces of the groups that come into contact in public involvement, based on differences that are both perceived to be and actually are intractable.

It has already been discussed that there are differences in the way that York and Kirklees were working with modernised government policy, differences which might also be found in other authorities across the UK, based on the overall political control of the authority and the antecedent policies they have nurtured. The electorate of the Kirklees metropolitan area for example did not return an overall majority of Labour councillors in the 1997 local elections, and as such the local authority would be misrepresenting the local population if they unswervingly repeated the central Labour government's intentions. Immediately there is a potential conflict interface - not an uncommon one in the local and national governmental system in the UK (Kitchen 1997), but of under stated relevance in public involvement research in the past. The York case study also demonstrates a situation where the local population might be used to one set of left of centre policies in the local authority (which would

have been even more apparent in the Conservative governmental period before 1997), but are now subject to a more centrist consumer citizen approach from their council. This kind of interface issue might explain at least some of the scepticism and cynicism of the public toward the policy intentions of these two authorities, and although it is not a particularly new phenomenon, identifying it in action in the field contradicts the authorities' reported successes in the public involvement programmes under examination. It is put forward here that any denial of the existence of this local interface by those implementing public involvement policy, would be a contributing factor in the counter productive over-estimation of interest in public participation by authorities.

After the policy interface is recognised, there is an issue based interface to consider. Here the specific elements of the decision making scenario come into play, and the classic multi party decision making conflicts arise. It would be redundant for the most part to begin a detailed discussion of these issues here, as there is a wealth of material in both the NCGIA and CASA literature on how these multi interest conflicts arise and are managed, and the reader is directed to them. In brief, those relevant to the empirical study here would be the issues of competition for neighbourhood budget allocation and the delivery priorities of local services in York, and the competing priorities of those wishing to develop the centre of the village of Slaithwaite around the newly regenerated canal, and those who want to preserve the village and its environment as it was before the proposed redevelopment. Such a range of interests, combined with public involvement rationales that were in both cases received with a degree of policy scepticism, resulted in a particularly mixed bag of intentions and hopes in the case studies, as described in the field data.

Finally, there is the methodological interface to consider. It was recognised by the community based professionals in the case study interviews and by the IT group at the University of Leeds, that there are commonly procedural issues to deal with in public involvement, that can become problematic, and that training and preparation are requirements of many public involvement

processes to ensure that the public are aware of procedure and the legitimacy of their actions.

This preparation of course incurs logistical costs, to both the public participants and the facilitators. Without the necessary financial, logistical and cognitive investment the result would almost certainly be unstructured, highly inefficient contact that would be unlikely to yield any useful or legitimate outcomes. Furthermore, when the fact that many issues in public contact situations can become particularly emotive, this lack of structure or process could result in particularly vociferous, anarchic or chaotic sessions. Even with some preparation and training however, it is still reported that at meetings and group sessions in both case studies, there was a definite dominance in proceedings by representatives of the local authority. The exception to that would be the budget allocation rounds at the ward centres at York, where the large numbers of participants prevented such an imbalance.

As an agenda interface then, this methodological stage highlights the procedural commitments that would need to be adhered to by the local authority and facilitators of any public involvement round, that might not necessarily be appreciated or shared by either a vociferous and eager public, or for that matter a smaller, inquorate, passive or less contributory gathering.

7.4iv   Conclusion: Accepting Plural Agendas

The term that was used in the preceding chapter for this extreme mixing of agendas, intentions aspirations, expectations and rationales, was 'fogging'. The results of the survey and the interview rounds showed that there were very few parallel or shared agendas between either the public, the community groups or the local authorities in the case studies. As a result of this, it was academically extremely difficult or even impossible to comment on the effectiveness of the outcomes of the particular schemes under examination. However, the objectivity in approach that this work was required to adopt is not a requirement of the members of the public who might wish to form an

opinion on the matter. In the stated opinion of the public as gathered in the postal survey, the public involvement schemes in York and Slaithwaite were not necessarily effective, and they felt they had no additional power to influence local authority decision making, and they were not particularly inclined to participate on another occasion, because (respondents state) their opinions are not taken into account by those taking decisions in the local authorities.

Whether these subjective opinions and attitudes are based on personal experiences of procedural or consensual breakdowns at the above mentioned agenda interfaces and are mainly a perceived phenomena, or whether they are true and accurate observations about the public involvement system they have come into contact with, will be a fascinating follow up to this work. However, these perceptions were, at the time of the fieldwork, far stronger entities than the public involvement policies that were evolving. The incompatible agendas, the perceived differences in rationales and methods of working are constant and additional bear-traps in public involvement, and it is hoped that this work has pushed them forward for further discussion.

Civic culture theory predicts such a plurality in participatory systems, although it had not foreseen the practical effects of uncertain intentions and indistinguishable motives. Where civic culture falls down in this instance is the point at which the public no longer knows what is actually going on (whether in fact, or in their opinion), because at that point the political mechanism is uncertain, and the civicness of the situation and the system is in doubt. However, according to Almond and Verba, enforcing a shared agenda would reduce the precious plurality of a civic culture. This work concurs with that point, and instead urges facilitators and implementers to help clear the fog in public involvement schemes by making their own aims explicit to the public that has made the considerable effort to mobilise, who in turn should be urged to articulate their own agendas as clearly as they are able. It is considered here that the opportunity for civic rationality to be exercised by the public will be enhanced by clarity, rather than by any sea change in

political attitude or by any manipulative and duplicitous central policy. Which ultimately is all that can be asked for in practice.

7.5   Thesis Evaluation

This research was originally intended to take apart and explore the topic of public involvement in local decision making, and look for evidence of the confounding factors that were described in the antecedent literature. All of the work was carried out at a time of rapidly emerging policy in the UK and in the light of a change of government that could potentially have contradicted much of the national policies of the previous Conservative administrations. At the earliest stages of the research, there was also an emphasis on the role of IT and PPGIS in public involvement schemes. However, this specific aspect was eventually considered to be an aside to the main area of interest, and it was finally made a contributory element in the discussion of public involvement tools and mechanisms. From the above points it can be said that this work had a lot of ground to cover, at a time of policy flux that included a new emphasis on community contact in local government, and with contributory software emerging from US and UK sources. Thus the research (on reflection) was carried out at a time of ambiguity in agendas, and evolution of approach. It is offered here that these points alone made the task of analysis and discussion more complex than if the research had taken place in a period of established policy or popular technique. However, this environment of uncertainty provided a challenge, and allowed some inventive interlacing of theory and method to understand the subject matter and address the research questions. It is felt that in the main, the aims of this research have been satisfied. As far as possible the policy and practice of the case studies in their national and local contexts have been taken apart, and examined for evidence of the problematic features of public involvement that had been described in the participation literature. Evidence was found of diminished interest in certain issues among the public, of a degree of rationalisation when making the decision whether or not to take up the

opportunity to participate, of a stated discomfort with the mixed agendas of authorities (and of the authorities' propensity to dismiss public input), and of a perception of uncertain efficacy of public involvement. The application of civic culture theory and public choice theories in the research provided an appreciation of these phenomena, with reference to the political economics of authorities and the public, and their civic awareness. The final result might be boldly summarised as an identification of a certain state of Civic Rationality - where there is public approval and orientation toward the democratic implications of public involvement in decision making and administration, but also a sense of rationally based pragmatism among those concerned. At the time of this research, any desire to be civic minded and politically active was tempered and frustrated by factors emanating from both authorities and the public, in terms of confounding perceptions and logistics. Now in the context of the public involvement elements of the modernising government agenda and its progeny, the stakes at authority level are raised, as rationalisation is at the heart of the 'better quality' government. However, whether one subscribes to the third way or not, a voluntary, lay or non-professional stratum of administration will become more and more important in the design, execution and implementation of public involvement in the light of these very policies. In which case the field of community development will surely benefit from the exploration and observations of a work such as this.

As a general data collection strategy the exploratory case study approach proved particularly useful in the research design, and the various works of Yin and Tellis were found to be most useful. The case study protocol allowed a structured and logical sequence of steps to take in the data gathering phase, and allowed the development of new avenues of exploration when certain criteria were met. This in turn allowed common or maybe new leads to be developed, while at the same time anchoring the process to the fundamental areas of interest. This approach was incorporated into the questionnaire in the postal survey, and in the semi-structured interviews to great effect, and provided a wealth of data for consideration. In retrospect however, this

accommodation for additional data to enter the process also had analytical implications, in that a significant amount of processing time and resources were dedicated to material that was of possibly secondary interest and did not contribute the final thesis.

Despite the effectiveness of this design, there were problems encountered in two main areas of the actual empirical study. Firstly, there was a significant gap in the range of interviewees, in that no individual form the Colne Valley Trust in Slaithwaite made themselves available. This was initially surprising, but with repeated attempts to secure an interview it was revealed that the CVT was not operating as it once had, and that the head of the organisation was no longer active in Slaithwaite. The group was reluctant to expand on this issue, and offered no other individual to discuss the case. This was a frustrating blow, in that the interview sample was deliberately small, purposive and representative of the various groups involved in the particular schemes under examination. The CVT had also agreed in 1999 to release members to be interviewed for this research, and the case study would have benefited greatly from their input had they not withdrawn this offer.

The second area where the data collection might appear to have been less than ideal, was in the response rate to the postal survey. The overall response rate to the postal survey was 31%, and although reassurance has been offered that such a response rate is not unusual for a postal survey, it is felt that the low response rate reduces the potency of certain results. Certainly it would be difficult to convince the reader of the UK-wide generalisability of the responses in the surveys with a response rate below 30%. Although, in an illuminating discussion on response rates on an on-line academic newsgroup dedicated to such research methods, it was suggested that firstly it is rare to obtain a response rate above 50%, and that it would be extremely unusual for a non expert to achieve a response rate of 35% to a post-out post-back survey[2]. The same source however, noted that higher response rates are more acceptable, and are achievable with focussed

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[2] Mitchell Nesler, University of Albany, online discussion. Unfortunately, the nature of such discussion groups is sometimes transitory, and the online facility was removed in late 1999.

resources and techniques. It is recognised here that the survey method could have been more efficient if resources and skills had been available to exploit. But as mentioned in previous chapters, forcing the issue past its natural response rate (for example by promising a reward for response as suggested in the survey design literature, or following up with postal reminders) seems to negate the whole point of the survey in this particular work, as data on non-participation and non-action are as valid as any completed questionnaire. On this issue it is interesting to note that nearly 5% of all of the questionnaires posted, were returned uncompleted. Several of these had been marked 'Not interested', with one respondent taking the time to clearly try a number of pens before finding one that worked properly - time that could have surely been used instead to attempt the questions.

Ultimately on this point it is suggested here that the low response rate was due in greater part to the nature of the subject matter it addressed, than it was to any efficiency issue (Grodsky 1997 – see footnote above), and that it is this phenomenon that to a greater or lesser extent is likely to manifest itself in various public involvement projects also. Internal validity and construct validity in this work are felt to be robust, and although the survey response was lower than hoped for, the multiple data type, multiple case study method and the use of the case study protocol therein suggest that there are a range of phenomena that would be observed in other cases - that is, that the external validity in the key aspects of this research is not seriously jeopardised by a low survey response rate.

It is felt that this research has been original in its approach to public involvement, considering it in terms of rational activity and public choice in a civic culture, at a time of policy evolution, and that it has addressed a framework of concerns from previous authors. In doing so it has generated valuable hypotheses for others to address, whether in an academic or policy environment. This thesis has been deliberately provocative in many places, in recognising the sceptical view of public involvement (which is not actually shared by the author) but also in concentrating on very grey areas of the

general topic. In a practical subject area that will eventually include public relations or even marketing elements, and in a topic that by its nature involves compromise and negotiation, there should be an appreciation of its own weaknesses from within, to pre-empt criticism at least or mend failing components at best.

The civicness of a society is heavily reliant on the public's satisfaction and familiarity with the available democratic mechanisms and tools of involvement. The public must also be afforded the *opportunity* to act as rationally as its executive bodies, and must therefore be served with evaluative and realistic information by public involvement practitioners and administrations. These same administrations will also need to recognise that their (sometimes imported) public involvement commitments and public contact policies may not necessarily coincide with the issues closest to their electorate's own interests, and should consider their approach more carefully than has been observed in the cases studied here, lest they dent the image of the exercise. Policy must also be flexible and accommodating, to prevent authorities from over extending themselves and their public, to avoid over-promising, and to develop and maintain both real and perceived relevance, representativeness and potency in the democratic involvement of the public in local authority decision making.

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