Pathways
through
participation

Pathways through participation:

What creates and sustains active citizenship?

Final report

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Foreword

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) and Involve are pleased to publish this important new report about how people participate in society. Pathways through Participation is an ambitious research project that aims to improve our understanding of how and why people participate, how their involvement changes over time, and what pathways, if any, exist between different types of activities.

The project emerged from a common desire across our three organisations to create a fuller picture of how people participate over their lifetimes. It builds on work completed at NCVO on active citizenship, adds to IVR's research into volunteering by exploring it in relation to other forms of participation, and extends Involve's research and practice in empowering citizens to take and influence the decisions that affect their lives.

National and local governments have grappled for decades with the challenges of how to encourage people to be more active citizens. Their reasons have varied over time, from improving public services to reducing public spending or enhancing democracy. Recent policy developments around localism, the Big Society, outsourcing public services, encouraging charitable giving and the role of the voluntary sector have made questions about participation more topical than ever.

This report provides the practical intelligence that will enable voluntary and community organisations, public service providers and government at all levels to better support and develop participation. It is only through hearing people's personal stories, and focusing on their individual experience, that the complexities and dynamics of how participation works in practice can be fully understood. We interviewed over 100 people across three localities – their stories of participation provide the powerful body of evidence drawn on in this report.

This research shows that people participate in a myriad of ways, depending on what has meaning and value to them. They participate as individuals and collectively. Their reasons for participating are sometimes altruistic and sometimes it is to achieve something more explicitly for themselves. We have found many stories of how life-enhancing participation can be, but also of its negative effects. Participation can be a core part of people's lives or something they do once in a while. It doesn't happen in a bubble but connects to different aspects of their lives. And it is shaped by their circumstances and capabilities, as well as the personal, practical and political opportunities and barriers they face.

We hope that policy-makers, practitioners and researchers will find this report useful in developing a richer and fuller understanding of how and why people participate, and what makes them start and continue (and stop) participating. Beyond promoting understanding, we hope that this report will help institutions and organisations find ways in which they can support and encourage opportunities for participation that better meet people's aspirations and expectations.
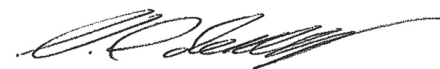
Signed by:

Sir Stuart Etherington, NCVO

Simon Burall, Involve

Nick Ockenden, IVR

Pathways through participation: Our findings at a glance

What is Pathways through participation?

The Pathways through Participation project is a two-and-a-half-year qualitative research project funded by the Big Lottery Fund and led by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), in partnership with the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) and Involve. The project explores how and why individuals get involved and stay involved in different forms of participation, to improve knowledge and understanding of people's pathways into and through participation and of the factors that shape their participation over time.

How does this project add to the evidence base on participation?

A lot is already known about people's motivations to participate, and some of the barriers they experience to getting involved. We reviewed existing evidence on participation in a literature review[1] at the start of the project and confirmed that research on participation has tended to look at participation within a particular type of activity (such as volunteering) or issue (such as housing) at a given time, and usually from an institutional or organisational perspective.

This project brings a fresh perspective to the debate, and adds to the evidence base by examining participation from the perspective of the individual and exploring the links and connections between different activities and episodes of participation throughout people's lives.

How did we do the research?

We selected three different areas from around England to provide a range of contexts for participation – one inner-city area (Leeds), one suburban area (the outer London borough of Enfield) and one rural area (Suffolk). Local stakeholders in each area helped us understand the opportunities for participation locally, and helped us identify individuals who were involved in different participatory activities. We then conducted over 100 in-depth interviews with local people, who reflected on their past and current experiences of participation. We also continued to involve local stakeholders throughout the research, including through formal Local Stakeholder Groups.

What does participation mean?

Participation means different things to different people. In this project, we understand participation in a very broad sense to include taking part in a wide range of social, public and individual activities, such as volunteering in a hospice, being a member of a local community group, purchasing fair trade goods, responding to a local authority consultation, and voting.

What do different types of participation have in common?

Despite the immense diversity of activities that we uncovered, we suggest that all forms of participation have some common features.

Participation is:

• Voluntary: participation can be encouraged, supported and made more attractive, but it is inherently about a free choice.

• About action: people are moved to action for a range of different motives and their involvement may be limited in time and scope, but all participation requires an action of some kind.

• Collective or connected: even when the action is individual, there is a sense of common purpose and the act itself has a collective impact or ambition.

• Purposeful: all participants are concerned about doing something that is worthwhile in their own terms and every participatory act has, and is intended to have, consequences.

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1 Pathways through Participation (2009) *Understanding participation: a literature review.* London: NCVO, IVR and Involve

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How widespread is participation?

There was a huge variety of participatory activities and many places and spaces where participation took place in our fieldwork areas. We found participation to be widespread, embedded, historic and centrally important to people's lives and the communities in which they live. This suggests there are already strong foundations for participation that can be built on, supported and encouraged.

What influences how people participate?

Participation is primarily about individual choice and personal preferences, and a person's capacity to take action. However, a range of other factors exists that are external to the individual and often beyond their control, that influence the way people participate or are able to participate. People's upbringing, family and social connections play an important role in shaping their participation as does the environment in which they live; whether, for instance, the voluntary and community sector is thriving locally and whether local groups and organisations have a culture and facilities that support and encourage participation.

The research also suggests that people's perceptions of participation and participants influence how and why they participate. Many of our interviewees were reluctant to being seen as political, or did not want to be considered a 'do-gooder'.

Why do people start participating in the first place?

There are a wide range of personal motivations for people's participation, including helping others, seeking influence or wanting new social relationships, which are intimately connected to people's personality, identity, values and beliefs.

People's access to resources also influences whether they participate or not: practical resources such as time, money and health; learnt resources like skills, knowledge, and experience; and felt resources such as confidence and sense of efficacy are all important. Lack of access to these resources reduces people's ambitions and expectations of their own participation. Local institutions, organisations, groups, venues and events all provide people with opportunities for participation. Without these opportunities participation is less likely to happen.

In addition to personal motivations, resources and opportunities people usually need a trigger to start participating. We found that the main triggers for participation are:

• an experience or emotion such as anger at a decision, a threat, or wanting to improve something locally

• a life event such as a new relationship, retirement, ill health, moving area or having children

• an outside influence such as a natural disaster, hearing about something for the first time, or just being asked.

Why do people stay involved once they've started?

Once they start, the quality of the participation experience is pivotal in determining whether people continue: the extent to which they feel they are making a difference and having an impact, whether they feel their contribution is valued and they are enjoying the experience and the quality of the social relationships with other participants. Although having continued access to the right support, resources and opportunities influenced people's decision to stay involved, a good quality participation experience was the single most important reason interviewees gave to explain their sustained participation.

Why do people stop participating?

Factors influencing why people stop participating included practical factors, such as moving away from the area and not having enough time, for example due to having new responsibilities either at work or at home, and experiential factors, such as having a negative participatory experience. People's experience of formal public consultations had almost always been negative and this affected their willingness to participate in the future. Participation can have a dark side: people can take on too much and burn out; groups can become closed, cliquey and exclude new people; all these factors can also lead to people stopping their participation.

Do people get involved in more than one type of participation?

People get involved in a range of activities, which span the different broad categories of participation, for example going to a public meeting, giving money to charity and helping out neighbours. We found that there are often connections between the different activities people get involved in.

Some people's involvement in a range of activities is consistently and consciously joined up: their participation is integrated into their lives. For other people, their involvement is better described as a series of one-off involvements, which are off-shoots of their core involvement. Our findings challenge the notion of spillover, whereby people who are involved in one type of participation such as volunteering, will inevitably get drawn into another type of participation, such as going to a local consultation. There are examples of this happening, but it is neither systematic nor automatic.

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Why are some people involved in multiple activities?

The primary connection that links different activities is a strong dominating motivating force, for example, living out certain values or beliefs, being concerned about a specific issue (like educational provision), having an interest (such as cricket or gardening), or wanting to put to use a skill (like accountancy). Almost always there is an enabling factor that sits alongside their dominant motivation, which facilitates the link. Enabling factors include existing institutions including schools and places of worship, organisations such as tenants' and residents' associations and community centres, and key individuals acting to bridge different activities and groups. These were all crucial in providing the space, conditions and practical support people need to participate in different ways.

What influences how people participate over time?

People's priorities shift as their circumstances change and their participation changes due to the impact of critical moments and turning points or transitions such as moving or retiring. These life changes can reshape people's lives, influencing whether they participate or not, as well as the activities they choose to be involved in. Societal and global trends or events such as climate change or the increasing use of the internet can also change if and how people participate.

Do people get gradually more involved?

Our research challenges the notion of participation as a progression, or something that gradually becomes more intense and more committed. We found that people are involved to different degrees over the course of their lives in terms of the time spent participating, and level of responsibility they hold. Participation can develop and grow but it is unpredictable; it is not necessarily linear. It can deepen or become more formalised but does not necessarily.

Do people participate consistently, or does it wax and wane over their lives?

Some people participate consistently and intensely over the course of their lives; others have peaks and troughs in their participation that often mirror their life stage and critical moments or turning points in their lives. Some people are never involved heavily – they may consistently participate over time but in a light way, for example by having a standing order to give to charity, and others are involved in a piecemeal and irregular way, for example by doing a fun run and voting. Both sporadic and less intense participation and sustained and deep involvement are equally as valuable to the individuals involved and to society.

So what can we do about it?

A number of important themes emerged from the research, and our recommendations are aimed at everyone who is concerned with improving the reach and range of participation opportunities – from central to local government, from major national charities to local grassroots groups and individual practitioners. Our key recommendations are clustered around three themes:

1. Develop realistic expectations of participation

An over-optimistic view of participation can portray participation as the answer to all society's ills but it is important that we acknowledge its limitations and develop realistic expectations of what can be achieved. This requires policy-makers to be clear about the purpose of the participation they want to see happening, and to recognise that almost everyone already participates in one way or another. It also requires institutions, organisations and groups to recognise that participation is dynamic and that opportunities need to be flexible; that participation should be mutually beneficial - participants need to gain something from the experience; and that people have limited time and sometimes just want participation that is sociable and enjoyable.

2. Understand what policy and practice interventions can and cannot achieve

Policy and practice interventions can influence participation, but there are many other factors that shape how and why an individual participates and that affect the desired impact of policy and practice decisions. Participation is more bottom-up than top-down, and does not always happen in the ways policy-makers want or expect. Some factors that shape and encourage participation are easier and quicker to influence (e.g. opportunities) than others (e.g. personal motivations).

3. Improving participation opportunities

Participation is widespread and embedded in communities, but inequalities of resources and power means that some people are more likely to be excluded from certain participatory activities. There is still a need to improve opportunities for participation. The first step is to establish strong foundations through starting at an early age, providing appropriate formal and informal places and spaces for people to meet and join in activities, and creating links and pathways through networks and hubs.

Improving participation opportunities requires starting where people are and taking account of their concerns and interests, providing a range of opportunities and levels of involvement so people can feel comfortable with taking part, and

using the personal approach to invite and welcome people in. Support is needed to enable organisations and groups to learn how to operate more effectively and therefore sustain people's interest and involvement. It is vital to value people's experience and what they do, at whatever level of intensity. Language referring to the 'usual suspects', 'NIMBYs' and 'do-gooders' is pejorative and creates a negative mood around active participation and should be avoided. The design and management of public consultations should be improved, so that participants feel it is worth taking part and that their contribution can make a difference.

Finally, organisations and government at all levels need to be aware of the benefits of participation, and use these to promote involvement. Similarly, those already involved can tell positive stories about their experience, and encourage others they know to participate. The recruitment of new participants is almost always more effective through word of mouth.

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Linda's story

Linda moved to the village in which she now lives when she was three. At 17, she moved to live in a local town, but returned to the village at 20 after having her daughter. Her parents live in the village, as well as her two best friends from childhood. Linda has fond memories of growing up in the area, loves living in the village and is happy to be raising her daughter there.

Much of Linda's participation has been through her daughter, who attends the village primary school. She helped out at her daughter's pre-school and got involved at the primary school as a parent helper in the classroom. Volunteering in this role complemented her studies and training at a local college and Linda's voluntary experience helped her get a paid job as a teaching assistant at the school.

Linda often supports school-related charitable fundraisers, for instance when the children do sponsored walks or bike rides, or other mums are fundraising for charity. The school organises a lot of events and activities open to the whole community:

'…the school always tries to keep the community feel as well, they always try to get everyone together and join in with things, which is lovely. They do a lot of fundraising and fun days and stuff like that, not just school people, for the whole village to join in as well, which is really nice…'

Linda was asked to join the pre-school committee but she declined because she had a negative impression of the committee, which has put her off the idea of committees in general:

'I didn't want to be a part of it because it all just seemed a bit bitchy and backstabby and it's like they were having committee meetings and spending time talking about other mums, and it wasn't just very nice, and I know that's not what being a committee is about, but that was my only experience of it and it wasn't nice, and so that's put me off getting involved in anything like that.'

Linda works behind the bar at a local pub, which performs a role as a village hub, where people are friendly and welcoming, but also where people can find someone to help them out (e.g. with a DIY project). People with allotments will sometimes bring their harvest to sell at the pub. Linda doesn't buy fair trade but thinks *'buying local'* is important to people in the village, particularly older people.

Linda does a lot of informal helping out of neighbours and friends, who help her in turn; for example, she checks on her elderly neighbour who gives her vegetables and she gets help with childcare from friends and family. Linda is also part of an informal dog-walking club with others in the village.

Linda started giving to a charity for premature babies because she was approached in the street by a fundraiser, but she has since decided to stop this contribution for financial reasons.

Linda doesn't vote for a number of reasons including lack of interest, not knowing enough about politics to feel she can express an opinion, and questioning the difference her single vote could make. She voted once when she turned 18 just because she was legally entitled to. She says she has never had any reason to attend a public meeting.

The Pathways through Participation project is a two-and-a-half year qualitative research project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund and led by National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in partnership with the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) and Involve. The project explores how and why individuals get involved and stay involved in different forms of participation to improve knowledge and understanding of people's pathways into and through participation, and of the factors that shape their participation over time.

Participation is a contested term; it means different things to different people. In this project, participation is understood in a very broad sense as the act of taking part in a wide range of social, public and individual activities, such as volunteering in a hospice, being a member of a local community group, purchasing fair trade goods, responding to a local authority consultation, or voting. Previous research on participation has tended to look at participation within a particular type of activity (e.g. volunteering) or issue (e.g. housing) at a given time, and usually from an institutional or organisational perspective. This project examines participation from the perspective of the individual and explores the links and connections between different activities and episodes of participation in people's lives.

The research was carried out in three contrasting areas in England: Leeds, the London Borough of Enfield, and Suffolk. These areas provided a range of different contexts for participation. We worked with local stakeholders in the three areas to identify individuals who were involved in different participatory activities to various degrees, and then conducted over 100 in-depth interviews with local people, who reflected on their past and current experiences of participation.

Like all compelling narratives, their stories of participation described events and actions, people and places, tension and resolution, successes and failures. We heard how participation is shaped by place, space and time, and is intimately linked to people's self-image, sense of agency, values and world views, and connections to others. Analysis of these personal stories provided powerful insights into why and how people participate, which we hope will contribute to the development of opportunities for participation that are better suited to people's needs, concerns and aspirations.

This report presents the main findings of the project and has five main sections:

Section 1: Pathways through participation: an introduction
This section briefly introduces the Pathways through Participation project and provides an overview of the project's background, purpose and methodology.

Section 2: People's experience of participation
This section describes the interviewees' experiences of participation: in what activities they are involved, when, where and how they participate, and the impacts of participation on people and places. It introduces some of the themes that are further developed in Sections 3 and 4.

Section 3: How and why participation begins, continues or stops
This section explores the many factors that shape and influence people's participation, and examines the major drivers and barriers that encourage participation or prevent it from happening.

Section 4: Links and patterns in people's participation
This section examines the links and patterns between different types of participation, between different periods of participation, and between different levels of intensity of involvement.

Section 5: Conclusions and recommendations
This section sets out the major conclusions of the project and identifies recommendations for policy and practice.

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1.1
Research background

Participation is core to the work of the three partner organisations working on the Pathways through Participation project: NCVO, IVR and Involve. Each organisation looks at different and complementary aspects of participation, with NCVO focusing on the role of civil society organisations in providing a conduit for participation; IVR on volunteering; and Involve on public participation and decision-making. Together, the three organisations have a history of researching the different forms of participation explored in the project, and a shared interest in improving the evidence base on people's motivations for participating, their practice of participation and what participation means to them.

This project builds on previous research by the three organisations and particularly on a study about active citizenship[2] by NCVO, at a time when government talked about 'civil renewal' rather than the Big Society. This study revealed the diversity of understandings of the concept of active citizenship. The research participants found defining the concept difficult and were far more at ease thinking of the participatory activities they considered expressions of active citizenship. The activities mentioned were extremely varied, ranging from acts of neighbourliness to political activism. What the research highlighted was a potential disconnect between the policy-makers' vision of active citizenship and the realities of what it means for people in their everyday lives.

Government policies have tended to focus on the relationships between citizens and state institutions, and the more formalised types of participation such as volunteering schemes and public consultations. These policies have often failed to consider more informal community activities and individual pro-social behaviours and actions.

The *Pathways through participation* project was designed to examine and challenge existing assumptions about what participation is and what it means to people. From the outset, the project adopted a holistic approach to participation, which encompassed the various dimensions of participation and better reflected people's own experiences, understandings and meanings of participation.

1.2
Research purpose

There is an extensive body of literature on participation, as highlighted by the literature review[3] that we carried out at the beginning of the project, which mapped out the state of knowledge on participation and identified gaps. We found a wealth of research on the different forms of participation and people's involvement in these different forms. Much has already been written on the triggers and motivations for participation – why people get involved – and on the barriers to participation – what stops them from getting involved.

However, existing studies have to a large extent neglected people's pathways into, through and out of participation. They have mostly looked at specific forms of participation in isolation, often within specific organisations or issues. They have also tended to examine participation at a given point in time, without looking at how people's participation changes and how they engage in different ways throughout the course of their lives. Little evidence exists about how different activities and episodes of participation may or may not be connected, or how much movement between different activities and episodes occurs, and what may cause or prevent such movement.

Building on the existing knowledge base, this project was established to address these gaps and improve understanding of participation in practice. We wanted to explore in detail how and why individuals get involved and stay involved in different forms of participation over time in order to better support opportunities for participation that are suited to people's lives. While the main objective of the project was to improve the evidence base on participation, the project also aimed to influence practice and policy so that more appropriate opportunities for participation could be developed and made available to a greater range of people.

Our research questions
The project was designed around three key research questions:

- How and why does participation begin and continue?

- Can trends and patterns of participation be identified over time?

- What connections, if any, are there between different forms and episodes of participation and what triggers movement between them?

1.3
Research relevance and context

Participation has been high on the political and policy agenda, in the UK and elsewhere, for many years. The aims and objectives of the Pathways through participation project were defined in 2008, based on the particular interests and experience of the three partner organisations. However, as the research progressed the project has become increasingly topical, particularly with regard to the Big Society agenda, which is partly based on the idea that people should participate more. While the Big Society concept remains highly contentious, it has undoubtedly promoted extensive interest, reflection

2 NCVO (2005) *Civil renewal and active citizenship: a guide to the debate.* London: NCVO.
3 Pathways through Participation (2009) *Understanding participation: a literature review. London*: NCVO, IVR and Involve.

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and comment on participation generally and particularly on relationships between individuals and the state.

1.3.1
Why participation matters

Across the globe, participation has been portrayed as a good thing – something that should be encouraged and developed because of the positive impacts it can have on individuals, communities and wider society.

Much emphasis has been placed by politicians and policy-makers on the importance of participation in local and national governance, for example in local government consultations, and this is a vital part of any understanding of participation. Greater public participation within the structures and institutions of democracy is seen as positive because it contributes to:

• strengthening the legitimacy and accountability of democratic institutions

• empowering local communities to take part in local decision-making and increase ownership of decisions

• building social cohesion by bringing people together around common causes and shared interests

• improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public services that are more in tune with people's needs

• increasing individuals' political efficacy and self-esteem.

People also choose to participate in civil society. The collective action that takes place within the voluntary associations that are part of civil society is seen as contributing to social capital, community empowerment and resilience. Associational life of all sorts is considered essential to fostering norms of trust and reciprocity and people developing a sense of connectedness, mutual understanding and solidarity. Through their

participation in associational life people can also gain skills and confidence, and the conviviality of coming together has a positive influence on people's quality of life and well-being.

The literature on the collective and individual benefits of participation is vast. The partner organisations of the Pathways through Participation project broadly share the widespread view that participation is a positive thing, and this normative assumption represents the starting point of the project. However, we also fully recognise the complexity of the issues and challenges associated with the many dimensions of participation, and acknowledge the darker side of participation in that it can exclude individuals and groups, reproduce inequalities and cause harm.

1.3.2
Active communities, localism and the Big Society

In the Western world, interest in participation has grown, largely in response to falling voter turnouts and the threat this represents to the democratic legitimacy of governments. It also stems from a growing belief that involving people in the decisions that affect them leads to more effective and sustainable policy solutions. In the UK this has led, over many years and especially during the last decade, to the development of government policies and initiatives that have aimed to provide people with more opportunities to engage in decision-making and in the shaping or delivery of public services.

Devolving power to a more local level and encouraging people to do more in their communities remained central to policies of the Labour government throughout its three consecutive terms. Both these ideas are also at the forefront of the Coalition Government's Big Society agenda:

'The Big Society is about a huge culture change where people, in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their workplace don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities. It's about liberation – the biggest, most dramatic redistribution of power from elites in Whitehall to the man and woman on the street.'[4]

Despite some policy continuities[5] between this government and the previous one, there are marked differences, which should not be downplayed. The major difference between the two is the way the role of government is viewed, and this has wide-ranging implications. While Labour saw government as having an enabling role in supporting participation, the Coalition considers that government prevents people from getting involved in their communities and should therefore step back.

According to the Coalition Government, building the Big Society[6] involves transferring power from central to local government, and beyond local government, giving new powers to local communities so that they can, for instance, take over the running of public services such as libraries and parks, and play a more active role in local planning. The Big Society is also about encouraging more people to be active in their communities through the giving of time and money.

The recent *Giving White Paper*[7] outlines proposals for increasing giving that aim to: provide new opportunities to give as part of everyday life, make available better information on opportunities to give, and remove or reduce bureaucratic obstacles to giving.

4 Cameron, D. (2010), Big Society Speech, 19 July 2010. Accessed at: http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/big-society-speech/
5 Alcock, P. (2009), Devolution or divergence? Third sector policy across the UK since 2000, Third Sector Research Sector Working Paper 2
6 Cabinet Office (2010) *Building the Big Society*. London: Cabinet Office.
7 HM Government (2011) *Giving White Paper* (Cm 8084). Norwich: The Stationery Office.

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The step-change in participation that the Coalition Government has called for is highly ambitious. Existing evidence shows that participation – whether volunteering, giving or other participatory activities such as responding to civic consultations – has remained largely stable or in some cases decreased in the last decade[8] despite a raft of programmes and policies to provide encouragement.

Recent Government initiatives to transform the vision of Big Society into a reality have raised many questions and generated much scepticism, particularly because, in parallel to these measures and announcements, the government has carried out severe cuts in public spending, which have affected people across the country. Many organisations, groups and programmes that provide a platform and support for people's participation have lost part or all of their funding and are struggling in the current economic environment. Interestingly, however, these difficult times have encouraged some people to participate in ways that the Government may not have anticipated, as protest marches against the increase in university fees and the local campaigns against the closure of libraries demonstrate.

These different elements are integral to the historic and current policy context in which the research is placed. We will examine in greater depth how the research findings can inform and feed into current thinking and debates about participation in Section 5.

1.4
Our research approach and methodology
We provide below a brief summary of our research approach and methodology, which reflects our approach to exploring participation, our research questions and our commitment to stakeholder engagement. Further information on the methodology of the project is available in Appendix A.

1.4.1
Our approach to exploring participation
In this project, participation is understood in a very broad sense as the act of taking part in a wide range of social, public and individual activities, including, for instance:

• volunteering in a hospice

• being a member of a local community group

• purchasing fair trade goods

• responding to a local authority consultation

• voting.

Our approach to exploring participation was based on this deliberately broad definition, in order to capture the full range of people's experiences and understandings of participation, which we knew from previous research[9] was far-ranging, complex and sometimes contradictory.

Our approach also placed the individual at the heart of the research. However, we recognised that participation could not be understood by looking at the individual alone: people's experience participation is situated in time, place and space (what Andrea Cornwall calls 'situated practice'[10]), and needs to be looked at in the wider context. We therefore chose to explore participation over the course of people's lives and within the communities they belong to.

8 NCVO (2011) *Participation: trends, facts and figures.* London: NCVO.
9 NCVO (2005) *Civil renewal and active citizenship: a guide to the debate.* London: NCVO.
10 Cornwall, A. (2008) *Democratising engagement – what the UK can learn from international experience.* London: Demos.

Throughout the project we referred to three broad categories of participation covering a wide range of participatory activities: social, public and individual participation.

Social participation
Social participation refers to collective activities that individuals may be involved in. This might include: being a member of a community group; supporting the local hospice by volunteering; and running a study group on behalf of a faith organisation. Others have called this kind of social engagement 'associational life', collective action, or civil, horizontal or community participation.

Public participation
By public participation we mean the engagement of individuals with the various structures and institutions of the state and democracy. Other authors refer to this as political, civic, or vertical participation and/or participatory governance. Examples of public participation include: voting in local or national elections; being a councillor; and taking part in government (or associated) consultations.

Individual participation
Individual participation covers the choices and actions that individuals make as part of their daily life and that are statements of the kind of

society they want to live in. This would include, for example: buying fair trade goods; boycotting specific products; using green energy and donating money to charities.

There are many overlaps between these categories and some participatory activities straddle the three, demonstrating the fluid and dynamic nature of the concept of participation as shown in the diagram below.

Figure 1:
Categories of participation:
public, social, individual

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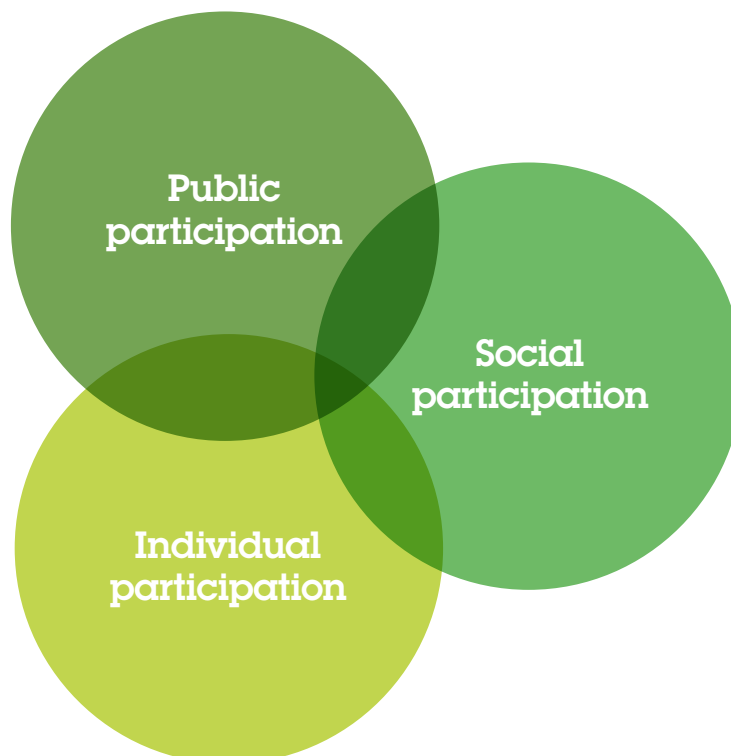
As a result of the project's original literature review, we produced a framework (see Figure 2) to help understand people's practice of participation and inform the next stages of the project.

The framework brings together the key experiential elements of participation in practice:

• the individuals participating

• the participatory activities in which they are involved

• the places in which these activities occur

• the stages in time over which participation happens.

It highlights some of the key dimensions or features of participation that characterise and structure participation, such as the intensity or the formality of engagement. Lastly, the framework also highlights the key shaping forces influencing people's participation, such as power and relationships.

Figure 2:
The participation framework

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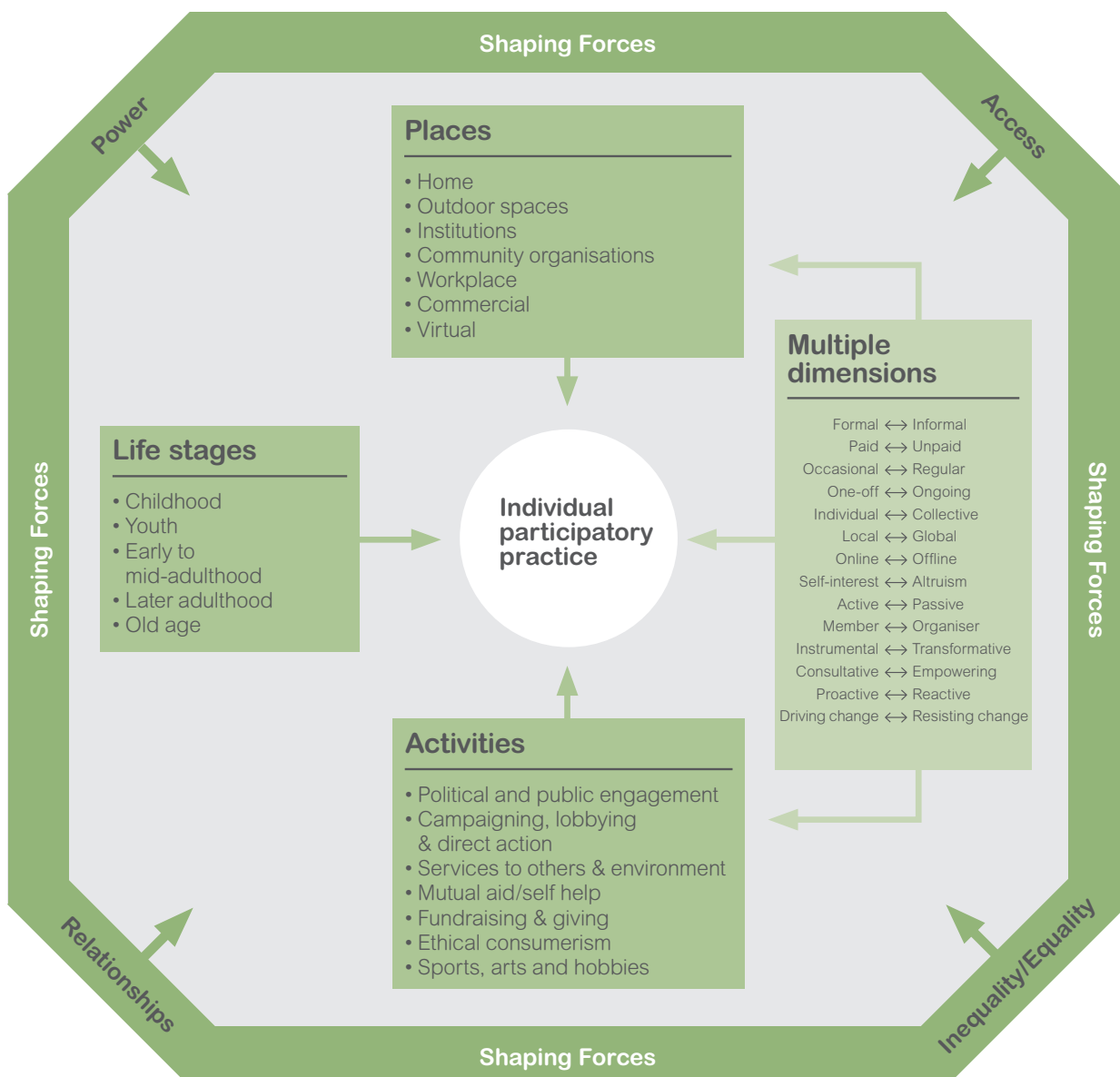
1.4.2
Life stories of participation in three contrasting areas

Our key research questions and the different components of our approach to exploring participation shaped the overall design and methodology of the project.

As the focus of the project was the individual practice of participation over time, we adopted a life story approach, which uses personal narratives as a way of capturing people's experiences over the course of their lives and the meanings they attach to these experiences. The narratives were obtained through a series of in-depth interviews that were loosely structured around a number of key themes (e.g. motivations; barriers; influences; types of participation) and lasted on average an hour and half each. During these interviews, people were asked to create a visual timeline of their history of participation to help prompt their memory, and facilitate follow-up questions by the interviewer.

We used purposive sampling to select the interviewees in order to cover the range of participatory activities of our framework, the different levels of intensity of involvement and a cross-section of the population in terms of social and demographic characteristics such as age, gender and education.
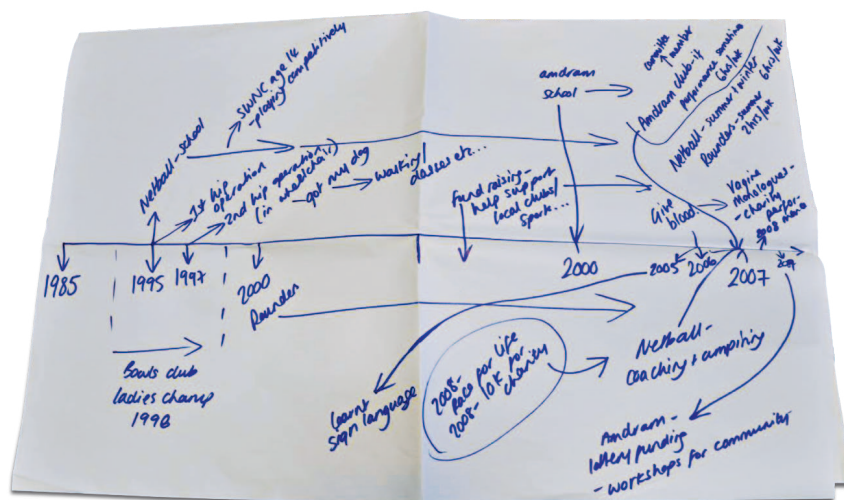
Most of our interviewees were recruited through existing sites of participation, including: sports clubs; community centres; tenants' and residents' associations; places of worship and many more. However, we also recruited people in places that were less obviously associated with participation, for instance pubs and shops, and through 'snowballing', via people we had already interviewed. Names of interviewees referred to in the report have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Altogether we carried out 101 interviews, creating a wealth of information that was analysed using the computer-assisted data analysis software NVivo. The analysis of the interviews, our principal source of data, provides the evidence on which the research findings outlined in this report are based.

Our approach to participation as situated practice required that we should explore participation in different contexts. We chose to carry out the research in three contrasting areas: the inner-city area of Leeds, the suburban area of Enfield and the rural area of Suffolk. Within each locality, we selected a smaller area as the focus for the fieldwork. These fieldwork areas are anonymous so that individuals are not identifiable.

The research was carried out in these different fieldwork areas to provide diverse contexts for participation and to ensure the research would cover an extensive enough range of individual experiences of participatory activities and practices. It did not set out to produce comprehensive case studies or inventories of participation within each area, as the focus of the project was the individual experiences of participation, not the locality.

Image 1:
Example of an
interviewee's timeline

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Pen portraits of fieldwork areas

Inner-city Leeds

The inner-city fieldwork area of Leeds incorporates several neighbourhoods, each with a very distinctive character. Parts of the area are home to a relatively young, transient, adult population of mainly students, typically reflecting that of an inner-urban area of a university city. Such communities often live side-by-side with families who have lived in the area for generations. There is a sizeable South Asian community, and the area is culturally diverse, with pockets of higher than average Muslim, Sikh and Hindu populations.

Physically, parts of the area are characterised by back-to-back, mixed tenure terraced housing, while nearby lies large 1960s high-rise and maisonette accommodation, which houses a diverse population. In recent years, pockets of the area have been the focus of anti-social behaviour and parts of the fieldwork area are among the most deprived areas nationally.

Suburban Enfield

Enfield is clustered around three major transport hubs, providing quick and regular access into the centre of London, which is 12 miles away by road. It is a physically and socio-economically diverse area, with the west of the borough being considerably more affluent than the east. The fieldwork area represents a typical suburban part of the borough, characterised by its good public transport links, 1930s semi-detached housing, a suburban town centre, and several large parks and open spaces. It straddles a number of wards, several of which are among the least deprived in the country, and is culturally and ethnically diverse – there is a relatively large Greek andGreek Cypriot population, as well as a sizeable Jewish population.

A prominent campaign of recent years surrounds the proposed reduction of services in Chase Farm Hospital, in the north-west of the borough, and two local councillors were elected under the Save Chase Farm banner. The campaign remained active throughout the fieldwork.

Rural Suffolk

The fieldwork area in Suffolk consists of two small localities with a combined population of approximately 4,500 people. Both are on the fringe of a town with a range of amenities, including a hospital and several schools, a shopping centre, a leisure centre, and bus, coach and rail services. However, public transport between the fieldwork localities and these amenities is infrequent and can make access difficult for some.

One of the communities is a village with its own parish council, and the other is a housing estate. The village was described to us as *'old Suffolk'* and *'a typical, though rather wealthy, village'*. The estate was described as friendly, safe, and a good place to raise a family, but also as a place that can still be *'looked down on'* in spite of a range of positive changes in recent years. Both communities are attracting new residents, but the estate in particular features a mix of established residents and a significant proportion of new arrivals to the community, drawn to the area in part because of its reputation for good-quality, affordable housing, and easy access to good road connections.

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1.4.3
Participatory methods, stakeholder engagement and action-focused research

Throughout the project, we used research methods that were interactive, collaborative and creative to better engage with people, and to encourage wider ownership of the research process and findings. Our general approach to the research overall has been collaborative and action-focused.

At the local level, we identified the areas partly on the basis of the willingness of key local stakeholders to engage with the project, including the local infrastructure organisation for the voluntary and community sector (the Council for Voluntary Service [CVS]) and the local authority. Both have taken an active part in the Local Stakeholder Groups, which were set up in each area and met regularly throughout the duration of the project. These groups have played an invaluable role at all the stages of the project and have informed the research design, the framing of the research findings and our local engagement strategy (see Appendix C for a list of members).

After initial interviews with individual key local stakeholders we organised several participatory mapping sessions with people in the fieldwork areas and with the Local Stakeholder Groups to locate where participation was taking place in the area. This helped us to understand how participation was organised and structured and, importantly, to know where to find people to interview. It also helped us build our relationships with people in the area and enabled us to develop a picture of the complex and dynamic realities of people's lives and environments.

Image 2:
Example of a local map of
existing sites of participation

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To widen local stakeholder engagement, we worked with the Local Stakeholder Groups to organise participatory workshops in each area, in order to explore the implications that the initial research findings had, for practice and policy. These events were aimed at local voluntary and community organisations, public bodies and service providers. The workshops provided an opportunity for people attending to identify what the findings meant for their own work and more widely, and to think of specific actions that they might want to take as a result of the research. The results of these workshops have fed into the conclusions and recommendations section of the report (see Section 5).

We have also engaged with stakeholders beyond the local areas of the research. At national level, we established an Advisory Group (see Appendix D for list of members), made up of experienced and knowledgeable individuals from academia, the voluntary and community sectors and local and national government, to guide the research throughout. From the outset of the project we communicated extensively about the different stages of the research process and our emerging findings by producing various reports that are available on our dedicated website. The final findings of the project will be communicated at national learning events, aimed at policy-makers,

voluntary and community organisations and public service providers, and widely disseminated by the three partner organisations, using a broad range of channels and networks.

Image 3:
Delegates at one of the
participatory workshops

02
People's experience of participation

Akash's story

Akash is a middle-aged British Asian of Hindu faith. He had a unsettled upbringing and early adulthood, which included time in a remand home, a children's home, a working boys' hostel and bedsits. During this part of his life, Akash was *'too busy trying to get by'* to participate, but he says that if people asked for help he would help them:

'...it's in the nature of me to help somebody else if they ask for it.'

Akash became a salesman, which took him travelling around the country, but mental illness took over in his thirties, which meant that for four years he very rarely left his house. He feels he turned a corner when he began to walk the dogs of his carer, which resulted in him meeting others in his neighbourhood and slowly becoming integrated into the local community, building for the first time in years some form of a social network.

This widening (or beginning) of his social network came at the same time as riots within his community. Local political unrest, the burning of a local pub and conflict with the police gave Akash something to fight against that he believed in, was passionate about and which directly affected his new network of friends.

This network and the catalyst of the riots led to his first taste of

participation, which he has sustained ever since, organising an annual community day, which brings all walks of the community together:

'The [community day] started as a need to actually cement the various factions of our community together and bringing together people seemed like a good idea, bringing together the Asians, Muslims, the West Indians, whites, everyone, the drug smokers, the drinkers, everybody basically and on a level playing field, so to speak, and see us for who we are basically, you'll see we have some fantastic musicians, great cooks, great artists.'

Akash's childhood gave him a strong sense of identity closely tied to the community in which he continues to live. He played football for a community centre, which he explains:

'...that was like, it's localised, it's tribal, to me it's creating a culture of "this is ours" but the thing is you play football, "this is ours and this is ours", you know like it is healthy. ... It gave me a sense of identity, I knew where I come from, I know my friends, I know my local streets...'

As a result, he has a real passion and pride for his local area and it is this passion that has sustained his interest in making the community day a success:

'I think my area's a beautiful area, but then I see it going down and I see people just ignoring it, then I meet other people who are passionate about stopping it and passionate about improving it and I think "I want to be on that side".'

Akash's involvement in the community day is by far his main participatory activity, although its organisation has led to him fundraising and contacting local councillors and he has also been very lightly involved in a campaign to stop the closure of a local school.

For Akash, being of Indian descent helped to shape his values:

'I'm proud to be an Indian and yes, it has been part of my story because I feel as though I've been my dad's ambassador, my dad taught me my manners, my dad gave me my initial values of respect and you get that in Asian families.'

Akash says that people around him have inspired him, influencing and sparking his participation. He also suggests that because he has been so well looked after by the state, by doctors, by social workers and by friends, this may have contributed to his decision to participate, although he stresses that *'it's not payback, there's no payback in this.'*

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2.1
Introduction

Participation means many things to many people. The picture of participation that emerges from this research is one of immense diversity. People's interests, aspirations and priorities prompt them to engage in their communities and in the political sphere in different ways, to different degrees and different ends, over the course of their lives.

Interviewees' stories included rich descriptions of who participates, what they are doing, where these activities occur, of the times in their lives when they were most and least involved, and of the impacts their involvements have had for themselves and for others.

The aim of this section is to give an overview of the different elements that form people's experiences of participation. It is designed to provide a foundation for the sections that follow.

2.2
Who participates?

Many studies of participation have used typologies and demographic segmentation to analyse the types of people who participate, and what participants are like. The qualitative research methods used in this project were not appropriate for analysis that confirmed or challenged existing quantitative research on who is most or least likely to participate in different arenas, although our sampling and findings suggest that age, education, class, gender, wealth and ethnicity do matter significantly in terms of who participates, how and why they participate, and how often. In this research this is largely described in terms of access to opportunities, perceptions of personal capacity, power and equality (see Section 3 for more about these issues).

We found however, powerful and common perceptions of the types and nature of participants, with both positive and negative

stereotypes emerging. Interviewees often described their own and others' participation in terms of specific roles, personality traits, values and beliefs, skills and abilities (see box below).

Roles
Interviewees described their own and others' roles in terms of being a *'leader'*; a *'catalyst'*; an *'initiator'*; a *'consolidator'*; a *'helper'*; and an *'organiser'*.

'There's different types of people in different organisations and you need them all. You need the innovators, you need the followers, you need the people to do the washing up, you need the people who have just got to keep the thing ticking over for a few years, just to make sure, until somebody else comes along who's got that drive…'

Personality traits
People saw themselves as a *'busybody'*; *'caring'*; *'a bit of a loner'*; *'a control freak'*; not wanting to put their *'head above the parapet'*; *'sociable'*; or being *'lazy'* or *'bossy'*. They described themselves as *'shy'*; being *'curious'* and liking new experiences; needing *'not to be bored'*; needing a sense of *'self worth'*.

Values and beliefs
For some people, being a participant was about it, *'being in my nature to help people'*; having *'a real social conscience'*; hating unfairness or discrimination.

Skills
Some people described being a participant in terms of being *'politically aware'*; *'conscious of power dynamics'*; good at getting *'things done'*; *'good at talking to people'*.

Some interviewees were critical of those who did not participate, saying that some people *'can't be… bothered'*, they're apathetic, or they're *'lazy'*. However, they were as likely to be critical of themselves as others in

these terms. Some reported feeling guilty about not doing more and/ or not doing a good job, saying, *'I've been a lazy sod all my life'*, and saw themselves as being a *'fair weather'* participant, taking the easy option. Some were critical of other participants they perceived as self-righteous or *'holier-than-thou'*, selfish and with ulterior motives, or *'cliquey'*.

'Most of them are very – how do we put it? Like almost a bit obsessive about being green and some of them do tend to have slightly holier-than-thou attitude about it all and that if you're not using recycled toilet paper you're a heathen.'

But people also talked about other participants in very positive terms – as inspiring, committed, welcoming, efficient, and *'lovely, positive people'*.

For the most part, interviewees normalised their participation, treating it as *'something that I do'* and perhaps had always done, and as part of who they are and how they engage with their wider world. This somewhat self-deprecating dismissive language perhaps reflects people's desire (conscious or unconscious) not to come across as self-aggrandising or as a 'do-gooder'. Some interviewees showed real concerns about the way they were viewed by others – for example, as naïve in their willingness to work for free, or being taken for granted.

'To me it's been the route of my happiness it really has. I don't mean that from goody-goody perspective, and I think a lot of volunteers are maligned like that, are do-gooders and all the rest of it.'

2.3
What participation activities are people involved in?

Interviewees' stories of participation included a vast array of activities that people were, or had been, involved in. The activities that people talked about were formal and informal, collective and individual and required different

levels of involvement and commitment. The activities interviewees identified and the main issues they raised about these activities are described below under the categories of social, public and individual participation (see Section 1.4.1 for full definitions), although there are clearly many overlaps between them.

2.3.1
Social participation

Social participation refers to the collective activities that individuals may be involved in. We found that this was the biggest single category of participation in people's stories. Interviewees mentioned a wide range of social participation activities, all of which can be grouped under three main headings:

Involvement in formal voluntary organisations

• volunteering in charity shops

• volunteering in a hospice, hospital, older people's centres or another care setting, or hospital radio

• volunteering for an international non-governmental organisation (e.g. VSO)

• acting as volunteer translators or volunteer befrienders

• being on the boards or committees (including as a trustee) of civic societies, housing associations and other charities

• being on local groups of national charities (e.g. Red Cross, British Legion, Samaritans, Campaign for Real Ale)

• volunteering to share skills, including helping in classes on English as a second language, literacy, IT skills and conversational English

• starting a parent-teacher association

• being parent-governors or magistrates

• involvement in uniformed groups such as Scouts, Guides and Brownies.

Involvement in informal or grassroots community groups

• helping to organise or being involved in community activities, for instance, a local arts or cultural festival, village fetes, theatres and amateur dramatic groups, arts centres, community radio, youth clubs

• involvement with the church (such as cleaning, flowers, bell-ringing)

• membership of tenants' and residents' associations, neighbourhood watch and on church and village hall committees

• being members, supporters, coaches and committee members of football, swimming, cricket, rugby, yoga, horse-riding and other sports clubs, as well as chess and bridge clubs and singing groups

• being on committees of gardening and allotment groups, bee-keeping and dog-walking groups

• participation in EcoTeams and green home activities, local oral history and archaeology groups

• running community newsletters and websites.

Formal and informal mutual aid and self-help

• being members and representatives of a trade union

• being a member of a peer-support group focused on mental or physical health (e.g. Alzheimer's sufferers and carers, diabetes support group, Alcoholics Anonymous)

• sharing childcare responsibilities (including babysitting)

• making cakes for a community event

• being a member of a community garden group (and/or garden partners schemes)

• taking part in a community clean-up and guerrilla gardening.

The boundaries between interviewees' social participation and their social lives and friendships were often blurred and appeared to be deeply linked to people's wellbeing, their desire for social interaction, their sense of identity and belonging to a community of geography or of interest. Social participation tended to involve long-term relationships, whether in a community theatre or in a much less formal setting, such as a dog-walking club.

For some, social participation was simply about enjoying the company of others and taking part in community life. For others, it was based on helping others who were perceived as less fortunate or in need; a charitable or philanthropic model (particularly formal volunteering).

'...the reason I joined ...was people with common interests. You identify yourself, oh, I'm like that, I could fit in there, and there's [a] void in your life that you want to do something, so you go along and do it.'

'...when I retired I went with a friend to the meeting of the tenants and residents. I thought it's about time I got interested in something rather than just my own home and family – and it was something to do out of the ordinary. It was quite matey.'

Interviewees often equated participation with formal and, to a lesser extent, informal volunteering. Many interviewees had some experience of formal volunteering, and some were longstanding volunteers with years of involvement. For the most part, they spoke of volunteering as a good thing for the volunteer, the volunteer-involving organisation, and the beneficiaries of the voluntary action. Volunteering was viewed as a way to meet the needs of others and of the wider community, and to supplement existing public services and institutions.

2.3.2
Public participation

Public participation refers to the engagement of individuals with the various structures and institutions of the state and democracy. Interviewees identified their own activities as including:

• being town and parish councillors

• voting

• standing for political office

• membership of (including on committees of) political parties

• attending meetings of political parties

• contacting MPs

• being a patient representative on health service issues

• attending area forums and conservation committees

• taking part in demonstrations and protests

• being part of an activist network aimed at political change

• signing petitions, campaigning and lobbying related to government or public policy decisions.

While a number of interviewees were actively engaged in the structures and channels of public participation, this category was discussed less in our interviews than social participation, and no one was exclusively involved in public participation. This may be a reflection of the greater number of opportunities for social participation compared to the relatively limited number of roles and opportunities for public participation, rather than a preference for social participation among interviewees. It may also be that interviewees' first thoughts about participation related to social participation activities, and their stories therefore related mainly to those.

However, interviewees explained their interest in participating in the public sphere (or not) in relation to the way they saw themselves (as political or apolitical) and their general perceptions of the state and the political system, rather than to the availability, or lack, of opportunities for public participation.

We found a strong reluctance from a majority of interviewees to seeing themselves, or being perceived by others, as political. Being political was often seen as very negative. Some interviewees were very deliberately and consciously not involved in public participation; they were sceptical about political representatives, disillusioned with the system or simply not interested in politics.

> '...I don't like politics with a capital P I suppose because I don't believe that one particular group of people has all the answers.'

Interviewees described their lack of confidence and trust in the political system as resulting from the parliamentary expenses scandal, the Iraq war and their view that politicians were self-serving, only in it for the money or only took an interest when it would help them win a seat at the election. However, there were also positive comments about specific MPs and councillors, such as a *'very good man'* or *'they do a good job'*.

Surprisingly, even among interviewees who held public political roles, such as parish councillors, or who were in frequent contact with political representatives, there were some who maintained that they were *'not political'*. The importance of self-perception as a shaping force in people's participation is explored further in Section 3.

People's public participation was often an extension of their social participation: that is, their engagement with a political process led directly out of their involvement in a group or organisation and was driven by a desire to achieve a particular aim on behalf of the group, be it raising funds or influencing a council decision. Interviewees talked about public participation mainly in terms of taking part in consultations, contacting political representatives, and voting.

Consultations

Several interviewees spoke of taking part in consultations, led by the council or another public body, on a range of issues of public concern, including private finance initiative (PFI) projects, school and hospital closures or reorganisations, policing issues, and planning and development issues.

Their accounts were almost entirely negative. They spoke about consultation processes feeling tokenistic or repetitious, with lots of consultations on similar issues and no sense that anyone was bringing together the results. Several mentioned that decisions had already been made prior to the consultation, which was only carried out to meet a legal obligation or as a public relations exercise. For many interviewees, negative experiences of consultation reinforced an existing sense of ambivalence and lack of trust in political processes in general.

Contacting a political representative

Interviewees identified many examples of contacting political representative – by email, telephone or face to face, or through Facebook campaigns, letters, petitions and by attending council meetings, councillors' surgeries, public meetings and election hustings. Their propensity to contact a political representative for any reason was generally determined by their overall sense of confidence and trust in the political system, with levels of trust seeming to vary between local, district and national levels of government.

The contact was sometimes made on the individual's own behalf or, as a member of a wider group or network. When contacting someone on their own behalf, it was often to try to get advice, express disagreement with their position or action, to show appreciation or redress a perceived personal injustice. An inadequate response from political representatives was a source of great frustration and anger for some interviewees, and several mentioned that the quality of that response resulted in switches of voting intentions. There were also positive outcomes reported, including getting funding for projects, getting practical help (e.g. salt for roads around a day centre), creating a formal conservation area, stopping a specific housing development, creating a tree management strategy and raising the treatment of asylum-seekers in Parliament.

Voting

In contrast to the inconsistent nature of most interviewees' involvement in other forms of public participation, and in spite of the general aversion to political participation, the majority were consistent and committed voters. Voting, it seems, does not necessarily reflect a commitment to wider political engagement; a number of interviewees saw voting as a civic duty. It was common for interviewees to attribute their views on voting and their voting habits (though not necessarily who they voted for) to a sense of duty fostered by their parents rather than to a general interest in politics or political beliefs. However, in spite of the commitment to voting, many interviewees were cynical about the value of voting, especially in safe seats.

Direct action

Interviewees generally described protest and direct action in relation to influencing government or public

policy decisions in quite ambiguous terms, although those with first-hand experience of direct action tended to speak more positively. Some expressed a sense that they would have to have a good deal of knowledge or feel very passionately about an issue to get involved in direct action. For some, direct action was a last resort: one interviewee described how he decided to go on a march because he felt his voice was not being heard through a formal consultation. Others just enjoyed it:

'...it's amazing, and everyone was there, and we had monks there and you had old grannies for democracy singing together...'

'I think it's good to appeal to people to see it as a celebration, it's a rally of people.'

Some felt that direct action could do more harm than good but that it was still an important option:

'Sometimes maybe too much confrontation does too much harm... but I would still never take away anyone's right to protest... it feels quite liberating to be able to go out and say – "no, I disagree with this".'

2.3.3
Individual participation

Individual participation refers to the choices and actions that individuals make as part of their daily life and that are statements of the kind of society they want to live in. Interviewees identified individual participatory activities less frequently than either social or public participation. This may be because they did not see these activities as central to their story of participation or because they did not immediately associate them with participation.

Individual participatory activities were often informed by or part of wider social, political or environmental

movements. Examples of individual participation included buying fair trade or green products, boycotting products from particular countries, and recycling waste, as well as signing petitions, giving to charity and informal helpful gestures between neighbours and friends (e.g. visiting an elderly neighbour).

Most interviewees had some experience of individual participation at some point in their lives, although the extent to which they were involved in these activities varied over time. Ethical consumerism and charitable giving were particularly common forms of individual participation among interviewees.

Ethical consumerism

Ethical consumerism covers consuming (or choosing not to consume) products for ethical, environmental or political reasons, as well as making lifestyle choices on ethical grounds. Interviewees mentioned:

- buying fair trade goods and setting up local fair trade networks

- taking part in alternative food networks

- growing their own food

- boycotting a product

- reducing waste and recycling (including setting up a computer recycling group)

- 'green home' initiatives and using green electricity tariffs

- carbon offsetting

- eating organic food

- buying from local shops and markets

- freeganism (gathering free food)

- choosing public transport rather than using a car.

Interviewees tended to speak in fairly pragmatic terms about their choices around ethical consumerism, talking about doing what they could, when they can rather than making hard and fast commitments to only buying, eating or doing certain things.

Many interviewees did a few things fairly regularly out of environment or social justice concerns, but this did not necessarily mean they embraced a wholesale commitment to ethical, sustainable living. They could feel strongly about some things and ambivalent about others. Convenience and cost were important considerations, even to those for whom the values around ethical consumerism were deeply important, and trying to make ethical choices often raised ethical conundrums.

'I think a lot of the things I do are pragmatic rather than positive choices, like the organic fruit and veg, it means I get food delivered and I don't have to go anywhere, it turns up on my doorstep.'

Many interviewees expressed some uncertainty about how much of a tangible, measurable impact their ethical choices might have, if at all – not being able to see a direct link between their individual decisions and an outcome was cited as a reason for ambivalence and inconsistency.

'It's a difficult situation because buying things from developing countries may support them, but, on the other hand, it's a question of whether they're being exploited by being paid peanuts for the work that they do.'

Charitable giving
Charitable giving includes soliciting and gathering contributions (as money or other resources) for charitable causes by requesting donations from individuals, businesses, charitable foundations or government agencies, as well as individual giving to charitable causes.

Examples from interviewees included:

• giving in places of worship

• taking part in sponsored runs and bike rides

• sponsoring a child

• selling vegetables from an allotment to raise money for charity

• taking part in bring-and-buy and jumble sales

• giving to fundraisers in the street and putting money in collection tins near tills

• donating blood

• carrying an organ donor card.

Interviewees had varied and often complex attitudes to giving money to charities, ranging from supporting one or two charities on a regular basis and excluding all others, to a much more piecemeal approach to giving. Many interviewees would give small amounts when asked, particularly by friends or family members, and when motivated by an emotional response, for example, to a natural disaster or a particularly effective campaign. Many spoke critically of pushy, aggressive fundraising, cold-calling and street fundraising, although a few had been convinced to give to a charity as a result of these methods.

Few people fully articulated the reasons why they did or did not support particular organisations through charitable donations. However, many interviewees affected by the illness of a family member or friend deliberately chose to support a charity working in that field. Interviewees involved in faith communities were also especially likely to give money to or through their place of worship. Similarly, interviewees who were concerned about human rights and the natural environment often gave money to international charities supporting these issues.

2.3.4
What participation is not
The very broad definition of participation adopted for this project was chosen to ensure that we captured the full range of people's experiences and understanding of participation. We found in the research that interviewees and others involved in the research had strong views about the activities they would not classify as participation.

For some, being paid excluded the person and the activity from being seen as participation. For others, to count as participation the activity had to be collective: not alone but with others. For some, whether the activity counted as participation depended on motivation, and some suggested it was to do with the impact or outcome of the activity. There was a clear sense that collective unpaid activities were seen as participation, and isolated paid activities were not. These views fed into our conclusions about the common features that define participation in practice (see Section 2.7).

2.4
Where does participation take place?
The places where people participated were as diverse as the activities they were involved in. There was a strong local focus to many interviewees' participation, with most identifying their main involvement in and through local groups, organisations and issues.

The physical geography, demographic make-up, history of a locality, and the many elements that make up its culture all affected where people participate at local level. The research for this project took place in three contrasting areas, to provide a rich set of contexts and environments in which to examine how people participate: an inner-city, suburban and rural area. Each had different facilities, structures and opportunities

for participation.

We found five main elements in relation to where people participated: the local physical places and spaces for participation; local events and organisations; online sites of participation; hyperlocal media; and national and international participation.

2.4.1
Local places and spaces

Across all three research areas, people participated in a range of physical places and spaces, both formal and informal. While formal spaces such as multi-purpose community centres served as much needed sites for groups to meet and run projects and events, informal spaces, such as parks, pubs, libraries (including mobile libraries) were often important in nurturing the everyday exchanges that are a part of social and community relationships. There were differences between the types of places and spaces on offer in the different fieldwork areas.

Leeds
Key sites were multi-purpose community centres (with cafés, events, rooms for local groups to use). Mention was also made of parks, the university, cinema, schools, Hindu temple, churches, mosques, the housing support office, housing associations, pubs, multi-use games areas – with netball, basketball and tennis, the volunteer centre, library, and education centre (especially for adults with learning difficulties). In addition, squats and various grassroots autonomous community-run sites were some of the spaces of participation created and maintained by people involved in the activist community.

Enfield
The focus in terms of physical sites was the parks and other open spaces, schools, a theatre, allotments, churches and church halls, synagogues, community centres, a cricket club and other sports clubs, Community House (housing the CVS

and volunteer centre), libraries, the civic centre (council offices), political clubs and a hospital (as the focus of a local campaign).

Suffolk
There were differences between participation in a housing estate on the outskirts of a market town and the 'traditional' Suffolk village. On the estate, a social club (which ran sports and social activities) and a council-run community centre were the two main spaces of participation. In the village, the church (which ran the village hall), school and preschool and pubs were important spaces for participatory activity, as were the park and sports fields.

The role of these spaces and places in encouraging and supporting participation is explored in more depth in Section 3.

2.4.2
Local events and organisations

Interviewees also talked about events and organisations that did not have a fixed physical base. Physical spaces were still needed to hold meetings and events but, in these cases, it was the activity and not the site or venue that was seen to be important. Again, there were differences in the types of events and organisations mentioned by interviewees in different places.

Leeds
Events and festivals were very important, especially the annual community day, which celebrates local cultural diversity. Fun days, open events and clean-up events were also mentioned. In terms of organisations, tenants' and residents' associations, arts groups, parents' groups, kids' clubs and the youth service van were all mentioned.

Enfield
The Enfield Town Show, jumble sales, fetes and fairs and other similar events were important. Here, local residents' associations were particularly strong, typically involved in local planning,

development and conservation issues. Several people also spoke of relationships among neighbours being nurtured through informal coffee mornings and street parties.

Suffolk
Key local events included firework displays, harvest events, farmers' markets, a charity duck race and family fun days. Non-site related groups were less often mentioned here, beyond mother-and-toddler groups, and neighbourhood watch.

2.4.3
Online sites of participation

The internet and computer technologies played an important role in supporting people's experience of participation in various ways, although they rarely catalysed or facilitated sustained participation on their own. We found that participation on and through online sites took two main forms:

- Online sites that were used to complement or support bricks and mortar or face-to-face places and spaces, including:

  - to share information with the public and prospective new members, for example through the *About us* page of a group's website or by putting committee meeting agendas or minutes online for the public to access

  - to facilitate communication among existing members of a group, for example, groups using email to stay in touch or make decisions between scheduled meetings or using video or phone technology to run online meetings

  - to mobilise action and help people campaign and advocate for a particular cause (e.g. a Facebook campaign to stop the deportation of an asylum-seeker that encouraged one interviewee to contact his MP to ask him to speak out against the detention of asylum-seekers).

• Online sites that may have links to offline participation but are intended and designed as stand-alone sites e.g. online discussion groups, social networking sites and indymedia.

2.4.4
Hyperlocal media

Interviewees described how local blogs, websites and newsletters (hyperlocal media) created places and spaces for participation. Activities took two main forms:

• Setting up, running and producing hyperlocal media, such as:

 - setting up a website for a local voluntary organisation

 - editing and designing a voluntary group's newsletter electronically before printing

 - establishing an archive of local materials (e.g. books, pamphlets, photographs) including digitising photos to go on a website

 - blogging on developments in the area (including one linked to a local print newspaper column).

• Using hyperlocal media, especially very local newsletters, to find out about participation opportunities, which was mentioned by quite a few interviewees. For example:

 '...we have a little newsletter come round that's delivered . . . and that mentioned in it how they're looking for volunteers for the youth club and just said, "Come down, if you fancy it, come on down on a Friday evening"...so I went and did that.'

2.4.5
National and international participation

When starting the research, we expected to find an emphasis on local participation, and that was the case, as outlined above. However, there were frequent mentions in people's stories of their participation overseas, and of participation that related to local, national and international issues. Interviewees mentioned apartheid in South Africa, the Chilean Solidarity Campaign, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Israel and Gaza, fair trade, and climate change.

Charitable giving and fundraising was one form of participation where the international or national activities of a charity or cause tended to be very important to interviewees – some gave predominantly to charities with an international focus because that is where they felt the human need was strongest while others only gave to domestic charities as a matter of principle because they felt charity begins at home.

People also participated beyond their local areas, through membership of national and international campaigning and advocacy organisations (Friends of the Earth and Christian Aid were often mentioned), and through direct action at regional and national levels about international issues: Stop the War and May Day demonstrations were mentioned by interviewees.

Similarly, interviewees described how internet-based technologies facilitated access to news and information about issues with international relevance, as well as helping activists and advocates make links with campaigns and social movements based in different parts of the globe. There were also connections through issues that had both local and global implications, such as fair trade and environmental issues.

We found very little experience of participation at the national level (such as taking part in consultations and programmes by national government or public bodies). Participation through national charities and campaigns, and direct action through protests, was mentioned. However, beyond that, the only examples of national participation we found were that some interviewees involved in local level campaigns lobbied their MP in the hope of increasing the reach and power of their campaign.

2.5
When and how do people participate?

People's participation is dynamic and constantly evolving. The activities they are involved in and their specific roles and responsibilities shift over time. Almost everyone we spoke to had experienced some degree of fluctuation in the levels of intensity and frequency of their involvement, relating to what was happening in their lives at different times. Participation over the course of people's lives was characterised by ebbs and flows, starts and stops, a mix of one-offs, short- and long-term commitments, and experiences that ranged from the undemanding to the intense and all-consuming.

We found two main elements in people's stories in relation to when and how people participate: people's participation varies according to age and level of intensity. These overlap but also differ, so different levels of intensity of participation sometimes reflect different life stages, but not always.

'Just as part of your lifecycle that perhaps other things happen in your life. So it might be having children, moving away, different job, moving house, those sorts of things, means that within your lifecycle change happens and certain things stop, other things begin.'

2.5.1
Participation at different ages

In structuring our analysis of people's participation over the course of their lives, we identified five main age bands and found that some broad patterns emerged in terms of how, and how much, people participated at different stages: in childhood, youth, early-to mid-adulthood, later adulthood, and old age. This approach was used in our research instead of defining periods of time by a characteristic that is not universally applicable, such as parenthood or retirement.

Overall in terms of age bands, common periods of non-participation were in early adulthood when the focus for many interviewees was on developing their career and in the much later years of life, when health, mobility, and caring for a spouse became common barriers to participation. These motivating or limiting factors for participation are described in more detail in Section 3.

Childhood
Many interviewees pointed to childhood as a period when parents instilled values and beliefs that guided their participation through their life, and described their parents as providing models for participatory behaviour.

'...one committee meeting we sat round and I don't know who asked it, actually, and said, "Who's mother was part of a parent group at school, your school when you were younger?" And everyone put their hand up. There was a group of about 10 of us and all of us put our hand up.'

Although there were many examples of participants following very directly in their parents' footsteps by doing identical or similar activities, sometimes people got involved in participatory activities in reaction to or rebellion against their parents. Childhood was also a time when many interviewees got involved and gained a sense of belonging through participatory activities at their school, youth club, place of worship, or through organisations like the Scouts and Guides.

Youth
For many interviewees, participation continued through their youth within many of the same, fairly traditional organisations as during childhood, though this was also a time when some interviewees started to specialise and concentrate on particular activities, such as sport, drama or music. Among many of the younger interviewees in this age group, structured school-based citizenship or community service programmes and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award were common points of entry to participation.

Those who had been through higher education reported mixed experiences in terms of participation. For many, it was a period of active participation and politicisation as a result of access to specific activities and opportunities; for others it was a period of disengagement, when socialising and studies took precedence over formal participatory activities.

Early to mid-adulthood
Interviewees characterised this period as a time when they focused on developing a career and relationships with friends or partner and attending to their social life rather than to participation.

'...I was completely career-focused and, quite honestly, the time I spent, the time and energy I spent at work, when I left work, there was no way I wanted to do anything like campaigning.'

Interviewees' experience of participation during early to mid-adulthood was greatly influenced by whether they had children. For some, the demands of having family marked a period of withdrawal from participation as domestic responsibilities and caring were necessarily prioritised. However, parenthood was a very common point of entry into community or associational life, often through volunteering or mutual aid in the form of parent-and-toddler groups.

'...everything always revolves round the children, really. I mean, when they were at school, we had the parent-teachers', then they were at Sunday School, we got involved in the church. It sort of goes on like that, really.'

We found that participation during parenthood often remains gendered. Many of the mothers we interviewed took a dominant role in child-focused participation, especially in their children's earlier years through parent-and-toddler groups, pre-schools and schools. However, fathers were also involved in children's schools and activities to a degree, for example helping at Scouts or sports teams and being part of a parent-teacher association.

Later adulthood
Some interviewees spoke of wanting to put down roots in their local area at this stage of their lives, whereas previously they had been more transitory and less interested in participating where they lived.

'...when you're working in town [London], you often end up meeting up with friends in town, and it was clear that we were getting older, and I wanted to build more of a life locally to where I lived, and my own community didn't really exist locally... so it was sort of a conscious act to try and create a more local community for myself...'

For many, of course, parenthood continued to shape their participatory activities.

In later years, caring for parents or other elderly relatives was identified as a barrier to participation. For several interviewees, participation was an extension of, or complement to, paid work. Interviewees with professional expertise and experience were often asked to contribute their skills and knowledge in a voluntary capacity.

'I'd been on other PCCs [parochial church council] in other churches in years gone by, I'd also been a church treasurer and it wasn't difficult to think I'd been given a gift and that gift is my profession [accounting], and there was a need for it to be used and so I was quite happy to assist.'

Retired interviewees tended to fall into two categories: those who took up new activities or deepened their commitments upon retirement to fill the time that had previously been occupied by work and those who eased off their existing commitments or looked for flexible commitments in order to have more time to travel and for leisure. By far the most people we interviewed in this age group fell into the former category.

Old age
In older age, poor health and the desire or need to reduce external commitments were the key factors influencing people's participation. For some, health problems and a decline in energy or mobility meant they had to start slowing down and doing less or to stop participating altogether. Some, however, carried on as energetically as ever.

'I meant to retire from [older people's charity] about 10 years ago, believe it or not, and I thought, right I'm going to find a treasurer and I will move out, because I'm now 89. It's too old. Much too old.'

2.5.2
Participation at different levels of intensity
People's experience of participation was far from static, not only in the activities they were involved in, but also in the amount of time they dedicated to participation and the type of roles and responsibilities they had.

To ensure that we were interviewing a range of people with different intensities of involvement, we established the following categories from which to recruit interviewees:

- **Non-participants**, who have never participated at all.

- **Past-participants**, who have participated earlier in their lives, but currently do not participate at all.

- **Light participants**, who currently participate occasionally, largely in one-off activities rather than ongoing.

- **Heavy participants**, who currently participate in, and organise activities on a regular basis, and likely to have a rich history of participation.

In spite of the concerted efforts of the research team (including approaching people who had no connection with an organisation in public places such as on the street and in the local pub), we found no-one to interview who had never participated at any time in their lives. All the interviewees who initially self-identified themselves as being a non-participant were either past participants or very light participants.

People's complex stories of participation quickly highlighted the limitations of the typology above. Interviewees often had a range of involvements at any one time: some were one-offs or episodic, and some were far longer-term and regular. Some interviewees expressed their level of commitment to a cause or an organisation by being involved over long periods of time. However, the frequency of their involvement, the amount of time they were able to give and how they contributed varied over time (see Section 4 for details).

The levels of intensity and frequency of people's participation fluctuated depending on what was happening in their lives and on their shifting priorities. Most people went through phases of participation and could point to different patterns within those phases. We also found that most interviewees had periods of non-participation during which they withdrew from participation for different lengths of time or stopped participating altogether. Reasons for withdrawal were varied and are described more thoroughly in Section 3.

Broadly, four types of intensity of participation over people's lives emerged from interviewees' stories: consistent and deep; peaks and troughs; consistent and light; and piecemeal and irregular. More detailed analysis of these categories, and the links between them, is given in Section 4.

2.6
Impacts of participation on people and places

The impacts of participation on people and places were a core part of interviewees' narratives of their experience of participation, and represent therefore a key element to understanding how participation works and how people participate.

2.6.1
Impacts on individuals

We found many examples of the impacts that participation had had on the participants themselves. Impacts identified were both instrumental and transformative although these distinctions (though useful for analytical purposes) somewhat mask the dynamic nature of the experience. Instrumental and transformative impacts are closely entwined with even the most basic of participation activities potentially leading to the most transformative impacts.

Instrumental impacts
Interviewees reported developing skills, connections and networks, avoiding boredom through having something to do, fun and enjoyment, self-help and support (e.g. for asylum-seekers, domestic violence victims, those in debt who volunteered to help others in similar circumstances), access to job opportunities, keeping fit and healthy.

Transformative impacts
Interviewees reported new friendships, a stronger more imroved sense of community, confidence, critical thinking (including politicisation), sense of purpose, moral satisfaction from doing good (the right thing or helping others), more positive sense of self-worth and identity, wellbeing and improved quality of life.

'You do feel good when you do things and I suppose that shows how much value I get from doing things, so other people benefit but actually it's me who's getting the biggest benefit and when you see it like that, it kind of makes you think "Oh I have done some things" and it's all been mostly fun as well.'

'From participation my confidence built up and I also got to network with people to do with children and it showed me what I need and other ways I can get onto what I need to do... Before this I was scared to do anything, from this I've got confidence from my volunteering.'

It is impossible to overstate how much their involvement meant to some people:

'Having been an asylum-seeker for a long time, I found that maybe my life was purposeless. I was not allowed to work, not allowed to do pretty much a lot, so the only thing I could do was volunteer, and that helped me to get through the day and also it just helped me to build my confidence and meet a lot of people socially.'

2.6.2
Impacts on places and communities

There were also some compelling stories about the impacts that participants' activities had had on other people and places. The range of impacts mentioned by interviewees as having resulted from their participation included:

- Making or preventing change in the physical environment within the immediate locality, such as:

  - becoming a designated conservation area

  - opening up stretches of footpath

  - providing or protecting community facilities/buildings (e.g. saving schools and hospitals from closure, raising money for an education centre).

- Supporting and enriching the lives of individuals and groups in a community, such as:

  - saving or providing local services (e.g. raising money for a school minibus)

  - provision of sport, arts and cultural activities and education for children and young people (e.g. horse riding for disabled children, inclusive theatre productions for vulnerable children)

  - provision of advice, counselling and guidance (e.g. debt advice, advice for asylum-seekers, diabetes information and awareness-raising)

  - support for ill people and elderly people (e.g. visiting to help with isolation, visits to cancer patients, hospital radio)

  - cultural events and activities (e.g. community day and other events)

  - reducing crime and violence (e.g. street pastors)

  - providing opportunities and skills (e.g. IT training, work experience at a wildlife rescue hospital, playwriting for homeless people).

2.6.3
Wider societal and global impacts on people and the environment

We also found many examples of how interviewees' participation had had an impact through creating and supporting wider change, including:

- advocacy and raising awareness of issues (e.g. tackling domestic violence, raising public awareness about sewerage/contraceptive pill and impact on water supply)

- changing legislation (e.g. 'statemented' children campaign) and potentially through environmental movement encouraging global commitments on reducing carbon emissions

- provision of an alternative to state provision (e.g. the home education movement)

- support to international causes by providing support, campaigning and fundraising for international charities

- environmental impacts such as reducing carbon emissions at the level of individual behaviour change and through local and national campaigning via environmental organisations (e.g. green home zone activity).

2.6.4
The darker side of participation

Participation is often treated as an inherently good thing, an end in itself and a form of social good that should be offered or delivered to as many people as possible. Our research has found many reasons to celebrate participation, some of which are outlined above. However, we have also found a picture of participation that is much more complex and messy.

Very few interviewees mentioned the participation that takes place through and with social and political movements that are seen as unacceptable by mainstream society, such as membership of the BNP, religious radicalisation, and violent direct action: sometimes referred to as uncivil society.

Interviewees talked more often of the negative impacts on the individuals who participate, including physical and mental stress, strain and burnout. When people have felt passionately about issues, disagreements have led to arguments, emotional distress and ill-health.

'Sometimes, when the PFI was all kicking off, I had sleepless nights, I was arguing with people, getting very stressed about it, to a point where it's making me ill, I don't want to be involved in this anymore, I'm taking my bat home.'

Although participation improved people's personal quality of life in many cases, it also detracted from it if participants felt pulled in too many different directions and over-burdened. Some interviewees told us, for example, how their involvement had caused tension within their personal lives and intimate relationships: the time and energy that was being committed to a cause or organisation led to resentment by partners, and people felt guilty that their involvements were taking them away from their families.

A great deal of participation happens in the context of groups of all shapes and sizes. Conflict and power struggles are issues within the smallest of grassroots groups at least as much as they are within larger organisations and institutions. Some people felt bullied, excluded, taken for granted and ignored within groups of well-intentioned fellow participants, just as within any other group of people.

Participation can also inflame wider conflict. Different groups of participants may be vying for access to or power over the same contested spaces or may be participating with very different desired outcomes in mind. Decisions made to encourage one group to participate may affect another group's ability to participate (e.g. changing the fee structure for hiring meeting spaces). Participation can also reproduce structural inequalities. Mothers may intentionally or unintentionally be expected to take on a greater share of responsibility than fathers when it comes to activities involving young children. Immigrants and asylum-seekers may be unable to participate fully as a result of language

problems or cultural difference, or may fear that participation could draw attention to them and hence increase their vulnerability.

Negative experiences of participation are not without consequences and can have lasting effects. When interviewees have had a negative experience of a specific form of participation – for example being on a committee, taking part in a consultation, or volunteering – that experience has sometimes not just led them to stop their involvement in that particular programme, project, or initiative, it has prevented them from getting involved in that form of participation again.

2.7
Conclusions

From the start of the project, we adopted a deliberately broad approach to participation to cover a wide range of public, social and individual participatory activities. This broad definition, and the research approach we used based on capturing people's own understandings of participation, has allowed us to develop a more holistic view of participation, closer to the realities of participation on the ground. In conceptualising and exploring participation more inclusively, we have taken the view that all types of participation and participatory activities are legitimate and valuable. In this way, we have been able to move beyond the usual silos that separate, for example, volunteering from political activism.

The research brought to the fore a huge variety of participatory activities and sites of participation. There were many opportunities and entry points for participation in the three fieldwork areas, and all those we interviewed had participated in some kind of activity at some point in their lives.

We were able to identify past participants who no longer participated, but were unable to identify any genuine non-participants. Even people who described themselves as non-participants or who were described by others as non-participants often turned out as having been involved at some stage when prompted. While we would not suggest unequivocally that non-participation does not exist, our qualitative findings are supported by quantitative evidence from the secondary analysis of the Citizenship Survey, which found that only seven per cent of people had not volunteered or donated money to a charitable cause[11]. Our findings suggest that participation is very widespread indeed, and is important to people's lives and the communities in which they live.

Across the remarkably wide range of activities identified in the research, we have concluded that all forms of participation have several common features (see box).

Participation is:

- **Voluntary**
  Participation can be encouraged, supported and made more attractive, but it is inherently about a free choice to take part (or not) without coercion or force. People get involved above all because they want to.

- **About action**
  People are moved to action for a range of different motives and their involvement may be limited in time and scope, but all participation requires an action of some kind. Even a relatively passive form of participation such as signing an online petition involves a degree of opinion, activity and effort.

- **Collective or connected**
  Participation means being part of something. Even when the action is individual (such as giving a charitable donation or buying fair trade foods), there is a sense of common purpose and the act itself has a collective impact or ambition.

- **Purposeful**
  All participants are concerned about doing something that is worthwhile in their own terms and every participatory act has, and is intended to have, consequences. At the very least, participation makes a difference to the individual participant; at most, it also helps change the world around them; and sometimes it does both.

Participation is therefore about activities, but is also about intentions and outcomes. Doing the right thing and doing something for the common good often run alongside more personal motives, such as people feeling good about themselves, protecting their own interests, or meeting their own needs.

11 Mohan, J. (2010) What do volunteering statistics tell us about the prospects for the Big Society? TSRC/NCVO Big Society Evidence Based Seminar 11 October 2010

03
How and why participation begins, continues or stops

Daniel's story

Daniel is a Roman Catholic in his mid-thirties, a refugee from Senegal and has a wife and three children. Before coming to the UK, he spent time living and studying in Russia where he says he did not participate because it was not the *'done thing'*. Nowadays he participates in a range of ways relatively lightly, including giving to charity, volunteering, voting, signing petitions, helping others informally and being a member of local groups.

Daniel's church played an important role for him and his family when he arrived in the UK and he has been a part of it since:

'When I came to England, my church really helped me a lot, because they really welcome us and we began by taking part in many activities run by our church.'

His church has opened the door to many participatory opportunities, including donating to charity, signing petitions and playing football in an inter-church competition. Being welcomed by the church and approached to take part in a range of activities was important for Daniel as he says he likes to be asked; otherwise he worries about whether he is needed.

He has volunteered at fundraising events for local groups, he says *'because it's an opportunity to take my children out'*. He feels that his friends and social networks have been critical to his participation in providing role models that have driven him to participate more and *'do good'*. He also gets involved in response to specific issues in his neighbourhood. He is, for instance, part of a neighbourhood watch group following a spate of burglaries in the area and has contacted the council to have rubbish collected.

Daniel is interested and engaged in politics which he traces back to his family being *'very involved in politics'* when he grew up; he feels, *'it's part of my responsibility, because I believe each person should vote. If you're entitled to vote, you should do it'*. His political outlook comes in part from his French-speaking Senegalese culture: *'In French, we say, "if you don't do politics, politics will do you"'*. He is currently involved in a bid to make his city a 'city of sanctuary': such a status means the city would be open, welcoming and fair for refugees and asylum-seekers.

Much of Daniel's involvement depends on time. He was a school governor for three years at his children's school, but says he had to withdraw due to not having enough time. However, he says his wife is now going to be a governor. He acknowledges that his participation in certain activities benefits his family and himself. For example, he says he has found being a school governor *'useful to mention in my CV'*. It also helped him to learn about the UK educational system and the national curriculum, and as a result he has been able to help his children more. When he sees a need, Daniel also helps other native French-speaking parents, who do not speak English, to overcome the language barrier and to understand the educational system.

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3.1
Introduction

One of the key aims of this project is to better understand why and how participation begins and continues. This section examines the different factors that shape participation, and whether these factors trigger, prevent, enable, stop or sustain involvement.

Our literature review uncovered strong evidence about why people participate in certain types of participation activities and the barriers that prevent them from participating. Our research adds to this evidence by exploring participation from the perspective of the individual and over the course of their lives, rather than at one moment in time or in one type of activity, and draws on participants' experiences and understanding of their own and others' participation.

3.2
The factors shaping participation

Participation is shaped by a multitude of factors that shift in significance over time and are in turn shaped by the impact of participation itself. These factors operate at different levels:

- **Individual,** including motivations, personality, identity and resources.

- **Relationships and social networks,** including an individual's family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and wider social networks.

- **Groups and organisations,** through which people participate, including their structures, processes and culture.

- **Local environment and place,** including local spaces, events, institutions and politics.

- **Wider societal and global influences**.

The factors that shape an individual's participation are:

- **Complex and wide-ranging**
  Participation is a reflection of an individual's personality and identity, and the meaning they give to and take from their participation. The individual is at the heart of participation; it is about individual choice and personal preferences, as well as agency, or an individual's capacity to take action.

  However, there also exist a range of factors, external to the individual and often beyond their control, that influence the way that people participate. Participation is integrated and embedded in everyday life, and must be viewed within the context of the many interdependent layers of the environment that shape people's lives, influencing who they are and what they do.

Figure 3:
Factors shaping participation
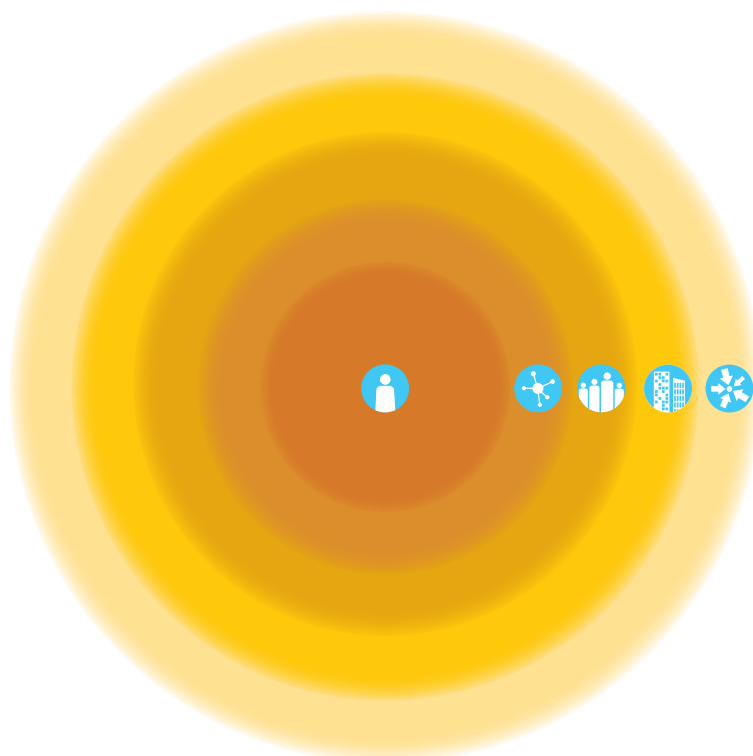
- Individual
- Relationships and social networks
- Groups and organisations
- Local environment and place
- Wider societal and global influences

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• **Interconnected**
The participation of an individual
can help to determine their future
participation and that of others.
For some, getting involved can
impact on their lives, building their
confidence, skills, experience,
networks and sense of worth.
Participation can also impact
on the prevalence and quality of
local spaces, events, and groups
or organisations, which in turn
shapes the environment in which
people participate.

• **Changing**
A person's identity, motivations
and capacity are not static; they
evolve as people move through
life and grow and develop through
their personal experience. People's
priorities shift over time as their
circumstances change and their
participation changes due to the
impact of critical moments and
turning points or transitions. These
life changes can influence whether
people participate or not, and what
activities they choose to be involved
in. Societal or global trends can
also alter how people participate.

Figure 4:
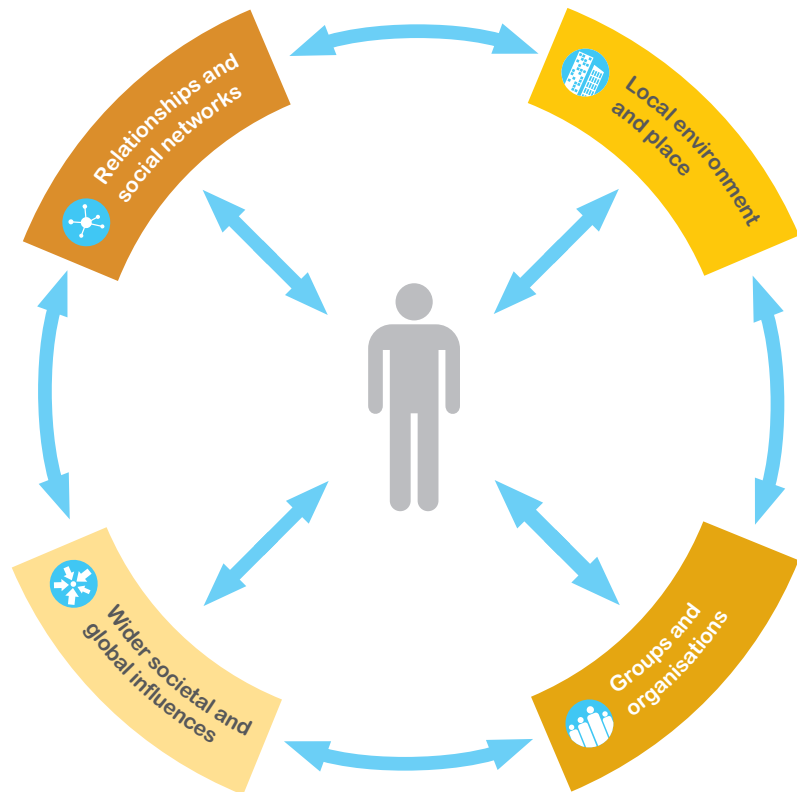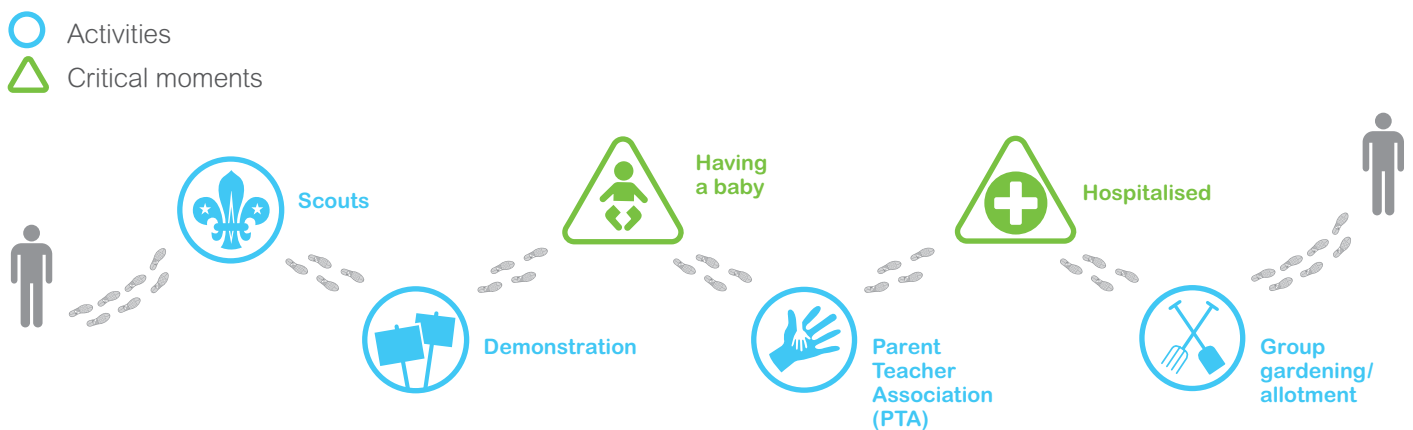*The interconnected nature
of participation*

Figure 5:
*How participation can
change over a lifetime*

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The factors that shape participation can be understood as those that enable participation – the drivers – and those that prevent it from taking place – the barriers. A multitude of drivers can lead to an individual choosing to participate, enable them to start, and allow them to sustain their involvement. Similarly, a range of barriers can prevent people from getting involved or sustaining their participation.

The following sections will draw out the key drivers and barriers to participation that emerged from the research: personal motivations; individual resources; relationships and social networks; groups and organisations; local environment and place; and wider societal trends and events.

3.3
Personal motivations

An individual's personal motivations shape whether and how they choose to participate; whether they wish to take up a participation activity, and what that participation activity is. Motivations arise from the meanings people give to their participation, their personality and identity, their values, beliefs and world views, and their perceptions of the impact of their participation. These are in turn affected by factors operating at the different levels illustrated in Figure 3. The interviewees' stories of participation also highlighted that motivations shift and change according to an individual's life stage, experiences, relationships and circumstances.

3.3.1
Meanings and motivations

Personal motivations for becoming involved arise from the meanings an individual attributes to participation. Our research participants attached a wide array of meanings to their own and other people's participation. In their own words they told us that participation was about:

Helping others, helping out and service to others including: giving

back; serving the locality; helping a neighbour; reaching out to those in need; responding to needs; sharing and contributing skills; making a contribution; supporting and encouraging others; improving a situation; investing time; volunteering.

Developing relationships including: making friends; meeting people; retaining relationships; bringing people together; working together; sharing experiences; building communities; connecting with the local and global community; having common interests and goals; taking part in group activities; companionship and cohesiveness.

Exercising values and ethics including: supporting each other to achieve something; empowerment; giving people a chance; bringing down barriers; inclusion and integration; belonging; strengthening or maintaining the community; altruism; making a difference; activities for broader environmental or societal benefit; political activism; exercising citizenship.

Influence including: campaigning; having a voice; opposing; questioning the council; influencing local decisions; having a particular role – such as a councillor, school governor, or being a committee member.

Personal benefits including: enjoyment and fun; feeling good; achievement and satisfaction; fulfilment and enrichment; having status; meeting one's own needs; putting beliefs into action; broadening your outlook; human connectedness and spirituality; having the opportunity to flourish; an improved quality of life; learning about communities; learning and gaining skills; building self-esteem and confidence; building up CV.

Involvement including: making things happen; taking part; joining in; feeling part of something; organising activities and events; fundraising.

While some people linked their participation to a higher purpose, such as making society fairer or

protecting the environment, others spoke openly about the reasons for their participation being more self-interested, such as feeling good about themselves, protecting their own interests or feeling a part of something. People did not generally participate for only one reason: interviewees would commonly refer to several meanings or motivations to explain their participation. Our research therefore suggests that the altruism versus self-interest dichotomy is a false one; these motivations often co-exist, as some of our interviewees identified themselves:

'You're very easily mistaken for being a goody two-shoes and that's what I'm saying, it's not all altruistic, it isn't. I get a big kick out of seeing other people made better from what I've done. You could say that that's selfish because it makes me feel better...'

Many of our interviewees' stories of participation were an exercise in reciprocity: an informal and often implicit exchange of resources and benefits. While people gave a lot in terms of time, money, energy, compassion and care they also took a lot away in terms of friendship, satisfaction, influence, support, confidence, skills and recognition:

'...it's that whole thing of you do feel good when you do things and I suppose that shows how much value I get from doing things – so other people benefit, but actually it's me who's getting the biggest benefit...'

3.3.2
Personality and identity

An individual's motivations to participate are often an expression of their personality and identity, which influences the participatory activities towards which they are drawn. Participation and identity, particularly for some consistent and deep participants, can be so inextricably linked that an individual's participation defines who they are:

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'If I didn't do it I'd be dead. I wouldn't be me... It's just what makes me who I am.'

As we identified in Section 2.2, our interviewees often referred to particular personal characteristics, or their absence, to help make sense of their participation or non-participation. For example, some individuals referred to traits such as being a *'caring person'* or having a *'real social conscience'*, while others explained their non-participation through not being interested or passionate enough to take part in an activity or support a cause, not having the aptitude or skills to be involved, or being content with the way things were.

Some of the traits that people referred to, such as needing not to be *'bored'* or being *'lazy'*, seemed to simply encourage or discourage participation. However most traits appeared to motivate participants to take a particular participation pathway into an activity they considered compatible with their personality or fulfilling a specific personal need. For example, one interviewee seemed to thrive on confrontation with his local council or other institutions, which led him to become involved in hot local priority issues and stop or shift his participation when things cooled down:

'I was chair [of the local tenants' and residents' association] for a long time and just said "I'm a war leader and you don't need me at the moment so I'm off".'

Interviewees also made reference to particular personal characteristics, such as liking to be in charge, as explanations for them taking a leading or organising role in groups:

'In terms of the organising, organising's a big part of my role at work, and I'm naturally organised, an organiser, if you like.'

Others spoke about being *'laid back'*, *'indecisive'* or being *'passive'* as explanations for not taking on leadership or more active roles. Some identified themselves as being

sociable and good at talking to people, leading them to take on roles working with people (e.g. befriending and counselling); while others spoke about preferring to be more solitary, which led them to take on roles in the background (e.g. IT and research).

Other character traits mentioned by interviewees to explain their participation included being:

• entrepreneurial or an innovator, so liking to get things started

• a consolidator, so not initiating, but making things better

• critical, so picking things apart in letters

• drawn to *'politicking'*, so seeking to change the way groups or organisations operate

• *'stubborn'*, so not giving up on a cause when others have walked away.

Participation is also intimately connected to an individual's identity, including their gender, faith and culture of origin:

• **Gender**
The gendered nature of participation was apparent in some of our interviewees' stories. For example, many of the mothers we spoke to were involved, or had been, in traditional caring roles that often revolved around their children, such as volunteering for parent-and-toddler groups. Gender relations and politics featured in a number of women's stories. For example, one interviewee whose first political activism was in the women's movement spoke about having been aware of power relations and gender inequality from a young age, and how this shaped her participation.

• **Religious faith**
Faith emerged from some peoples' accounts as being critical to their participation. One interviewee, for example, described helping his neighbours as part of his *'Christian role'* while another commented that Islam *'... encourages you to*

do something, to contribute, to be involved...' The effect of religion on participation does not just come from religious belief, but from shared values and community (see Section 3.5.2).

• **Culture of origin**
People's culture of origin also arose as a shaping factor of their values and beliefs and subsequent participation. An interviewee, who had migrated to the UK, was very clear about the impact of his culture and religion on his participation:

'Even though I have the British nationality, I have the Eritrean culture... all our culture, we took it from the Bible. It's not human made. It's God made culture I would say, and all it says is help as you go, so that gives me satisfaction, so to get satisfaction I have to help.'

3.3.3
Values, beliefs and world views
Understanding people's values, beliefs and world views is critical to understanding their participation. People's values, beliefs and world views are closely linked to their experiences, social connections, cultural, social and ethnic norms, and perceptions of community (of place and interest), as well as life spheres (the different elements that make up an individual's life – for example, family and work). All these elements are integral to people's identity and their self-image.

The interviews clearly showed that people's participation is intimately linked to what they believe and care about. People's concerns, interests and passions shape their attitudes and behaviours, the choices they make, the priorities they set themselves and their motivations for action:

'...even at that point in time, before I'd really started to work out what I was supposed to be doing, I was an environmentalist. I was a human

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*rights kind of person; that was
already what I was.'*

Our interviewees' values, beliefs
and world views often impacted on
the focus of their participation – the
activities they are drawn to or the ones
they don't want to be involved in:

*'...everything that I've done in a
sense has been oppositional.'*

*'I would never be a woman who
marched with a placard. That
wouldn't be my style at all, no. No.
No, I can't think why I would ever do
that... I can't think of a reason that
would drive me strongly enough to
do that, no. No.'*

They talked about a range of values
and beliefs that influenced their
decision to participate and the way
they participated, which included
the following themes:

- **Fairness, equality and
  social justice**
  *'...everything I do is driven by
  wanting a more equal society'.*

- **Voice and influence**
  *'If you don't vote... you
  can't complain'.*

- **Community spirit**
  *'I always believe that neighbourhood
  is like family. You have to know
  each other really well to be able to
  live together'.*

- **Compassion and mutual respect**
  *'We've got to get to the stage when
  we will respect everybody, including
  our enemies...'*

- **Individual and family wellbeing**
  *'...we're all out there looking out for
  ourselves basically, it's a very selfish
  attitude, but we're all out there
  keeping a roof over our heads and
  paying the mortgage and feeding
  the family'.*

- **Responsibility**
  *'I've always felt comfortable and,
  therefore, felt a bit of a responsibility
  for other parts of the world which
  don't have the comfort we've had'.*

- **Environmental and
  animal welfare**
  *'...it's become pretty obvious it's
  not just a question of degrading the
  environment, but it's the survival of
  the human race at stake'.*

- **Culture, heritage and
  conservation**
  *'...that's the British tradition... we're
  sort of losing our heritage... and
  I think it's a shame because we
  should still keep what the country's
  based on'.*

3.3.4
Perceptions of impact

People's motivations to participate are
influenced by the extent to which they
believe that their actions will make a
difference, where they will have the
most impact and their perceptions of
the relative worth of different activities.

Several interviewees, for example,
spoke about their time and energy
being worth more than their money.
Some expressed reservations
about the usefulness of formally
engaging with institutions, for instance
not wanting to contact political
representatives who were considered
to be self-serving, or to take part in
a consultation because they felt their
input would not make a difference.
Others challenged the impact of
taking part in direct action, believing
it to be ineffective or even damaging:

*'...I'm not great for the whole
political activism thing... I prefer a
more active sort of giving back. I'd
rather do something proactive than go
to a protest. If there's an opportunity
to do either, I'd rather do something
practical and concrete.'*

In making these judgements,
interviewees referred to their
values, beliefs and world views, and
experiences, but they also made
reference to their perceptions of
other participants. One interviewee,
for example, who had been a
regular volunteer for seven years,
had become disillusioned with
volunteering, in part due to the people
she volunteered with:

*'...volunteers are unreliable, if they
don't turn up they won't tell you, so
you're like, suddenly stuck with an
extra workload and they just think it
happens. It doesn't just happen; you
need people to make it happen. So
I don't want to work with volunteers
anymore, I don't like them.'*

An individual's perception of their
skills, knowledge and experience
came through as an important factor in
deciding which activity to get involved
in and where their participation
might have the most impact; as one
interviewee commented:

*'...I think writing letters is actually
something I'm really good at; that's
probably something that I could put
my time into quite effectively.'*

Some interviewees spoke about a
process of evaluating the impact of
their participation and adapting their
engagement accordingly; for example,
one individual commented about a
consultation concerning the closure
of a local hospital that:

*'...was so poorly done that you could
say that's why I went on the march
in the end because I felt your voice
wasn't being heard as part of that
[consultation] thing.'*

As well as helping to determine
how an individual participates, our
research suggests that perception of
impact is a key determinant of whether
people sustain their participation.
Participation needs to fulfil the
meaning an individual ascribes to it;
they want to see that it is having the
impact they desire, for themselves,
their networks and communities, or
further afield.

3.4
Individual resources

Individual resources, including
people's abilities, capacity and
personal circumstances are vital to
whether they start and sustain their
participation. Resources, along with
opportunities, are enabling factors
that allow an individual to participate.
Together they determine an

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individual's relative power, which we understand as '*the ability people have to achieve their purposes, whatever these purposes happen to be*'[12]. As such, power is held by everyone, but in unequal amounts; for instance, wealth, levels of education, language fluency, experience, knowledge, confidence and sense of agency are unequally distributed among individuals and communities. The result is that some people are faced with more constraints and barriers to participation than others, and fewer resources with which to overcome them

Our analysis suggests that the resources that are important to an individual's participation can be divided into three groups: practical, learnt and felt.

3.4.1
Practical resources

Practical resources include an individual's time, money, access to transport and health.

Lack of time, either real or perceived, was an issue that was raised by many of our interviewees. They spoke about the pressures of everyday life and commitments that prevented them from starting an activity or increasing their level of involvement. Work or study and family commitments were often cited as reasons for not having the time to participate more, particularly for volunteering. In the case of family commitments, several interviewees spoke about caring commitments reducing their involvement or preventing them from participating. The illness of a family member can be a critical moment that triggers an individual to stop their participation:

'...my wife unfortunately suffers from Alzheimer's now quite badly, I'm a full time carer for her so I can't do the volunteering that I would love to do.'

Several interviewees talked about their involvement in a particular activity

being a reason they did not take part in another. Connected to this, some expressed the belief that they already did enough, while others said they would like to participate in other ways but did not have the time. A few interviewees also mentioned having to prioritise their participation, cutting down in some areas in order to do more or sustain their involvement in others.

Not having the time to participate seemed to mean a variety of things to interviewees. For some it was a very literal evaluation; they felt they had spent their time participating to the detriment of other aspects of their lives (see Section 2.6.4); for others it was based on more of a work-life-participation balance equation. It was apparent that some of our interviewees were very busy people, but still participated. Time considerations therefore have a differential impact on individuals' decisions whether or not to participate, though critical moments that free up or restrict a person's time can be key to triggering the start or end of a person's involvement.

Lack of money was cited as a barrier to participation particularly in reference to donating to charity and ethical consumerism:

'...if I could I probably would buy more organic things but I seem to spend my life time being skint.'

Lack of money was also a barrier for activities that required extensive travelling. Problems getting to and from sites of participation were raised as challenges by a number of our interviewees:

'I protested a few times in Liverpool... and I've been on a couple of Iraq war ones. I should really do Climate Camp and those ones, but they're down in London and I can't really justify travelling that far. It's quite expensive when I have no money.'

Particular problems included participants not having their own

transport, travel being too expensive or being required to travel after dark, particularly in areas where people felt unsafe at night. In a couple of cases, particularly in the rural fieldwork area, these issues were linked to a lack of services or facilities; in one case, a local bus service had been stopped, in another car parking space had been reduced.

Deteriorating physical health, linked to old age and periods of illness, was mentioned by a number of interviewees as the reason their level of participation was reducing or ceasing. For example, one interviewee spoke about the challenges that severe health problems had presented to her participation:

'At times my health is really, really challenging and I just physically can't do things that I want to do, which is really frustrating. Really frustrating.'

But this example also shows the powerful meaning participation can have for an individual; for this interviewee, being able to volunteer in spite of her severe health condition was a marker of what makes her the person she is:

'Sometimes... I won't be able to eat anything till about 10 or 11 o'clock at night; so [it is] a very physical challenge to me. And, for me, it's a mark of my ability to live my life by maintaining my ability to do these things. It's a marker for me. When I have to start cancelling things because of my health, I really feel I've lost a battle, so it's a real mark for me of my ability to overcome my health, and for it not to drive my life.'

Issues relating to emotional and mental health were also reasons for breaks or stops in participation. In a number of cases these were due to participation itself, resulting from fatigue or burnout from being overburdened.

12 Beetham, D, Blick, A, Margetts, H. and Weir, S. (2008) *Power & Participation in Modern Britain.* Liverpool: Democratic Audit.

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3.4.2
Learnt resources

Learnt resources include an individual's skills, knowledge and experience. While a number of interviewees spoke about being motivated to participate in order to develop their skills, knowledge and experience, a lack of these resources was also cited as a barrier to participation. A few interviewees, for example, who had migrated to the UK, spoke about the challenges associated with not being fluent in English:

'I sort of felt rejected... I'm offering my time to do things... but because English is my second language, it's difficult for me to convince some that, hey, I'm capable of doing that. So it took me a while to get an organisation which really wanted me.'

Not being computer or web literate was also raised by a couple of interviewees as being a barrier to participation, while developing skills in these areas was cited as an important aid to participation:

'I suppose it all set off from learning the computer. I couldn't do half these things without the computer.'

Many interviewees spoke about the skills, knowledge or experience that they could transfer from other parts of their lives (e.g. paid work) being important to them feeling able to participate:

'...it's the sort of stuff I've been doing for the last 20 years in part anyway so it's not difficult for me to do.'

The skills, knowledge and experience considered as important to their participation ranged significantly, from fairly general attributes, such as being a skilled communicator and being well organised, to very specific qualities such as understanding planning legislation, being a trained scientist or having experience of running a magazine. For those who have them, these specific skills and competencies can be a valued asset. However, they can also lead an individual to become overburdened with responsibility as others rely too heavily upon them.

3.4.3
Felt resources

Felt resources include an individual's confidence and sense of efficacy. Both influence whether and how an individual participates.

A few interviewees spoke about wishing to participate in entirely different activities or roles from their professional life , but many appeared to like the comfort of the familiar and preferred to be involved in activities they knew from past experience that they were capable of doing:

'...I felt confident that I could do that because it's the kind of experience I had doing my job.'

People's lack of confidence can prevent them from starting and deepening their participation. One interviewee spoke about having not had the confidence to participate in the past due to being overweight and fearing that people would judge her. Another spoke about her shyness, meaning she stayed on the fringes of a group rather than taking up an active organising role.

All three sets of resources – practical, learnt and felt – fluctuate across an individual's lifetime. An interviewee in her eighties commented that her confidence in her ability to participate had declined as she got older as she did not trust her memory as much. Another person spoke about how resources in all three categories had come together at a certain stage of his life, enabling him to participate more:

'...I think there's a certain age when you do feel you've got everything in place. You've got the knowledge, you've got the experience, you've got a bit of free time, you feel fairly confident about things, and therefore I think you could be able to do it.'

Participation can itself increase or generate these resources, creating a virtuous circle; an interviewee commented that:

'[Volunteering] probably increased my confidence, and the more I grew in confidence the more I was able to do more volunteering, and wanted to do more volunteering. Because obviously, the first time you go, it was awful, I was so nervous, and it prevents you from doing something.'

Some interviewees spoke about their involvement in an activity gradually building their confidence to increase their commitment or to try new things. Some of the stories we heard, showed that participation can have a deep and profound effect on an individual's life. Akash's story (page 21) is a powerful example of the impact a relatively small step into participation can have on an individual's life and their subsequent involvement. Through walking the dogs of his carer he met others in his neighbourhood, and he built a social network that was critical to him becoming deeply involved in the organisation of a community day.

But as highlighted above, a lack of confidence is a significant challenge to starting to participate in the first place. While the variation in levels of confidence and sense of efficacy can partly be explained by people having different personalities, the interviewees' stories suggests they are also to a significant extent linked to inequalities of learnt resources. An interviewee with a relatively high level of learnt resources highlighted:

'There's people's houses being knocked down, having land taken off them, they've got gaps round their windows that wind hails through. The only people you hear are the loud middle class people. [Why is that?] Because they organise, they naturally do it, they'll write letters and they know the system, they know how to work the system.'

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3.5
Relationships and social networks

An individual's participation is influenced by other people. Their relationships and social networks help to:

- shape an individual's personality, motivations and capacity

- trigger their involvement

- support them or prevent them from starting or sustaining their participation

- determine the likelihood of their participation being a success.

An individual's relationships are themselves a resource, which play an important role in determining how 'powerful' they are (i.e. how able they are of achieving their purposes). The people who are important to an individual's participation range from those closest to them, through to those they have regular contact with, such as colleagues and other participants, to people they do not directly know, but who lie in their wider social networks.

3.5.1
Close relationships

Interviewees all spoke about the influence of close relationships on how and why they participate, including parents, siblings, partners, children and friends.

Parents

Many interviewees spoke about how their parents had influenced their personality and identity, helping to shape if and how they participate. One interviewee, for example, spoke about her parents instilling in her the confidence to participate:

'I think probably just my family and my upbringing really has set the groundwork for it. Not even the political side of it but just having a lot of confidence and belief in myself.'

Our findings suggest that parents' direct involvement in activities is a very powerful form of influence on their children's current and future participation. Several interviewees shared activities (such as fundraising, charity work, church membership, sport, attending demonstrations, or participating in local politics) or interests (such as art, poetry, gardening, animals or maths) with their parents.

It is not, however, a prerequisite that parents are active participants themselves in order to motivate participation in their children: encouraging certain values and beliefs, political discussion and an interest or concern in social issues can be equally influential. A number of interviewees linked their values, beliefs or world view back to those of their parents. They referred to:

- religious faith

- specific political ideologies

- values, such as empathy, respect for others, belief in the importance of helping others, or social justice

- ways of approaching things, such as being open-minded, questioning or critical

- rules to live by:

  '...my mother taught me that you always go to where the shoe is pinching; do you know what I mean? Head for the place where there's difficulties.'

Parents also provided a key source of support for participation, particularly from childhood to early adulthood, including:

- financial (e.g. funding an individual while at university, meaning they do not have to work and have more time to participate)

- practical (e.g. transport to sporting events across the country)

- social networks (e.g. providing connections to people with influence or who share interests)

- knowledge about opportunities to participate.

There were also some examples of people using participation as either a form of rebellion against their parents or as an escape from a difficult home life:

'I've done a lot of volunteering, because it was the only way to get away from my stepdad and mum, was to go out and do volunteering, because I was scared everyday to go home.'

One interviewee spoke about having *'escaped'* to university from her controlling father and joining peace movements, commenting:

'This was about doing all the things my father wouldn't let me do.'

Partners and children

From early adulthood onwards, interviewees referred to their partners influencing or triggering their participation; examples ranged from the very tangible such as being encouraged to attend an animal welfare demonstration, to the less tangible, for instance an individual describing his wife as his *'conscience'*. The support of spouses or partners, whether practical (e.g. caring for children) or emotional, can also be important to whether participation is sustained. There were several references to partners acting as silent members of groups; they were not official members themselves but often helped out the person who was.

Partners and participation are not however always a happy marriage. Some of our interviewees spoke about one partner's participation leading to tensions within a relationship, due to their partner feeling it was causing them to neglect their relationship or family.

Interviewees also spoke about becoming involved in their children's schools or other organisations or groups their children were involved with (e.g. Brownies or Scouts, theatre groups, and sports clubs). But our research suggests that the nature of these types of participation means that they are unlikely to be sustained

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after a child's involvement ceases:

'I think my interest will wane probably as a [school] governor as my son leaves, my interest initially came from my son being at the school so I think after a couple of terms of governor, I think it's time to do something else again.'

Children often shift their parents' priorities and can redirect their participation away from other participatory activities, as an interviewee commented:

'...it's quite interesting that most of the people involved in [a local community organisation] are people who've not got children or whose children have grown up and left.'

Children can also prevent participation, with childcare duties presenting a barrier to involvement, particularly to the involvement of both parents in the same activity.

Friendships

Many of our interviewees mentioned getting involved through or involving their friends. This can be to the extent that several interviewees referred to the groups and networks through which they participate overlapping very closely with their social networks and friendship group.

Friends can also be an important source of motivation, support, encouragement, and even competition, which can enable an individual to sustain their involvement or cause them to deepen it:

'...if she [house mate] comes home and she's not as tired as me, then she'll think she needs to do more, or if she's really tired and I'm not that tired and I'm like "oh, I should do more". I guess we push each other subconsciously.'

Being asked (whether by close relationships or acquaintances) to participate emerged as one of the most important triggers to participation. One interviewee

reported that being asked to join in had helped him to overcome what he felt was a major barrier to getting involved:

'...to be honest, I prefer when they ask, because sometimes people are afraid to start. I think, oh, I want to do it, but do they need me?'

Participation can also lead to new friendships, which can encourage people to sustain their involvement, in spite of other unfavourable circumstances or a loss of interest, due to a sense of duty or obligation. But equally, there were examples of strong friendships or ties leading people to stop their participation when a close friend or mentor left. One interviewee stopped coaching at a local sports club because he didn't like the way the head coach had been treated:

'...it was, if I'm being honest, it was the way they treated people as in the head coach. I thought they treated him bad and... I'm not going to say he was my best friend or anything, but because he helped me get into it, that was part of my decision of not staying up there. I could have, I know a lot of other coaches who did [stay] but me, myself, I thought I was doing the right thing of maybe sticking loyal with people who'd helped me out.'

3.5.2
Wider social networks

Other participants can also provide a bridge between different activities and groups through their many memberships. These bridges can play an important role, linking an individual to wider social networks and broadening their participation. Interviewees sometimes identified community leaders or lynchpins that played this bridging role, including a university lecturer, vicar, a member of a political party and the elderly matriarch of the street. One interviewee referred to a key figure in

the community, telling how he learns of council meetings not through the council but through her; and if it were not for her, *'you wouldn't know what was going on.'*

Some interviewees also referred to themselves as being well networked, which they described as something that grows exponentially; once someone becomes connected to one network, it becomes easier to tap into the wider networks of other members, leading them to participate elsewhere. Section 4 will build on how this can create links between different activities in more detail. One interviewee commented on how social connectedness can be linked to the role that they have takes on within a group or organisation:

'...the more networked you become, the more natural it then becomes to take on those kinds of roles that benefit from having a network.'

Our research suggests that an individual's wider social networks help to explain how and why they participate. Previous research[13] into the effects of social networks has shown the importance of the make up, structure and density of an individual's broad social networks to many aspects of their lives. Similarly, our research demonstrates that the networks of an individual's friends, family, colleagues and other participants can be an invaluable resource that can determine whether they have the opportunity to participate and whether they are able to achieve their purposes.

An individual's wider social network (e.g. through paid work) can be called upon to give them access to resources, knowledge, connections and decision-makers. Experiences from our interviewees' stories of participation suggest that being well-connected can afford an individual better access to decision-makers and make it more likely that they will gain support for their ideas. One

13 Putnam, R. (2001) *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community.* New York: Simon & Schuster; Gaia, M, Neumark, T, and Broome, S. (2011) *Power Lines.* London: RSA, amongst others.

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interviewee, for instance, spoke about how a councillor, who attended the same mosque as him, helped to identify local sources of funding for a football team.

Our research confirms the findings of previous research on social capital: those with strong wider social networks and high levels of social capital have a higher degree of power than those without. This can entrench inequalities in participation (as those whose involvement has less impact are less likely to continue to participate) and wider life:

'Put bluntly I think certainly if you look at [area described by interviewees as fairly affluent]... there is a huge amount of social capital, there are a lot of people who've been in good solid middle-class professional jobs who've either retired or stepped down, have a lot of time, a lot of energy and a lot of social commitment. You get less of that in the old communities of [area described by interviewees as quite deprived] where the jobs have been predominantly manual jobs, people have done those and not had a professional network that links them in with other people other than their jobs and I think it is a different form of social connection.'

Interviewees also suggested that once decision-makers get to know a participant or group through their involvement in one issue, they are more likely to return to them for their input:

'We've encouraged local councillors to come and we have a monthly informal meeting in the local pub, 8.30 in [name of pub]... as you get to know the councillors, they tend to be more interested in what you think about other things that are happening.'

This can reinforce a divide between insiders and outsiders, making a relatively small group of insiders quite powerful in shaping a local agenda.

3.6
Groups and organisations

While some participation takes place on an individual basis, we found that most participation takes place within formal or informal groups and organisations, as these create opportunities for individuals to participate through linking people with similar interests and concerns, bringing together resources, and providing support. What groups and organisations do and how they operate will prompt people to get involved and sustain their participation.

Groups and organisations often provide a ready-made network or community around an issue or place. Participation within a group or organisation can therefore be a means to meet people who share common interests or who live within the local area. People often sustain their participation because they enjoy being involved in a particular activity and with a group of people. When groups and organisations work well our research suggests that they provide individuals with fun, friendship, companionship, a social life and a greater sense of (shared) efficacy.

Regardless of a group or organisation's size, formality or mandate, it is the way it operates and its culture that determines the quality of people's experiences of participation and whether they sustain their participation over time. As well as talking about the benefits of being a member of a group or organisation, our interviewees also spoke about relationship and structural problems they had experienced that put them off becoming or staying involved.

3.6.1
Relationships within groups

Insular or cliquey groups and organisations had caused some interviewees to stop their participation. They spoke about being made to feel unwelcome in some groups and organisations (often linked to issues

concerning *'back-stabbing'* and infighting), not being able to influence decisions, or not getting on with other participants.

Others referred to particular individuals or groups who dominated discussions or decision-making, leading quieter people to feel shut out and sometimes to leave. Participants suggested that simple gestures such as greeting new participants by name can be critical to making them feel welcome, and subsequently sustaining and deepening their participation:

'...the first contact person is the person who's going to make you feel welcome or unwelcome.'

A number of our interviewees recounted stories of being involved in groups where they felt that their involvement was neither needed nor appreciated, which prevented or stopped them from participating. Some spoke about feeling disempowered, disillusioned, frustrated or cynical about their involvement as they felt it made little difference. Interviewees also mentioned feeling undervalued or that their contribution was not recognised by groups or organisations, leading some of them to stop. Others spoke about feeling taken advantage of, particularly in the case of running after-school activities for children whose parents did not participate themselves, or show any appreciation.

Some interviewees spoke about feeling pressurised or cajoled into deepening their participation, causing some to become overburdened and stop their involvement. Several interviewees talked about being unable to say no when asked to take on responsibilities, leading in some cases to them becoming burnt out. This process is not always an explicit one, but often the result of implicit pressure:

'...we were sat in the group towards the end and they're saying "This post is coming up" and everybody [was] just sort of staring at me and

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you know for weeks I was just sat there, you know I just felt the walls closing in and it's got me. I was never pushed, I was kind of gently directed.'

An individual's participation can become a lot deeper for a lot longer than they initially intended due to these group dynamics. People mentioned taking on multiple roles on committees and/or having to stay in a role for longer than they desired. Sometimes it was clear that individuals were genuinely looking to reduce their involvement, but in other cases it seemed likely that their deep involvement was to an extent self-inflicted and a mark of pride or assertion of their value to a group or organisation. Either way, an individual's role title often did not reflect the breadth of their duties.

3.6.2
Group structures
and processes

The timing and flexibility of participation opportunities emerged as being important to whether involvement begins and is sustained. Some of the interviewees referred to being excluded from participating with a particular group or organisation due to when meetings were held; specifically, some older interviewees talked about evening meetings stopping them attending. Some people spoke about liking their involvement to be flexible, in terms of when, how much or where (e.g. from home or another location) they were involved in order that they could fit it around other responsibilities. They spoke about the appeal of time-limited involvement with no expectations of further involvement.

Interviewees mentioned problems they had encountered regarding organisational processes, such as meetings being poorly run, too formal, technical or time-consuming. Meetings with no clear direction and which do not lead to action were cited as being a particular problem:

'I'm not a big major fan of committee meetings because I think a lot of them are a lot of chat for not a lot of outcome... there are a lot of meetings that you don't need I find...'

Others spoke about issues relating to poor or non-existent record-keeping, meaning verbal promises were made but never followed up. A few also mentioned processes such as CRB checks presenting a barrier to starting an activity due to the paperwork and time involved.

The need for groups to have a shared aim and for members to get along was highlighted, but it was suggested that this cannot and should not be forced. Groups may break apart when there is a divergence of aims, but this was not perceived necessarily as a bad thing. However, some of our interviewees spoke about how conflict or *'bad blood'* within a group had impacted on their involvement or stopped individuals from working together. There were several references to personal politics and conflicts, power dynamics, hassle or pressure turning individuals off participating in a particular group or organisation, or a particular role, such as sitting on a committee. Interviewees asserted the importance of effective leadership and of having an outlet or process through which to manage conflict:

'There was a little bit of a, well, how can I say it, clash of characters, at one stage, yeah, at one point during that time which was really not very nice, and I was blamed for something which I didn't actually do, and that was all, it all was a bit yeuch... I've always tried just to keep it efficient, keep it clean, keep it running happily, nicely, you know, you want a nice atmosphere. When people, issues that people brought up, I was trying to make sure that they would get heard, and sometimes I felt like I ended up sort of in the middle, between different viewpoints...'

There did not emerge from our interviews a right way to organise a group or organisation to achieve

a clear direction or shared group aims; some interviewees talked about preferring a consensual approach to decision-making within a group, while others asserted the need to have a leader who is decisive and who can bring about organisational change. Benefits and challenges were associated with both hierarchical and non-hierarchical groups and organisations, and demonstrate the need to have a mixture of personalities and styles within groups.

Some interviewees also mentioned how the lack of support or personal development opportunities had caused them to stop or consider stopping their involvement. When support was provided it came in many forms, including education or training, access to opportunities, practical (e.g. advice, financial or in-kind contributions, job references), emotional or psychological, access to social networks and friendship.

3.7
Local environment and place

The characteristics of a place can influence the ways in which people view opportunities to participate and shape the way in which individuals get involved. They can provide the context in which groups thrive or wither, or where opportunities to participate are plentiful and diverse or sparse and narrow. Local environment and place affect the way people interact, and the opportunities they have access to.

The context in which participation does or does not take place varies across and within areas. We found that four categories of factors within an individual's local environment or place are important to if and how they participate:

• local sites of participation

• features and perceptions of place and community

• local political culture

• local priority issues.

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3.7.1
Local sites of participation

Local institutions, organisations, groups, venues and events offer opportunities for participation (see Section 2.4 for the different sites of participation identified in our three fieldwork areas). They can also encourage an individual to participate by providing support and building or strengthening social networks.

Schools, colleges and universities

Schools emerged as an important institution for triggering participation, particularly in connection to schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award. While individuals may not continue to be involved in the same way after leaving school, it can give them an early experience of participation and the confidence to become involved in activities later in life. Educational institutions such as schools and universities are also important for giving individuals access to different points of view, information and experiences, which can help to shape their world view.

'It probably starts back in high school, kind of form leader. I represented my class in school and any kind of issues that came about from my peers, from students.'

Religious institutions

Religious institutions (e.g. churches and mosques) were vital to some of our interviewees' participation, to the extent that their involvement revolved entirely around them. While faith can be an important shaping factor of an individual's identity and values (see Section 3.3.2-3), the interviews suggest that it is the religious community that is often even more critical to participation. Attached to religious institutions is often a strong, welcoming and safe network, based on a shared belief and/or sense of community, which can provide a hub for participation:

'...I do go to church to practise my faith, but again, it's more of a social thing as well, it's to get to know people, to help out.'

One interviewee spoke about the effect of his conversion to Islam on his involvement in the local community, commenting:

'It's been an absolute catalyst. That's not to say it was the only reason, but I don't recall being community involved before being a Muslim.'

Community hubs

In all three fieldwork areas, sites that served as multi-purpose hubs – providing spaces for groups to meet, fostering interaction between groups, supporting neighbourhood-level social networks, and linking different groups, organisations and activities – came across as being particularly valuable resources for participants. Staff and participants in these community hubs could serve as brokers, linking individuals to groups and projects. Two characteristics seemed to be important to their success: firstly, that they were run by the people who use them and secondly, that they did not become monopolised by a particular group of people, as this can be off-putting for others and prevent links emerging between different groups and communities.

Other sites

Job centres, GPs, advice services, and volunteer centres were cited by a number of our interviewees as providing routes into participation, particularly volunteering, by highlighting opportunities and recommending involvement as a means towards an end (e.g. increasing employability, improving mental health or developing language skills):

'Thankfully he [an adviser at a job centre] *was someone that kind of took the bull by the horns, one of the good advisers I'd say and he just got on the phone straight away to this volunteer centre and said, you know, "can we book an appoint-ment?"'*

Recreational spaces

Spaces such as music venues, sports clubs and parks, and community events (e.g. coffee afternoons, street parties, summer fetes and sport clubs' annual events) and virtual spaces, such as online forums, provided a platform for interaction between different individuals and groups, building the networks that can trigger and enable participation in the fieldwork areas.

These spaces can, however, also be a source of tension and conflict that can isolate and divide people. Each area had its own stories about conflict over contested spaces, where there were conflicting views between individuals and groups over such questions as how they should be used, who should get priority access, who should run them, and whether they should remain open. Conflicts ranged from disputes over the use of green space, for example, whether people should be allowed to have barbeques in a park or whether it should be used for playing football or sunbathing, to disputes between those who wanted to protect undeveloped land and developers.

The participation of some individuals and groups can determine the prevalence, accessibility and inclusivity of sites of participation. For example, some interviewees were involved in campaigning against the closure of local public services or spaces, others were involved in renovating community buildings, and some founded or organised groups on which the participation of others depends.

3.7.2
Features and perceptions of place and community

A range of features and perceptions of place and community provided opportunities and presented barriers to participation within a locality.

Levels of transience

Long-term residents who know a place, its people, its organisations, its issues and how to communicate in an area, were considered critical to participation. High levels of transience, particularly in one of our fieldwork areas that had

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experienced some significant demographic changes, was cited by interviewees as a barrier to participation, as people are less likely to have local knowledge or have strong social networks within the area. This was to the extent that some of our interviewees referred to the area as being in decline:

'...I get on with most people but it's not as good as it was. Everybody knew everybody else but... they moved out or moved into homes or died...'

Levels of hostility

Linked to the former point, hostility or resentment between neighbouring communities, particularly where an area is in transition, was identified as a barrier to participation. This came through as a particular issue in one of our fieldwork areas where permanent residents had been replaced by a growing student population. However, for some this motivated them to participate, either to oppose the change or to help overcome the hostility.

'...I just wanted to kind of be involved in something that I can give back to the community, because there is the whole stigma of students in [the community]...'

Levels of commuters

Commuting reduces the time individuals have available to participate, as well as potentially limiting the likelihood that people have strong social networks within their local community. People who worked outside their home area were more likely to socialise outside as well, meaning they were less likely to have strong ties to their neighbours or local community, which Section 3.5 showed can be critical to an individual starting to participate.

Urban design

The built environment in which people live can determine how likely they are to know or have significant contact with others in their community:

'...it's very much who you meet in the lift, who you meet walking across the car park and who you're on nodding terms with.'

One interviewee spoke about detached or dispersed housing, which meant that people were unlikely to meet their neighbours. Another spoke about the main entrance to tower blocks being a good place to leave posters, leaflets, notices and newsletters to inform people of opportunities as many people would see them, while this was not the case for low-rise flats or houses.

Risk

The perceived and actual levels of risk in a place is important to whether individuals feel able to participate, particularly after dark. Several interviewees spoke about feeling unable to get to and from an activity due to high perceived levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in an area.

3.7.3
Local political culture

Opportunities to participate within a place are influenced by its political landscape. Several interviewees from the inner-city fieldwork area mentioned having moved to the city and being struck by the size and strength of the activist community, as well as the cultural diversity of the city. For them, it felt like a place where they could feel at home in their views and lifestyles, unlike the more conservative places where they had grown up.

Some places develop a reputation for being 'political'; for example, Liverpool's working-class politics were mentioned by one interviewee as an important influence in her politicisation. The politics of a place can be self-reinforcing, as people with similar world views and lifestyles cluster together.

In political terms, the clustering together of likeminded people often creates safe seats, where one political party regularly receives a large majority of the vote. There was a common view among our interviewees

that safe seats do not encourage public participation, as people do not feel that their involvement will make a difference:

'...you do feel sometimes you could vote for the local hedgehog and it wouldn't actually matter.'

There was a sense from some of our interviewees that the possibility of political change can prompt people to get involved or vote:

'...we've just had a shift in local government and it seems like it's maybe more worth getting involved here because there's a fight to be had...'

3.7.4
Local priority issues

The emergence of a local issue that an individual considers to be a priority can trigger them to start to participate. In general, our interviewees seemed more ready to become involved in local level public participation in order to preserve features of their locality rather than to change them:

'We have had instances in the past where there have been proposals to do things in the area where we lived, come and chop down trees, this sort of thing, and we were aggrieved by that and actually did take action against that at a very local level and stopped them doing that, it was unnecessary.'

Local priority issues that interviewees spoke about included resistance to a school closure, a 'private finance initiative', a new housing development, a change to the local school system, a hospital closure, tree-culling, the introduction of wheelie bins, and the opening of a gourmet food outlet. Whereas social and individual participation often seemed to be integrated within the grain of people's lives, formal public participation was not embedded in their everyday life in the same way.

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People's distrust, cynicism and disillusionment with politics and with democratic institutions could mean that their involvement in public participation is more likely to be reactive – responding to a decision or a perceived injustice – which can reinforce existing views. The research suggests that more reactive forms of public participation (e.g. a campaign on a local issue), under the right conditions, can transform into more proactive forms of participation.

For example, in an area bordering one of our fieldwork areas, the local council planned to sell a redundant school building to a developer, to be converted into flats. In opposition, local residents formed a trust, which successfully bought the building to convert it into an enterprise and arts centre, including a community centre, incubator for small businesses, café and arts centre. This example of community action depended upon residents in the area having a certain level of social capital. An interviewee highlighted the difference between the residents of this more *'middle-class'* area (where he lives himself) and more deprived neighbouring areas:

'...many of us have had years of being able to write applications... you do have to be able to put your proposals down on a piece of paper and many of us are well versed in being able to do that, so for us, filling a four-page form saying what you want the money for, how are you going to spend it and wanting all sorts of information about your demography and so on, is bread and butter. For other groups that might be quite challenging and quite difficult to do and I think that probably again is where this sort of middle-class enclave... benefits because we can play the system.'

3.8
Wider societal and global influences and events

An individual and their opportunities to participate are influenced by the era, culture and wider societal context in which they live and have lived. This context is made up of political, economic, social and environmental factors, which also help to shape people's motivations and resources. Personal experience beyond people's local area played a key role in building connections to wider issues.

3.8.1
National context

National context influences people's participation. A number of our interviewees, for example, spoke about the MPs' expenses scandal and linked this to some strong opinions about politicians and the value of engaging with them. There were also references to the economic pressure that the current recession has put on places of participation such as pubs, clubs and organisations.

Interviewees commonly referred to particular national events that triggered them to participate, such as protests against the poll tax, capitalism and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. For some, experiences linked to these national events had shaped their world view and participation in the future. An interviewee recounted his experience of a police horse charge at a protest he attended:

'We were just standing there in an innocent crowd and one wally threw a brick at the local Conservative Club window, and suddenly we got charged by horse mounted police, and this woman with a baby almost got trampled. That politicised me basically at that point.'

3.8.2
Social and political movements

A range of social and political movements were also influential, including the feminist, suffragette, peace, trade union, anti-capitalist and environmental movements. While some people's commitment to particular social or political movements endures over time, some of our interviewees spoke about moving between movements according to the priority issue of the time.

Several interviewees referred to periods of time that had shaped their participation; the 1960s were cited by some as a particularly influential political time. In two of our fieldwork areas, some interviewees who came of age during Margaret Thatcher's time as Prime Minister and during a period of recession, seemed to have been profoundly affected and politicised as a result of that experience in a way that has influenced their participation since:

'I think there was sort of through the '80s and into the '90s there was this whole kind of like... and it grew up out of mass unemployment I think. There's this whole kind of alternative culture thing, squatting and music and you know, and signing on because people were sort of... you were skint so you sort of created your own support networks.'

3.8.3
Long-term societal and global trends

Interviewees spoke indirectly about the effects of a range of long-term societal and global trends on how they and others participate.

- **Social norms**
  The shift towards greater individualism means many people do not know or interact with their neighbours and social networks within areas have weakened.

- **Communities**
  Ties to particular communities of place have loosened as many people no longer live, study, socialise and work in the same place.

- **Mobility**
  Participation can be further afield as people's mobility has generally increased.

- **Technology**
  New forms of participation and social

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interaction have been enabled by technological developments, with a growth in communities of interest facilitated by the internet.

3.9
Conclusions

Our research has found that people have differing and multiple motivations for participating; these include helping others, seeking influence or wanting new social relationships, and that motivations are shaped in part by an individual's personality and identity, and their values, beliefs and world view. People will participate in ways that have meaning and value to them and through which they believe they can have an impact. If an individual does not identify with a particular cause or activity, reducing the barriers to them becoming involved is likely to make little difference.

These personal motivations help to create the conditions in which participation can happen, but it usually takes a trigger to get started. We found three main triggers for participation:

• an experience or emotion such as anger at a decision, a threat, or wanting to improve something locally

• a life event such as a new relationship, retirement, ill-health, moving area or having children

• an outside influence such as a natural disaster, hearing about something for the first time, or just being asked

For some, these triggers are just a passing influence; for others these emerge as critical moments in their lives – turning points for their future as well as specific motivations for how they participate.

Our findings show that these drivers of participation (personal motivations and triggers) are tempered by people's access to:

• practical resources (e.g. time, money, health and access to transport)

• learnt resources (e.g. skills, knowledge and experience)

• felt resources (e.g. confidence and sense of efficacy).

Lack of access to resources can reduce people's ambitions and expectations of their own participation.

Family and friends also affect the extent to which people are inclined to participate through the role participation plays during their upbringing and the shaping of their personality, identity, values, beliefs and world view. Wider social networks also emerged as being important to whether and how individuals participate, and the success of their participation.

Our findings highlight, as other studies have, the importance of strong bonds within groups (bonding social capital) as well as between groups (bridging social capital), to all areas of an individual's life, including their participation. Many interviewees greatly valued the social ties generated while participating. Our research suggests building and strengthening social networks can lead to greater participation by linking people to new opportunities and sources of support.

The social and collective dimension of participation is reflected in the fact that much participation takes place within groups and organisations – of various sizes and with various degrees of formality. Once an individual starts participating, the quality of their experience becomes particularly important to whether they continue, including the extent to which they feel they are making a difference and having an impact, whether they feel their contribution is valued, and the quality of the social bonds with other participants.

When talking about their reasons for stopping their participation, our interviewees typically spoke about practical or experiential considerations or a trigger such as a life event (moving area, having to care for a relative, etc.). A few

common characteristics were identified as being critical to groups or organisations working well and providing positive experiences of participation that will help sustain an individual's participation in the future:
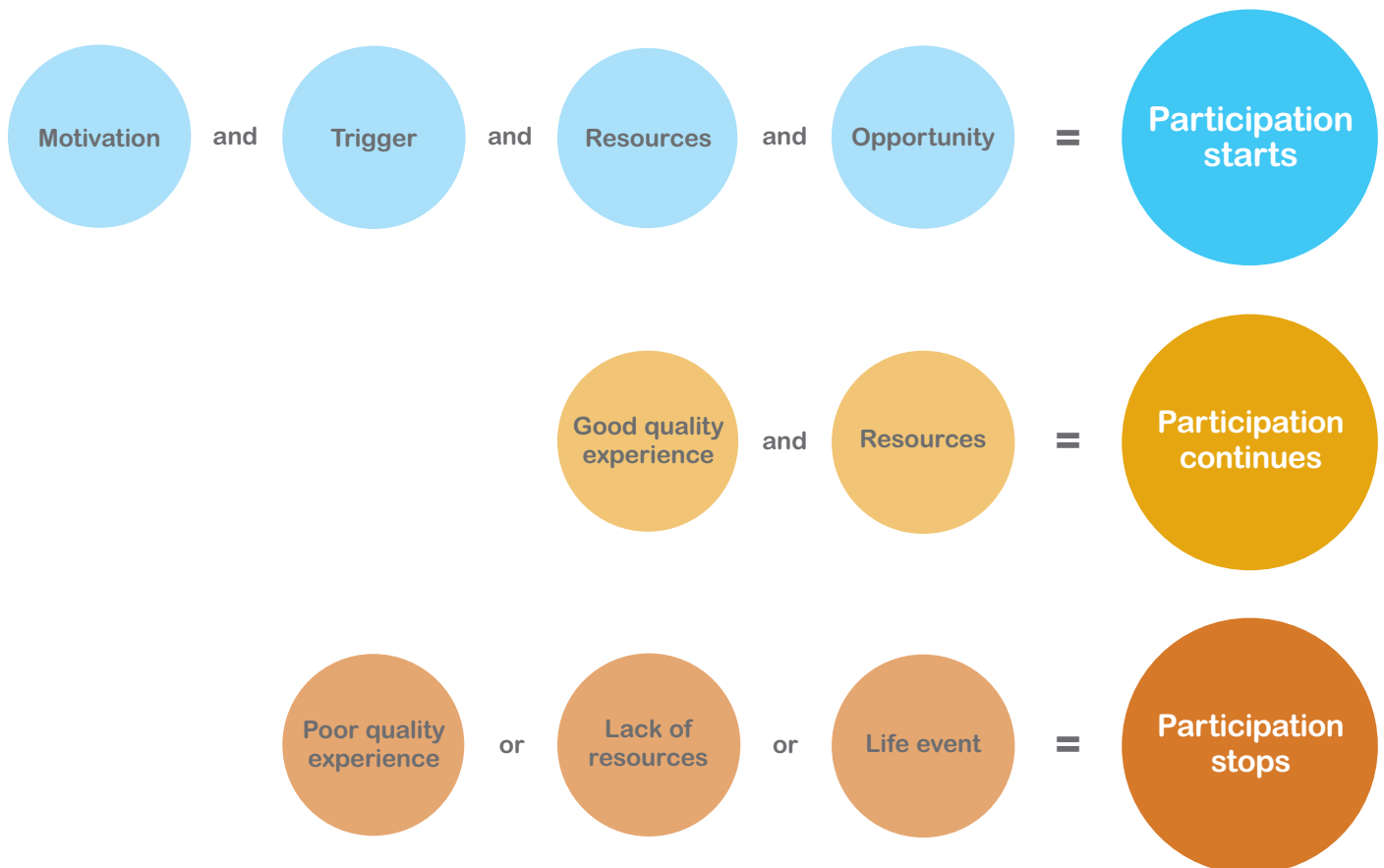
• Individuals need to feel that their help or involvement is needed, valued and meaningful.

• While being asked can be an important and positive route into participation, feeling pressurised or cajoled can put people off.

• Individuals need to feel that their participation within a group is contributing towards an aim they share.

• Groups need a process for addressing conflict – whether formal or informal – in order to ensure participants feel able to continue participating when conflict does arise.

• Groups and initiatives need to feel open and accessible to an individual in order for participation to begin and continue.

• Groups need to have purposeful meetings in order to ensure individuals feel their efforts are worthwhile.

• Individuals need to be able to access support, develop relationships and enjoy their involvement.

Our research demonstrates the importance of institutions, organisations, groups, venues and events in creating an environment in which participation can flourish and in providing the conditions and opportunities for an individual to translate their motivation to participate into action. Public, private and voluntary and community organisations and institutions can enable participation by providing resources and support, and in some cases, bridging groups and communities through their everyday contacts with local people. However, any attempts to encourage participation must take into account

differing local contexts, as the nature and features of place and community, including resources, the local political culture and local priority issues, also play a key part in how and why people participate.

The different elements that explain why an individual starts, continues or stops participating are summarised in Figure 6.

Figure 6:
The participation equation
– why participation starts, continues or stops

| Motivation | **and** | Trigger | **and** | Resources | **and** | Opportunity | **=** | **Participation starts** |

| | | | | Good quality experience | **and** | Resources | **=** | **Participation continues** |

| | | | | Poor quality experience | **or** | Lack of resources | **or** | Life event | **=** | **Participation stops** |

04
Links and patterns in people's participation

Jonathan's story

Jonathan is aged 55-65. He and his wife set up a rescue charity for wild animals in 1975 and have been heavily involved ever since. The critical moment for him and his wife's participation came four years into their marriage, nearly 30 years ago. He was taking their dog for a walk and the dog pulled him down a slope to a bird's nest that had two baby birds inside. He took them home and tried to find help for them, without success:

'Couldn't find no help at all, the RSPCA said they'll never survive, just let them die, we weren't prepared to do that, so we battled on and saved them and they turned out to be two beautiful goldfinches and so that [I] realised that you know, these creatures can get help in the right place... So that's how it started, our interest of wildlife rescue started if you like, it's my dog's fault!'

From this point until 1999, the couple ran a wildlife rescue charity from their home. In 1999 someone working for the council asked if a local country park could give them a piece of land that was formerly for pets. They had room for six aviaries and the council asked them to take over the running of it because they *'couldn't afford to keep it and said we'd make a better job of it'.*

Jonathan was a lorry driver, but retired due to ill-health. His health condition meant that he had to stop working five years ago but could spend more time supporting the charity. Jonathan is completely dedicated to the charity. He has put a huge amount of time, energy and money into it and he feels as if his children have suffered because of it. Being an ambulance service for injured wildlife meant that he could get called out at any time of the day or night, and that he and his wife no longer took their two daughters camping at the weekend, or on day trips or holidays.

Jonathan remembers the finances being so bad at times that he had to go around to all the places where they had collection boxes attempting to get enough money together to buy the animals' food, and owing money to the Inland Revenue. One of his daughters remembers the bailiffs coming round to the house and gets upset when members of the public who use the rescue service are demanding and ungrateful, because of how much the family has invested in the charity. The fortunes of the charity turned in 2008 when someone who had seen Jonathan giving a lecture about the charity died and left some money to them. Their charity is now in the black financially and employs six staff. The love that Jonathan and his wife have for wild animals has kept them going:

'...what's made us carry on is the rewards you get...You can tell by the look in their eyes whether they want to live, and that gives you the will to make them want to live, and forget about all modern drugs and techniques, it's... the love, the care and the freedom these animals get from it...'

Jonathan has been to several public meetings over the years, (e.g. one about a geese cull and others about planning). However, he feels that they were a *'waste of time'* and doesn't go to meetings any more because he feels disillusioned: *'a lot of things are already pre-empted'.* He has had similar experiences with local politicians, having contacted them and had empty promises given to him and people (MPs and councillors) not getting back to him. He always votes, and thinks everyone should, even if it is to express dissatisfaction with the choices on offer.

The energy and commitment Jonathan and his wife have dedicated to wild animals has been recognised: in 2003 they had lunch with the Queen and Prince Philip and in 2005 they each received an MBE.

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4.1
Introduction

Links between people's participatory experiences are at the heart of this project. This section explores whether connections exist between different forms of participation, and what triggers movement between them. By investigating the connections between different participatory activities, and by looking at patterns in people's participation over their lives, we are able to explore this question in depth

Understanding links and people's pathways through participation matters because if organisations and policy-makers want to encourage opportunities for participation, it is imperative to understand the motivating and enabling factors that sustains people's involvement over time. Through this analysis, we are able to shed light on questions about people's pathways through participation by considering whether participants spill over from one type of participation to another. We are also able to challenge assumptions about a natural, linear or automatic progression through a ladder of engagement, whereby people's level of involvement and responsibility increases over time from carrying out occasional menial tasks, such as sorting stock or cleaning, to taking on more technical or responsible roles, such as being the treasurer of a charity or becoming a local councillor.

This section explores the links and patterns in people's participation in both the breadth of their involvement and the depth of their involvement. Section 4.2 looks at the links that exist between the multiple participatory activities that people get involved in, while Section 4.3 explores the different intensities in which people participate over their lifetime. We introduce examples of interviewees' stories as a whole in this section as a way to illustrate the links between activities and over time.

4.2
Involvement in multiple participatory activities: models and motivations

Most of the people we interviewed were involved in a range of activities that spanned the broad categories of social, public and individual participation. Given the fluidity between these broad categories, and the scope for very different forms of participation within each broad category, this section looks more specifically at multiple involvements within participatory activity types, i.e. involvement in one or more of the seven activity types (see Figure 2 page 16):
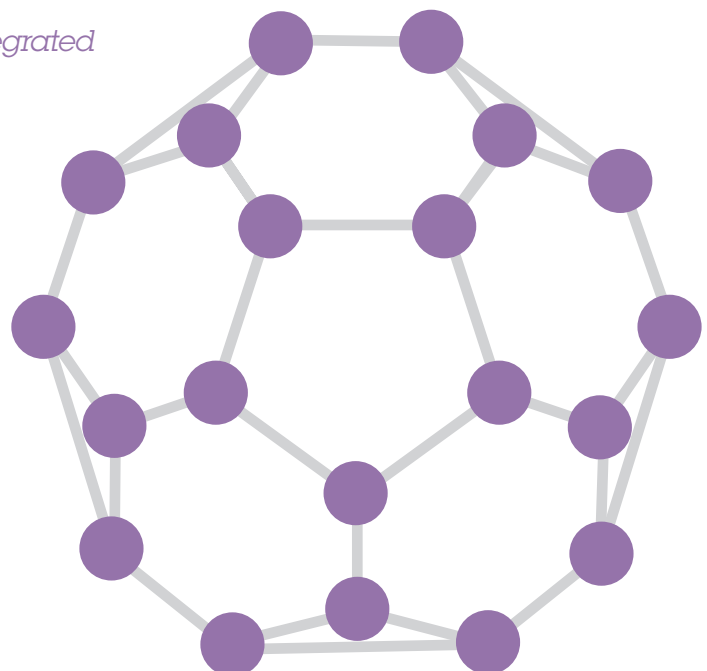
- political and public decision-making

- campaigning, lobbying and direct action

- service to others and the environment

- mutual aid/self help

- fundraising and giving

- ethical consumerism

- sports, arts and hobbies

Figure 7:
Model 1 - integrated involvement

Among people involved in multiple activities we identified three broad patterns, or models, of involvement: integrated involvement (Model 1), core-peripheral involvement (Model 2) and unlinked multiple involvement (Model 3).

In Model 1 (see Figure 7), participation is integral to the way in which participants live their life and express themselves. There is fluidity between the different activities in which they are involved, and they are often deeply committed to the organisations, activities and people who they participate with and for, giving a considerable amount of time and energy to them.

Their participation is clearly guided by a set of values or beliefs of which their participation is an important expression. In this model, the circles represent a participatory activity or action and the lines represent the links between the activities.

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In Model 2, people have a core, or primary, activity and get involved in others in order to support or complement their core activity. Often heavily engaged in one activity, these participants get involved in other activities when it furthers their interest or the interest of the organisation or group they are part of. The driving force for core-peripheral type involvement is less often about a value or belief system, as in Model 1, and more commonly motivated by an interest, an issue or a skill set.

Figure 8 illustrates this type of involvement in various participatory activities, with the central purple circle representing the primary, core activity and the smaller purple circles linked by the arrows illustrating peripheral involvements that are off-shoots of the core activity.

Some people were involved in many activities, but their involvement in these activities was unlinked. Model 3 (see Figure 9) illustrates different participatory activities, represented by the purple circles that are not directly connected or joined up. People whose participation falls into this model may have several things that they are passionate about and involved in, but that are unconnected.

We know that people are complex and have various motivations. Sometimes these motivations lead people towards specific activities, for example, the person who gives to the local hospice because it looked after a friend and they want to give something back and who manages a local allotment because they are well organised and like gardening. These two activities both count in our understanding of participation, and both are important, but they are not clearly or directly connected to each other.

Unlinked multiple involvements can be explained through the many factors set out in Section 3 and are therefore not explored further in this section, which is concerned with links and patterns in people's pathways through participation.

Figure 8:
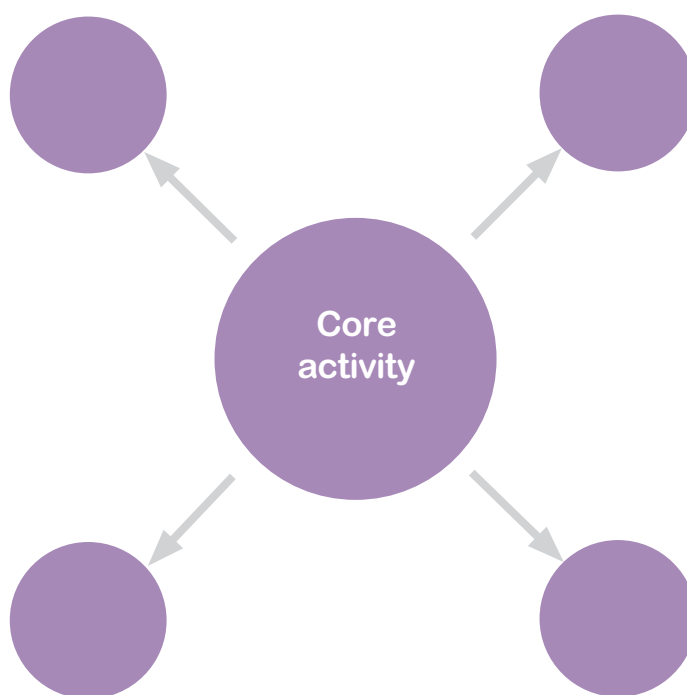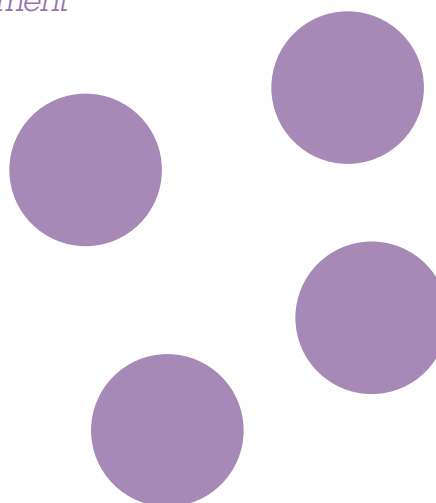*Model 2 - core-peripheral involvement*

Figure 9:
Model 3 - unlinked multiple involvement

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Our research indicates that the linking factors, as indicated by the lines in Model 1 and the arrows in Model 2, between the different activities is a dominant motivation. The dominant, or overarching, motivations that link multiple participatory activities fall into four main categories:

- **Values and beliefs** – a set of beliefs or principles, both secular and faith-driven, that people live out through participating in a range of activities.

- **Issue** – a specific issue that drives people to get involved in additional types of participation.

- **Interest** – a general interest, curiosity or passion that leads people into different types of participatory activities.

- **Skills** – a set of skills that people develop, both professionally and at an amateur level that they put into practice across their involvement in a range of participatory activities.

These four categories are by no means mutually exclusive, but they are a guide to the dominant linking motivation among interviewees who were involved in a range of linked activities.

4.2.1
Values and beliefs

Four clear guiding belief systems that underpinned and linked a number of interviewees' involvement were evident: a belief in social justice, religious faith, neighbourhood and community and a concern for the global environment and human rights. All interviewees whose dominant motivating factor was values and beliefs are best represented by Model 1 (integrated involvement).

Social justice
Without exception, the people we interviewed who were involved heavily in activist groups or networks, and many of the people who had been involved in numerous protests, were motivated by an anti-establishment world view and were concerned about social and

economic inequality. The motivation that linked their activities was a highly attuned sense of social justice that is lived through social activism.

Alma's story (see Box 1) demonstrates how someone's political views and belief system can be lived out through a range of involvements across different participatory activities, from leisure and recreation to mutual aid, from campaigning and direct action to service to others. Alma's involvement is integrated through her public, professional and private life. The driving motivational factor running through her involvement is her belief in social justice and in '*sticking up for what's right.*'

Box 1
Alma's story

'*I'd decided to teach I suppose for political reasons, I wanted to be some kind of enabling force to help working-class kids get more out their lives because obviously the grammar school system that I went through was totally unfair.*'

Aware of class relations from an early age, Alma became actively political at university in the 1960s through her involvement in the anti-apartheid movement, and the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. After university, she went to the United States for a year and volunteered at a radio station and at a nursery for the children of members of an African-American revolutionary leftist organisation.

When she returned to the UK, she became involved in Chilean refugee groups and the Anti-Nazi league. She had two daughters and then moved towards more community-

orientated activities in community associations. A trained teacher, Alma became a National Union of Teachers representative, which then led to her joining the Socialist Workers' Party. She is currently involved in various activities including a community consortium, an action group against the closure of a local school, the management committee for the local community day, a friends of a local cinema group and less formal activities like visiting an elderly neighbour.

'*...it's the hard core of us that are committed to sticking up for what's right, like this area needs more playing fields; [the school] belongs to the community it shouldn't be knocked down and made into a supermarket or made into executive flats that local people can't afford... or even worse more student flats, which we don't want.*'

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Many of the people that we spoke to who were not accessed via activist networks or groups, such as Alma, but were recruited via a more stereotypical volunteering role, had an explicitly value-driven quality to their participation, which also tapped into a highly attuned sense of social justice that linked different activities in which they were involved.

One interviewee, for example, volunteered for a local theatre and was heavily involved in other organisations, from Women's Aid and Animal Aid to the Royal College of Nurses and being a trustee of a sustainable living centre. She had been involved in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and in socialist politics when she was younger. She made sense of her many involvements through a feeling that, *'you've got to get inside it to change it'* and through a sense of responsibility to others around her:

> *'I have always had a culture within my home that you help people... that people are the reason for getting up in the morning... and unless you have interaction which is of a positive nature between people and you take social responsibility for how our society functions, then you can't say anything about it.'*

These examples are of people who are operating within what might be called a social justice paradigm. The dominant linking motivation across their many involvements is an explicitly political view of the world, and a belief that they can do something about it: they are social change agents, and their involvement speaks to the transformative, active, driving change dimensions reflected in our original participatory framework (see Figure 2 page 17).

Religious faith
Religious faith also provided a clear guiding belief system that motivated and linked some interviewees' multiple involvements. This connected people's participatory activities from formal volunteering to charitable giving, ethical consumerism and fundraising,

and sometimes linked to public participation through having contact with local representatives.

Giving a fixed proportion of one's wealth to charity (a tithe in Christianity, zakat in Islam) was a norm among people of all faiths that we spoke to. More informal ways of helping to care for neighbours and family was something that people who talked about their faith as a driver for their participation did. Some people made sense of the different activities in which they participated in terms of a calling from God and a sense of duty to God or a higher deity.

Interviewees cited the facilitative role of the church, mosque or synagogue in linking them to a whole range of activities, including ethical consumerism, charitable giving, fundraising, campaigning, contacting political representatives, leisure and recreation and to various voluntary positions within the institution as well as links to other (non-religious) voluntary and community organisations.

The role that religious institutions can play in linking people to political representatives was also evident from the interviews. One interviewee, for example, talked about meeting a local councillor at his mosque and through talking with him being made aware of funding that the interviewee accessed to support the football team he had set up. Besides linking in directly with political representatives, religious institutions can provide a link to other statutory bodies and committees. One interviewee, for example, sits on the local standing advisory council on religious education in the area, which was facilitated via her church.

In terms of social participation, interviewees talked about the role of the church as linking them with different activities both inside the formal structures of the church (e.g. as a lay reader, member of the parochial church committee, flower arranger or bell-ringer) as well as with other faith-based groups. One interviewee, for example, spoke of his involvement

with a cluster of committees and organisations connected to the Methodist church or his faith more generally, including Action for Children, the Methodist Homes for the Aged committee, and Christian Aid.

Neighbourhood and community
For several interviewees, the dominant linking motivation that connects their many involvements was a commitment to the local community and neighbourhood. This commitment linked people's activities in a range of different groups, including tenants' and residents' associations, community action groups and local preservation societies. Interviewees' involvement in these groups and organisations at a local level was often linked to public participation and contact with public officials and representatives, for example by going to area forums, local consultations and local government scrutiny panels.

In the suburban fieldwork area strong links existed between the local historical society and residents' associations, and between residents' associations and other groups such as the District Civic Trust, friends of parks groups and local groups campaigning about improving the local area. The boundaries between one group and another were sometimes blurred because the people who make up the different groups were often the same, with similar interests and concerns. People belonging to residents' associations were aware of the different structures through which they could have a dialogue with local representatives, and the historical society tried to send a representative to relevant local authority scrutiny panels, with residents' association members being core attendees at the local area forums.

Robert's story (see Box 2) demonstrates these linked multiple involvements, which is underpinned by a deep commitment to his local environment and neighbourhood, and facilitated by groups and campaigns, some of which Robert initiated himself.

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Box 2
Robert's story

'I see life as you have to look after the birds in your garden don't you, and feed them and so on. I've got a pond with newts in, these things matter a lot.'

Robert is a recently retired town planner and has lived in the same house for over 20 years. He is a longstanding residents' association member, has started several local campaigns, for example to establish a 20-mile-an-hour zone, and is passionate about the local area and the environment. Robert was instrumental in getting the local authority to put in place a tree management strategy and in making the case for his local area to be designated a conservation area:

'The [council] scored each area according to quality and so on and the need for it and it was below the line so we thought we've got to keep plugging away. We suggested that we need to meet with the local politicians, cabinet member of the environment and so on, got together a small group of residents

from the residents' association and plugged away at that and in April of this year the council – and I think it was probably an electoral thing – actually in February of this year they decided to make the area a conservation area.'

He is a member of two friends of parks groups, attends local

area forums and council scrutiny panels as part of his role on the residents' association. He is very well networked locally and knows councillors and people in senior positions in his and neighbouring local authorities, partly through working for local authorities for a lot of his professional life. In the last year he has set up and is running a community orchard. Robert is also a member of the local historical society and the Green Party. He always votes and is a former Labour party member. He is a vegetarian, thinks fair trade is important and tries to use the local shops. He and his wife donate to charity (money and clothes) and will leave most of what they own to charity in their will.

Box 3
Simon's story

Simon is a white British male, who is aged between 25-34 and is currently studying for a PhD. After previously working as part of a bicycle repair/DIY collective when visiting the USA, he returned to England and set one up himself with friends, particularly aimed to be inclusive, empowering and benefit the wider community. He demonstrated and leafleted on the Iraq war, and joined People and Planet when he was an undergraduate.

After returning to his home town to do a PhD, he got involved in a

practical environmental charity, where his main interest is helping to run a non-hierarchical vegan fair trade food co-op. Through this he is also involved to lesser degrees in other areas such as Climate Camp, a local radical social centre, and gender politics. He is also involved in an independent media project, has always voted and gives to charity. Simon explained that much of his participation is a natural progression of his beliefs, and that it is the *'obvious thing to do'* and cites his politics, and his *'underlying ethos'* as connecting all his activities. Specifically, he

explained his participation in organisations such as People and Planet:

'Because I thought the world could be a better place and I kind of think it's people's responsibility if they want it to be a better place to make it a better place... I think that it would be good if people felt that they were empowered to make the world a better place, and if this organisation was trying to do that then I'd be involved in that organisation.'

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Global environment and human rights

A belief in human rights and environmental sustainability was another key theme emerging as a dominant linking motivation for some interviewees. It connected their involvement in international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the Soil Association and in local activist networks and groups. Interviewees connected their involvement in a range of groups and schemes to a concern for both people and the planet. Where people were involved across a range of international human rights and environmental groups, they often cited an underlying philosophy or outlook as the primary motivation:

'I think most of them are connected, because I want to see people properly treated, Amnesty International, and I want to see the world properly treated, and when I say that, when I say the world properly treated, we have to fit in to how the world functions. We can't impose our will upon the world, are you with me?'

'Over the last few years it's become pretty obvious it's not just a question of degrading the environment but it's the survival of the human race at stake, so that keeps me involved.'

Simon's story (see Box 3) illustrates how an underlying belief in trying to make the world a better place connects his involvement in a range of local and international initiatives and groups.

The interviewees who spoke of a clear set of principles or beliefs as a way to explain their participation, whether this was framed in terms of social justice, religious faith, commitment to their neighbourhood or a love of the natural environment, were generally people who were deeply involved in one or more participatory activities, and whose participation was woven into their daily life. Rather than seeing participation as a bolt-on, it was

part of who they are and how they express themselves. Their belief system forms the bedrock of their participation, which isn't confined to one participatory activity or type – there is a fluidity and movement between them.

4.2.2
Issues

For some interviewees, a specific issue led to their involvement in a wide range of participatory activities. This was especially the case for people involved primarily in social participation, particularly formal volunteering and involvement in community-based groups and networks.

Crossing over into public participation by getting involved in the machinery of local or central government, statutory bodies or *'the system'* was often connected to a specific issue that had a direct impact on an interviewee's life. This might have been something that they perceived was unjust or unfair and that directly affected them or someone close to them, or something that would benefit them personally or further the aims of the group they belong to.

Housing was one such issue, and was evident as a dominant linking motivating factor for a number of the inner-city interviewees. Tenants' and residents' associations were important in this area in linking members with other organisations and with public participatory structures both on an individual level and as a representative of the group. Links existed between the tenants' and residents' associations and several community action groups, as well as links with community arts groups. There were often connections between interviewees; often people joined one group because they found out about it through another participant who played a key facilitative role in making links; a lynch pin or bridge builder. The co-founders of a community arts project were both participants in a tenants' and residents' association, for example,

and one of the founders talked about the anti-private finance initiative campaign, which involved all the groups mentioned above:

'There's some people who might be in both. We all know each other, there were some people who were tenants' and residents' association who was in [the PFI campaign group] *and so on and so forth. You know what's going on. The council hated that, it's like, "They're talking to each other".'*

Educational provision was another key issue that provided the impetus for a number of interviewees to extend their involvement in a group or loose collective to making contact with elected representatives; or in two cases, putting themselves forward to stand for election, as either a councillor or as a parliamentary candidate. Specific issues that motivated a cross-over from social to public participation included mooted school closures, school intake numbers and educational provision for children with special or additional needs.

Angela's story (see Box 4) illustrates how the issue of special educational needs (SEN), and specifically autism, has linked her involvement with voluntary groups, the local education provider and into standing for local election.

We interviewed several people with children with learning disabilities who had specifically campaigned on this issue, as a one-off that was somewhat outside their normal sphere of participation, which tended to be volunteering for groups based around their children, for example sitting on the PTA or volunteering for groups that their children are a part of like Brownies or other activities.

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Box 4
Angela's story

When Angela, now in her mid-40s, was a student she was involved in community projects and peace protests such as CND and Peace Camp. She then trained as a teacher and became interested in alternative schooling, and was involved in anti-war and poll tax demonstrations in the 1980s. When her son and daughter were born, she moved to Leeds and through a combination of her own interests and her children's needs, became very involved in child orientated groups and SEN (special educational needs) issues.

Angela has recently done voluntary work for Asperger syndrome and autism groups. She has also been very much involved in the resistance to the closures of two local schools, and this led to her standing for election as a local councillor:

'I joined a group by invitation... which is anti-academy and anti-closure, and I was invited to that by a friend who had been a governor and teacher at [school]... During the course of meetings, discussions and various bits of campaigning it came up that it would be a really good idea if we

had a candidate in the next local election... Meanwhile I was writing letters to councillors and stuff and getting no response, or getting brushed off all the time. Because there are an awful lot of reasons not to close this particular school... So they all looked round the table and every one of them worked for either the council or [education support provider], except me, so I was the one that got chosen...'

Box 5
Diana's story

Diana, is a full time carer for her disabled daughter. She has volunteered in numerous activities that support her daughter, for example as a committee member of her school and at an inclusive theatre that she attends. Diana does not consider herself political

'...we had a really nice contractor transporting our children and she lost the contract because they gave it to some other person that was a lot cheaper... because they don't have loyalty the council

do they, it's whatever makes the budget look good, and so we did send a letter to our MP, got them involved in it, went up to Downing Street, but it didn't happen anyway...'

but did get involved in a campaign with other parents of her daughter's school, to protest that the person who had been contracted to provide transport for the children for 15 years lost the contract to an organisation that provided an *'atrocious'* service:

Her role in the campaign was in *'the background'*, she typed the letter to the MP, and Diana did not talk about additional or further political involvement.

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Diana's story (see Box 5) illustrates the way in which someone whose involvement has historically been exclusively in the realm of social participation around an issue (in Diana's case, disability) can cross-over into public participation around that same issue.

Issues that affect people directly and personally can provide the motivation for people to crossover from one participatory activity and link to another, as Angela's and Diana's experiences illustrate. Occasionally, this crossover is a gateway into a more sustained involvement in the new realm, as Angela's decision to stand as a councillor demonstrates. Although hers is a powerful example, it is not necessarily the norm, in that Angela was already a teacher, and had been involved from her university days in political activity through campaigning and direct action. Standing as a local representative was therefore perhaps a natural extension of her campaigning work.

Angela's participation is highly integrated into the way she expresses herself and lives her life and it is also influenced by her political beliefs. She is another example of a Model 1 type participant. More commonly, the issue is short lived and a one-off response that an individual feels to be something difficult or unjust, as in Diana's story, which illustrates Model 2 (core-peripheral multiple involvements).

4.2.3
Personal interests
People's interests and hobbies provided a third clear dominant motivating factor across their range of involvements. We spoke to people who were heavily involved in activities linked to a specific area of interest. Most examples of this type of linked involvement were from people involved in sports and the arts (including theatre, music and art), but also in more specialist subjects such as local history, foraging for wild food, real ales,

and cycling. Interviewees who were involved in a range of activities that were linked by an interest are best represented by Model 2 (core-peripheral involvement).

Several interviewees were heavily involved in a sports club – as a player, coach, and/or member of the committee of the club. For these interviewees, the interest in sport was a core activity from which other forms of participation developed; in several cases, into contact with political representatives. The reason for the contact varied, from trying to access funding by speaking to local councillors about potential grants, to planning issues.

One interviewee in his early 50s had been involved in a local rugby club since he was 18 as a player, and in various roles on the committee from fixture secretary to social secretary and club captain. He said that he had *'never been involved in any other areas'* and that everything he had always done had been around sport. However, he had come into contact with local political representatives because his attempts to gain planning permission to allow the club to have on-site practice facilities have been frustrated for a number of years:

'I've just contacted the councillor that's responsible for parks and leisure and I spoke to him last week and he sounded quite positive. I've sent him a load of information so I'm waiting to hear back. But previous to that I've written to two MPs, I've probably contacted five councillors and about 46 council officials to get absolutely nowhere with it. Just as we get to a point of them agreeing to sign a lease for us they decide that they want to have another review of the site to see if potentially they can use it for something better... it's very frustrating.'

There were other examples of people who were involved to quite a limited extent in a special interest group (i.e. social participation) who crossed over into public participation on a one-off

basis as an extension of their activity in the special interest group. For example, one interviewee's interest in real ale and social drinking was expressed through his membership of CAMRA (the Campaign for Real Ale). CAMRA had a motion going through the House of Commons to regulate the price of beer in favour of pubs rather than supermarkets and the interviewee wrote to his MP asking him to support the motion because, in his view, pubs are the centre of the social life of villages and he lamented people not being able to afford to drink in pubs, and pubs closing.

For others, the link between their various activities remained within the realm of social participation and did not crossover into contact with public officials or representatives, such as the cricket captain and coach, who organised fundraising cricket matches in his village in order to raise money for a cancer charity, but who had no interest in or desire to get involved in any type of political or public participation. Links between people's formal volunteering and fundraising or charitable giving were common in other interest areas, with several people fundraising on behalf of an organisation in which they were involved in other ways (e.g. on a committee), as well as contributing their own funds to an organisation in which they were involved (less common).

4.2.4
Skills and abilities
Several interviewees talked about a particular skill or ability that they had acquired providing a link between the different participatory activities in which they were involved. We interviewed a number of public servants including teachers, town planners and police officers and other professionals including lawyers, IT specialists, scientists and a chartered accountant. There were clear links and fluidity of movement between these participants' professional life and their civic or social life.

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One interviewee, for example, was an experienced lawyer and advocate whose knowledge of constitutional law and belief in democracy all linked his involvement in direct action, campaigning, social activist groups (online and offline) and into contact with local representatives through speaking at a local area forum.

Michael's story (see Box 6) demonstrates how his professional skills as a teacher have provided the dominant motivating force that linked his social and public involvements.

Where interviewees demonstrated that a particular skill provided a clear motivating link across their range of involvements, both Model 1 and Model 2 were evident. In Michael's case, his involvements are integrated, but there were examples too of core-peripheral involvement. Among these interviewees, their skill had been gained through professional training and work and the people in question were educated to degree standard. This could reflect that people choose to go into a profession because it is something they enjoy and are good at, and that they want these factors to be part of their non-paid work as well.

4.3
Intensity: exploring the depth of people's participation over time

A key feature of almost all interviewees' stories of participation was that their participation had changed over their lifetime.
The nature of people's involvement in terms of both the quantity of time spent participating (i.e. number of hours or days) and in terms of the level of responsibility held, varied over time.

It is important to note that in referring to responsibility we do not necessarily mean being a trustee or having some other formalised or constituted role; we mean having a critical role, without which the participatory activity would not be possible for others. These two factors – time spent and level

Box 6
Michael's story

'...so there are links all the way along really, and it's mostly young people... I work with kids and I know what I can do that is comfortable. I'm not going to be asked any hard questions either [laughing].'

Michael, who is aged between 55-64, moved to the local area after he retired from teaching and got involved in the parish council, initially as a councillor and a year later as chair. He volunteers at a National Trust property as a learning mentor, primarily with school groups, and is a school governor and chairman of a community music programme. His past activity includes: various roles with the cubs and scouts (participant, cub helper, scout leader, chair of parents' committee, secretary and chairman of local Scouts Association); some voluntary involvement in his job as a teacher (e.g. running football clubs); being secretary of a rugby club and referee in college; a trade union member and general committee member; on the local authority education committee and health and safety committee.

His work as a teacher links his involvement with the trade union, his role as school governor, and in general his work with children through Scouts and now through the National Trust. He draws on the skills he developed as a teacher both in his work directly with children and more broadly in his work with groups, and sometimes has to use his 'teacher's look' with adult committee members when there is conflict within the group.

of responsibility – represent the level of intensity.

As introduced in Section 2.5.2, four broad types of intensity of participation over time emerged among interviewees (see Figure 10):

• **Consistent and deep**
  People who are consistently, deeply involved: they have been heavily involved in terms of time spent participating and responsibility since childhood. The intensity of their participation is consistently high, and their commitment is enduring. Participation is consistently prioritised and fundamental to the way they live their life.

• **Peaks and troughs**
  People who have peaks and troughs, or periods of intense involvement and periods of very light or total non-involvement: this type of participant has periods where their participation is highly prioritised in their life (sometimes even above work, family, friends and leisure) but also has

periods where participation lies dormant.

• **Consistent and light**
  People who are consistently but lightly involved: they have given a small amount of time, with little or no commitment, for a long time, but participation has never been intense, and is not a priority in their lives.

• **Piecemeal and irregula**r
  People who are involved in a piecemeal, irregular and inconsistent way: their involvement is one-off and episodic, and has never happened in an enduring or consistent way.

This typology is illustrated in the figure overleaf.

Figure 10: Typology of intensity of participation over time
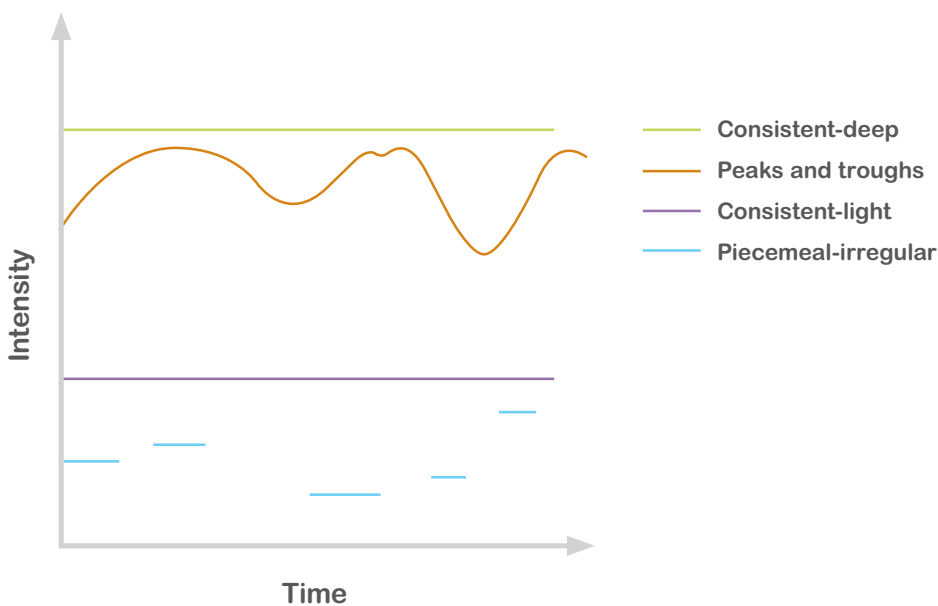
4.3.1
Consistent and deep

Consistent, deep participants represented a small proportion of our interviewees. Their involvement has been a story of continuity rather than of change – the issues they have been interested in and committed to and the institutions and organisations that they are part of remaining constant over the passage of time. Their participation is a core part of their daily life and gives meaning to it: participation for them is a habit. Consistent, deep participants do not necessarily have a range of involvements – their involvement may be based within one activity type and within one organisation and have no links with other types of participation.

There are a number of elements that help to explain consistency, or sustained participation over time that are consistent with the factors already identified as being important in shaping people's participation in Section 3. In addition to these factors, if someone had been involved as a child, their personality and the role they adopted in an organisation helped to explain consistency, or continuity of involvement.

Several interviewees spoke of having been involved in a similar way since childhood. For some, this was a continuation of their participation in the same organisation since they were young, with evidence that the structure of the organisation provided a clear pathway of participation. An interviewee talked about the structure of uniformed organisations (e.g. Brownies, Guides, Cubs, Scouts, Boys' and Girls' Brigade), instilling responsibility from a young age and allowing young people to move up through the organisation in a structured way.

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Such organisations provide early opportunities for children to learn about participation, which may continue into adult life, as Annie's story demonstrates (see Box 7).

For others, their continued participation was less about a particular organisation and more about a personality trait that guided their participation as a child and continues into adult life:

'...as a child I felt it was really important to go to that church bazaar or that jumble sale and be involved in the choir, because if I wasn't there, then that would be one less person, and that wouldn't be right. I don't know where that came from, but that was then too, and that's come here again, but as an adult, that child who's this adult now, who's involved, just at a different level, but much the same, much the same.'

Consistent, deep participants have chosen to place their participation at the centre of their lives, and to make it a priority. Several talked about the importance of staying power and commitment, which was an important character trait of many of the consistent, deep participants.

As Section 3.3 demonstrates, people's personality, temperament and self-perception, including a sense of the skills one has to offer, are central to the types of roles people take on, and therefore highly influential on the levels of intensity of people's participation. As these personal factors are fairly constant, there was a degree of consistency in the roles that people adopt in their participatory activities.

Roles that people adopted included as a leader or advocate, as an organiser/planner, as a formal committee member and as a 'behind the scenes' worker. For example, people who are shy or like to be in the background, tended to consistently take on administrative, IT or other such backroom roles, while leaders felt most at home when they were in charge and were often comfortable

Box 7
Annie's story

'I started off in guiding as a Brownie and I went through the whole Brownies, Guides, Rangers and started helping out in a pack, and I've never really left! So I've been doing this for 25 years. I now run the pack I joined as a Brownie.'

Annie joined Brownies in 1970 as a child and now runs the Brownie pack she joined 25 years ago – in her words, she 'never really left'. She thinks that she joined Brownies initially because it was conveniently located in the church at the top of the road, her friends went and her mum was involved in helping out. Her mother had been involved with Guides, helping out at parents' meetings at Guides, and for the participant, moving up through Brownies, Guides and Rangers was a natural progression and

something 'quite normal', and was helped because the company was friendly.

After going through Brownies, Guides and Rangers she became a pack leader (1978), then a leader in training (1982), and in 1984 started running a Brownie pack. In 1991 she became the district commissioner, and in 2010 became the division commissioner for Girl Guiding in the wider area. As division commissioner she looks after *'about 30 units in my area, about 500 girls and about 30 leaders across the three districts'*. She explained staying involved because she *'enjoyed the friendship, the things we did and the activities, the camping, all the helping out. I enjoyed that kind of meeting or involvement'*.

with public speaking and advocacy. There are obvious parallels here with motivating factors that link involvement across different activities and include people's personality, what they enjoy doing, and what they are good at, including professional skills that carry over from paid work.

4.3.2
Peaks and troughs
Many interviewees' participation fluctuated over time, in peaks and troughs, with periods of intense involvement and periods of light or non-involvement. Three factors appeared to be important in explaining why people's participation fluctuated in this way: life stage, critical moments and snowballing.

Life stages
Some of our interviewees talked about periods of intense involvement and periods of light or non-involvement. Peaks and troughs in participation often mirrored life stages, both with people's priorities shifting over time,

and their capacity to participate changing.

A pattern emerged of people's lighter/non-involvement (a trough) due to focusing on their work and career, and of deepening involvement in retirement (a peak), both of which are connected to life stage. Similarly, having children and becoming more settled in one place was often reflected in an increase in people's participatory activity.

'...after I came down from university and I think got more involved in the Peckham Labour Party partly because we'd bought a flat and therefore we were going to be settled for a few years... we'd got to know one or two people who were involved in participation, in a way it grows from getting to know people... so we used to go regularly to branch meetings and eventually I got elected onto... the old general management committee of Dulwich Labour Party...'

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Critical moments

External factors, critical issues and unexpected events also helped to explain why some people's participation diminishes at a particular point in time. Periods of mental or physical illness explain why some people's participation reduced or stopped completely. Several interviewees described their involvement diminishing due to burnout.

Caring responsibilities, for a child or relative, were another explanatory factor in people becoming less heavily involved. Other reasons for a trough in participation included letting someone else have a turn at the role and breaking up with a partner who had been an important companion in participation. Moving country, region or city explained explained why several people reduced their commitments or stopped altogether because they left the organisations, people or lifestyle that accompanied their participation.

Snowballing

A third explanatory factor in the peaks and troughs type of participant is snowballing of involvement over time. In many of these cases, people were involved to some extent already and then they took on a new, more formal governance role on a committee and/or as a trustee, which led to a corresponding increase in workload:

'...as you move on, you get more involved, more highly involved in particular societies so for instance in conservation I started off as a volunteer and then I worked my way up the committee, to be president and obviously as just a regular volunteer, you have to dedicate a lot less time to it than if you're president so as you move up in one, you've got to decrease your time on other ones.'

This increase in responsibility did not always sit comfortably with interviewees because it did not always fit with their self-perception, personality and skills:

'...it's like the fellowships, it's exactly like that. You go there, you say "Right I'll make the tea", which I love doing, you know what I mean. I get the tea, coffee, biscuits everything... and then, "we want you to be secretary". Up from making tea, you know to secretary. Things can snowball a little bit and I just want to do a little bit. I don't want to be sat at the front driving the bus. You know what I mean?'

Albert's story (see Box 8) demonstrates how major life changes such as retirement can link to an increase in someone's participation, but also the unpredictable nature of participation, as unexpected events such as ill-health interrupt the consistency of his participation. Snowballing of responsibility is evident here as his participation became more formalised in official public roles.

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Box 8
Albert's story

Albert is 76 years old and married. He was born and raised in Ireland and moved to England in search of work at age 18. He is an ex-serviceman with the British Army. He retired from a career in the building industry and before that worked as a manufacturer in nearby factories.

Albert's participation was greatest as a young man. During this period, he initiated and coordinated the unionisation of the workers at the factory he worked at, and became the union leader at the factory. He was secretary and chairman of the local branch of the Labour Party at a time when, as he describes it, the party had many members but did very little. He was also involved in the wider Labour party and trade union movement. For example, he would attend educational events in London and send away for educational materials. Albert was also a town councillor for two terms.

Albert has Parkinson's disease, which is beginning to affect his mobility and memory. Until recently, Albert was secretary of the local branch of the British Legion, however his health problems have limited what he is currently able to do, which is the main reason he recently resigned as secretary of the local Legion. However, he will continue to be a member and raise funds through the poppy appeal. Albert continues to raise funds and be on a committee for Arthritis Care.

Box 9
Stella's story

Stella is over 65 years old. She came to England from Greece when she was 15 years old and worked as a machinist. She and her husband (who died several years ago) set up and ran a grocer's shop and then a dressmaking shop, which they did until retiring 20 years ago. Eight years ago she started volunteering at a drop-in centre run by a local charity for Greek and Greek Cypriots for pensioners and has been doing this ever since. She goes once a week on a Monday morning and makes the toast and tea and 'quite a lot of things'. Prior to this she had not done any voluntary work:

'No, apart from bringing up children and looking after husband, having your own business, I've been working very hard really.'

Stella always votes because she believes that *'we need somebody to guide us'* and because if you don't vote, people don't *'know you're here'.* She attended a public meeting about the proposed closures at a local hospital because a key leader of the Greek and Greek Cypriot community *'sent'* her and her daughter. She accompanied her daughter to some hustings before the recent general election, but doesn't go to *'these places'* because she feels that *'you have to have somebody with you'* and, when he was alive, her husband *'wasn't up to anything like that'.*

Stella makes charitable donations to the church every week but otherwise not regularly. She mentioned making donations to *'foot and mouth'*, the Red Cross and *'the blind'.*

4.3.3
Consistent and light

Some people's participation is characterised by a consistent involvement over time, but it is of a different quality and nature to that of consistent, deep participants. Instead of identifying with their involvement as almost a part of what makes them who they are, and what characterises their daily life, consistent light participants were often committed to an activity but were not heavily involved in it. They didn't identify with it heavily; for example they may consistently have given to charity but did not think much about it. While participation was not necessarily the focal point in life for consistent, light participants, it was often connected to engaging with being part of a community, of place, religious faith, or culture, as Stella's story illustrates (see Box 9).

4.3.4
Piecemeal and irregular

Piecemeal, irregular participants do not consistently participate in anything and participation is not a priority in their life. Tracing patterns in their participation is difficult because of its sporadic and reactive nature.

Piecemeal, irregular participants can be characterised more easily by the absence of the factors that come together to make deep, consistent participants. For example, they have not heavily invested in their local area or community; their focus in life is on their work, family or social life; they did not enjoy participating as a child or youth to the extent that they wanted to carry on as an adult, and their social networks do not clearly support or foster their participation. They do not have any apparent need or interest that drives their participation.

Most of the people we interviewed who fell into this category were initially approached as non-participants, so we approached them directly as opposed to via their membership of or connection to an organisation. However, all of them were in fact

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involved to a very light extent, for example, they vote, occasionally donate money to charity and fundraise and help out their neighbours. Nadir demonstrates a piecemeal, light and irregular story of participation (see Box 10).

4.4
Conclusions

This section has explored the links and patterns that exist between people's participatory activities, and their involvement over the course of their lives, in order to shed light on people's pathways through participation. We found that when people have a range of involvements that are linked, it may be an integrated, sustained involvement over time in a range of different activities (i.e. Model 1, integrated involvement), or it may be one-off involvements that span out from a core or central activity (i.e. Model 2, core-peripheral involvement).

It is evident that people do indeed move between different activities and also between different broad categories of participation, from social to public participation, for example. However, there has to be a strong, dominant motivating force for this to happen, which is a powerful reminder that movement between different types of participation, especially between activities within the broad social and public participation categories is not automatic or systematic.

Where people have a range of involvements, whether of the integrated or core-peripheral nature, there is almost always an enabling factor that sits alongside the dominant motivation that facilitates the link. A motivation may provide the spark for involvement but by itself is not generally enough to stimulate motive into action. Existing institutions, organisations and networks are crucial in providing the space, conditions and practical support people need to participate: all the examples of

Box 10
Nadir's story

Nadir is a middle-aged Turkish Muslim, with two grown-up children, both of whom are studying political science at university. He has worked in the area for 11 years and spends most of his time helping with the family business, a dry cleaning shop. He has a degree in political science from Thames University.

Nadir grew up in Cyprus where he was a Scout. Sometimes in the school holidays he helped collecting the harvest – olives and oranges. In the war in Cyprus in 1974 in which there were several months of fighting, he helped with the wounded and those under siege. He described the conflict as something '*unexpected*', and that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. While the fighting was happening, he took bread and milk to old people stuck indoors and after the war he did lots of reforestation, because lots of trees were burnt in the conflict.

Nadir thinks that it is important to vote but does not always do so. He has had some contact with political representatives, for example the local MP contacted him about his dry cleaning shop because he was lobbying against proposed rises in the council tax rate and wanted to draw the shopkeepers' attention to how this would affect them. He has little respect for Parliament and democracy and does not think they truly represent the people. Some time ago, Nadir took part in a demonstration against the Greek Cypriot embargo on the Turkish Cypriots. He said, '*I'm not an activist but when there's an injustice I take a stand on it.*'

Nadir has collection boxes for thalassaemia (a blood disease) and Cancer Research on the shop counter and gives money when disasters happen. In terms of ethical consumerism, he said that he is price conscious. He is '*eco-friendly*', but he said that he will not go out of his way. He knows his neighbours and helps them out if they need it (e.g. carrying shopping).

multiple involvements that we encountered were supported by some collective structure. The role of lynchpins (some of whose stories are told above) is crucial in these collective structures: they may set up the group and/or provide an important function by introducing participants to each other, sharing information and making sure that meetings and events are organised.

Looking at links in the ways in which people get involved over their lifetime, we found that the nature and quality of people's participation is complex and changes over time. The extent or depth to which people get involved in different activities, depends on an interplay of factors – some of which ebb and flow, and some of which remain constant. This reflects the dynamic nature of participation.

The patterns of participation in the typology (see Figure 10) sometimes sit alongside well defined life stages or periods of time, such as having children, retirement, being at university, and career building. However, they also reflect other critical moments and turning points in people's lives – the moment someone moves to a new location, and tending to the health needs of a loved one. The typology is a useful way to view the dynamic nature of participation over the course of people's lives without falling into rigid, pre-defined stages as life course perspectives can tend to do, but also as a way of helping to navigate and make sense of what may otherwise appear to be an unrelated collection of random moments.

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As with any typology of human behaviour, this is imperfect and simplifies reality. People are often involved in more than one activity at a time, as Section 4.2 explored, and they are not necessarily involved in each activity with the same intensity. A more complex typology could be developed for each individual that plotted the different activities they are involved in, and the different intensities they are involved in those activities, over time, as Figure 11 illustrates.

This approach would also reflect the different qualities of different participatory activities, and that some activities only take place on an episodic basis (e.g. voting, attending a community event or going on a protest march) as they are momentary and time-bound. Other activities, such as regularly making a charitable donation by direct debit or holding a formal governance role on a committee, are more regular and constant.

We have concluded that it is impossible to make meaningful value judgements when talking about the nature of participation. What needs to be remembered is that one of the defining features of participation is that it is undertaken by people of their own free will. Heavy or light, consistent or irregular, people participate in the way that suits them. This is not to say that participation cannot be encouraged or enabled, or that we cannot support and be aware of triggers, but that we must not suggest that one form of participation is better than another. Indeed, the often cited value of long-term involvement can be perceived by others very negatively as demonstrating a *'holier-than–thou'* attitude, and as cliquey and stale.

Figure 11:
An individual's
participation over time

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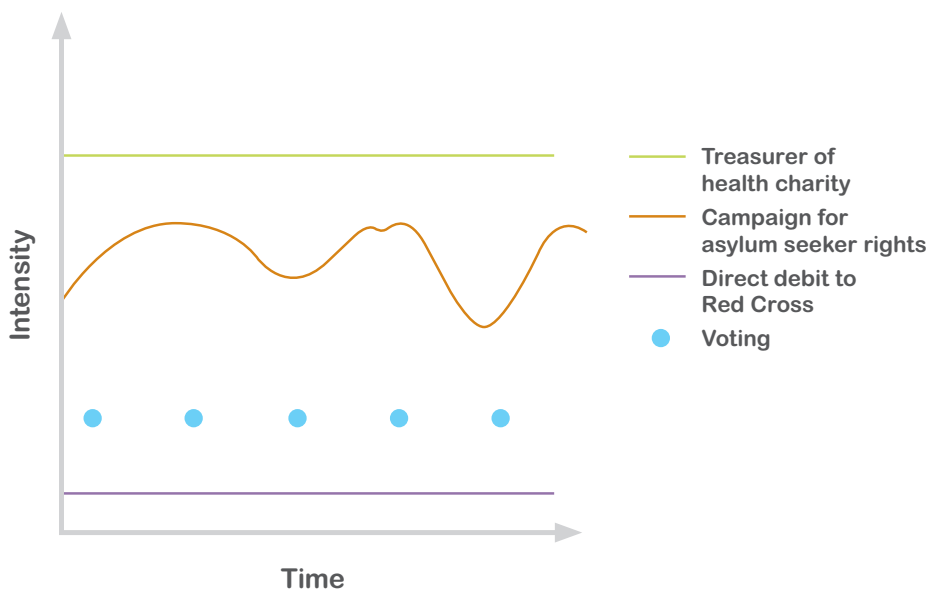
Our findings challenge the common assumption that people who are involved in one type of participation (e.g. volunteering) naturally get involved in, or have a spillover into, public participation (e.g. going to a local consultation) or indeed into individual participation (e.g. ethical consumerism or charitable giving)[14]. There are examples of this happening, but it is neither systematic nor automatic. The evidence of links between individual participation and other types of participation was more limited than between social and public participation and other types of participation, perhaps because the people we interviewed privileged their social and public participation activities when describing their life story of participation. Exploring the potential connections that link individual participation to other types of participation in greater depth would require additional research.

Our findings also challenge the notion of participation as a progression, or something that develops over time: we have not found that people's lives reflect a ladder of participation in which their involvement grows steadily over time, or in which they take on increasing responsibility in an organisation over time, although there were examples of this. Both these findings have important public policy and practical implications, and we reflect on these in Section 5.

14 The idea of spill over can be traced back at least to the 19th century, with Alexis de Tocqueville's idea that voluntary associations can teach members civic skills and values and act as schools for democracy. See *Understanding participation: a literature review, p35*

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Naomi's story

Naomi is a former town planner, aged between 35–44. She became a member of Friends of the Earth (FoE) in 2007, and identifies this as the first time she ever did any *'official voluntary work'*. As a member of the local group of FoE she was involved in activities around climate change (e.g. the Big Ask campaign) and setting up and running a farmers' market, which the local group had to run a *'bit like a business'*. Naomi became the local FoE membership secretary for almost two years. In this time she supported stands and postcard signings at local events, and was involved in another campaign called the Food Chain.

In November 2009, Naomi went on an EcoTeam training course. EcoTeams encourage teams of neighbours and friends to monitor their energy usage, waste production and shopping habits with a view to looking at how to reduce waste and save energy. The model appealed to Naomi as it was friendly, social and, *'very much around helping people'*. She set up an online EcoTeam but this, *'didn't work out too well'* because:

'I did it just online, because people couldn't meet, and it sort of worked to start off with but, to be honest, with summer holidays and not meeting, it meant not actually physically meeting, it kind of fizzled out somewhat.'

Through *'various internet networks'*

she got involved with another environmental initiative: a local green home zone. This initiative had the backing of local businesses, which were going to try to discourage people from using plastic bags, the support of the council and the Energy Saving Trust. One of the things Naomi does through the green home zone is visit people's houses to help them identify key areas they can work on to improve their home energy efficiency.

Before joining FoE, Naomi didn't have the energy and space to do anything voluntarily outside work – her career was her focus and priority, and any spare time she had would be spent at the gym or socialising with friends. A number of factors came together to make her decide to join the local FoE group. Her interest in sustainability and the local and global environment clearly links with her choice of voluntary activities. Her work was in the public sector and she had been involved with a project about sustainable transport development. She changed job roles and started working fewer hours and became *'a bit itchy'* as she says she needs *'to influence things'*. She made a conscious decision to make more of an active life locally for herself as she had a bit more space and time. Her friends were spread out across the city and her social community existed mostly in the centre of town, so she wanted to try to make a more local life for herself:

'And I suppose it was also, with age as well, you know, I no longer felt the need to every weekend go out, drink loads, party, whatever. I thought, well, actually, I might like to do some other stuff, really, and so, you know, giving up a Saturday afternoon to do a stand didn't feel like a major encroachment on my social time, really. So it was just sort of age, stage and, I can't think of a third word to rhyme with that!'

Naomi stood down as membership secretary for FoE last year as she was more focused on her personal study of alternative health practices and helping with the setting up a community interest company – her time was getting stretched and so she decided to stop doing the FoE work so intensively.

In terms of other involvement, she and her husband have direct debits set up with FoE, the NSPCC, cancer charities and a charity for children who are deaf and blind. They are also members of the National Trust. She always votes, and thinks it's important:

'I actually, I don't know, I kind of also feel like, oh, damn it, people have died for us to be able to vote, so I think it's a really good thing to be able to do and, you know, there's parts of the world where you couldn't, so, therefore, we shouldn't take it for granted.'

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5.1
Introduction

The Pathways through Participation project sought to explore how and why people participate in a range of activities over the course of their lives: from volunteering in a local charity to taking part in a public consultation or buying ethical products. To achieve this, the research focused on three questions:

1. How and why does participation begin and continue?

2. Can trends and patterns of participation be identified over time?

3. What connections, if any, are there between different forms and episodes of participation and what triggers movement between them?

Our initial framework for participation outlined the key elements of people's experience of participation (Figure 2 page 16):

• the individuals participating

• the activities in which they are involved

• the places in which these activities occur

• the stages in people's lives at which participation happens

• the key dimensions or features of participation that characterise and structure participation, such as the intensity or formality of engagement

• the major shaping forces influencing people's participation, for instance power and relationships.

This framework provided a good starting point for understanding participation in practice. However, completing the research has helped us refine our understanding of the many and interdependent factors that influence an individual's experience of participation. These shift in significance over time and are shaped by the impact of participation itself, on people and on places.

The research shows that the ways

in which people participate and the circumstances under which participation takes place are complex and that any future approaches to increasing the number of people participating or to diversifying the range of people who participate need to reflect and respond to that complexity.

This section draws out a number of important themes that have emerged throughout the research, and which cut across all three research questions. The final section highlights specific recommendations for future policy and practice.

5.2
Conclusions

The deliberately broad definition of participation adopted by this research has allowed us to develop a comprehensive understanding of participation. Placing the individual at the centre of the study – by hearing more than 100 personal stories of participation – has given us a new insight into the personal, lived experience of participation, closer to the realities on the ground. We present below the key conclusions from the research that we hope will develop a better understanding of the issues that affect people's involvement, the enablers and benefits, and the barriers and tensions.

5.2.1
Participation is personal

People participate because they want to, and sometimes because they need to. They get involved in activities that have personal meaning and value, that connect with the people, interests and issues that they hold dear. Participation must therefore be viewed first and foremost from the perspective of the individual taking part.

Policy-makers and practitioners who wish to promote and encourage participation must view participation holistically, because trying to channel individuals into narrowly defined areas

of participation is unlikely to result in more active citizens. If an individual does not identify with a particular cause or activity, reducing the barriers to them becoming involved is unlikely to make a difference. Any attempt to encourage participation (in terms of starting and sustaining) must take into account – and not work against – the differing and multiple motivations people have for becoming involved.

5.2.2
Participation is changing and dynamic

Much research and many policy models have tended to consider people's participation as a static activity at a single moment in time; rarely has previous work placed people's involvement in the context of what has come before, the other activities they are involved in, or what their future plans are.

Our research has shed light on the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of people's participation over time and their pathways between different activities. We found that people's involvement changes over their life course as they experience different life events and triggers; there are periods of time when barriers are more prevalent and others when enabling factors have a greater role to play. Some people sustain their involvement while others drop in and out depending on circumstances and experiences.

We observed how people follow a range of pathways to move between different types of activity, with one form of engagement often prompting or leading to another. However, while spillover between activities did happen, it was not systematic. We also did not find evidence that people followed a set path or a progression of participation in which they climb to a natural end point of participation. Some people took on more complex and responsible roles as they grew in confidence and skill over their lives but this tended to be the exception and not the rule. While participation can

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develop and grow, it is not necessarily linear; it doesn't automatically deepen, intensify or become more formalised over time. In our view, there are no grounds for valuing one form of participation more highly than another; sporadic or less intense participation is as valuable to society as sustained, deep involvement.

5.2.3
Participation is widespread

The research brought to the fore a huge variety of participatory activities and sites of participation. There were many opportunities and entry points for participation in the three fieldwork areas where our research took place, and everyone we interviewed had participated in some kind of activity at some point of their life.

We were able to identify past participants who no longer participated, but were unable to identify any genuine non-participants (i.e. people who had never participated in their lives). Even people who thought of themselves as non-participants or who were described by others as non-participants often turned out to have been involved at some stage when probed. Our findings add weight to other studies which suggest that participation is widespread and is centrally important to people's lives and the communities in which they live.

However, while participation is widespread, there is significant potential for more opportunities to participate to be made available to a wider range of people. We found that few people had a comprehensive picture of the full range of opportunities available to them locally. Decisions about what to do and how to get involved tended to be almost entirely the result of personal contact (e.g. being asked by a friend) or finding information of direct personal relevance (e.g. an

advert to join the parent-teachers' association of their child's school). This was also true of support bodies and other public and voluntary and community organisations, which often had only a partial picture of local activities, groups and events, which limited the extent to which they could help provide access to relevant and appropriate opportunities for individuals wanting to participate.

5.2.4
Social connections are central

People participate in activities and groups because of the people they know, like, enjoy being around and care about. Wanting to make social connections, meet new people and combat isolation or loneliness can trigger involvement, and the relationships that are built in groups are a crucial sustaining factor in people's participation. The human desire to be with others in a collective endeavour, and the quality of the relationships between fellow participants that grow through belonging to a group, came through vividly in our research. This confirms earlier research on active citizenship which found that effective participation is predicated on two things: association and connection.[15]

Belonging to a group, be it a formal organisation or a loose network, provided crucial links to other types of participatory activities, including connecting with local and national democratic decision-makers and structures. These connections happened through the pooling of knowledge, skills and personal links, which happened more in some groups than others: a tenants' and residents' association will more often be in contact with local councillors and officers than, for example, a local sports club, because of their respective aims and objectives. However, where a specific goal is in mind, such as securing more practice space, sports club members

can become important lobbyists and advocates to local and national representatives.

The downside of strong social connections is that groups can become cliquey and closed to outsiders; the old adage 'it's not what you know, it's who you know' can magnify disparities of access to people holding power and decision-making roles.

5.2.5
Participation is mutually beneficial

A key element of participation is that people gain as well as give when they participate. This is not to suggest that participation lacks altruism, but rather that if it is not a mutually beneficial activity then people's involvement may falter. This can be as basic as enjoyment and having fun.

We also identified considerable evidence that people participated specifically in order to achieve something, whether this was preventing a housing development on an area of green space or seeking funds to build a new sports club. Some people demonstrated seemingly endless energy and commitment to the cause, but they also frequently showed their dissatisfaction and frustration when barriers were encountered or change was not possible. This was perhaps clearest in relation to public consultations, most frequently about planning. Negative experiences, in which people felt a consultation was not genuine, were extremely commonplace, contributing to a distrust of authority, a lack of enthusiasm for that type of participation (which could be irreparable and turn people away forever), and a wider feeling of disempowerment.

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15 NCVO (2005) *Civil renewal and active citizenship: a guide to the debate.* London: NCVO.

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5.2.6
Perceptions of participation are contradictory and critical

People perceive their own participation and that of others in different ways. Such perceptions often influence how and why they choose to get involved. We uncovered, for example, a reluctance towards political involvement, with many people suggesting that they did not see themselves as political or would not like to be associated with such activity. Similarly, strong stereotypes of participants were also evident, with many people suggesting that they did not like or did not want to be seen as 'do-gooders'. This was particularly true of some people's perceptions of volunteering and volunteers.

People's perceptions of themselves, of participation and of others who participate did not, however, always match reality. The negative perception of participation in politics was, for example, often inconsistent with the reality of the frequency of people's engagement in this field: the vast majority of respondents voted, and many people had contacted their local MPs or campaigned or protested. It seems that people felt there was a difference between party political activities and political engagement in the wider sense. Furthermore, while some interviewees referred to the negative stereotype of the 'do-gooder', they were so active personally that they could easily have been described in that way themselves. Some were well aware of these contradictions and were as critical of themselves as they were of others.

5.2.7
Conflict and tension are an integral part of participation

Policy-makers and practitioners have tended to portray participation as a good thing and to focus on the positive impacts of people's involvement; how it can benefit society, organisations and the individuals involved. However,

we must also acknowledge that participation can and does have a less positive side for communities and participants: it frequently involves conflict and tension.

We found much evidence of the difficulties caused by clashing or dominant personalities within groups, the development of cliques, or disagreements with the strategic approach to achieving the mission of an organisation. Furthermore, some people we spoke to had become burnt-out at especially stressful and busy periods within the organisations they had been involved in or their personal relationships had been put under considerable stress. Such scenarios had led to people stopping their participation.

Conflict could also develop as an intended consequence of participation. Many individuals we spoke to had set themselves up in direct opposition to the state or other forms of authority, either locally or nationally. We observed a great deal of participation to be about seeking, or resisting, change, whether this was lobbying local MPs or taking part in marches. We found that interviewees often saw such protests and campaigns as a last resort, but they also stressed the important role of these activities as part of a healthy and pluralist democratic society.

The impacts of tensions and conflicts on participants, groups and communities can be positive or negative depending on where this pressure emerges. We observed that if it was internal to groups – such as disputes between individuals – they would have largely negative impacts on someone's willingness to continue their participation; but if they were external – such as opposing a building development on a park – they could prompt people to get involved. In some cases campaigns that began through conflict around stopping something eventually developed into proactive community activities and organisations.

5.2.8
Participation is more bottom-up than top-down

We found that individuals defined their own participation and made their own decisions about how and why they participated according to their upbringing, life stages, personal characteristics, beliefs and values, interests and personal circumstances. In contrast, government policy was never described as a motivating factor by the interviewees, and any influence was reported negatively: imposition of government agendas and intentions on people's existing activities, for example, was viewed as politicising their participation and was almost unanimously rejected. People participated as free agents. They came with a variety of motivations but did not seem willing to allow someone else to impose an external set of motivations.

People's negative reaction to the imposition of agendas that are not theirs has potentially been exacerbated by government's encouragement of comparatively narrow, highly formalised and structured forms of participation (e.g. formal public consultations, regeneration boards, health consultative bodies, formal volunteering). This does not fit easily with the variety of participation activities we identified. It can also be counter-productive: it can dissuade some people from participating and limit the diversity of people involved, or kill-off local groups through, for example, processes and demands that are too formalised, and generally inhibit less structured forms of participation. Participation can be encouraged, supported and made more attractive but it is inherently about a free choice to take part (or not) without coercion. People get involved above all because they want to.

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5.2.9
Significant barriers to participation are entrenched

Much has been written about the factors that prevent people from participating. Our findings complement this evidence base but we have been able to develop a more nuanced understanding of the barriers to participation by taking an approach that places the individual and their wider life and history at its centre.

At present much policy remains focused on initiatives to address the symptoms (e.g. technology to promote volunteering and giving opportunities) without addressing the underlying causes (e.g. lack of confidence or resources). We found that deeper and more entrenched issues in society are reflected in disparities in the practice of participation. Issues of power and inequality in society are key to understanding how and why people get involved and stay involved. The uneven distribution of power, social capital and other resources means that not everyone has access to the same opportunities for participation nor do they benefit from the impacts of participation in the same way. Such persistent and structural socio-economic inequalities are clearly challenging to address and cannot be removed without profound societal changes.

There are also, however, many basic practical reasons why people do and do not participate that can be tackled more easily. Our research challenges assumptions that non-participation is about apathy, laziness or selfishness. Participation opportunities need to complement people's lives and respond to people's needs, motivations and expectations. The 'build it and they will come' approach does not work in isolation.

People juggle many competing demands for their time and attention and their priorities will vary according to personal circumstances and life stage. This has implications for the part that participation can play in local communities and wider society. Episodic and less demanding forms of participation are likely to be more attractive to a greater number of people but may not provide the level of involvement that would be needed, for example, for the ownership of major community assets or the delivery of public services.

5.2.10
Participation can be encouraged and enabled

Our research identified a range of factors that fostered people's participation. Individuals were, however, frequently unaware of the local support networks and infrastructure that is specifically designed to facilitate and encourage participation. These findings complement previous research[16] which has, for example, found that smaller, grassroots organisations rarely engaged with Volunteer Centres and often existed independently of such structures. However, we observed that well-run and welcoming groups, the right physical locations in which to meet and sufficient funds can create the right growing conditions for people to participate and provide a positive experience that will encourage them to continue participating.

Many interviewees highlighted how their parents and wider family had played an influential role in instilling a culture of participation and/or the values and beliefs that later framed their participation. But not all interviewees had been socialised into participation through their family; schools and youth groups (such as Scouts and Guides) also played an important role in providing exposure to participatory activities during people's formative years.

As well as schools, institutions such as places of worship and organisations like community centres provided a range of opportunities to participate, some within their own walls and some beyond, offering a gateway to other sites of participation or activities. The importance of physical spaces where diverse groups can meet, and bonds and networks are formed and maintained, was found throughout the research: without access to a hall or a room many collective activities would simply not happen. These spaces that provide access to a range of activities and people allow pathways and connections to be established that support sustained participation.

Individuals who are bridge-builders within communities were also an important enabling factor. They brought people together and facilitated access to opportunities and routes into participation. However, sometimes key individuals were seen as very much a mixed blessing when they acted as barriers to the involvement of others, perhaps protecting their own positions at the expense of others, by preventing fresh people from taking up leadership roles.

5.3
Recommendations

The complex and dynamic nature of participation uncovered in this research strongly suggests that there is no single policy or practice lever that will result in more and better participation. However, we have identified a series of recommendations that would tackle many of the barriers we have identified, and would encourage more people to get involved, help them to have a better experience, and increase the positive outcomes of their participation.

As the project has explored participation in the round our recommendations are numerous and are aimed at a wide audience:

- politicians and policy-makers

- practitioners in the voluntary and community sector in frontline groups

16 IVR (2005) *Volunteering to lead. A study of leadership within small volunteer-led groups.* London: IVR.

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and infrastructure organisations

• people working for central and local government and statutory bodies

• individual participants.

Some recommendations apply to all these stakeholders and others are more targeted. Some relate to key principles and others are action-focused and practical.

5.3.1
Develop realistic expectations of participation

An over-optimistic view of participation can portray participation as the answer to all society's ills but it is important that we acknowledge its limitations and develop realistic expectations of what can be achieved.

Recommendation 1:
Have a clear purpose

Be clear what type of participation is sought and for what purpose. Policy-makers and practitioners need to know why they want participation to happen and develop and what they wish to achieve through participation. Clarity about purpose and expectation will inform policy and practice interventions in terms of what sort of participatory activity they need to promote. It will also reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings, suspicion, distrust and disengagement.

Recommendation 2:
Acknowledge what already exists

Recognise that almost everyone participates in some way and has an opinion or ideas to express, and use this as a base on which to start future planning. Participation is common, embedded and historic. Policy and practice should therefore move away from the assumption that suggests people are not already active.

Recommendation 3:
Provide flexible opportunities and support

Understand that participation is dynamic and evolving, not static. Institutions and organisations have to be flexible in their approach to participation and be prepared to engage with people whose needs, aspirations and circumstances are likely to change over time. This approach has implications for organisations' own structure or priorities. It is, however, equally important to be clear that some participatory roles need a regular and/or long-term commitment. The people in these roles need to be valued and looked after, and it needs to be made clear when they take on a role exactly what they are signing up to.

Recommendation 4:
Let it be fun

Recognise that many people are looking for participation that is simply sociable and enjoyable, without major responsibilities and long-term commitments. Some people want to increase and deepen their participation over time but many seek activities that they can take up and give up easily, without guilt and recriminations.

Recommendation 5:
Ensure there are benefits

Plan on the basis that participation is mutual and reciprocal, not purely altruistic. People want to see their participation make a difference, and will engage if it concerns something that directly matters to them and that they believe has value. Institutions, organisations and groups need to make people feel their help or involvement is needed, valued and meaningful for them to stay involved, whatever the activities they do or their depth of involvement.

Recommendation 6:
Recognise people's limits

Recognise the limits to what people can do and the time they can give. Any initiatives to encourage people to participate need to recognise the pressures of everyday life and of modern society, and be realistic about what people can do in their spare time and how much they can contribute to community activities: there really are only so many hours in the day. Simply removing practical barriers will not lead to an influx of additional participants.

5.3.2
Understand what policy and practice interventions can and cannot achieve

Policy and practice interventions can influence participation, but there are many other factors that shape how and why an individual participates and that affect the desired impact of policy and practice decisions.

Recommendation 7:
Recognise the limits of policy

Participation is more bottom-up than top-down. Policy-makers need to accept that participation may not always take place in the ways or on the issues they necessarily want. Forcing participation runs counter to its essence. Many grassroots activities are independent, often self-sufficient and so rooted in the community that government cannot, and should not, influence them. There needs to be a better recognition of where policy is able to have a supportive effect, and where it should leave people to get on with things themselves because otherwise it risks destroying what is there.
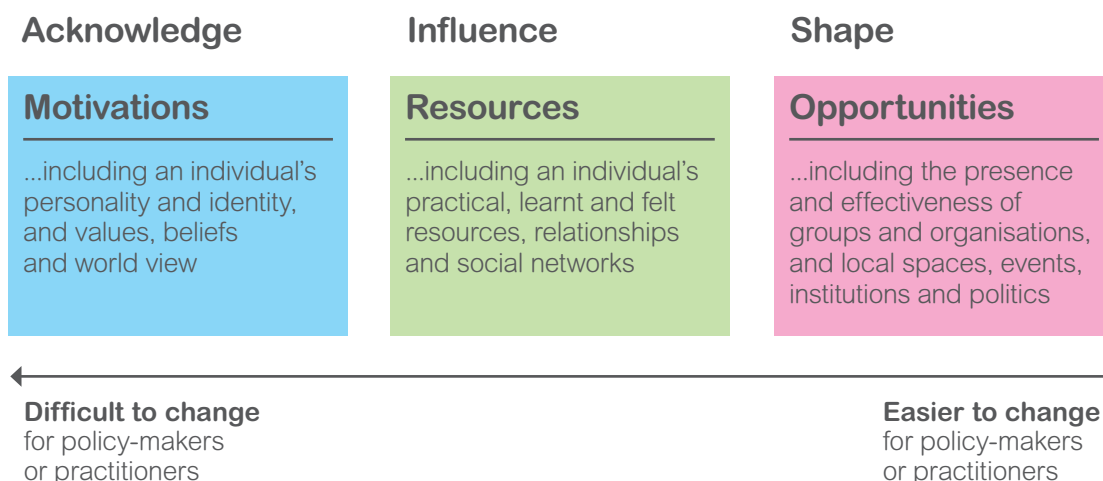
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Recommendation 8: Understand where change is easiest

Some things are easier to change than others. Policy-makers and practitioners need to better understand the variety of factors that shape people's experience of participation and their relative importance. Some of these factors will be easier to influence than others, and this knowledge will help define institutional and organisational strategies, policies and initiatives, provide focus and recognise limitations. Some actions will have an impact only in the long-term and will require greater ongoing commitment and patience.

We suggest that:

• an individual's motivations are difficult to shape in any predictable way but policy-makers and practitioners should acknowledge their importance and aim to understand them

• an individual's resources cannot be wholly shaped by policy-makers and practitioners, but can be influenced by their decisions and initiatives.

• an individual's opportunities to participate can be shaped collectively by policy-makers and practitioners.

Figure 12:
Acknowledging,
influencing or shaping

Acknowledge	Influence	Shape
Motivations	**Resources**	**Opportunities**
...including an individual's personality and identity, and values, beliefs and world view	...including an individual's practical, learnt and felt resources, relationships and social networks	...including the presence and effectiveness of groups and organisations, and local spaces, events, institutions and politics

Difficult to change
for policy-makers
or practitioners

Easier to change
for policy-makers
or practitioners

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5.3.3
Improve participation opportunities

Participation is widespread and embedded in communities, but inequalities of resources and power means that some people are more likely to be excluded from certain participatory activities. There is still a need to improve opportunities for participation.

Recommendation 9:
Establish the foundations

Certain factors are conducive to the development of participation and need to be encouraged.

- Start at an early age. Early influences significantly impact on people's participation. Opportunities for parents to participate while their children are at school can make a difference, as can young people's membership of youth groups and citizenship activities in schools (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh awards). Also, schools that are embedded in communities can give children an early experience of active citizenship beyond the school gates.

- Provide formal spaces and places. People need places and spaces to meet and to join participatory activities. Multi-purpose centres, such as neighbourhood community centres with a wide range of activities, can provide gateways to different activities. Existing institutions, organisations and groups are the enablers of participation – lose them and many participation opportunities will be destroyed.

- Ensure there are public informal spaces available, such as open spaces and parks, as these work to maximise chance encounters that can build social networks and relationships, as well as generate a sense of locality and neighbourhood.

- Provide links and pathways through networks and hubs. Many groups and organisations operate in relative isolation and would benefit from networking more with others. There need to be local platforms for them to come together formally or informally so that participation opportunities are more widely known and shared. Many groups and activities are below the radar of mainstream support organisations (and each other), but these groups can be identified (e.g. through national networks, campaigns, community leaders), and contacts made to link them into hubs if they want that to happen.

Recommendation 10:
Start where people are

If policy-makers and practitioners want to increase numbers of people participating, or want to increase access to opportunities for participation, they need to appreciate an individual in their wider context; both their environment but also their life up to that point. By understanding their past experiences of participation, their priorities and concerns, what else they do in their community, and their motivations, organisations and initiatives can better match aspirations and expectations with opportunities. People follow their own interests when choosing their participation activities (whether architecture or sport), and effective outreach and recruitment recognises these potential hooks.

Recommendation 11:
Provide options

Provide a range of opportunities and levels of involvement. Institutions, organisations and groups should offer a wide range of potential activities for people to get involved in order for them to identify where they are comfortable at the start. They should promote pathways within their own structure and processes that support people who want to move and change activities or level of involvement as their circumstances, experience and interests change.

Recommendation 12:
Use the personal approach

A personal invitation and warm welcome is far more effective than the most professionally designed poster or leaflet. Many people enjoy the opportunity to get involved informally and will be put off by processes and structures that are too formalised and structured.

Recommendation 13:
Value what people do

Policy-makers and practitioners need to value people's involvement in whatever form it comes, at whatever level of intensity: valuing the small actions as well as the major commitments. Institutions, organisations and groups should not seek to encourage all individuals to automatically progress through increasingly responsible roles, but rather value their unique contribution, understand the wider context within which this takes place, and match their participation to their motivations and circumstances.

Recommendation 14:
Value people's experience

People already actively participating should be supported and seen as a resource, not a burden or a nuisance. Language referring to the 'usual suspects', 'NIMBYs', 'do-gooders' etc. may not only be pejorative to those it is aimed at, it also creates a negative mood around active participation generally.

Recommendation 15:
Support individuals

Those who have an interest in encouraging participation need to provide support to individuals. This can be achieved by:

- Ensuring that communities and individuals who may be excluded by their circumstances or lack of resources are specifically encouraged to feel they will be welcome and valued, and targeting

some outreach to those groups not yet involved.

- Providing access to support for individuals under pressure, stress and with too much responsibility so that they can develop positive relationships and enjoy their involvement. Institutions, organisations and groups need to recognise that pressurising and cajoling people can have a negative impact for all those concerned in the longer term.

- Developing mentoring and shadowing initiatives within institutions, organisations and groups that bring together experienced participants and new participants to encourage potential pathways that strengthen and sustain participation.

Recommendation 16: Manage organisations and groups effectively

Organisations and groups provide a platform for participation. If they function effectively and purposively, without unnecessary formality or excessive bureaucracy, they are more likely to attract and sustain their members' participation, for example:

- Individuals need to feel that their participation within a organisation or group is contributing towards an aim they share in order to maintain their involvement.

- Organisations and groups need to establish clear roles and responsibilities, so members know what is expected of them.

- Friendly, informal, purposeful and productive meetings and events that are respectful of people's time and contribution sustain participation more effectively than formal, bureaucratic, lengthy meetings.

- Members with differing interests and views need to be supported to find common ground and to develop the skills and processes to manage internal conflicts.

Recommendation 17: Support organisations and groups

The organisations and groups that provide many opportunities for participation need financial and practical support to survive and to develop. Voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations have a key role in providing access to relevant information and opportunities, training and networking. Support from local and central government and other public bodies can take many forms, for example:

- Non-financial support, including pro-bono support from the public sector and providing access to public facilities and resources to allow groups to meet and carry out their work in a cost effective way.

- Financial support and investment, including public funding, to support the voluntary and community sector infrastructure to improve the quality and efficiency of their activities and build a more complete network of local infrastructure provision.

Government at all levels should also recognise that established organisations and groups are at least as valuable as new organisations, groups or initiatives.

Recommendation 18: Improve public consultations

Improve the design and management of formal public consultations, which we found were seen almost always as negative participatory experiences. This means, for example, that consultation managers need to consider the following:

- Involve people throughout the decision-making process, from scoping and defining the problem to implementing the decision.

- Involve people early enough in decision-making cycles to be able to make a difference (not after the decision has been taken).

- Provide ways that people can participate that fit their everyday lives.

- Provide a variety of participatory options to allow different levels of involvement.

- Manage consultations so that people are asked once for views on a topic, not over and over again on similar issues.

- Let participants know what difference their views have made, and how they are being taken into account.

- Let participants know what the final decision is.

Recommendation 19: Promote the benefits of participation

Organisations and government at all levels need to be aware of the benefits of participation, and use these as a hook to encourage more involvement, particularly the new relationships and enjoyment that participation involves. This means placing more emphasis on communicating the impacts of participation, the difference it makes, and letting people know that their contribution counts. The recruitment of new participants often happens by word of mouth: if individuals feel they are valued and that their participation is making a difference, they will tell positive stories to people they know and encourage others to participate.

Appendix A
Research methodology

This qualitative research project included a number of key stages: a literature review; the selection of the areas in which our fieldwork would be conducted; key stakeholder interviews; local area profiling; activity mapping; in-depth interviewing, and participatory workshops. The research also involved extensive local and national stakeholder engagement, as described in Appendix B

1. Literature review
The research began with a literature review which aimed to:

- review the current state of and gaps in the knowledge about participation and pathways into and through participation (including literature on motivations, triggers, routes into and through participation, progression, retention etc.)

- identify theories to help us understand and make sense of the issues to be explored

- develop an analytical framework to help us examine people's experience of participation over time and inform subsequent fieldwork, including the sampling and recruitment of research participants.

The review provided a synthesis of previously published material, that used a combination of scholarly outputs such as journal articles, books and book chapters and grey literature from research institutes and charities including the partner organisations own literature. Our starting point was to pool and review key sources and publications from the partner organisations, as each has published extensively on issues that relate to participation (e.g. active citizenship, volunteering, public decision making). Alongside this work, the researchers developed key search criteria that they used to search academic databases (e.g. Web of Knowledge), reviewed the articles that were relevant to the project's three research

questions, and used these articles to identify further relevant sources.

The review focused principally on literature about community development, volunteering and public participation. We also referred to other bodies of literature, including literature on social movements and ethical consumption. The review was structured around four key themes: the historical and current drivers of participation; the activities of participation; the actors of participation and the theories relating to participation. It was published in December 2009 and is available to download on the Pathways through Participation website[17].

2. Area selection
In order to provide diverse contexts for participation and to ensure the research would cover an extensive range of individual experiences of participatory activities and practices, our fieldwork was carried out in three contrasting areas. Our intention was to select areas in which we would be able to recruit a wide range of people who participate in different contexts, not to produce case studies or inventories of participation within each area.

We recognised that the choice of areas in which suitable fieldwork communities would be selected needed to consider geography, demography and socio-economic

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factors. It was agreed that a rural, suburban and inner-city area would provide the range of activities and people needed for the research.

The selection of the fieldwork areas was based upon a number of criteria including the:

• demographic make-up of the area

• extent and nature of the local VCS

• political control of the local authority (LA).

A four-stage approach was adopted to carrying out the selection of areas:

Stage 1 drew on existing demographic classifications of English LAs in order to establish what constitutes a rural, suburban and inner-city area and produced an initial long-list of local authorities.

Stage 2 narrowed down the long list of local authorities by removing certain atypical local authorities including:

• Beacons

• Civic Pioneers[18]

• Network of Empowering Authorities LAs[19]

• areas that have been heavily researched in the past.

Stage 3 involved further research of the shortlisted local authorities in order to sift and reduce their number. Existing networks and knowledge from within the partner organisations, and the expertise of the project Advisory Group and other networks were utilised to gather local intelligence. Further research was carried out through location visits, interviews, and desk based research, including establishing existing participation levels and the nature of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in the areas through using National Indicators (NI) relevant to public participation and volunteering, including NI 003 (Civic participation in the local area), NI 004 (% of people who feel they can influence decisions in their local area), NI 006 (Participation in regular volunteering) and NI 007 (Environment for a thriving third sector).

Stage 4 involved making a collective final decision within the project team on the final three LA areas. One of the most important criteria for choosing an area was the willingness of the local VCS infrastructure body and the local authority to work with us. In each area, the local VCS infrastructure body became our key partner (see Appendix B for more detail). Leeds was chosen as the inner-city area, Enfield as the suburban area and Suffolk as the rural area.

3. Stakeholder Interviews

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with key organisational stakeholders in each of the three areas. The key informant interviews had a number of aims:

• helping to narrow down the LA area to a specific fieldwork area

• identifying participatory sites and spaces

• identifying participatory organisations and groups

• recruiting potential Local Stakeholder Group members

• building relationships with people.

Potential key informants were identified mainly through contacts provided by our local partners (I.e. the local VCS infrastructure organisation) in each area and subsequent snowballing.

4. Area profiling

Area profiles were produced of the fieldwork areas. The aim of the area profile was twofold: to better understand the contexts for participation at both the LA and neighbourhood level, and to prepare for subsequent data collection stages. Each area profile gave a brief overview of:

• the physical, social, economic, cultural, institutional and political context of the LA and fieldwork area

• the practice of participation across the LA and fieldwork area

• the practice of non-institutional/ informal participation and non-participation across the LA and fieldwork area.

Each area profile used a range of data sources and included descriptions of:

• the local history

• the political structure and history

• demographics and the socio-economic background

• the physical and environmental area

• voluntary and community sector activity

• informal networks.

5. Activity mapping

Two activity mapping sessions in each of the three fieldwork areas were carried out with local people. The main aims of these sessions were to:

• explore participants' knowledge, experience and understanding of participation

• identify the range of places and spaces for participation in the local area and beyond

• contribute towards understanding the local context of participation

• inform the design and sampling of future research activities.

Participants were recruited using a purposive snowballing approach that drew on existing contacts and organisations. Recognising that in using this approach there was a danger that the diversity of the participants would be compromised, efforts were made to reach out and recruit additional and diverse participants, in terms of:

• age

• gender

• ethnicity

• religious affiliation

• socio-economic status

• employment

• residency within the area

18 See 'Introduction to the Civic Pioneers' at http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1108568.pdf
19 See 'The Network of Empowering Authorities (NEA) and their work' at http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9381747)

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- types of participatory activity

- intensity of engagement in participatory activities.

An additional mapping session was carried out with the Local Stakeholder Group in each area.

The maps themselves and what the participants said about the maps proved to be particularly rich, complementing significantly the information gathered during the area profiling stage. The sites of participation identified helped the researchers to find some key places and spaces where participation happens locally, which helped them target certain sites and organisations to recruit interviewees. A report[20] of the mapping stage was produced, and published in June 2010.

6. In-depth interviewing
The next phase of the data collection process was the individual in-depth interviews. The overarching aim of the interviews was to explore individuals' stories of participation, including:

- meanings of participation (people's understanding of participation and what it means to them)

- motivations, triggers and routes into and out of participation

- the difference participation makes to people's lives

- the barriers to participation

- the links that exist between the different forms and episodes of participation in which people have engaged.

A life-story approach, which puts emphasis on eliciting personal narratives, was used in the interviews. The technique is respondent-led, allowing the interviewee to tell their story in their own words and recount events in their preferred order without the interviewer asking too many direct and predetermined questions.

A flexible three-part structure was used in the interviews. The interviewer started with a couple of

questions about the interviewees' current involvements (the activity for which they were recruited), then shifted to open-ended questions about the interviewees experience of participation over their lifetime, followed by prompts about specific examples of participation. Interviewees were invited to create a visual timeline to help structure discussion and make it interactive and creative. The timeline helped to prompt the interviewee's memory, and to facilitate follow-up questions by the interviewer. The interview concluded with questions inviting the interviewee to reflect on their timeline as a whole.

In total, 101 interviewees were recruited from across the three fieldwork areas. Interviewees were selected from across the seven activity types we identified in our framework of participation:

- public and political engagement

- campaigning, lobbying and direct action

- service to others and the environment

- mutual aid/self help

- fundraising and individual giving

- ethical consumerism

- sports, arts and hobbies.

Interviewees were also selected to represent a range of degrees of involvement (from very active to occasional participants) as well as diversity across:

- age

- gender

- ethnicity

- religious affiliation

- socio-economic status

- employment.

Participants were recruited in a variety of ways, including through:

- the key informant interviews and local mapping workshops

- snowballing, via other research participants and local stakeholders

- meeting people at local events and social 'hot spots' (e.g. pubs, shops)

- researching local activities, organisations and events on the internet and in local newspapers and publications and contacting named people

- invitations to participate on local notice boards (e.g. places of worship; job centre; housing office; shops; library).

All interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed (interviewees' consent was gained for this). The transcripts were then analysed using NVivo, a qualitative research software. A 'coding framework' that represented key themes and topics was created to help analyse the interview transcripts. Each transcript was read and coded by the researcher who had conducted the interview. To test the framework and ensure consistency in the way the interviews were coded, all three researchers began by coding the same interview transcript, comparing their approach, and ensuring that codes were being used consistently. The researchers then added in several additional codes to the framework, so the analysis was, in theoretical terms, using a combination of grounded theory where the researchers allow themes to emerge in response to what they are reading from the 'bottom-up' and a 'top-down' or structural approach where the hypotheses developed throughout the project are 'super imposed' on the data.

The thematic codes, from across the entire research (e.g. 'life stage' or 'world view'), resulting from this process were then divided between the researchers who analysed them to identify and compare themes, similarities, differences, patterns and trends, which were set out in code notes. These code notes, along with the vignettes, form the basis of this analysis and the findings in this report.

In total, the researchers analysed an estimated 2,525 pages of transcribed text, representing approximately 151 hours of recording.

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20 http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Using-participatory-mapping-to-explore-participation-in-three-communities_June-2010.pdf

In addition to the analysis using NVivo, a short vignette was written for each interviewee in order to maintain their unique story and enable us to pinpoint particular drivers, barriers, links, breaks, commonalities and transitions throughout their experience of participation.

7. Participatory workshops

Participatory workshops were held in each of the three fieldwork areas. The purpose of these workshops was to:

• present and discuss the research results with local stakeholders

• provide opportunities for local stakeholders to identify the implications of the research findings for their own work locally and more widely

• enable local stakeholders to identify specific actions that they might want to take as a result of the research, and actions that are needed more widely.

The workshops were designed around three key questions:

• **What?** The research findings

• **So what?** The implications of the research findings locally and more widely

• **Now what?** Identifying actions to address the findings and implications.

The workshops in the three areas were tailored to the local circumstances following feedback from the Local Stakeholder Groups. In Enfield and Suffolk a one-day workshop covered all three key questions, while in Leeds the questions were split over two half-day workshops.

The workshops were well attended in each of the three areas and attracted a diverse range of people, primarily from voluntary and community organisations and statutory bodies, as the table below shows:

	Enfield	Leeds	Suffolk
Total number of participants	37	47 (30 in workshop 1 and 17 in workshop 2)	36
Voluntary and community organisations (%)	59	56	63
Local authority (%)	27	16	21
Other public bodies (%)	9	16	12
Other (%)	5	12	4

A report for each of the workshops was written, summarising in some detail the approach and contents of the workshops, circulated to all participants and published on the project's website[21].

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21 Enfield: http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Using-participatory-mapping-to-explore-participation-in-three-communities_June-2010.pdf;
Leeds: http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/resources/workshop-materials/leeds/;
Suffolk: http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/resources/workshop-materials/suffolk/

Appendix B
Stakeholder engagement and communications

1. Stakeholder engagement

The Pathways project was designed to engage stakeholders throughout its duration in order to encourage wide ownership of the research process and findings. Our view has been that wider engagement would improve the relevance, value and depth of the data gathered; meet participatory research ethics for research on participation; and create opportunities to link the research findings to policy and practice changes so that more appropriate opportunities for participation could be developed and made available to a wider range of people.

Throughout the project, we have used research methods that were interactive, collaborative and creative. These included the use of activity mapping sessions, in-depth interviews using visual timelines and the participatory workshops (see Appendix A for more information).

We recognised that the contributions and buy-in of local stakeholders was crucial to the success of the project and its outcomes, and so from the outset stakeholder involvement was sought and facilitated. In each of the three fieldwork areas a Local Stakeholder Group was established in partnership with (and chaired by) the lead voluntary sector infrastructure body in the area: Voluntary Action Leeds, Enfield Voluntary Action and SAVO (Suffolk Association of Voluntary Organisations).

The Local Stakeholder Groups brought together a range of practitioners and policy makers from voluntary and community organisations and statutory bodies operating in each of the three areas (see Appendix C for full details). The Groups met on a quarterly basis to support and guide the development of the research project. The Chair of each Group also sat on the national Advisory Group.

The purpose of the Local Stakeholder Groups was to strengthen local stakeholder engagement in the project and to enhance its impact. This was achieved through the groups fulfilling the following roles and functions:

- advise on the local development of the Pathways through Participation project

- enhancing the Project Team's understanding of the local area

- helping to facilitate access to potential research respondents

- ensuring that the research was informed by the best available local knowledge

- acting as local advocates for the project

- helping to identify and address potential issues

- contributing to the design and undertaking of the research at the local area level, as appropriate.

To widen local stakeholder engagement, we worked with the Local Stakeholder Groups to organise participatory workshops in each area to explore the possible implications the initial research findings could have for practice and policy. These events were aimed at local voluntary and community organisations, public bodies and service providers. The workshops provided an opportunity for people attending to identify what the findings meant for their own work and more widely, and to think of specific actions that they might want to take as a result of the research. Full day workshops were held in Enfield and Suffolk, and two half-day events held in Leeds, with 40-50 local stakeholders attending in each location. Detailed reports were produced from each workshop and circulated to all participants. The results of the workshops fed into the drafting of this final report, particularly Section 5. In addition, the priority actions identified at the workshops formed the basis for discussions at the final meetings of the Local Stakeholder Groups, at which members considered the next steps they would take to extend and improve opportunities for participation in their areas.

The project was also guided in its work by a national Advisory Group consisting of academics, policy-makers, representatives from the voluntary and community sector and the Chairs of the Local Stakeholder Groups (see Appendices C and D for a full list of members).

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participation:
Final report
September 2011**

**Appendix B
Stakeholder engagement
and communications**

2. Communications

In order to increase impact and reach, the team developed an extensive communications strategy to engage with a wide range of stakeholders. Throughout the project we communicated the project's progress; our research findings and outputs; and information, articles and reports on participation that were directly relevant to the project but produced by others.

To do this we created a website dedicated to the project and also set up an e-newsletter which people could subscribe to via our website. Since the beginning of 2011 we have had 24,320 unique visitors to our site and have currently over 900 subscribers to our e-newsletter in the UK and beyond, including people working in the voluntary and community sector and statutory bodies as well as private individuals.

We have also promoted our work using the existing communication channels of each partner organisation and their networks, and presented papers at various conferences and seminars, including: the Social Research Association conference; the NCVO/VSSN (Voluntary Sector Studies Network) annual research conference; the BIVAR (Birkbeck College and Institute for Voluntary Action Research) seminar series, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Civil Society and Volunteering monthly meetings and the People's Voice conference.

All our outputs (including reports, summaries, presentations, e-newsletters) are available to download in the resources section of our website[22]. Our major outputs are as follows:

Understanding participation:
A review of the literature review

• Briefing paper 1:
  What is participation?

• Briefing paper 2:
  What are the drivers of participation?

• Briefing paper 3:
  Who participates?

• Briefing paper 4:
  Why participate?

• Situated practice:
  Initial reflections on the organisation of participation

• Using participatory mapping to explore participation in three communities

• Strengthening participation:
  Learning from participants

• Participatory workshop reports

In addition to these existing outputs, we will be producing a project summary report and three shorter outputs (4 pages) that will provide an overview of the project findings and review implications and recommendations for a more targeted audience. Briefing 1 will focus on public engagement at the local level and will be aimed at government, local authorities, public service providers and voluntary and community organisations; Briefing 2 will focus on volunteer involving organisations and will be aimed primarily at volunteer managers; and Briefing 3 will look at the relevance of the project to the Big Society agenda and will be aimed at national policy makers. We will also be producing a short report on our research process to reflect on how organisations can translate research findings into action and the challenges that this entails. All these will be available to download on our website.

The communications strategy has been successful in making the project accessible to a wide audience, as reflected by the high rates of downloads of some of our key documents. The report *Understanding participation: a review of the literature* has, for instance, been downloaded over 7,700 times since it was published and the report *Using participatory mapping to explore participation in three communities* over 2,200 times.

22 http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/resources/

Appendix C
Local Stakeholder Group members

Enfield

Ilhan Basharan
London Borough of Enfield

Liane Burn
Enfield Disability Action

Vivienne Hoffman
Ruth Winston Centre

Julie Howes
NHS Enfield

Paula Jeffery (Chair)
Enfield Voluntary Action

Huw Jones
North London
Chamber of Commerce

Maureen Juliana-Harvey
Community Empowerment
Network Enfield

David March
Residents' Association

Jacqueline Martyr
London Borough of Enfield

Alice Mayer
Theatre Company

Niki Nicolaou
London Borough of Enfield

Garrett Pennery
MET Police

Shirley Scott
London Borough of Enfield

Tony Seagroatt
Age UK Enfield

Litsa Worrall
Greek and Cypriot Community
of Enfield

Leeds

Andrea Tara Chand
Leeds Initiative

Steve Crocker
Leeds City Council

Chris Dickinson
Leeds City Council

Sally Anne Greenfield
Leeds Community Foundation

Amanda Jackson
University of Leeds

Richard Jackson (Chair)
Voluntary Action Leeds

Taira Kayani
Burley Lodge Centre

Rachael Loftus
Leeds Initiative

Mike Love
Together 4 Peace

Greg Miller
University of Leeds

Natasha Mort
Voluntary Action Leeds

Richard Norton
Re'new

David Reid
Leeds City Council

Norma Thompson
NHS Leeds

Suffolk

Susan Allison
Local resident

Joe Carter
Newmarket Racing Partnership

Lisa Chambers
Suffolk County Council

Kerri Leach
Forest Health District Council

Sue McAllister
Newmarket Community Partnership

Jonathan Moore (Chair)
Suffolk Association of Voluntary
Organisations (SAVO)

Graham Passey
Sports and social club

Lynne Rawlings
Newmarket Citizen Advice Bureau

Gill Robinson
Suffolk Volunteering Federation

Appendix D
Advisory
Group members

Karen Cave
Department for Communities
and Local Government

Richard Grice
London Borough of Barnet

Arianna Haberis
Department for Communities
and Local Government

Jayne Humm
Community Development Foundation

Richard Jackson
Voluntary Action Leeds

Paula Jeffery
Enfield Voluntary Action

Mike Locke
Volunteering England

Jonathan Moore
Suffolk Association of Voluntary
Organisations (SAVO)

Angela Paine
Third Sector Research Centre

Jethro Pettit
Institute of Development Studies

Colin Rochester
Birkbeck College, University
of London

Marilyn Taylor (Chair)
Institute for Voluntary Action
Research (IVAR) and the
University of the West of England

Joanna Wheeler
Institute of Development Studies

Appendix E Partner organisations

The partner organisations

The Pathways through Participation project is a joint research project, led by NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations) in partnership with IVR (Institute for Volunteering Research) and Involve.

NCVO is the largest umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in England with over 8,400 members. Its research team conducts research on issues of importance to the voluntary and community sector, including citizen engagement and voluntary action.

IVR is a research and consultancy agency specialising in volunteering. Formed in 1997, it is part of Volunteering England and has a research partnership with Birkbeck, University of London.

Involve provides expertise in public engagement, participation and dialogue to help empower citizens to take and influence the decisions that affect their lives. Involve carries out research, provides consultancy and delivers training to inspire citizens, communities and institutions to run and take part in high-quality public participation processes.

The project team

All three organisations recruited a new full-time researcher and appointed a project manager. Each organisation had responsibility for conducting research in one of the case study areas: NCVO was responsible for Enfield; Involve for Leeds and IVR for Suffolk.

All members of the project team were actively involved in the design, research and dissemination stages of the project. Throughout the duration of the project, the team met monthly to review progress and discuss next steps. Additional meetings were held to discuss specific thematic issues and findings. In between meetings the team used an online project management system to communicate (i.e. basecamp).