

Associations, Deliberation and Democracy: The Case of Ireland's Social Partnership

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Abstract

Over the past two decades there has been a burgeoning interest and research into experiments and innovations in participatory governance. While advocates highlight the merits of such new governance arrangements in moving beyond traditional interest group representations and deepening democracy through deliberation with a broad range of civic associations, critics express concern about the political legitimacy and democratic accountability of participating associations, highlighting in particular the dangers of co-option and faction. Addressing these concerns, a number of theorists identify an important role for civic associations in linking deliberations at micro policy levels to those within the public sphere more broadly. These normative contributions raise an important empirical question - does civic associational engagement at micro levels leave scope to engage both laterally across associations and vertically with members and citizens more broadly? More simply put, is civic associational engagement within micro-policy fora 'good' for democracy more broadly?

Drawing from a study of civic associational engagement in Ireland's national Social Partnership process over a ten year period this paper argues that, where deliberations become overshadowed by more traditional communicative norms of bargaining and negotiation, it is not. Evidence is presented from the Irish case to show how civic actors, having internalised the dominant communicative norms of the process, have contributed towards a narrowing of the deliberative space both within, but most particularly, outside this process. This, it is argued, has resulted in a considerably weakened public sphere with neither the institutional apparatus nor the discursive

capacity to seek accountability from political and civic leaders at a time of profound crisis within the Irish state.

Introduction

Over the past two decades there has been a burgeoning interest and research into experiments and innovations in governance at both local and national levels. Whether characterised as co-governance¹, joined-up governance², multi-level governance³, network governance⁴ or participatory governance⁵, these innovative structures bring together the principal norms and tenets of both associative and deliberative democracy by opening the fields of policy to vertical and horizontal networks of civic associations while employing deliberation and iterative dialogue to achieve consensus. The spread of these new governance arrangements has been both wide and deep with innovations in participatory governance associated with both public sector reforms and ‘Third Way Politics’ across the Western world⁶ while similar arrangements underpin the good governance reforms of the 1990s in a wide range of developing countries⁷.

Advocates highlight the merits of these governance arrangements at both instrumental and political levels. Instrumentally, they are seen to lead to more effective policy as local partners and associations bring locally relevant information, analysis and skills to the table⁸. Moreover, the norms of deliberation employed in building shared understanding are seen to build consensus, solidarity and social stability⁹ while the extension of the political space to a broader range of civic associations is described as deepening democracy, moving beyond traditional interest group representations and

deepening and extending the democratic state¹⁰. These merits notwithstanding, concern has been expressed in relation to the perceived democratic deficit of these governance networks. While for some, the weak linkages between these new forms of governance and the formal institutions of representative democracy constitute an area of concern¹¹, others argue warn against the perils of both faction among¹² and cooption of¹³ civic actors engaged in these processes. Issues of the democratic legitimacy and accountability of participating associations are therefore to the fore for sceptics and critics of such processes. Addressing these concerns, a number of theorists¹⁴ identify an important role for civic associations in linking deliberations at micro policy levels to those within the public sphere more broadly. Building on the work of Jane Mansbridge who argues that elite deliberation must be supplemented with deliberation among *'the rank and file'* as *'only citizens themselves can know what outcomes they want'*¹⁵, Caroline Hendriks proposes an *'integrated deliberative system'* linking micro-level deliberations to a series of communicative arenas fostering critical, public reflection¹⁶. Independently of these theorists, Lucio Baccaro similarly argues that the legitimacy of micro governance arenas should be based on *'their capacity to pass the test of collective scrutiny'* within an active and mobilised public sphere¹⁷. The agents of such mediation between sites of micro-deliberation and the broad public are located by all theorists within civil society. Herein lies the dilemma however. While, in theory, civic associations represent a key mediation point between the broad public and the state, enhancing democracy through their participation across the deliberative system at both micro and macro levels and in the intervening spaces in between, in practice, their collective capacity to sustain engagement at all levels remains understudied. In a paper examining the link between

associational and neo-corporatist models, Lucio Baccaro poses the question succinctly.

It is highly likely that modern democracies need both a civil society of the Habermasian kind, which controls from outside the formal structures of government specialized in the resolution of practical problems, and a civil society of the associational democratic kind, which participates directly in problem-solving. What we need to understand at this point— and the question is not just theoretical but eminently empirical—is whether such duplicity of functions is sustainable: whether civil society is able to regenerate itself constantly and smoothly, so that for each organization that accedes to the bureaucratic circuit another emerges to take its place in the unstructured public sphere, or whether the transition of civil society associations from the ‘lifeworld’ to the ‘system’ of an enlarged bureaucracy (Habermas, 1987) does not deteriorate their capacity for critique and articulation of value-based alternatives.¹⁸

Through an examination of civic associational engagement within Ireland’s national Social Partnership process, a process variously characterised as a form of ‘network governance’¹⁹ and ‘an Irish version of Third Way politics’²⁰, this paper interrogates this question more fully. The paper employs an actor-oriented approach to analysis which focuses on the experiences, analyses and perceptions of state and civic associational participants within the process. The findings presented draw on twenty two interviews conducted from 2005 to 2007 with state and civic actors participating within the process. These include representatives from eighteen of the twenty three ‘community and voluntary’ organisations involved as well as four of the most senior civil servants involved in deliberation, negotiation and administration of the process²¹. While this research was originally conducted as part of a broader research project comparing Ireland and Malawi’s processes as cases of globalised governance²², a new analysis of the Irish data within the framework of deliberative theory – inspired by the rapidly changed Irish context – reveals important issues for deliberative actors and theorists alike. The research is complemented by an analysis of successive Social Partnership strategies and background policy documentation. The analysis presented

highlights fundamental challenges posed by the superimposition of deliberation on more traditional communicative norms of bargaining and negotiation and it is argued that civic actors, having internalised the dominant, more traditional communicative norms of the process, have contributed to a narrowing of the deliberative space both within, but most particularly, outside this process. Over time, as an increasing number of national civic associations have entered the process, civil society outside has been left with little leadership to re-animate the public sphere. The result, it is argued, is a weakened public sphere with neither the institutional apparatus nor the discursive capacity to seek accountability from political and civic leaders at a time of profound crisis within the Irish state.

The argument is developed as follows. Within the context of an extensive literature examining the concurrence of Ireland's Social Partnership process with the emergence of the economically vibrant 'Celtic Tiger' economy of the 1990s, and given the massive economic, social and political crisis now facing the country and its people, the following section argues the case for a re-orientation in focus toward the implications of the process for substantive democracy within the country more broadly. This re-orientation is next theorised through an examination of the normative ideals, critiques and responses to these of the inter-related theories of associative and deliberative democracy. The issues raised provide a framework for the third section wherein state and civic associational involvement in the Irish process are examined. Turning to Ireland's deepening crisis, the paper concludes with a discussion of the lessons – both of a practical and of a theoretical nature – drawn from the process.

Social Partnership: Ireland's experiment in participatory governance

Ireland's Social Partnership began in the late 1980s in an effort to address the economic crisis then facing the country. Although initially developed around a solid corporatist core comprising capital, labour, farmers' organisations (organised into three respective 'pillars') and the state to negotiate and agree wage levels, thereby promoting industrial stability and a climate attractive to foreign investment, from the outset the process also included a wide range of non-pay aspects, including policies on tax reform, the evolution of welfare payments, trends in health spending, and structural adjustments²³. Over the course of over twenty years, both the policy remit and the range of actors involved have increased substantially, moving the process a significant distance from its corporatist roots. The inclusion, in the mid-1990s, of a fourth pillar, the 'community and voluntary pillar' (CV pillar) comprising some seventeen national associational networks²⁴, described by the state as widening and deepening participation within the process²⁵, marked an important step in Ireland's move towards participatory governance. A fifth 'environmental pillar', made up of twenty-seven environmental associations, joined the process in 2009. Both these pillars, comprising national networks with extensive associational memberships throughout the country, have brought a large cross-section of civic associations into the Partnership process. Simultaneously, many of these same associations are engaged in parallel processes directly through locally based partnership structures – the principle model for policy making at local levels since the 1990s²⁶. The extent of the spread of participatory governance throughout the country, engaging community based associations both directly and indirectly through their representative networks, raises an important question as to the impact (if any) of these processes on associational life across the country more broadly.

Notwithstanding the significant expansion and development of Social Partnership, analysis and commentary on the national process has, for the most part, centred on its function as an integral part of the country's macroeconomic framework and, with a focus on the traditional core of state, labour and unions, its role in building and consolidating the 'Celtic Tiger'. Opinion is divided within the literature between analysts who celebrate the process' role in securing industrial stability, attracting foreign investment and stimulating growth²⁷ and those who highlight the lack of socially progressive outcomes²⁸ together with the growth in income inequality over the Social Partnership period²⁹. A comprehensive critique of the process as privileging capital over income equality and social justice comes from Kieran Allen³⁰ who focuses on the rise of the 'working poor' and the role of trade unions in the process. Taking a more globalised perspective and drawing on Castells' conception of the 'network state'³¹, elsewhere this author has argued that the process has functioned as an important political instrument in expanding and consolidating a Gramscian integral state, nurturing and promoting engagement across civil society more broadly in managing the social fallout accruing from the costs of the state's project of global economic integration³². To a lesser extent, some attention has also been directed at both the deliberative nature of the process (although this characterisation remains somewhat vague and undertheorised)³³ and, with weak linkages to the parliament and its institutions, its implications for (liberal) representative democracy³⁴.

An area which has received far less attention from scholars and commentators however, and the focus of this article, is the political significance of the process more

broadly, most notably in relation to its implications for broader macro deliberations within the public sphere and the health and vibrancy of associational life across the country. While a small group of theorists³⁵ argue that civic associations have been co-opted into the process thereby failing to exert any real influence therein, these assertions lack solid empirical bases and we remain unclear as to why or how this may have happened (if indeed it has). At an empirical level, significant questions remain, therefore, in relation to the agency of civic associational networks within the community and voluntary pillar in the process³⁶. At a more theoretical level, the reality of participatory governance on the ground in many guises throughout the country, together with the high level of civic associational involvement this entails, provides a good case from which to interrogate normative proposals and suggestions for civic associational agency in linking macro and micro deliberative spheres. It is to these proposals, and their significance in relation to Ireland's national process that we now turn.

Associations, deliberation and democracy: Theorising Social Partnership

While many global commentators source the origins of partnership governance arrangements within the discourse of the public reforms of the 1990s³⁷ with, as we have seen, scholars of the Irish process situating their analyses within labour relations theory, the emphasis on deliberation and consensus linked to the role ascribed to civic associations as state 'partners' in economic and social development point to deeper linkages to both associative and deliberative democracy.

Although debates on the nature, role and function of civil society broadly and civic associations more specifically date back to the seventeenth century³⁸, the 1990s

brought about a vigorous revival in interest in the field, most notably in relation to the role of civic associations in democracy. Two key trends appear to have promoted this revival. The first is the role of civic associations worldwide in mobilising the so-called ‘Third Wave’ of democracy that swept through Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa in the early 1990s, while the second is the context of falling voter turnout and growing apathy with liberal representative institutions in the West. Inspired by these developments, two broad schools of thought have emerged in relation to the role of associations and their relations with the state. The first envisages a civic associational space critical of and separate to both market and state while the second, theorised most comprehensively as a model of ‘associative democracy’, envisages associations working in partnership with the state.

In one of the most significant contributions to the 1990s debate on the role of civic associations in democracy, Cohen and Arato³⁹ advocate a model in which civic associations promote democracy through their animation of the public sphere, ensuring vibrant debate and deliberation among civil society at large, with this, through association’s ‘dual role’, in turn feeding into political deliberations and decision making at more formal levels. The authors draw heavily on Habermas’ notion of a ‘communicative / discourse ethics’ wherein the public sphere is depicted as a site of rational critical deliberation among free and equal citizens employing deliberative norms which are inclusive, reasoned and reflective, and aimed at reaching common understanding and consensus⁴⁰. Habermas argues that unconstrained communication is made possible by civil society organisations which periodically renew the political debate and force the official circuits of power to be attentive and responsive to new issues arising at the periphery of the system. Following Habermas,

for Cohen and Arato⁴¹, *'The political role of civil society in turn is not directly related to the control or conquest of power but to the generation of influence through the life of democratic associations and unconstrained discussion in the cultural public sphere.'* The role of civic associations, following this conception, is to open up public spaces for more inclusive, broader deliberation and debate on issues of public interest and concern.

While this conception invokes a deliberative space open to all, it is not without its critics for whom Habermas and his followers deliver an overly rationalist conception of the public sphere which, despite claims that it makes room for difference, fails to adequately theorise pluralism and power. Specifically, critics argue that the norms of rational discourse with their deliberative emphasis on communicative reason and consensus ignore the pluralist and inevitably conflictual nature of society⁴² and exclude individuals and groups for whom more emotive, less bounded and less rational forms of communication are the norm⁴³ thus reinforcing and reproducing existing exclusions and inequalities as powerful actors come to dominate the public sphere⁴⁴. The influence of these different critiques on deliberative theory is apparent in recent work with theorists, appreciating the legitimacy of differing opinions and positions, advocating more pluralist conceptions of the public sphere (see for example Benhabib's argument that a civic perspective of 'enlarged mentality' suffices in the absence of consensus⁴⁵, or Dryzek and Niemeyers' proposed concept of 'meta-consensus' which recognises the legitimacy of different values and positions⁴⁶). Thus, contemporary debates, cognisant of the multiplicity of positions and proposals, envisage a role for civic associations in animating the public sphere in a way which

ensures that communications are not distorted by powerful voices and interests and that a diversity of positions, interests and perspectives are expressed.

The second major contribution to the debate on associations and democracy advocates a model where associations work in partnership with the state in a more formal deliberative role in the arena of economic and social policy and service delivery. Several variants on this model have been proposed. Hirst's proposal is for a radical transformation of public and private spheres whereby the state cedes key economic and social functions to civic associations⁴⁷ with civic associations, following this conception, playing a role in both policy formulation and implementation in partnership with, although autonomous to, the state. Cohen and Rogers' recommendations for a closer relationship between associations and states to address the shortcomings of the welfare state⁴⁸ resonate with those proposed by Hirst. In line with the instrumental arguments of governance proponents, Cohen and Rogers argue that associations can help improve policy formulation and implementation by leveraging local knowledge, encouraging compliance to policy and monitoring outcomes. Fung and Wright propose a third variant on this theme. Their proposals for what they call Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) see associations pushing for institutional reforms wherein individuals may directly participate with state actors in deliberation and policy formulation at local levels. The benefits of such arrangements, they argue, are reciprocal, with associations providing channels for individual voices while the direct opportunities to influence policy and state action creates incentives for individuals to create and maintain associations⁴⁹.

In Ireland, the key government policy document setting out the relationship of the state to civic associations reflects strongly these basic principles of associative democracy. Within this document, the State is described as '*not the answer to every problem, but just one player among others*', with the government's vision of society described as being '*one which encourages people and communities to look after their own needs – very often in partnership with statutory agencies – but without depending on the state to meet all needs*'. Thus, policies and action priorities should be based on local knowledge and, in line with the proposals of a number of associative democrats, the Irish government recommends that the contribution of associations to policy and service provision be supported financially⁵⁰.

As with the first model discussed, a number of problems with these normative associative models have been identified. These may be summarised into the 'what' and the 'who' of representation within these formal, micro-level deliberative fora. The 'what' problem raises questions regarding which issues to include and how to deliberate upon these. Both Schmitter⁵¹ and Young⁵² are sharply critical of European models of associative democracy in that, they argue, only distributional issues are included with all other non-materialist issues remaining exempt. The 'who' problem relates to the 'faction' problem common within traditional interest group politics – that of incomplete representation and self-serving behaviour. As in traditional interest group politics, civic associations are likely to represent the specific interests of their members, and not those of society more broadly. Two aspects of this problem are of particular concern here. First, there is the problem of equality of representation. Well resourced groups coalescing around specific issues are generally more powerful and therefore more successful in attaining their interests than more marginalised

groupings with broader concerns. As Fung notes '*In political science and political sociology, group research has consistently shown that "the flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with an upper class accent"*'⁵³. And second, as Hirst and Bader⁵⁴ note, civic associations as self-governing entities may withdraw from the wider community they purport to represent, seeking to control their members through the services that they provide – a problem of oligarchy and a lack of internal democracy. Far from mediating and representing members' interests, associations may become institutions of social control.

Cohen and Rogers (1995), recognising that all associations may not automatically be 'public spirited', propose two solutions. First, they envisage a level of state intervention to curb factional interests and centralise and stimulate '*a deliberate politics of association*' to equalise interest representation or make associations more public-spirited or 'other-regarding'⁵⁵. Thus, states may intervene to ensure accountability of group leadership to members, the representativeness (or 'encompassingness' as they term it) of the group relative to affected populations and their modes of interaction with other groups – by selecting the civic actors to be involved. Second, Cohen and Rogers⁵⁶, together with a number of other theorists⁵⁷ highlight the importance of linking deliberations at micro policy levels with those at more macro levels within the public sphere more broadly.

Associations therefore, in theory represent a key mediation point between the broad public and the state, enhancing democracy through their participation across the deliberative system. At a micro, formal level, they can represent the interests, ideas, analyses and positions of 'the people' affected by particular policy processes and

decisions. At a macro, informal level, they can facilitate public deliberation by opening the space for a diversity of voices, views, interests and positions. And, in the intervening spaces in between, they can improve the quality and equality of political representation by making the link between informal and formal arenas, opening channels for individuals to hold their political leaders accountable, mobilise where necessary and press their public concerns. The key question is to what extent do civic associations succeed in promoting such deliberation across these multiple fora? Or more specifically, does their engagement at a micro level leave scope to engage laterally across associations and vertically with members and citizens more broadly? This question is explored below through an examination of the community and voluntary pillar's engagement in Ireland's national Social Partnership process.

Deliberation and Democracy within Ireland's Social Partnership

As we have seen, the shift to a more associative model within Ireland's national Social Partnership process formally came about in 1996 when, following some pressure from a number of civic interest groups, the Irish state invited eight civic networks into the process to form a new 'community and voluntary pillar'⁵⁸. While some networks had applied to be involved⁵⁹, others were invited. Networks targeted for invitation by the state were key umbrella groups for particular sectors with sizeable constituencies of interest⁶⁰. The Community Workers Cooperative (CWC), interested in gaining broader-based representation, went on to form the Community Platform, an amalgam of initially seventeen small national associations (although membership has fluctuated up and down over time).

Notwithstanding their commonalities as key national civic associational networks with wide membership bases, from the outset there were clear differences between participant groups. First, there were divisions between issue-based/single constituency groups focused on securing specific policy gains and broader-based groups interested in engaging in more open deliberative dialogue with other participants. Specifically, with a doubling of EU Structural Funds in 1989, leading to a total investment in Ireland over the period 1989 to 1999 of Euro 11 billion⁶¹, for a number of interest-based associations, engagement in the process was about '*shaping the social agenda and where resources are going to be placed...*'⁶², while for others it was more about opening up dialogue and debate. Second, there were divisions between welfare-type approaches to social inclusion focusing solely on distributional issues, as advocated by particular religious associations, and associations aiming for broader structural change. Third, there were also divisions in relation to communication norms, with some associations from the outset stressing a rational, 'professional' approach in the Habermasian sense, yet others favouring wider methods of communication including protest and contestation. And fourth, although many participant associations worked through extensive constituent networks comprising hundreds of locally based associations, there were clear differences in relation to the size and capacity of participant groups at national level. The average estimate of human resource requirements for participation within the process is one person full-time⁶³, with this intensifying during negotiation periods leading up to agreement on final strategies. While some organisations employed one-two dedicated policy officers, others employed just one-two staff overall. Participation in the process thus drew heavily on limited resources and many civic participants noted that

ties with their constituencies have suffered as a consequence of the exigencies of participation in the process.

As we have seen, for advocates of participatory or network governance the key benefits for the state include more effective policies together with increased social cohesion and stability. While senior state officials appear somewhat ambivalent in relation to the policy expertise of participant associations, there is no doubt that their engagement has brought a legitimacy to both the process and its outcomes. And with associational networks extending throughout the country at local level, this legitimacy has the potential to reach far and wide. As a senior state official involved notes *'...there is an aspect of legitimacy which derives from their [civic associations] involvement. In a sense, the concern with fairness in the broader sense in the agreement is a good element to have in terms of the wider public understanding and acceptance of the outcomes of these negotiations... We would have found restructuring the economy much more problematic, much more conflictual, much less successful without it.'*⁶⁴

The Social Partnership model therefore, as conceived by both state and civic actors at the outset, represented a hybrid of both associative democratic and corporatist models. Its associative democratic influences are apparent in both the state's and civic actors' own 'selection' of a diverse range of associations, while the state's particular focus on sectoral interest-based or single-issue groups belies its corporatist roots, increasing the scope for faction. Of particular interest in this paper is the nature and quality of deliberation within and without the process and its impact on faction among participant associations.

Deliberation within Social Partnership

As we have seen, one of the key features of deliberation is its potential to address, to some degree, the problem of faction by facilitating a sharing of views and a transformation of preferences. The aim is to build shared understandings, solidarity and consensus on policy direction moving forward. However, within this section we see that Ireland's Social Partnership process, through its institutional design, its dominant communicative norms and its pressure to reach consensus across diverse civic interest groups mitigates against this, with problems of both faction and deliberation increasing over time.

The Social Partnership process comprises both a range of sectoral pillars and a complex set of institutions, both formal and informal – each with overlapping but specific remits feeding into the final policy strategy. Pillar members are expected to work with colleagues within their own pillar to produce consensus policy proposals and positions. Pillar representatives then present and promote these at different fora within the process. At a broad level, the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) is the institution which brings together up to fifteen invited representatives from the community and voluntary pillar together with fifteen representatives from each of the other pillars as well as a variable number of parliamentary representatives and independent specialists to deliberate upon and input to reports in broad areas of social inclusion which may inform relevant policy on an ongoing basis. Since its inception in 1993, the NESF has produced thirty-nine reports on different areas of social policy. In March 2010, the institution was amalgamated into the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). The NESC, in operation since 1973 and

therefore predating Social Partnership, is identified by all actors as the pivotal institution in the process as this, the state's principal advisory body, is responsible for producing a strategy document which sets out the parameters under which the subsequent negotiation and bargaining phase is conducted. Comprising a sub-set of participants from each of the pillars (5 representatives from each), the NESC is designed to provide an open deliberative space aimed at reaching what its Director describes as a '*shared understanding*' on key economic and social issues drawing on inputs from its participants. In recent years the NESC has focused on addressing the growing crisis in social services which accompanied the period of rapid economic growth through a problem-solving approach with social partners. In parallel with this key forum, pillar members meet separately within their own pillar to analyse and prepare joint positions on and responses to draft papers emanating from the NESC secretariat. The frequency and intensity of both NESC and pillar meetings increase considerably in the months leading up to the final bilateral negotiations between pillar members and state representatives. This third official stage of the process, referred to by all as the 'negotiation' phase, is where deliberation ceases and pillar representatives engage in separate bilateral, intensive negotiations with state officials in attempts to maximise policy (and budgetary) outcomes. It is at this point that the corporatist wage and tax deals are negotiated with employer and union pillars whilst separate civic actors' negotiations focus solely on the core aspects of social policy set out in the NESC strategy. This negotiation phase can take anything from a number of weeks to a number of months as the classic instruments of bargaining and negotiation come into play. In parallel to these official fora, *ad hoc* unofficial meetings also take place between strategic actors and state officials in efforts to progress specific

organisations' interests. Table 1 below synthesises the purpose and composition of these main fora.

Table I: Social Partnership institutions, their purpose and their participants

Institution	Participants	Purpose
National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) – established in 1993 – meetings are ongoing	- Up to 15 reps from CV pillar (generally variable) - 15 reps from each of 3 other strands – Parliament; employer-trade union- farmer; and central-local government-independents respectively - NESF staff	To deliberate upon and draw up reports in broad areas of social inclusion which may inform relevant policy
National Economic and Social Council (NESC) – established in 1973 – meetings are ongoing	- 5 reps from CV pillar - NESC staff - 2 reps from Prime Minister's department - 10 government nominees	To deliberate upon and draw up the strategy which sets the parameters for the subsequent negotiations
Negotiations leading to 4 th strategy, <i>Partnership 2000</i> (happened in 1997)	All CV pillar members meet in a 'separate room' with state officials who also meet separately with members of other pillars	To negotiate social policy commitments for inclusion in the subsequent strategy
Negotiations leading to 5 th strategy, <i>Programme for Prosperity and Fairness</i> (happened in 2000)	All CV pillar members meet in a 'separate room' with state officials who also meet separately with members of other pillars	To negotiate social policy commitments for inclusion in the subsequent strategy
Negotiations leading to 6 th strategy, <i>Sustaining Progress</i> (happened in 2003)	All CV pillar members meet in a 'separate room' with state officials who also meet separately with members of other pillars	To negotiate social policy commitments for inclusion in the subsequent strategy
Negotiations leading to 7 th strategy, <i>Towards 2016</i> (happened in 2006)	All CV pillar members (including 9 new members)	To negotiate social policy commitments for inclusion in the subsequent strategy
Monitoring committee / Steering group (post 2003 on)	5 reps of the CV pillar	Regular meetings (every 1 to 3 months) to track implementation of Social Partnership agreements
Bilateral meetings with key state officials (<i>ad hoc</i> unofficial meetings determined by officials)	Representatives of specific associations - as agreed by state officials	To input to specific policies in line with sectoral interests
Quarterly plenaries (nominally every three months, generally happen less frequently)	All members of CV pillar meet with all members of other pillars	Formal sessions where state reports on progress of agreement
Other policy fora and working committees (increasingly all national level policy processes have been linked to Social Partnership)	Very variable – Representatives either elected by CV pillar members or invited by state officials	To input to state policy in specific areas – some directly arising from SP agreement, others formed directly by state

Within the context of these multiple fora, four features of the process have served in particular to increase factional politics and self-serving behaviour among civic actors over time with the result that interest-based politics has tended to trump deliberation as time has evolved. The first is the fact that, with both the NESF and NESC comprising a select number of representatives of each pillar and the final phase negotiations taking place on a bilateral basis through the so-called '*separate rooms*' mechanism, the opportunities for face-to-face deliberations across all pillars are rare. As Table 1 illustrates, the only opportunity for all participants from all pillars to come together is during the quarterly plenaries (which in reality are reported as happening once to twice a year). These meetings are described by participants as '*largely set pieces*' where formal speeches are delivered with little or no opportunity for cross-deliberations. Civic actors report that most of their time has been spent in meetings with counterparts within their own pillar negotiating agreed pillar positions rather than deliberating with other actors. With meetings with members of other pillars rare, and competition for places within other fora (together with all-important informal bilateral meetings with state officials) fierce, opportunities and incentives to work toward shared understandings and transform preferences across sectoral interests are reported to have been few.

The second related feature is the requirement that the CV pillar produce consensus positions and proposals on a wide range of social policy issues. These consensus positions are then brought forward by a select number of pillar representatives to different institutions within the process (e.g. the NESC, the formal bilateral meetings or various working committees). With members seeking to push their own particular

sectoral interests, civic actors report that most of their time has been spent ‘*negotiating within the pillar*’ in an effort to push their particular agendas as well as secure places within other key fora. The time commitment for engagement within the pillar alone has been significant and, as we will see, the pressures to reach consensus has led to growing antagonism and conflict within the pillar over time.

A third feature is the communication norms promoted throughout the process, together with the range of issues up for discussion. The corporatist roots of the process have already been noted. While Ireland’s process has been described as combining a mix of bargaining, negotiation and deliberation⁶⁵, as we have seen, the deliberative component is largely restricted to the NESF and NESC fora, while traditional corporatist norms of bargaining and negotiation dominate the all-important later phase. This is apparent from the naming of this latter phase – the ‘negotiations’, as well as from participants descriptions of communication being ‘*hard-nosed*’ and ‘*macho*’, navigable by ‘*playing hardball*’ in ‘*a kind of culture of negotiations that suits the unions*’ but not all civic actors.⁶⁶ As one of the senior state officials notes ‘*It always comes down to deal-making... this is about the craft of negotiation, deal-making... You either can do it or you can’t.*’⁶⁷

A fourth feature of the process, again revealing its corporatist underpinnings, is the decision-making process which, largely taking place within informal, hidden arenas, is characterised by one civic actor as a mechanism of ‘*horse-trading*’⁶⁸. Civic actors are under no illusions as to their distance from the decision-making processes. As another notes ‘*Don’t make any mistake. We all bid in our stuff, but the scribes are in [the Department of an] Taoiseach’s*’⁹⁸, or in whatever Department, or with influence

*from other places. So what comes back to you as a draft is their hand with never enough of what you've put in...'*⁷⁰. All civic actors note that the decisions are made elsewhere, in other rooms, with other actors.

These key features of the process have, over time, combined to produce a heady mix of frustration, antagonism and animosity among and between civic actors. While civic actors note that an interest in building solidarity and shaping a social agenda together was certainly a feature at the outset in the mid-1990s – most particularly for the Community Workers Cooperative which formed a broader-based Community Platform with this in mind – their appetite for collective work has certainly waned over time and increased fragmentation rather than cohesion has come to characterise the civic pillar, with factional politics now predominating. Both state and civic actors' responses to an inevitable split within the pillar in 2003 following a particularly difficult round of negotiations reflect a hardening in attitudes and a narrowing of communicative norms both within and outside of the process.

Following the publication of the 2003 agreement, both the Community Platform – led by the Community Worker's Cooperative – and the NWCI publicly refused to endorse it on the basis that it offered nothing to their respective constituencies. While there has never been a formal ratification requirement for Social Partnership agreements, both the term itself (agreement as opposed to strategy), and the unwritten codes of conduct that surround it, imply endorsement of resultant strategies by all. The Platform and NWCI's rejection of the 2003 agreement (or non-agreement as it thus was), although it attracted sparse media coverage and failed to generate wider public debate on either the process or the issues, nonetheless appears to have perturbed both

the state and remaining CV pillar members alike in that, signalling what Mouffe⁷¹ would regard as false consensus, it undermined both the legitimacy of the process and that of its participants. This is evidenced in the consequences for the dissenting parties who were, in their own words, '*severely punished*', by state and remaining CV pillar members alike.

This punishment took two forms. First, dissenting associations were removed by the state from the process. Having lost their social partner status, they then found themselves ostracised not just from fora relating to the partnership process, but from a wide range of other policy fora also (for example consultative committees on specific social policy issues, bilateral meetings with officials). It was becoming clear to civic actors that Social Partnership had become the gateway into all other national level policy fora, whether formally linked to the process or not. Moreover, dissenting parties found themselves isolated, not just by state actors, but by remaining civic participants themselves, being denied access to or information on policy developments by their own colleagues. As one civic representative notes, '*...what's interesting is that some of the groups that stayed in the [CV] pillar... would be even more punitive than the state itself, more exclusionary than the state itself.*'⁷². And second, their core state funding and hence survival was jeopardised. Following the Cohen and Rogers' model, many civic associations in Ireland are predominantly state funded. In 2005 this state funding accounted for 74.5 per cent of non-profit organisational income⁷³. Following its rejection of the 2003 agreement, all state funding to the Community Workers Cooperative was cut resulting in the loss of two out of four of its staff. In contrast, two existing and one new CV pillar member received once-off grants of between Euro 50,000 and Euro 250,000 in both 2003 and

2004⁷⁴. From 2006 on, funding of Euro 10 million per annum has been made available to CV pillar members for *'costs arising from contributing to evidence-based policy making, over and above normal activities and programmes'*⁷⁵. Facing financial challenges and left in something of a policy wilderness, both the NWCI and the Community Platform, led once more by the Community Workers Cooperative, in early 2007 agreed to rejoin the process. Both were promised Euro 55,000 per annum state funding for their participation. In addition, at the state's invite, nine other sectoral associations joined the civic pillar in 2007 and an additional pillar comprising twenty seven environmental associations was created in 2009.

Clearly the stakes are high and the pressures to conform to the narrow communicative parameters of the process and retain or regain social partner status are considerable. This is not lost on remaining civic actors who, despite growing factionalism and a loss in appetite for cooperation, appear determined to present a rational, consensual front. A disciplining (in a Foucauldian sense) element has entered the pillar, where there is no longer any room for groups not committed to a problem-solving discourse employing what have become the normative communicative methods of 'reasonable' evidenced-based argumentation. Any other communicative approach, as articulated by one new pillar member below, is now perceived as knocking the process, dragging down pillar members, and demonstrating a lack of respect for the process and its participants. *'I suppose I have no difficulty for any organisations coming in once they're coming in for the right reasons, and not to knock the whole process and not to drag us all down... It's a lot about attitude as well of people. I think the Community and Voluntary Platform could make a very positive role in partnership once it doesn't try to unbalance the respect that we've built up'*.⁷⁶

This determination to present a professional, consensual front notwithstanding, factional politics prevails and the appetite for collective, cooperative engagement has certainly dissipated. A number of civic representatives now speak of expending far less energy on trying to work collectively. One representative, reflecting on evolving relations within the pillar, puts it succinctly, *'Because I think it's very clear, as much as we are democratic within the pillar, as much as we have worked to make a pillar position, this is not a consensus game. This is not a cooperation game. Every one of the fifteen of us is out for our own agenda and we really couldn't give a hoot about the others.'*⁷⁷

Thus, the civic pillar, following some ten years engagement in the process, emerges as a somewhat more homogenous entity, rational and professional in conduct yet determined to unilaterally fight for rather than change specific sectoral preferences. Clearly this has had significant implications for deliberations within the process – but what of deliberations and engagements with constituents and citizens more broadly in a more integrated deliberative system as advocated by contemporary theorists?

Deliberation outside of Social Partnership

With an increasing number of civic networks entering the process in recent years, it is particularly striking that the level of public debate and scrutiny of the process and its civic actors has declined significantly. While the process received considerable attention in its earlier years, with civic actors engaging media specialists to gain coverage in the national media and raise debate within the public sphere in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the dearth of media coverage and public debate on the CV

pillars' contributions during and beyond the 2006 deliberations stands in marked contrast to these earlier years. This is due to the norm of confidentiality which increasingly imbues the process. As a senior state official notes, *'I suppose we would also expect... a degree of observance of the no surprises principle'*⁷⁸ meaning that everything should be dealt with internally rather than generating any external debate on relevant issues. This has clearly been communicated in subtle ways to participants.

*There's definitely a confidentiality anyway and I suppose you have to monitor that reasonably as well. There's probably a level of discretion. But there's also a spirit of the agreement, or a spirit of Social Partnership, which says ... 'we'd rather you talk to us than go public'. Or they [state officials] may not say it, but you'll know it from body language, people not returning your calls, people being snotty.*⁷⁹

Thus, the communicative norms within the process have had a significant impact on deliberations within the broader public sphere. With practically all of the main nationally based civic networks now engaged, or in some cases, re-engaged in the process, and with norms of confidentiality actively promoted by state and civic actors alike, the public space for reflection, debate and critical scrutiny has been considerable weakened. This is exacerbated by the weak linkages between many civic actors and their own constituencies as they report that the exigencies of the negotiations and deliberations within the process have drawn on their limited resources. Indeed, it is noteworthy that, when questioned in 2007 about their lack of media work, a number of members of the civic pillar regarded the media as a lobbying tool, rather than as a mechanism for mobilising popular debate. Thus it was deemed important to use it judiciously so as not to 'upset' colleagues in the process. In the words of one pillar member, *'...you need to be careful not to use it [the media] too*

*often. One, you upset the other organisations in the negotiations if you don't manage it right. Two you upset the civil servants...You need to be careful*⁸⁰.

It would appear that, contrary to the norms of the integrated deliberative system advocated by a number of deliberative theorists, as increasing numbers of associations enter the micro level policy circuit and both internalise and promote its narrow communicative norms among co-actors and constituent networks alike, civic associational agency within the public sphere is increasingly impoverished and the space for scrutiny, critique and the articulation of alternatives all but shut down. In co-dependent relationships with the state – both financially and in terms of their increasingly specialised policy remit, and with little support from a considerably weakened public sphere, civic associations appear to have little choice but to remain inside. This has led to a sclerosis in both the process itself and in governance and democracy more broadly raising important questions in relation to the overall democratic viability of the process.

Conclusion - The politics of deliberative democracy

September 29th, 2008 is a date now etched into the mind of every Irish citizen. On this date, with neither public nor parliamentary consultation, a handful of senior state officials signed a blanket guarantee to transfer the rapidly rising debt of all Irish privately owned banks to the public. As the bailout costs escalated (current estimates put the final cost at Euro 5 billion (\$5 trillion) although the ultimate limit is anybody's guess) and a budget crisis loomed, again with neither public or parliamentary consultation, on November 29th, 2010, officials signed a structural adjustment loan of Euro 85 billion (\$8.5 trillion) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and

European Central Bank (ECB) to cover immediate costs of the bailout. The *quid pro quo* is a commitment to public expenditure cuts totalling Euro 10 billion (\$1 trillion) together with tax hikes to the tune of Euro 5 billion (\$ 500 billion).

Spectacular as these events and figures appear, possibly the most remarkable aspect in all of this – and one noted by a number of international onlookers - has been the paucity of both debate and action within the public sphere in the face of such devastation. Michael Lewis, writing in early 2011 that “*For two years they [the Irish people] have laboured under this impossible burden with scarcely a peep of protest*”⁸¹ highlights the stark contrast of the Irish public’s reaction to that of the Greek and Icelandic peoples’. Indeed, the only notable expression of public anger remains somewhat ambivalent – a replacement of one centre-right coalition with another in national elections held in February 2011. Why the apparent passivity? Is it that the Irish public does not understand what has happened, what their political leaders have foisted upon them? Far from it. With public discourse – within the media and beyond – dominated by talk of international markets, subordinated debt and capital flight, the public has become expert in the vagaries and nuances of the international bond markets. However, in the absence of alternative discourses, voices and interests across this same public sphere, appeasing the international markets is the only option, the sole focus. The diversity of positions, interests and opinions central to contemporary theorists’ conception of the public sphere is glaring by its absence. This stands in marked contrast to the relatively vibrant public sphere of the 1970s and 1980s which, animated by community housing groups in urban areas together with vibrant women’s movement more broadly, infused the public sphere with the language of class, gender and wider power relations⁸².

It may appear something of a leap to attribute this narrowing of the public sphere to the relative invisibility of a once vocal and vibrant network of civic associations⁸³ and indeed, even more of a leap to suggest that their accession to the micro policy sphere of Social Partnership is a factor in any of this. However difficult this may be to prove conclusively, the analysis presented in this paper does point to the role of the process in narrowing the deliberative public sphere, thereby, at a broader level, highlighting some fundamental challenges in the translation of the ideals of deliberative and associative democratic theory into practice. Underpinning these is the fact that ‘new’ governance processes do not arrive into political vacuums – either institutional or cultural. And clearly politics matters. There are some useful lessons here for deliberative proponents and theorists.

First, while associative models certainly do offer the potential to improve policy and, by extension, social outcomes for particular groups, in the context of a traditionally integral Gramscian state with a strong tradition and experience of corporatist models, associative models also afford states opportunities to consolidate their legitimacy and support for specific policies and programmes through complex lateral and horizontal associational networks.

Second, in this same context where communication norms of bargaining and negotiation prevail, it may not be possible to introduce deliberation. Or indeed, what is termed deliberation may in fact be something else. Certainly, the failure of the Irish process to accommodate contestation and a plurality of communicative modes within many, if not all its institutions raises questions about the degree to which it may be

characterised as deliberative at all. This in turn leads to questions as to its in/exclusivity. Indeed, is it possible to superimpose or graft deliberative processes onto pre-existing models?

Third, the problem of faction has been highlighted throughout the case study. In the context of a strong Gramscian state such as that seen here, Cohen and Rogers' proposals for state intervention as a means of increasing equality of representation to address factional issues make little sense. Greater equality and diversity in civic associational engagement will only lead to more complex, messy and conflictual deliberations, making securing wider public support all the more difficult. On the other hand, as students of politics the world over are only too well aware, financial support begets political support. Within the narrow policy and financial constraints of contemporary state-associational relations, it makes little sense for civic partners to bite the hand that feeds. Moreover, with a weakened public sphere where the actions of state and civic associations alike proceed largely unremarked upon, there is clearly little incentive to do so.

This brings us back to the question posed at the beginning of the article – does civic associational engagement at micro levels leave scope to engage laterally across associations and vertically with members and citizens thereby sustaining a vibrant, active public sphere? Is civic associational engagement within micro-policy fora 'good' for democracy in a substantive sense? The answer to this has to be a qualified 'it depends'. As the Irish case has shown, it depends on the nature of the state and its development project; it depends on its relations with civic actors across all spheres; it depends on the discursive and communicative norms allowed within micro-fora; it

depends on the interests, motivations and actions of civic actors involved; and most particularly, it depends on how civic participants within micro-fora interact with their peers and counterparts without. Whatever the answer, the question is an extremely important one. In the Irish case, civic engagement within Social Partnership appears to have eroded democracy. At a broader level, as the political and economic contagion that was borne in a period of participatory governance spreads throughout the Western world, it perhaps time to reassess the democratic viability of participatory governance institutions and arrangements globally, turning our attention to the ways in which contemporary political and civic leadership may be reinvigorated, recharged and rendered more accountable to and representative of society at large.

Notes

1. Jan Kooiman, *Governing as Governance* (London: Sage, 2003).
2. Tim Reddel, "Third Way Social Governance: Where is the State?", *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 39, no. 2 (2004): 129-43.
3. Henrik Paul Bang, *Governance as Social and Political Communication*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).
4. Eva Sørensen, "Democratic Theory and Network Governance", *Administrative Theory and Praxis*, 24, no. 4 (2002): 693-721; Peter Triantafillou, "Addressing network governance through the concepts of governmentality and normalisation", *Administrative Theory and Praxis*, 26, no. 4 (2004): 489-509.
5. Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, "Thinking about Empowered Participatory Governance" in *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, eds. Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, (London: Verso, 2003); Janet Newman, "Participative Governance and the Making of the Public Sphere" in *Remaking Governance: Peoples, Politics and the Public Sphere*, ed. Janet Newman, (UK: The Policy Press, 2005).
6. Tim Reddel, "Third Way Social Governance: Where is the State?", 130.
7. Martin Doornbos, "'Good Governance': The Metamorphosis of a Policy Metaphor", *Journal of International Affairs*, 8, no. 4 (2003), 3-18.
8. Bang, *Governance as Social and Political Communication*; Fung and Wright, "Thinking about Empowered Participatory Governance"; Kooiman, *Governing as Governance*.
9. Sørensen, "Democratic Theory and Network Governance"; Dermot McCarthy, "Contextualising the state's response to global influences", in *Taming the*

- Tiger: Social Exclusion in Globalised Ireland*, ed. David Jacobsen, Peadar Kirby and Deiric O’Broin, (Dublin: TASC, 2006).
10. Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1992); Paul Hirst, *Associative Democracy*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Paul Hirst and Veit Bader, *Associative Democracy: The Real Third Way*, (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2001); Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, *Associations and Democracy*, (London: Verso, 1995); Archon Fung, “Associations and Democracy: Between Theories, Hopes and Realities”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29, no.1 (2003) 515-39; Fung and Wright, “Thinking about Empowered Participatory Governance”.
 11. Norbert Bobbio, *The Future of Democracy*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); Rhodes, R.A.W., “The new Governance: Governing without Government”, *Political Studies*, 44, no. 2 (1996), 652-67; Jon Pierre, *Debating governance: Authority, steering and democracy*, (London: St Martin’s Press, 2000); David Held and Anthony McGrew, *The Global Transformations Reader*, (UK: Polity Press, 2003).
 12. Hirst, *Associative Democracy*, 29; Fung, “Associations and Democracy: Between Theories, Hopes and Realities”, 524.
 13. Fred Powell and Martin Geoghegan, *The Politics of Community Development: Reclaiming Civil Society or Reinventing Governance?* (Dublin: A & A Farmer, 2004); Jonathan S. Davies, “The Limits of Partnership: An Exit-Action Strategy for Local Democratic Inclusion”, *Political Studies*, 55, no. 4 (2007), 779-800.
 14. Cohen and Rogers, *Associations and Democracy*; Jane Mansbridge, “A Deliberative Perspective on Neocorporatism” in *Associations and Democracy*,

- 133-147; Lucio Baccaro, “Civil society meets the state: towards associational democracy?”, *Socio-Economic Review*, 4, no. 2, (2006) 185-208; Caroline M. Hendriks, “Integrated Deliberation: Reconciling Civil Society’s Dual Role in Deliberative Democracy”, *Political Studies*, 54, no. 3, (2006) 486-503.
15. Jane Mansbridge, “A Deliberative Perspective on Neocorporatism”, 141.
 16. Caroline Hendriks, “Integrated Deliberation: Reconciling Civil Society’s Dual Role in Deliberative Democracy”, 499.
 17. Lucio Baccaro, “Civil society meets the state: towards associational democracy?”, 203
 18. Lucio Baccaro, “Civil society meets the state: towards associational democracy?”, 203.
 19. Niamh Hardiman, “Politics and Social Partnership: Flexible Network Governance”, *Economic and Social Review*, 37, no. 3, (2006) 343-74; Sean O’Riain, “Social Partnership as a Mode of Governance: Introduction to the Special Issue”, *Economic and Social Review*, 37, no.3, (2006) 311-18.
 20. Fred Powell and Martin Geoghegan, *The Politics of Community Development: Reclaiming Civil Society or Reinventing Governance?*, 137.
 21. All twenty three civic associations were contacted with requests for interview. Five declined to be involved. The four senior state officials were the Social Partnership Chair (Secretary General in the Prime Minister’s Department), its Vice-Chair, the Director of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the Head of the Social Partnership Secretariat.
 22. See Niamh Gaynor, *Transforming Participation? The Politics of Development in Malawi and Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

23. Brigid Laffan and Rory O'Donnell, "Ireland and the growth of international governance", in *Ireland and the Politics of Change*, eds. William Crotty and David Schmitt (Harlow: Longman, 2001); Ray Mac Sharry, "Social Partnership" in *The Making of the Celtic Tiger - The Inside Story of Ireland's Boom Economy*, eds. Ray Mac Sharry and Padraig White (Cork: Mercier Press, 2000); Niamh Hardiman, "Which path? Domestic adaptation to internationalisation in Ireland", *ISSC Discussion Paper 2004/12*, (Dublin: ISSC, 2004).
24. The community and voluntary pillar, although involved in a number of Partnership fora (the NESF and the joint parliamentary sub-committee on employment) in the early to mid-1990s, formally joined the process in 1996. Initially made up of some seventeen national networks, it was expanded in 2003 to include eight more associational networks.
25. Government of Ireland, *Partnership 2000*, (Dublin: Government Publications Office).
26. Charles Sabel, *Local Partnerships and Social Innovation: Ireland*. (Dublin: OECD, 1996)
27. See for example Paul Teague and Jimmy Donaghey, "Social Partnership and Democratic Legitimacy in Ireland", *New Political Economy*, 14, no. 1, (2009) 49-69; Jimmy Donaghey, "Deliberation, employment relations and social partnership in the Republic of Ireland", *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 29, no. 1 (2008), 35-63; Rory O'Donnell and Damian Thomas, "Ireland in the 1990s: policy concertation triumphant" in *Policy Concertation and Social Partnership in Western Europe: Lessons for the Twenty First Century*, eds. Stefan Berger and Hugh Compston, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 237-

- 57; Lucio Baccaro and Marco Simoni, “Centralized wage bargaining and the ‘Celtic Tiger’ phenomenon”, *Industrial Relations*, 46, no. 3 (2007) 426-55.
28. William Roche and Terry Cradden, “Neo-corporatism and social partnership”, in *Public Administration and Public Policy in Ireland: Theory and Methods*, eds. Maura Adshead and Michelle Millar, (London: Routledge, 2003), 75-6; William Roche, “Social Partnership in Ireland and New Social Pacts”, *Industrial Relations*, 46, no. 3 (2007), 395-425; Hardiman, “Which path? Domestic adaptation to internationalisation in Ireland”.
29. Denis O’Hearn, *Inside the Celtic Tiger: The Irish Economy and the Asian Model*, (London: Pluto Press, 1999).
30. Kieran Allen, *The Celtic Tiger: The Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
31. Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).
32. Gaynor, *Transforming Participation? The Politics of Development in Malawi and Ireland* – see chapter 5.
33. While some (O’Donnell and Thomas, “Ireland in the 1990s: policy concertation triumphant”, 176-8) appear to envisage it as a departure from more traditional corporatist communicative norms, others (Paul Teague, “Social partnership and local development in Ireland: the limits to deliberation”, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 44, no. 3 (2006), 421-43; Donaghey, “Deliberation, employment relations and social partnership in the Republic of Ireland”) argue that such a characterisation is premature. While these debates on the deliberative nature of the process remain somewhat vague and under-theorised, they do highlight the difficulties in moving seamlessly

from one communicative mode (traditional mechanisms of bargaining and negotiation) to another.

34. Played out within both the academic literature (Séamus Ó'Cinnéide, "Democracy and the Constitution", *Administration*, 46, no. 4 (1999), 41-58; Teague and Donaghey, "Social Partnership and Democratic Legitimacy in Ireland") and more popularly (for example concerns among opposition political parties about social partnership's 'democratic deficit'), the focus here remains on the linkages between the process and the country's institutions of representative democracy (the parliament and senate).
35. Rosie Meade and Orla O'Donovan, "Editorial introduction", *Community Development Journal*, 37, no 1 (2002), 1-9; Mary Murphy, "Social partnership - is it 'the only game in town'?", *Community Development Journal*, 37, no. 1 (2002), 80-90; Rosie Meade, "'We hate it here, please let us stay!': Irish social partnership and the community/voluntary sector's conflicted experiences of recognition", *Critical Social Policy*, 25, no. 3 (2005), 349-73.
36. It remains too early to assess this same issue in respect of the recently formed 'environmental pillar'.
37. See for example David Marsh and R.A.W. Rhodes, *Policy Networks in British Government*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); Kooiman, *Governing as Governance*; Reddel, "Third Way Social Governance: Where is the State?", Bang, *Governance as Social and Political Communication*.
38. See Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*; Mary Kaldor, "Civil Society and Accountability", *Journal of Human Development*, 4, no. 1 (2003), 5-27; and Frank Trentmann, "Introduction" in *Civil Society: A Reader in History, Theory and Global Politics*, eds. John Hall and Frank Trentmann,

- (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) for comprehensive overviews of the competing strands of thinking on the concept over the centuries.
39. Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*.
 40. Juergen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1989 [1962]).
 41. Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, ix-x.
 42. Chantal Mouffe, “Democracy, Power and the Political” in *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996); Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).
 43. Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Iris Marion Young, “Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy”, in *Debating Deliberative Democracy*, eds. James Fishkin and Peter Laslett, (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 102-20.
 44. Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy”, in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2002), 109-42.
 45. Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 115,142.
 46. John Dryzek and Simon Niemeyer, “Reconciling Pluralism and Consensus as Political Ideals”, *American Journal of Political Science*, 30, no. 3, (2006) 634-49.
 47. Paul Hirst, *Associative Democracy*, 20-21.
 48. Cohen and Rogers, *Associations and Democracy*, 55.
 49. Fung and Wright, “Thinking about Empowered Participatory Governance”.

50. Government of Ireland, *White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing a Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*, (Dublin: Government Publications, 2000) 32, 33, 41.
51. Philippe Schmitter, “The Irony of Modern Democracy and the Viability of Efforts to Reform its Practice”, in *Associations and Democracy*, 167-83.
52. Iris Marion Young, “Social Groups in Associative Democracy”, in *Associations and Democracy*, 207-13.
53. Fung, “Associations and Democracy: Between Theories, Hopes and Realities”, 524.
54. Hirst and Bader, *Associative Democracy: The Real Third Way*, 29.
55. Cohen and Rogers, *Associations and Democracy*, 48-9.
56. Cohen and Rogers, *Associations and Democracy*, 251.
57. Mansbridge, “A Deliberative Perspective on Neocorporatism”; Hendriks, “Integrated Deliberation: Reconciling Civil Society’s Dual Role in Deliberative Democracy”.
58. The eight organisations were as follows: Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI), Community Workers Cooperative (CWC), Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed (INOUE), Irish Congress of Trade Unions Centres for the Unemployed (ICTUCU), National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWC), National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), the Society of Vincent de Paul (SVP) and Protestant Aid.
59. The INOUE and CORI

60. The NYCI (youth), the NWCI (women), the SVP (described in interview by its representative as representing ‘Catholic middle Ireland’) and Protestant Aid (reportedly to balance the strong Catholic representation).
61. Joe Larragy, “Origins and Significance of the Community-Voluntary Pillar’s Entry to Irish Social Partnership”, *Economic and Social Review*, 37, no. 3 (2006), 375-98.
62. Interview civic pillar member, March 1st, 2006.
63. Estimated by civic partners interviewed.
64. Interview senior state official, March 14th, 2006.
65. Interviews senior state officials, March 3rd, 2006; March 14th, 2006; See also O’Donnell and Thomas, “Ireland in the 1990s: policy concertation triumphant”, 171.
66. Interview civic pillar member, May 23rd, 2006.
67. Interview senior state official, March 8th, 2006.
68. Interview civic pillar member, July 5th, 2005.
69. Prime Minister’s Department.
70. Interview civic pillar member, October 13th, 2006.
71. Mouffe, “Democracy, Power and the Political”; Mouffe, *On the Political*.
72. Interview civic pillar member, January 30th, 2005.
73. Pauline Connolly, “The Public Funding of the Non-Profit Sector in Ireland: The Muddy Waters of Definitions”, *Administration*, 54, no. 2 (2006), 85-6.
74. Data received by email communication from the Department of Community and Family Affairs.
75. Government of Ireland, *Towards 2016: Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement*, (Dublin: Government Publications, 2006), 71.

76. Interview civic pillar member, September 13th, 2006.
77. Interview civic pillar member, September 26th, 2006.
78. Interview senior state official, March 14th, 2006.
79. Interview civic pillar member, September 26th, 2006.
80. Interview civic pillar member, September 26th, 2006.
81. Michael Lewis, “When Irish eyes are crying”, *Vanity Fair* magazine, (March 2011), 193.
82. Patricia Kelleher and Mary Whelan, *Dublin Communities in Action*, (Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency, 1992); Siobhan Daly, “Mapping Civil Society in the Republic of Ireland”, *Community Development Journal*, 43, no. 2, (2008): 157-176.
83. While the trade union movement has organised a couple of public protests, these have been poorly attended with union leaders heckled at the podium for their ‘cosy relations’ with state officials through Social Partnership.