
Participation at the Periphery: Community Participation in Reformed Local Government Structures

Deiric Ó Broin

NorDubco, The North Dublin Development Coalition

Setting the Context

This paper briefly examines the current local government structures in Ireland and, in particular, the role and experience of the newly established structures in Fingal County Council and Dublin Corporation. The example of the existing community participation mechanisms on the Strategic Policy Committees and the City and County Development Boards of both local authorities will be examined. Finally, it puts forward proposals for community and citizen participation on the Local Area Committees.

The recent establishment of City/County Development Boards (CDBs), Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs), Local Area Committees (LACs) and the myriad of other reforms contained in the recently published Local Government Bill represent the most ambitious restructuring of local government in over fifty years. The introduction of the county/city manager system and the abolition in 1977 of the collection of domestic rates (property-based taxes) by Irish local authorities had hitherto represented the sum total of a century's reform, the centralised nature of the state having resulted in minimal sustained movement for reform. A number of worthy reports and recommendations were produced and welcomed but no changes were implemented (see Barrington, 1970). The current institutional reform process has broad cross-party support. Indeed the current and previous government's proposals are very similar in many ways.

The remainder of Section I will examine the nature, role and function of local government in Ireland. It will also analyse the principles underpinning the reforms contained in the proposed legislation. Finally, it will provide a brief examination of trends and circumstances that may affect the process of local government reform. Section II includes a brief introduction to the principles that drive citizen participation in government. This is followed by an examination of the role and function of the community and voluntary sector in Ireland, its role in driving a social inclusion agenda and issues that may have an impact on the sector's development. As part of this examination, Section II addresses the impact on the sector of EU- derived principles and trends in government organisation. Section III examines the progress of the existing reformed structures to date and lessons that may be provided for the development of more inclusive participation on the Local Area Committees. Finally, Section IV contains a proposed Local Area Committee Model and recommendation for developing a more inclusive decision-making process.

Governance in Ireland

The governance of any nation state is a complex affair - necessarily so. Ireland is a small

open economy, a member of the European Union and has numerous international obligations. The existing system of governance is heavily influenced by history and the population structure in the country. Ireland has a low density of population, the distribution of which is skewed towards the eastern coast.

Elected officials in Ireland have more limited powers than their equivalents in many other countries. Government has at its disposal a range of organisations and semi-autonomous agencies that it uses to deliver government and the services that emanate from government. Some of these perform roles and deliver services that are provided by regional and local administrations in other countries, for example, the provision of education (Coughlan and de Buitleir, 1996). Almost all of these are national organisations with regional offices. Most do not have regional autonomy. The system is effective in many ways. However, when dealing with local issues and difficulties, national government is in most cases unable to respond in the sensitive way that is often necessary.

What is Local Government?

The definition of local government implies that it is both local and involves government functions. Neither term is simple in its content. First, considerable argument has taken place about the nature of 'local'. It can be defined by long history and tradition: the counties and urban settlements that structure our formal spatial awareness. Alternatively, the appropriate locality for local government purposes is the socio-economic area governed by journeys to work and the scale needed to provide certain public services. From both perspectives, 'local' is understood as wider in scope in Ireland than in many other systems of local government.

Second, there is the problem of defining 'government'. Local authorities are not sovereign bodies. They are creatures of the Oireachtas (Irish parliament), which retains a superior constitutional sovereignty enabling it to change or to revoke previously enacted legislation. Local government possesses only delegated powers. Modern local authorities depend upon statute and are subject to a strict interpretation of the legal rule of *ultra vires*. They have no general competence to act for the benefit of the people of the local area. Specific authorisation must be given. The powers provided may be either mandatory (i.e. something must be done) or permissive (i.e. something may be done).

Government versus Administration

Although 'government' does not have the strength of meaning in local terms that it possesses when related to the modern nation state, it retains a stronger meaning than 'administration'. Local authorities are elected bodies and are expected to develop policies and deliver certain services appropriate to their localities within the framework of national legislation and the powers delegated to them. Despite the disagreements that exist about the definition of local government, there is a common understanding of its meaning in the Irish context. First, local authorities have a clearly defined physical structure. That is, they have geographical boundaries that are contiguous but do not overlap. Second, local authorities are multi-purpose bodies responsible for many services. The term 'local government' does not usually include, as in some countries, elected bodies responsible for only one service. Third, local councils are directly elected on a similar franchise to that used for Dail elections. Fourth, local government has an independent power - albeit carefully circumscribed - of raising revenue.

The Functions and Justification of Local Government in Ireland

Local government has two advantages over other forms of local administration. First, as multi-purpose bodies, local authorities are able to co-ordinate the provision of several services within a corporate framework. Second, the independent element introduced by both local elections and the power to raise revenues locally allows local authorities to develop policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of local populations. Local government has also been justified in terms of wider political values. Among the foremost of these is the promotion of liberty by the dispersal of power from the centre to the localities. No one would argue that local government always acts fairly or that central government is always autocratic. The argument is simply that of pluralism: when there are several centres of power, disagreements are likely to come into the open and open government is preferable to excessive centralism.

Key Principles Underpinning the Current Reform Process

The local government reforms proposed by the previous Fine Gael-Labour-Democratic Left coalition and the present Fianna Fail-Progressive Democrat government share a basis in a set of common principles. These principles were set out in a series of policy documents that listed the problems and failings of the existing local government structure as follows:

1. The narrow scope of local government functions;
2. Councillors were not realising their potential in terms of the policy development role;
3. The local government structure had been by-passed by local development agencies;
4. The existence of too many central controls;
5. Scarce resources.

In order to redress these failings, a core list of key principles were developed:

1. Local government should enhance local democracy and encourage greater participation by individual citizens and communities;
2. The customer should be serviced better;
3. The provision of services by local government should be more efficient;
4. Greater resources should be provided to enable local government to fulfil its role.

The Report of the Task Force on Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems developed a wider set of principles but they can be best seen as an elaboration of the above (Department of Environment and Local Government, 1998, 5). Building on the principles outlined by the Task Force, the key recommendations were given statutory effect in the Local Government Bill, 2000. For the purposes of this discussion paper the most relevant reforms are related to the development of more inclusive structures. These are the establishment of Local Area Committees, Strategic Policy Committees and City/County Development Boards.

The reforms have been partially implemented over the past 12 months but their statutory basis is contained in the provisions of the Local Government Bill, 2000. This Bill contains the statutory recognition for the three main institutional changes in terms of non-councillor participation in local government. A number of the reforms are already in place, notably the Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and the City/County Development Boards (CDBs). These have been in operation for a number of months and mechanisms for non-councillor membership has been developed (Department of Environment and Local Government, 1999).

The Bill also introduces a range of reforms to enhance the fundamental democratic nature of local government. It aims to:

1. Enhance the role of the elected member;
2. Support community involvement with local authorities in a more participative local democracy;
3. Modernise local government legislation and provide the framework for new financial management systems and other procedures to promote efficiency and effectiveness;
4. Underpin generally the programme of local government renewal.

The Bill follows from the recent amendment of the Constitution (Article 28A) which gave specific recognition to local government and fixed a five-year cycle for local elections. It provides a statutory framework for the local government system (i.e. structures, functions and operations) and repeals outdated law and terminology. Under the provisions of the Bill, a single, common legislative code will apply to all local authorities, replacing archaic provisions spread over a whole series of Acts dating back to the 19th century. Local authorities will be known in future as county councils, city councils and town councils in line with everyday language.

Summary

The pace of change poses fundamental questions about the role, function and very nature of local government in Ireland. Despite recently celebrating 100 years of local governance in 1998 and the recent constitutional referendum on the recognition of local government in Ireland, government is only now reforming an outdated structural arrangement. Part of this process involves developing structures that will promote greater public participation in local government.

Community Participation and Involvement

Citizen participation in government is an inherently positive process. This is a central tenet of every democratic political persuasion and ideology. Where many differ is on the degree and model of participation. The recently published Local Government Bill is part of an attempt to address the democratic participation deficit that exists in Irish local government. Proposals for the direct election of council chairpersons, city and town mayors, the establishment of town councils on request of a verifiable citizens initiative and local referenda and other forms of citizens' initiative are based on the premise that electing councillors every five years is insufficient citizen participation and that mechanisms must be devised to encourage it. The recent establishment of the Strategic Policy Committees and the City and County Development Boards can be seen in this context.

A number of aspirations underpin the current process. These are outlined in the various publications and reports emanating from the Department of Environment and Local Government in recent years. It is appropriate to examine a number of these and the consequences of their application. As outlined in the initial Task Force Report (Department of Environment and Local Government, 1998, 5), they include community development, social inclusion, partnership and participation, democratic legitimacy and voluntary effort.

The community development principle aims to provide an outlet for local communities to be

fully involved in, to influence and to shape local decisions (Department of Environment and Local Government, 1998, 6). This is a much wider definition than that generally accepted by most local politicians. This developmental and educative role of local government has its roots in 19th century liberal thinking (Mill, 1861) but it has been updated and reintroduced as an integral part of addressing the needs of disadvantaged communities. The partnership and participation principle states that any new model will be constructed along partnership lines, involving state agencies, local communities, social partners and public representatives in the design and delivery of local services. Greater democratic legitimacy is perhaps the most persuasive argument for the proposed reforms as within its definition would come increasing participation, partnership and the developmental and educative aspects of the community development ideal. The inclusion of voluntary effort as an underlying principle is aimed at retaining the considerable unpaid voluntary effort in some of the local development agencies (Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, 1997, 13).

The Potential of Voluntarism in Irish Society

When Fergus O'Ferrall was reviewing the justifications for voluntary action in his recent examination of the Irish voluntary sector (O'Ferrall, 2000, 78), he stated that many writers (from De Toqueville to Dahl) shared a central concept and context, i.e. active citizenship within a liberal democracy. The concept of active citizenship is an important component of the argument for revising our political structures to encourage the participation of citizens. These are not abstract notions best confined to the politics departments of universities but central to voluntary and community activity. It is important to note that both the Green and White Papers Supporting Voluntary Activity published in 1997 and September 2000 identified issues relating to participative democracy as developments to be considered in the context of the White Paper.

In an important section entitled *Rethinking Our Vision*, the Green Paper argued that there is a need to "create a more participatory democracy where active citizenship is fostered. In such a society, the ability of the voluntary and community sector to provide channels for the active involvement and participation of citizens is fundamental" (Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, 1997, 24). The White Paper further stated that "voluntary Activity is an essential part of a society where people are concerned for each other. An active Community and Voluntary sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of decentralised and participative structures and fosters a climate in which quality of life can be enhanced for all" (Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, 2000, 53).

Linked to the role of the community and voluntary sector in contributing to a democratic and pluralist society is the position of the state. The state promotes and enables, it engages in dialogue and partnership and seeks to allow bottom-up responses to emerge from the voluntary and community groups. It is important for all the relevant stakeholders to realise that "advanced and vigorous forms of participation depend on a large floor of low profile activity" (Chanan, 1999, 21). The active citizenship central to this new vision relies on a well-resourced and supported community and voluntary sector.

Resources and Support

What the community and voluntary sector can achieve is limited by access to resources and

to the pertinent local decision-making structures. The proposal argued for in this paper aims to address both of these limitations. It is first necessary to establish a support mechanism for the local community and voluntary sector organisations to include their voice in the relevant local decision-making structures, i.e. the recently established Local Area Committees. As it stands, the ways in which groups are legitimised and obtain access to funding and official recognition are varied, but most community and voluntary sector groups lack funding, premises and equipment. Autonomous groups rely largely on their own unpaid labour and where official funding tends to be linked to specific issues, the action of local groups is broadly-based and tends to provide wider benefits in terms of social inclusion.

Recognition for the Sector

The effective delivery and implementation of local government action depends on the recognition of the realities of everyday life. There is an unpaid economy which underlies the formal sector and which has its own nature: a non-cash economy of voluntary action. This component of Irish society constitutes the living and working context for conditions in local areas. It does not just use public services, it engages with public services to try and make them more effective.

One of the key elements being stressed in this paper is that of partnership between the major participative and representative structures in local areas. In such a partnership, it is important that the community and voluntary sector retains its own distinct viewpoint and ethos.

The Dilemma of Representation

It is commonplace to argue that parliamentary institutions in liberal democracies are undergoing systematic erosion and that traditional models of representative government, let alone representative democracy, are no longer accurately descriptive. It is now fashionable to talk about governance rather than government. Whereas the model of representative government mapped out fairly simple, serial flows of power between the represented and their representatives, the defining characteristics of governance is the differentiation of the represented and the complexity of the relations with the institutions of government.

Modern governance is increasingly divided into semi-autonomous specialised segments or sectors; that is, it is multi-polar with the inter-penetration of state agencies and agents of civil society. In everyday policy-making, there is no single centre. The complex differentiation of society is reflected in the differentiation and complexity of governance, the differentiation of representation, the differentiation of systems of knowledge and expertise, and the spectrum of values and lifestyles of ordinary citizens (Anderson and Burns, 1996). This dilemma in the existing systems of democracy has to be addressed if the legitimacy accorded to the system by citizens is to be upheld. The complexity and subtle stratification of current Irish society needs to be recognised and political mechanisms devised to take account of these changes.

Summary

The main pragmatic reason for the development of new structures and the involvement of the community and voluntary sector is that the marginalised and socially excluded members of Irish society do not participate in political activity as envisaged by liberal democratic

theory. An analysis of voting patterns and turnout in any deprived part of the state will support this assertion. One of the strengths of the community and voluntary sector is that it has involved the excluded. It has been successful where the mainstream political institutions of the state have failed. As Irish society has become increasingly complex and wealthy, the will and potential to develop and enhance the existing democratic decision-making structures has waned. However, the current process of reform can significantly enhance the position of the more excluded members of our society by incorporating the community-voluntary sector strand in the Local Area Committees.

Reformed structures

As stated in section one, for the purposes of this discussion paper the most relevant reforms are the establishment of Local Area Committees, Strategic Policy Committees and City/County Development Boards. The reforms potentially provide a forum for greatly expanded community participation in local government decision-making structures. Indeed, the Minister for the Environment and Local Government has spoken at length about the marriage of participatory democracy and the liberal representative system. While the focus of this paper is the development of the Local Area Committee Structures, the establishment of the Strategic Policy Committees and the City and County Development Boards have provided some important lessons.

Strategic Policy Committees

In its 'Programme for Government' and its mid-term review 'Action Programme for the Millennium', the current government set out its commitment to the restoration of real decision-making and power to local authorities and local people. An integral part of this process was the proposal to establish policy-centred Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) within each City and County authority. The SPCs were initially established during 1998 but due to a number of outstanding issues their activities were very limited.

In light of the experience gained the establishment of the SPCs and the fact that new SPCs were due to be established following the local elections in June 1999, the Minister for the Environment and Local Government felt that it was opportune for a broadly-based working group to consider any necessary revisions to the comprehensive guidelines issued in November 1997. It is envisaged that the SPCs will:

1. Assist the councillors and the local authority in the formulation, development and review of policy;
2. Reflect the major functions or services of a local authority within the broader context;
3. Be tailored to the size, membership and administrative resources of a local authority.

It was initially expected that SPCs would have a minimum one third of their membership drawn from sectors relevant to the committee's work. However, this minimum figure has become fixed in stone.

Strategic Policy Committees and Non-councillor Participation

A number of issues arise when the structures are examined in light of the stated objective of increased participation. The guidelines state that a minimum of one third of the SPCs membership should come from relevant sectors and interests. As stated above, both Fingal

County Council and Dublin Corporation viewed the minimum requirements as fixed. In addition, Dublin Corporation requested that organisations have a city-wide remit. This membership criterion had a significant impact on applications and the subsequent membership of SPCs because very few community or voluntary sector based organisations have sufficient resources to undertake city-wide activities. This requirement strictly limited the number and type of applicant. The requirement that non-councillor members should be sectoral representatives has meant in practice that there is a wide diversity of organisations on certain SPCs. A number of organisations are national representative organisations with large resources at their disposal and it is questionable if smaller, less public organisations, can hope to have a significant impact on the policy formulation process without access to adequate resources. The relationship which the non-councillor members have to their organisations or sectors is as yet unclear. Is there a reporting relationship between the non-councillor member and a sectoral forum of some kind? Will a sectoral forum be established? The SPC Guidelines envisage that consultation with relevant sectors and interests should be an on-going part of the SPC process. This may be of additional significance where an SPC covers a number of services with limited opportunity for direct sectoral participation on the committee, or where it was not possible to accommodate fully the range of relevant interests.

SPCs could be viewed as a forum to allow councillors to access relevant expertise on a number of policy matters without having to consult local authority professionals, while also allowing certain organisations to gain access to the decision-making process without any clear mechanism for ensuring accountability, representation or legitimacy. This is unlikely to be the situation. However, until clearer guidelines are issued on the selection procedures for non-councillor members, there is likely to be continued confusion about their role and the implicit assumption that only 'compliant' organisations will be co-opted.

City /County Development Boards

The CDBs have been up and running for approximately 12-16 months. However, the scope of the task accorded to them is immense and each local authority has taken a slightly different view of how best to establish and support the relevant Development Boards. Additionally, there has been a tendency among some local authorities to retain certain functions that were clearly envisaged as being transferred to the CDBs. At this early stage, it is uncertain if this is a minor hurdle or a significant problem. The CDBs' main objective (i.e. to draft a strategic social, economic and cultural development plan) is undoubtedly radical in the Irish context. The completed strategy will form the basis for the co-ordination of all appropriate public services in each area. These services include health, local development, enterprise development and training (Department of Environment and Local Government, 2000). To date, the position on the provision of education is unclear.

The role of the CDBs has been augmented and it appears that, in parts of the Greater Dublin Area at least, the CDBs will play a significant role in establishing a broader policy presence for the local authority concerned. The most relevant issue for this discussion paper, without doubt, is the role of the community and voluntary sector in the new structures. The speed at which the CDBs were established and the relative lack of information left many community and voluntary sector groups unprepared for involvement and participation in the new structures. The role of overlapping existing area partnership community forums and the newly established CDB forums and clusters will require clarification as will the relationship between

the social inclusion work of the area partnerships and the broader remit of the CDBs.

Summary

It is clear that an opportunity still exists to radically enhance participation in local government decision-making. Aspects of the Task Force Report on the Integration of Local Development and Local Government have been implemented yet much remains to be accomplished if the potential offered is to be realised. The institutional reforms previously mentioned are but one side in a two-way process. The community and voluntary sector needs to develop more coherence and establish channels of accountability to the public (Craig, 1995). Developing this capacity will require additional resources and if the sector is to be included as a valued stakeholder in the decision-making process, this will be vital. As part of this process of inclusion, both councillors and administrators will have to learn to work with the sector and not see them as at best a well meaning irritant or at worst a competitor for resources.

Proposals for Change

In the broad public policy context, two strands in the future of local government require attention. First, how to react to pressures on its resource base, powers, structure and functions in the short to medium term. Secondly, what agenda should be set now for the longer-term renaissance of confidence and democratic potential in local communities? The recently published Local Government Bill is addressing part of this agenda. It should be stated that this will radically alter the nature, structure and accessibility of local government in Ireland but if the democratic decision-making structures are to be enriched, as well as just increasing voter turnout, new measures are required. Recent years have seen a renaissance in discussion and thought about participatory democracy. Part of this process has been the realisation that Ireland needs to develop a more participative form of local government, which would involve a partnership between local government and the local community and voluntary sector. In '*Better Local Government: A Programme for Change*', it was noted that:

"Representative democracy can be strengthened by the involvement of local people in a meaningful way in devising new approaches to meet community needs. Such involvement and participation can represent a major resources available to councillors in carrying out their functions."

(Department of the Environment, 1996, 20)

Allied to this development has been the acceptance of the community and voluntary sector as one of the four social-partner pillars in drafting the state's social and economic strategies. Given these developments, it is useful to remember that official recognition of the community and voluntary sector at local level is not new or anywhere near as radical as it is often made out to be. As recently noted by Sean Gallagher (2000), the Local Government Act, 1941, contained provisions that allowed local authorities to give formal recognition to a local organisation if it existed for the general social and economic advancement of the locality. Local authorities could assist such Approved Local Councils (ALCs) and even devolve functions to them. While the long-term aspects of the legislation were not fully explored, by 1955 there were 55 ALCs in existence.

Proposals for the Inclusion of the Community and Voluntary Sector in Local Area Committees

It has been noted by many involved in local development organisations that the Report of the Task Force left a hostage to fortune when it stated:

"It is proposed that city and county councils operate all but their major policy services through Area Committees based on the local electoral areas or a combination of these. These committees would include representatives of the community and voluntary sector."

(Department of Environment and Local Government, 1998, 17)

The Report also stated that the area committees should develop a better role in community development and support at that level and local authorities should recruit (by open competition) community officers to liaise with their communities. Where an Area Partnership or rural development body exists, it would assume responsibility for community development with a focus on disadvantage.

As previously stated, the existing system of representation does not take into account the complex and subtle structure of modern Irish society. Many people, groups and interests are left unrepresented or under-represented. The strengths of the current electoral system are numerous. It is 'open', transparent, allows for accountability and is deemed legitimate by citizens. These strengths can be incorporated into a model of community- and voluntary-sector-based representation.

A number of models are proposed. Each has a series of strengths and weaknesses and, by including them, it is hoped that reflection and productive discussion around the proposals may lead to their introduction or the development and implementation of more appropriate ideas. Central to all three models is the existence of a county/city community and voluntary sector forum. This would be composed of all eligible community and voluntary groups in the designated area. The county/city forum could be developed from the existing economic, social and cultural clusters under the remit of the City Development Board and from the Fingal Community Forum in county Fingal. It is proposed that the Office of the Director of Community and Enterprise would have responsibility for establishing and resourcing the County/City Community Forums and their constituent members.

For the purposes of organising County/City Community Forum (CCF) membership of the Local Area Committees, the CCF would organise itself into a series of Local Area Forums. These would correspond with the geographical boundaries of the appropriate Local Area Committees.

It is proposed that one third of the seats on the relevant LAC would be reserved for local community and voluntary groups. These groups would have to meet strict criteria in relation to eligibility and should be involved in combating social inclusion at some level. The Local Area Forums would be established, organised and serviced by a relevant local development agency, i.e. an area partnership company and/or ADM-funded community group. The relationship would be contractual and based on the existing model between area partnerships and FCS. This was developed for the delivery of the Local Employment Service but has merit in that it is transparent and lays down clear objectives and performance indicators to be met by either party.

In a number of areas, this may not be an option but it would be possible for the relevant Office of the Director of Community and Enterprise to develop and support the relevant Local Area Forum. The Forum representatives would report back to the Forum on a quarterly basis and aim to develop a dialogical and developmental relationship with the Forum members.

This would take the form of a written report delivered before the meeting of the Forum and a plenary session to encourage deliberation. It is also suggested that gender issues be addressed to encourage greater participation of women.

A number of mechanisms for election and/or selection exist. These include:

Election by organisation. It is proposed that organisations would be nominated by fellow members of the Local Area Forum for the reserved seats on the LAC. The organisations, if elected would nominate a member of the organisation for the required term of office. The nomination process would be an internal organisational process but would be subject to the agreement of the majority of the Local Area Forum. If this is not forthcoming, the organisation must nominate another member.

Election by members. Individual members of eligible organisations would be nominated by member organisations. The nominee would have to be a registered member of an eligible organisation. Voting procedures would be similar to option A.

Selection by lottery. Lottery is probably the oldest form of selection in democracies and can trace its roots back to Athens in the 5th century B.C. It is proposed that a lottery procedure be developed, for example through the use of a computer software package, which would randomly choose from among the member organisations to represent the Local Area Forum. The selected organisations would then nominate a member in a similar fashion to option A. In order to address the varying sizes of constituent organisations, it is proposed that the procedure would weight organisations by the membership within the random selection procedure.

These groups would be elected/selected by the Local Area Forum for a total of five years and would not be eligible for re-election. This is to encourage a roll-over of groups and allow enough time to enable those elected to develop their talents and expertise. It is important that the councillors and the representatives of the LAC Forum would understand their mutual roles. The councillors are elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage and therefore are the legitimate representatives of the community. The representatives of the Local Area Forum are the representatives of community and voluntary sector-based groups and organisations and interests that are currently under represented or unrepresented. As a whole the LAC will better represent the citizens, interests and groups of the local area.

Conclusion

While it could be argued that the geographical area of a LAC is too large to establish a community identity, it is posited that the role of the various fora is to encourage deliberation and participation in the wider community not in an area-based cultural or geographical identity. The encouragement of networking, interaction and debate is fundamental to the development of active citizenship, a development successive governments have attempted to foster and support.

One of the primary aims of this discussion paper has been to show the relationship between active citizenship in a general sense and community involvement in official institutions such as Local Area Committees. It is argued that all branches of society have something to gain from becoming more aware of, and supportive towards, local community organisations. It has been noted on many occasions that the community and voluntary sector is vital to the development of active citizenship but it often exists at a low level of development owing to

long neglect in policy and a general lack of public awareness of its collective significance.

At the same time, official initiatives such as Operational Programme for Local and Rural Development have sought to enlist the participation of representatives of the local community and voluntary sector in plans for improvement and yet are often unclear as to how to achieve this objective. Whilst only a small number of local people can become directly involved in such initiatives, the key to success is to take a strategic view of the local community and voluntary sector. By building up their capacity both individually and through fora, these organisations can provide opportunities for participation at many different levels. On the basis of a stronger sector, community representation on local government structures can be linked to increased activity on many different issues amongst the local population as a whole.

This discussion paper concludes by proposing that the inclusion of, engagement with and support for the local community and voluntary sector should become a standard component of local authority planning and local government structures.

References

- Anderson, H. and Burns, D. (1996) *The Rise of the European Union and the Erosion of Parliamentary Democracy: a Study of Post-parliamentary Governance*. Routledge, London.
- Barrington, T. (1970) *More Local Government*. Institute of Public Administration, Dublin.
- Chanan, G. (1999) *Local Community Involvement - A Handbook for Good Practice*. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin.
- Committee on the Management of Local Government (1968) *Proposals for Reform*. Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London.
- Coughlan, M. and de Buitelir, D. (1996) *Local Government Finance in Ireland*. Institute of Public Administration, Dublin.
- Craig, S. (1995) *Community Participation - A Handbook for Individuals and Groups in Local Development*. Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin.
- Department of the Environment and Local Government (1998) *The Report of the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems - Preparing the Ground*. Government Publications Office, Dublin.
- Department of the Environment and Local Government (1999) *Strategic Policy Committees - Guidelines for Establishment and Operation*. Government Publications Office, Dublin.
- Department of the Environment and Local Government (2000) *A Shared Vision for County and City Development Boards*. Government Publications Office, Dublin.
- Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (1999) *Local Leadership, Local Choice*. Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London.
- Department of Social Community and Family Affairs (1997) *Supporting Voluntary Activity: A Green Paper on the Community and Voluntary Sector and its Relationship with the State*. Government Publications Office, Dublin.

Department of Social Community and Family Affairs (2000) *White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*. Government Publications Office, Dublin.

Gallagher, S. (2000.) P. J. Meghan and Approved Local Councils. *Institute of Public Administration Journal* Vol. 48, No. 2.

Mill, J. S. (1861) *Essay on Representative Government*. Methuen, London.

O'Ferrall, F. (2000) *Citizenship and Public Service: Voluntary and Statutory Relationships in Irish Healthcare*. Dundalgan Press, Dundalk.