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**Responsible participation and housing: restoring democratic
theory to the scene**

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Introduction

Implicit in the current policy focus on community participation is a diverse range of types of civic engagement (Goodlad, 2002). In addition to forms of participation that devolve responsibility for services to residents or service users (as in ‘community ownership’ housing), participation can mean involvement in framing local strategies, in monitoring how they are implemented and in commenting on or monitoring local services provided by others. Secondly, community participation is used to mean joining voluntary and community organisations for pleasure and benefit to self and others and because community and voluntary organisations can serve as a mobilising force for other types of participation. Finally civic participation can mean informal social support or control based on family, friendship and neighbourliness. The first of these – ‘community’ involvement in service delivery – is the concern of this paper.

As new forms of participatory and deliberative local governance developed in the last quarter of the 20th century, their stated rationale varied over time and from one group to another though with continuing government, public and academic support for the idea of participation. However, recent critics (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Cruikshank, 1994) contend that participation is a symptom of the state turning away from tackling poverty to placing the obligation on poor citizens to help themselves, as part of a broader neo-liberal agenda (Jessop, 2002; Raco, 2003). The rationale for participation attributed to policymakers is that active citizenship attaches responsibility to citizens for alleviating problems arising from structural inequalities. This reconstituted citizenship contrasts with the market-based and consumerist forms of participation endorsed in the 1980s and 1990s in that ‘community’ is promoted with rhetorical and strategic purpose.

This paper seeks to explore the new responsible participation and its multiple rationales and outcomes using empirical evidence about ‘community’ housing associations in Scotland. After a discussion of the emphasis on participation and responsibility in neighbourhood regeneration and housing policy, we outline current critiques of responsible participation and suggest that they reflect an epistemology that overlooks some key features of the interaction between policy and action at local level. The paper then examines data on participation in housing organisations from a study of citizen participation in four neighbourhoods in central Scotland. The argument is structured around the three key purposes of political participation identified in democratic theory. The paper concludes that democratic theory can play a valuable part alongside other theoretical perspectives in exploring the complex processes at work in the new institutions of responsible participation.

Participation and responsibility

Political participation has a long history as a demand of excluded groups. Since the late 1960s, particular social and cultural groups (women, disabled people, for example) have campaigned for rights to participate on the ground that their interests are not adequately represented in the policy process (Young, 1990; Lister, 1997), while politicians have stressed the advantages of wider community participation, for example in voluntary organisations, in fostering social cohesion or its variants such as ‘community’, social capital and social order (Blunkett, 2002). Further, for a variety of

public sector managers, participation was seen in the 1980s and 1990s as a response to questions about local electoral mandates, traditional local government practices, the alleged lack of accountability of non-elected local institutions and the fragmented structures of governance. It served to reform government by empowering consumers and improving managerial effectiveness (Ferlie et al, 1996; Walker, 2001).

Housing has been heavily implicated in the development of ideas about participation. Particularly relevant in housing policy were the critiques of bureaucratic (insensitive and unresponsive) and professional (arrogant) approaches to service delivery; and the use of fragmented or dispersed organisational forms in which traditional notions of accountability were challenged through participation. Tenant participation emerged in Britain in the 1970s (Richardson, 1977) and continued to grow from then to the introduction of Best Value and tenants compacts after 1997. A steady growth in the number of formal structures and policies for tenant participation (Goodlad, 2001) was accompanied by a widening in the subject matter of discussion between tenants and social landlords (Cole et al, 2000). Triggers included the tenants' charter debates of the late 1970s, the Citizen's Charter HMSO, 1991) and the move to introduce compulsory competitive tendering and tenant's choice of landlord after 1987. A 'major stimulus' for housing associations 'was provided by the Housing Corporation's *Tenant Participation Strategy* in 1992' (Riseborough, 1998, p 226). In practice, the rhetoric of national policy was filtered through local policies and interactions between councillors, housing managers and tenants to create a varied pattern of participation (Cairncross et al., 1997). Cole *et al's* conclusions arise from qualitative as well as quantitative research, adding to their force:

'many local authorities have been steadily broadening their "arena of engagement" with tenants, developing council-wide consultation processes, tenants' representation on working parties and committees, joint tenant-officer training and so on – more a part of their "normal business" than a special accessory or set of techniques' (2000, p 2).

Two distinctive features of housing's role in the development of participatory governance stand out. First, housing in all tenures has been affected through a combination of policy for social rented housing and for area regeneration. Indeed, the 1980 Right to Buy might even be seen as an earlier, pre-New Labour form of the new 'responsible participation'. Secondly, the nature of tenant participation has been more varied than user involvement in some sectors, ranging from individual tenants choosing a type of heating system to tenant involvement in neighbourhood or city-wide issues (Cairncross et al., 1997). The neighbourhood scale has been a particular policy focus following publication of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), 2001). Other policy initiatives have also targeted new resources and attention onto responsibility and participation at neighbourhood level (Meegan and Mitchell, 2001; Foley and Martin, 2000; Wallace, 2001). The neighbourhood is therefore an arena for local participatory democracy as well as for assaults against urban decline and degeneration:

'neighbourhood renewal starts from a proper understanding of the needs of communities. Communities need to be consulted and listened to, and the most effective interventions are often those where communities are actively involved in their design and delivery, and where possible in the driving seat' (SEU, 2001, p. 19).

Policy for 'community ownership' housing from Scotland's New Labour Scottish Office then the Labour-Liberal-Democrat Scottish executive resonates with the new interest in tenant responsibility. A green paper in 1999 projected a vision for 'community ownership' housing as: 'a way of empowering tenants' (Scottish Office, 1999, p. 51). It is defined as resulting from the transfer of public sector rented housing to a non-profit body with tenant, local authority and 'community' representation; with 'effective tenant involvement' in key decisions; and with the housing continuing to be let at affordable prices on the basis of need. In response to opposition from trade unions and some tenants' organisations, the Labour-Liberal Democrat Scottish Executive argues that 'community ownership' would not involve 'privatisation' – the housing 'would continue to be available to let at affordable rents to those in housing need' (p.52).

This community ownership model grew out of the work of 'community-based' housing associations in inner city neighbourhoods in Glasgow from the mid-1970s. These are resident-controlled, though usually with minority representation from the city council and other community interests (such as local priests or teachers), and they were seen as highly successful in renovating inner city Victorian tenements. Membership is typically restricted to residents (of any tenure) in a locality of several thousand people and the management committee is elected from the members each year. Clapham and Kintrea (1992) recount how council tenants disaffected by the rate of progress with council housing renewal were attracted to this model when invited by Glasgow city council to consider transfer to new housing co-operatives and associations. From the mid-1980s a series of relatively small transfers, typically around 200-300 houses with prospects of further development, took place in the outer estates. The idea was taken up in Edinburgh and in other parts of Scotland and local authority support has played 'a crucial role'. 'Community ownership' housing was included as 'a distinct category' in the Approved Development Programme of Scottish Homes, the government agency that funded a large proportion of their development programme (Clapham and Kintrea, 1992, p. 82). They operate 'as a matter of policy' in 'very poor areas' (Clapham and Kintrea, 2000, p. 539).

The 'community ownership' housing model is attractive to government for a variety of reasons: to 'empowerment' is added the capacity of 'community' housing organisations to maximise 'the resources available for investment in public sector housing' (Scottish Office, 1999, p. 51) by leverage of private finance. Another feature of the 'community ownership' and 'community-based' housing model (together called 'community housing' below) is the potential for wider action. 'Community' housing associations tend to expand 'beyond their mainstream housing activities' (Scottish Office, 1999, p. 53), to job creation schemes, childcare, community care and work-space management (Goodlad, 2000a).

Critics of the new responsibility

While evidence of more citizen participation in social housing (Cole et al, 2000; Goodlad, 2001) and area regeneration (ODPM, 2002) has emerged, an apparently less welcome rationale is now said to be present in current policy enthusiasm for participation. The strengthening under the Labour government elected in 1997 of the 'turn to the community' in public policy (Duffy and Hutchinson, 1997; see also Imrie

and Raco, 2003) is under attack on a number of grounds. It is said to require a new form of responsible participation, in which the state bestows rights on citizens as long as individuals, families and 'communities' exercise greater responsibility for their own problems. Thus Imrie and Raco point to 'Labour's belief that poor communities will only make progress if their members become informed and knowledgeable citizens (as empowered consumers) who can make the decisions to overcome whatever personal problems they have' (2003, p. 24). Policy for poor areas is said to blame the victims and place on them a new burden of active citizenship. Furthermore, 'Labour's programmes for an urban renaissance are underpinned by an analysis of urban populations that does not deny that individual apathy and docility may, in some way, be responsible for poverty and deprivation' (p. 24). Imrie and Raco go on to argue that: 'What we have here is, then, a policy design that targets a population (in this case, the poor) along the lines of an entrenched stereotype – that is, the poor are a problem because they are dependent and deviant' (p25). Instead of welcoming community and civic participation, it is criticised on the diverse grounds that it is *poorly conducted, corporatist, diversionary and exclusive*.

In relation to the conduct of participation, a large literature reports problems, obstacles and frustrations (Cooper and Hawtin, 1998; Burton et al, forthcoming; Foley and Martin, 2000). These vary from ineffective techniques for engaging residents' interest to more fundamental issues such as the paradoxical tendency for power to be centralised to government level as it is decentralised below local government level. Hence, area policies: 'are problematic for assuming that a lack of civic participation is the problem to be addressed, rather than the often exclusive character of policy decision-making processes, for instance' (Imrie and Raco, 2003, p. 24). Much of this critique can be seen as calling for improvements to the methods and techniques of participation and much 'good practice' literature is available to assist practitioners to develop their skills and capacity to engage communities in participation or to assist them to evaluate their practice (see, for example, Cairncross et al, 1989; Burns and Taylor, 2000).

Second, participation brings dilemmas and tensions for citizen participants, since for those who are tempted to get involved, acting with responsibility leads to trade offs and accommodations with public policy constraints. Hence, the 'origins of the recent rise of tenant involvement may be understood as incorporation of tenant activity by the state' (Riseborough, 1998, pp. 239-40) and there is 'concern that, by becoming involved (such as delivering services on behalf of the state), organisations and their leaders may simply be incorporated, gaining little for their constituencies' (Cochrane, 2003, p. 230). Regulatory and new public management systems require community groups to meet national standards. For example, tenants taking responsibility are expected to 'comply with public service principles of accountability, confidentiality, financial propriety and working within the relevant statutory and regulatory constraints' (DETR, 1999, cited in Imrie and Raco, 2003, p. 27). An epistemology that considers the state to be the servant of the market feeds the suspicion of participation as incorporation. In reviewing alternative theoretical approaches to understanding tenant participation, Goodlad suggests that such critics would answer the question of why the state should 'make any concessions to improve the status of citizens, such as the promotion of citizen participation' with the answer: 'it is in the interests of capital' (2001, p. 184).

The third accusation is that governments favour participation because it acts to conceal and reinforce poverty and other oppressions and injustices: the 'political narrative of community and individual responsibility is one that deliberately deflects attention from the causes of poverty' (Imrie and Raco, 2003, p. 30). Communities are deluded by talk of self-help and are not allowed to challenge the market solutions provided by government. For example, council tenants may find that transferring their housing out of the council sector is a pre-condition of renewal. The most radical of these critiques suggests that, given the unequal power relations implicit in state-supported, advanced capitalism, participatory projects are meaningless 'window-dressing' exercises that protect the political status quo and reproduce inequality in a tyrannical fashion. Others see the role of tenant participation and the state more ambiguously (Hague, 1990; Somerville, 1998). However, poverty, it is said, requires to be tackled through more fundamental challenges to existing power structures.

Further, participation discriminates in favour of the strongest and excludes groups with fewer resources and least status. Communities cannot be trusted to represent the diversity of local populations or interests; and communities of place, the key focus of policy, do not constitute communities of interest so that disabled people (Edwards, 2001; 2002), ethnic minority groups (Cooper and Hawtin, 1998) and the poorest people (Morrison, 2003) are neglected. Whether controlled by the state or by community organisations themselves 'there is some justifiable scepticism about the extent to which excluded groups really will be given significant influence or involvement in the new arrangements' (Cochrane, 2003, p. 230).

Powerful as these critiques can be, the critics of the new responsibility do not ask and therefore do not answer some pertinent questions, such as what is the role of agency in processes of responsible participation? Does negotiation take place between community organisations, and government? Is it possible that policy is not implemented uniformly or as it appears in government policy statements? An alternative (realist) approach sees the interplay of power relations, participation and outcomes as more complex than the critique allows. What happens at neighbourhood level is the product of a combination of contingent and structural factors in which actors may interact to generate outcomes that are not necessarily consistent with government policy. Citizens are not necessarily the compliant and quiescent dupes of ministers that the new responsibility critics contend (Flint, 2002). As Cochrane acknowledges, questions should be asked about whether the 'position of voluntary and community groups within the new arrangements is ambiguous' (Cochrane, 2003, p.230). May they gain *and* lose?

Understanding the new responsible participation through theory

How then are we to begin to unravel the implications of the new responsible participation? This can be seen as an empirical question. What is participation like 'on the ground'? There is a large research literature on citizen participation in general and tenant participation in particular that might provide answers, much of it descriptive and polemical in tone. However, it is often marred by a lack of conceptual clarity about how participation should be evaluated. Without theory it is hard to see how far in practice the diverse results are achieved across the range of possible outcomes. It is hard to know what the empirical detail is telling the reader about the state of

participation. This is partly a reflection of the taken-for-granted nature of participation and participatory democracy but is also a consequence of the challenge represented by such a research task. For example, asking key actors and elites if they favour particular conceptions of the purpose of participation would be open to the criticism that they would provide answers they considered safe or politically correct. In any event, it is arguably more important to establish the outcomes and effects than the intentions of actors.

The root of the difficulties with much of the participation literature lies in its lack of explicit theoretical content. The key to making sense of empirical data on tenant participation lies in theory building so that hypotheses can be developed about the possible relationship between tenant participation and public policy outcomes. Empirical research would then be required to examine how social structures and human agency interact to support or otherwise the hypotheses generated. This requires a research design far more sophisticated than perusing government policy statements for their possible implications or providing data not collected with any particular hypotheses in mind. But what theory? We suggest that democratic theory provides an appropriate framework for examining the possibly complex interactions of purposes, actions, structures, mechanisms and agency within particular cases (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). The value is not to show that democratic theory is true or untrue but to use it to reveal systematic patterns, consistencies and inconsistencies in its practice. The value lies in the capacity theory offers to construct and test hypotheses and to understand the complex interactions at work. This is not to say that democratic theory alone can help us unravel what is going on within responsible participation.

Participation in democratic theory

Classic debates in democratic theory about civic participation emphasise the continuity of its place as a fundamental feature of governance and community. Present debates are heavily influenced by the past. The concept of participatory democracy found renewed favour in public opinion and public policy from about 1968, after a period when representative democracy was seen by political scientists and politicians equally as providing stable government in contrast with the fascist and communist populism of the 1920s and 1930s (Pateman, 1970). The newfound enthusiasm for participation was a result of reaction to the domination of the post-war welfare state by elites of politicians and professionals. Citizens in general and particular groups of citizens demanded to play a more active role in defending their interests. Structures and processes of government were opened up to new voices and the concept of citizenship has been in dispute ever since (Roche, 1992).

Crudely, three rationales for participation are advanced in democratic theory, one 'developmental', another 'instrumental' and the third termed 'due process' (Richardson, 1983). The developmental or educational effect of participation on individuals and society is said to foster personal development, a democratic political culture conducive to further participation, and social integration as a consequence of aiding the acceptance of collective decisions. This is the social cohesion, or 'incorporation', purpose seen by critics of participation as compounding social inequality and suppressing dissent. Second, in democratic theory, the outcomes of democratic political processes – decisions – reflect the interests of those who

participate in the process of decision-making (Held, 1996). Those affected can defend their interests since participation is for the instrumental purpose of securing the product of political decisions, which include an agreed distribution of material resources. This cannot offer any guarantee that inequalities will be corrected or poor and excluded groups favoured but taken with the developmental purpose of participation, it offers the most promise of inroads into inequalities of resources. These rationales, in tandem, are implicit in accounts of participation that see transformational opportunities for formerly excluded groups to achieve material gains. They lie at the heart of recent interest in Habermasian collaborative planning (Healey, 1997) and deliberative democracy (Smith, 2003) as ways of promoting equality and a green agenda, for example. Third, the notion of a right to participate irrespective of outcome is highly valued (Richardson, 1983) and has new meanings as a consequence of changing ideas about the proper role of human rights in contemporary democracies (Smith, 2003). Paradoxically, this purpose of participation is that it has no wider instrumental or social purpose. It is simply the right thing to do in a liberal democracy.

Clearly the practice of democracy falls far short of this utopian ideal – which should be seen as presenting an ideal type, not reality – and political scientists have revealed many systematic inequalities in patterns of activity. Participation is not evenly distributed across space or social groups. Factors that pre-dispose people to participation are related to economic status; and, especially, educational background (Parry *et al.*, 1992). Hall's review of associational activity in Britain is also relevant and shows that the two groups 'left out of civic society and increasingly marginalized from it are the working class and the young' (1999, p. 455). Political exclusion is therefore seen increasingly to demonstrate a distinctive socio-spatial segregation, with exclusion concentrated in 'inner cities, on peripheral housing estates, or in poor rural communities' (p. 8; Geddes, 1995; cited in Percy-Smith, 2000, p. 148). Social rented housing tenants typically have characteristics that place them amongst those least likely to be engaged in civic participation or to be inclined to consider participation worthwhile. The new critics of responsible participation are therefore not alone in pointing to the ways in which inequalities of status, power and resources may be reflected in participatory experiences.

The study

The data reported here were collected in a study of citizen participation in neighbourhood governance in four neighbourhoods in Glasgow and Edinburgh in the first half of 2000. Housing was not originally seen as the key focus and so early theory building and hypotheses were originally intended to examine social cohesion and neighbourhood participation more generally. One deprived neighbourhood and one more prosperous neighbourhood in each city were selected. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used: interviews with key actors, including community activists at neighbourhood and city levels; focus groups in three neighbourhoods and a household survey of around 200 householders in each of the neighbourhoods. In presenting data from the household survey, we provide descriptive data but, with one exception, no significance tests as yet.

The deprived neighbourhoods ('Edinburgh SIP' and 'Glasgow SIP') were both designated as Social Inclusion Partnership areas (SIPs) in 1999 by the Scottish Executive. They had been the subject of previous area regeneration initiatives and had a long history of participatory practices and experiments and public funding for the voluntary sector. They suffer the stigma commonly associated with such areas and have been anonymised here at the request of some respondents. Both were originally built almost entirely of council housing, near the edge of their cities, from the late 1950s, to provide housing for people displaced from demolition areas. Both have since acquired a more mixed tenure structure due to a combination of new building by private developers and housing associations, right to buy, and transfers to housing associations. Both neighbourhoods continue to suffer from the social, economic and environmental characteristics, including poor housing, of many deprived urban areas. The two other neighbourhoods ('Mixed Edinburgh' and 'Mixed Glasgow') were more typical of the population of the wider conurbations as their tenure profile shows (Table 1).

Table 1 Tenure, by neighbourhood (percentages)

Tenure	Neighbourhood				
	Edinburgh SIP	Mixed Edinburgh	Glasgow SIP	Mixed Glasgow	All four neighbourhoods
	%	%	%	%	%
Owned	27	67	19	73	46
Private renting	2	20	1	1	6
Public sector (mainly council) Housing association	49	3	51	25	32
Other	22	8	27	2	15
	1	3	2	1	1

Source: household survey (n = 780)

Tenant participation in practice

The two SIPs provide a focus for supporting and stimulating participation. At the same time, council departments and other agencies in both cities have a variety of policies for user involvement. These apply in the two mixed neighbourhoods as well as the SIPs but, in the former, although a diverse range of voluntary and community organisations exists, there is no co-ordinating or support organisation at neighbourhood level. The councils as landlords also maintain a number of structures for participation, including liaison between tenants' associations and local managers. An important part of the context for this study is that, at the time of fieldwork, tenants of Glasgow city council were the subjects of a consultation process to determine the future of the council housing stock. A proposal to transfer all the housing to a new Glasgow Housing Association (and hence to smaller 'community' associations in 'second stage transfers') was engendering debate and uncertainty. A tenants' forum was established in each neighbourhood office area and meetings between tenants and housing managers were taking place throughout the city, including in the two

neighbourhoods studied. The Scottish Executive ultimately approved the transfer after a tenants' ballot and transfer took place early in 2003.

The four neighbourhoods contain 'community ownership' housing in former council housing or 'community-based' housing associations, which have either renovated older stock or built new houses for rent or shared ownership. Housing associations employ staff, operate from local offices, and have management committees made up largely of local residents. They operate typically at the scale of 200 to 500 housing units in these neighbourhoods, very much smaller than the scale – over 3,000 units – of the city council's decentralised housing offices at the time. In the Glasgow SIP, the housing associations were represented on bodies such as the SIP by means of their own forum.

In our fieldwork, council and housing association tenants reported very different experiences and attitudes. From the household survey and in interviews and focus groups a picture emerged of housing associations providing a more responsive service in which tenants felt their views were valued and that it was worthwhile participating. Members of housing association committees seemed more self-confident about their capacity to achieve results from public bodies, although frustrated that the rate of progress was slower than they desired. The household survey showed that council tenants in the two SIP areas in particular were less contented with the city councils than people in the mixed neighbourhoods, largely it seemed because they perceived housing services to be poor and unresponsive. Tenants of Glasgow city council reported long delays in getting repairs carried out. In contrast, tenants of housing associations had reasons for being more satisfied than council tenants – they could see renewal activity taking place even if their home had not yet been reached.

We have seen that democratic theory suggests that participation might have a number of effects on policy outcomes and citizen efficacy. We now explore how far these were apparent in 'community' housing associations. We present results from our own and other sources structured to answer key questions about the interactions between participation and political outcomes.

Participation as social and political cohesion

The contention in democratic theory that participation engenders personal development and social cohesion is not easily tested using quantitative methods since the direction of causality is at issue in reports of associations between measures of social cohesion and participation. Maloney et al. (2000) argue that the state can promote the conditions in which trust (as a measure of cohesion) can emerge. It is also argued that trust, social capital and social cohesion can only be understood in specific social, political and geographical contexts and only constitutes social capital where individuals in specific settings draw upon trust and networks to act (Pennington and Rydin, 2000). These writings, and the research on which they are based, support the hypothesis that 'community' housing association tenants in our neighbourhoods would be likely to display higher measures of social cohesion than council tenants.

As expected, housing association tenants reported higher levels of social cohesion compared with council tenants on a range of measures in the household survey. Three

are reported in Table 2. We found that a higher proportion of housing association tenants (47%) than council tenants (33%) reported they would, most of the time, trust the council ‘to do what is right’. A second measure of trust – willingness to work together with others to improve their neighbourhood – showed another similar divergence. Seven in ten (70%) of council tenants compared with three-quarters (76%) of housing association tenants agreed they would be willing to work together with others on something to improve their neighbourhood. A third measure of cohesion found similar results with a greater proportion of housing association (78%) than council tenants (70%) agreeing that they like to think of themselves as similar to people who live in the neighbourhood (Table 2). This finding raises the issue of whether in thinking of themselves as similar to their neighbours, residents are acting to exclude people they do not consider like them. We will return to this issue below.

Further measures of social and political cohesion could have been provided in Table 2. For example, housing association tenants were more likely than council tenants to report that they would regularly stop and speak with people in the neighbourhood, more likely to feel they belonged to the street they live in, more likely to plan to remain resident for a number of years, more likely to borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours and more likely to say that they had voted in the previous two major elections (1997 general and 1999 Scottish Parliament elections).

Table 2 Measures of social cohesion by tenure in four neighbourhoods, by tenure (percentages)

	Housing association tenants	Tenure	
		Local authority tenants	All tenures
Strongly agree/agree:			
most of the time you can trust the council to do what is right	47	33	33
I would be willing to work together with others on something to improve my neighbourhood	76	70	73
I like to think of myself as similar to the people who live in this neighbourhood	78	70	70

Source: household survey (n = 780)

A degree of trust in official bodies is arguably necessary for participation in the new responsible governance, but it is not sufficient. Implicit in models of citizen participation is a reliance on community groups to represent the interests of the residents of an area to public officials and this role is acknowledged in the funding and other support provided for groups in renewal areas and elsewhere. But do residents trust activists in our neighbourhoods? To a varying degree, it seems: yet again, housing association tenants were more likely (43%) than council tenants (35%) to disagree that ‘people who are active in local community groups are out for themselves’.

Finally, a boost to self-esteem, learning and status from participation was apparent in activists' accounts, including though not only committee members of housing associations. Yet attitudes demonstrated ambivalence: on the one hand, participation for its own sake was valued, yet if activists felt their contribution was ignored, they thought the effort not to have been worthwhile. These self-development outcomes seem to be largely confined to activists, especially members of housing association management committees. This brings us to the instrumental purpose of participation.

Participation for instrumental gain

We have discussed social cohesion as a product of participation and now move on to consider the possibilities of participation securing material benefits – in this case, better housing and neighbourhood conditions. A key question is whether participation enhances the prospects for social equality by enabling the outcome of political processes to reflect the needs and aspirations of participants.

Whether tenant participation has had a favourable material effect on tenants is disputed. The context for it has not all been favourable: 'the polarising effect of housing tenure and welfare restructuring ... has left tenants both more involved in housing management but simultaneously less likely to be strong negotiators within contemporary welfare debates. Tenant participation therefore illustrates well the key distinction between formal and substantive citizenship rights' (Goodlad, 2001, p. 193). It seems clear that housing activists want to see material benefits from their participation (Cooper and Hawtin, 1998; Mullen et al, 1997; Cairncross et al, 1997; Birchall, 1992). For 'community' housing association tenants, the primary motive for taking control was to secure capital investment (Clapham and Kintrea, 1992; Clapham, Kintrea and Kay, 1996). But were these goals achieved?

Clapham et al (1989; 1991) conclude in their study of six of the earliest community ownership associations and comparator neighbourhood management arrangements, that the former achieved several instrumental gains over their comparators. In addition to capital improvements, tenants also felt their new landlords were effective housing managers, and contributed to community development (Clapham et al, 1991). Our qualitative results suggest the same. Further, the instrumental benefits are not only found in capital investment. During transfer negotiations, tenants have often secured better tenancy conditions than operate elsewhere in the social rented sectors, in the sense of the balance between tenants' individual rights and the association's rights (Mullen et al, 1997). The carrot of access to investment funds gives way typically to higher levels of continuing tenant participation and tenant satisfaction than in the council sector (Clapham, Kintrea and Kay, 1996; Clapham and Kintrea, 2000).

The instrumental gains from housing association tenure were clear in results from a question in our survey about how the neighbourhood had changed over the previous two years. Table 3 shows that tenants of housing associations tended to have a more positive view of neighbourhood change, with 37 per cent of them feeling their neighbourhood had got better as a place to live, compared with 21 per cent of council tenants. While 15 per cent of housing association tenants felt it had got worse, many more council tenants felt that (36%). This provides one of the most direct indicators that community housing can deliver gains from the perspective of residents.

Table 3 Residents' perceptions of how neighbourhood has changed over last two years¹, by tenure (percentages)

'how has this neighbourhood changed over the last two years?'	Tenure		
	Housing association tenants	Local authority tenants	All tenures
got better	37	21	24
stayed the same	44	37	49
got worse	15	36	23
DK/not stated	5	6	5

¹ resident for at least two years

Source: household survey (n = 657)

It is worth pointing out that although some private finance has been used by 'community' housing associations since 1988 to fund housing improvements, they are able to tap into larger direct grants than the sums ever available to council tenants (where capital improvement is generally paid for through borrowing). Housing associations in Scotland are therefore not a cheap option for government. In 1998-9, grant was expected to meet 70 per cent of development costs, on average (Scottish Office, 1999). As a consequence, Scottish tenants of housing associations benefit from lower rents than their counterparts in England. Part of the reason for this is that, although operating at neighbourhood level, 'community' housing organisations do not restrict their activities to that scale. For example, one director told of a series of incidents associated with lobbying the local authority and government ministers when public spending constraints threatened their development programmes. Action included boarding an aircraft and lobbying a minister during the flight to London. The housing politics of Scotland mean that conservative as well as labour ministers do not want newspaper headlines that vilify them for insensitivity to the problems of poor housing and homelessness (Goodlad, 2000b).

Although we did not ask specifically about satisfaction with landlords, we nevertheless concluded that such a question would have resulted in higher levels of satisfaction with housing association landlords than councils as landlords, as other research in Scotland has shown (Clapham et al, 1995; Clapham et al, 1991). One committee member of a housing association with previous experience as a council tenant seemed to speak for many: 'It's chalk and cheese (the difference between council and housing association)...we can have a go at anything (here in the housing association) but they, up there, it's hopeless, you can't get nothing done ... it's meetings, meetings, talk and more talk ... I just had enough'.

A number of results also showed a stronger sense of political efficacy amongst housing association tenants compared with council tenants (Table 4). A much higher number of housing association (45%) than council (26%) tenants agreed that community groups are generally effective in influencing the council. Further, 53 per cent of housing association tenants and 65 per cent of council tenants agreed that 'individually people like me can have no say in what the council does'; and 50 per

cent of housing association tenants agreed that ‘a group of people like me can have no say in what the council does’, compared with 55 per cent of council tenants (Table 4).

Table 4 Residents’ perceptions of political efficacy, by tenure (percentages)

	Tenure		
	Housing association tenants	Local authority tenants	All tenures
<i>Strongly agree/agree:</i>			
- community groups in this neighbourhood are generally effective in influencing the council	45	26	31
- individually people like me can have no say in what the council does	53	65	55
- a group of people like me can have no say in what the council does	50	55	44

Source: household survey (n = 780)

These results may reflect the greater satisfaction felt by housing association tenants with the council’s service provision role in the neighbourhoods. For example, 59 per cent were satisfied with how their last enquiry was dealt with compared with 41 per cent of council tenants. The same proportion (59%) feel the council is efficient in its service delivery compared with 42 per cent of council tenants; and 34 per cent compared with 23 per cent of council tenants felt that the council gives good value for money for the council tax they pay.

The results of our initial analysis at neighbourhood level supported the view that instrumental gains from participation will themselves engender more participation in a feedback loop that contributes to social equality (Docherty et al, 2001). This does not mean that council housing is intrinsically less able to deliver instrumental gains for tenants, but suggests that the contingent circumstances of low investment, apparently unresponsive management and uncertainty made it so at the time of fieldwork.

Participation and due process

The third ‘purpose’ of participation is to grant citizens the dignity of entitlement, irrespective of outcome. There was evidence that residents appreciated the opportunity to be involved even though they often did not take it up. Their feelings were clear from graphic accounts of the indignity resulting from lack of participation, disrespect and the unresponsiveness of the council as landlord. In contrast, while there is variation in the degree to which individual tenants participate in both parts of the social rented sector, tenants of ‘community’ housing associations seem to be more likely to attend meetings called by their landlord than council tenants (Clapham et al, 1991). Further, participation in community ownership associations was sustained over a long period ‘around 46 per cent of all residents had been to a meeting during the (previous) year ... (these) figures are quite similar to the earlier ones’ from a study carried out six years previously (Clapham and Kintrea, 2000, p. 544).

Further, we were able to show that public policy, including SIPs, makes a difference to residents' perceptions of efforts by the council to keep them informed (Docherty et al., 2001). When tenure is examined, council tenants are found to be more likely (50%) than housing association tenants (35%) to feel that the council does not keep residents of the neighbourhood informed, while 36 per cent of housing association tenants compared with 23 per cent of council tenants agree that the council involves residents in decision-making in the neighbourhood (Table 5).

Although residents want to have opportunities to participate, they often rely on activists to take them up. Further, they – and the activists – want the opportunities to be effective in achieving material results. Activists feel frustrated by a perception that their involvement is fruitless, leading one to withdraw from a SIP board for example. However, committee members of housing associations were distinctive in having positive views about the success of their involvement.

A neighbourhood inclusion index developed from answers to three questions found that residence in housing association housing was independently associated with a sense of inclusion, whereas council renting was not (see Docherty et al, 2001). The rating of the neighbourhood as a place to stay correlated strongly; the lower the rating the less the sense of inclusion. And residents who perceived that conditions had stayed the same or got worse, were significantly more likely to feel excluded. A neighbourhood effect was significant in the case of the Glasgow SIP, where residents tended to feel significantly less included by their council.

Table 5 Residents' perceptions of council information and involvement, by tenure

	Tenure		
	Local authority	Housing association	All tenures
<i>Indicator of political inclusion</i>			
'the council does not keep residents in this neighbourhood informed'			
agree strongly	19	7	12
agree	31	28	33
neither agree nor disagree	9	5	13
disagree	30	42	31
disagree strongly	7	11	5
DK	5	7	6
'the council involves residents in decision-making in this neighbourhood'			
agree strongly	2	3	1
agree	20	33	17
neither agree nor disagree	16	15	17
disagree	27	26	36
disagree strongly	23	11	19
DK	11	12	9

Source: household survey (n = 780)

Residents of the SIP neighbourhoods have noticed that efforts are being made to improve their area but this does not result in a sense of inclusion if people feel, as some in Glasgow are particularly likely to, that their area has not yet improved. Residents in the two Glasgow neighbourhoods were more likely to draw on negative personal experiences of council decisions and council tenants in particular feel more hopelessness and futility about the idea of taking action, and this attitude percolated more generally into attitudes towards the council (Docherty et al, 2001). These results show that city-level factors, as well as neighbourhood effects and housing association tenure are implicated in neighbourhood participation. Although residents like to feel they have opportunities to participate, these must be seen as effective if participation is to be sustained.

Responsible participation: constraining or enabling?

While the evidence presented above provides *prima facie* grounds for community housing organisations to be seen as capable of providing some of the positive outcomes hypothesised from democratic theory, it is necessary to take a balanced look at the evidence about this form of democratic engagement. This section discusses this with reference to the critique of responsible participation introduced earlier.

First, do ‘community’ housing organisations meet the standards that are commonly set for democratic engagement? Are they suitable vehicles for participation? Are they able to engender participation beyond the management committee? This was not a study of the methods used or effectiveness of housing associations as vehicles for participation. However, our and other evidence suggests that ‘community’ housing associations are not perfect if measured against the highest standards of governance and community development. Their meetings may not always be well-attended, they may struggle at times to find new volunteers to serve on management committees, there is some falling away of interest amongst tenants after their homes have been improved and the number of activists relative to the population is not very large (Clapham and Kintrea, 2000; Goodlad and Kintrea, 1997). This raises the issue of how the conduct of participation should be judged. It might be asked how ‘community’ housing associations compare with other social landlords in relation to participation. Other studies have concluded that ‘community’ housing associations are at least as good managers as other landlords and can be better at promoting involvement (Clapham and Kintrea, 1992; Goodlad and Kintrea, 1997). Our study lends weight to these conclusions. If judged against tenant participation in public housing, then it appears to be more extensive and more sustainable in community housing associations, *due to the combination of structural and contingent factors at work*. Where it fails to meet the highest democratic standards, theories of democracy help us see some of the factors at work but other theories are also required to explain the inequalities and power relationships involved.

Second, can responsible participation in ‘community’ housing associations overcome the tensions, contradictions and trade offs that mean ‘incorporation’. On one hand, tenants are offered responsibility, on the other it is taken away through public spending curbs and through a regulatory system that requires adherence to national standards and legislation in relation to equal opportunities, housing homeless people, financial probity and management standards, for example. These undoubtedly impact

on housing associations and can create tensions (Mullen et al, 1997). Clapham and Kintrea (2000) conclude that community ownership associations are heavily constrained by their regulatory body, mediated by their staff. However, a key question for us is whether residents consider the trade offs worthwhile, and the answer appears to be a, sometimes qualified, yes. In our study as in others, tenants of 'community' housing organisations seemed to see the possibility of making gains despite the difficulties. There has been significant flux in the balance struck over time between government, financial institutions, local authorities, housing associations, tenants, applicants and other citizens. Democratic theory has helped us see that tenants feel they are making some gains, what those gains are, and what tenants feel is lacking; but it does not allow us fully to understand why the gains may be limited.

How does the experience of 'community' housing associations meet the accusation that they provide a distraction from poverty? Certainly there is incontrovertible evidence that poor people are disproportionately housed within the sector, but also that they enjoy better housing conditions there in general than they would in any other tenure, given their low income (Scottish Homes, 1997). Further, they attract higher levels of public subsidy than they would elsewhere. Indeed we can see the emergence of 'community' housing associations as a response to the deprivation felt by their residents. Their action to defend their spending programmes makes it hard to see them as dupes who acquiesce in their own oppression, but equally they alone have not succeeded in overturning the association between social rented housing and poverty or of substantially increasing the amount of public money devoted to housing in Scotland. The picture is a subtle blend of influence and weakness in relation to tackling area deprivation, in which observers would take different views about the balance of the argument. The processes at work are only partly explained by democratic theory. However, theoretical approaches that assume responsible participation is inherently diversionary appear to be even more limited.

Finally, do 'community' housing associations show any capacity to include disabled people, ethnic minority groups and other social or cultural groups who do badly in the housing system? Evidence could be adduced that there are weaknesses and difficulties (Mullen et al, 1997), but in the context of evidence that the sector houses as deprived and excluded a set of groups as council housing does (Scottish Homes, 1997). Continuing disputes about the relative weights to be attached to the rights of individual citizens, community housing associations, local authorities, financial institutions and the central state characterise the sector. It is far too simple to see this as incorporation or exclusivity. It seems that the intersection of policy, law, and local action creates a complicated and changing picture in which housing associations can sometimes be interpreted as implicated in oppressing certain groups and at other times as successfully subverting stereotypes and injustices. For example, when the Scottish executive proposed to strengthen the powers of local authorities to act against housing associations to ensure accommodation for homeless people after council housing transfer to housing associations, they opposed the proposal. On the other hand, housing associations strongly opposed the reduction in tenants' rights, including rights in relation to security of tenure, introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988, and campaigned for their restoration in 2003.

Overall, it appears that housing associations compare reasonably well with other tenures (Clapham and Kintrea, 2000; Mullen et al, 1997). Their performance is a

result of a complex interplay between regulations, funding, anti-discrimination statutes, local action and local policies that structure their work. Their governance has been developed in ways that address fears about the possible effects of communitarian authoritarianism. In addition, the activists in 'community' housing organisations appear to resemble more closely those people normally excluded from formal politics than do elected representatives and professionals (Goodlad and Meegan, forthcoming).

The critics of responsible participation do not provide a coherent argument in relation to the alleged exclusivity of responsible participation. They deplore government policy for seeking to protect the interests of minorities and excluded groups through legislation and regulation applied to participatory bodies, and at the same time, they condemn community organisations for the danger of exclusivity if regulation does not occur. The choice for tenants and public policy is not between regulation and no regulation, but about the nature of the accommodation of different interests within a complex governance framework. The factors implicated in oppression are far more complex and varied than the influence of 'community' housing associations. Yet again, democratic theory shows us that at times housing associations have provided a means to challenge such oppressions, but it struggles, despite recent efforts (for example, Young, 1990), when seeking to understand oppression and inequality.

Conclusions

The evidence about community-based forms of governance is limited and provisional, and epistemological debates prevent unanimity of approach to studying it. This paper has argued that democratic theory can assist in evaluating the new institutions of participatory governance by providing an appropriate framework for examining their influence and effects. We have presented and discussed data from a democratic theory perspective that shows that community housing organisations interacting with national policy and the actions of residents are able to provide gains in a number of senses anticipated by democratic theory.

The household survey, the qualitative findings and previous studies all suggest that 'community' housing associations have achieved positive impacts on social cohesion and personal development for activists; and that these are closely related to the instrumental gains tenants feel they are making. Although tenants like to feel they have opportunities to participate even if they do not take them, it seems that their key test of participation is that it should be seen to provide material benefits. The three purposes of participation can therefore interact in a self-reinforcing way.

A key feature is that these community bodies result not only from government policy, but also from the willingness, sometimes reluctantly felt, of tenants and local authorities to tackle the problems they face, with tenant responsibility as a key feature of the model (Goodlad, 2000). They represent a complex interaction in which residents have been active agents in their own destiny. It is hard to see that the evidence about their activities justifies the conclusion that they divert attention from poverty and other forms of social exclusion or represent unambiguous incorporation into market-based solutions.

Given the embeddedness and multi-dimensional character of social exclusion, it is unrealistic to expect citizen participation in the new responsible governance at neighbourhood level to bring about radical social and economic change. However, it is possible to see that *in current circumstances*, this model offers some better chances than state or market models of tackling poverty and oppression in housing. Further, although ‘community’ housing associations do not meet the rigorous standards that an ideal type democracy would provide, compared with other institutions of governance they provide a varied and sometimes more favourable pattern of participatory advantages and challenges for residents.

At national level these factors include the financial regimes applying to social rented housing, the disposition of the Scottish policy community to address poverty and poor housing, the desire to find models that can be presented as not privatisation and the fortuitous existence of the community-based housing association model developed in the 1970s. At local level the desire of tenants to secure capital investment acted as a carrot that enabled committee members of ‘community’ housing associations to build trust within their constituencies. Further, ‘community’ housing associations offer the possibility of participation at several levels of governance – individual house, neighbourhood, city and Scottish wide. The tenants are far from being the powerless victims of government’s obsession with using community as an instrument of efficient government painted by some critiques. In relation to theory, we have seen that democratic theory goes only part of the way to structuring and explaining the outcomes of participation. Other theoretical approaches are also needed and democratic theory too needs to develop better accounts of the unevenness in democratic practice observed in community organisations and elsewhere.

Finally, it seems to be misleading to present ‘community’ housing, as developed by housing associations in Scotland, as an example of communitarianism, or as a product of neo-liberalism. Nor does it closely resemble post war social democratic institutions. These and other examples of responsible participation represent a challenge for social scientists seeking to understand their form and impact. Democratic theory provides a more nuanced view than the view that sees them in dichotomous terms as a choice between staying outside the state and fighting for justice or coming inside and losing out. Such a view denies the complexity of multi-level governance and of multiple identities within community. This paper’s approach shows the value of evaluating interactions between actors at neighbourhood level against democratic principles. This shows a continuous renegotiation of the boundaries and conditions of responsibility in play.

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