Modernising Governance

New Labour, Policy and Society

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into the values of the dominant partner. The power to engage actors discursively, and to draw them into the government's agenda, can be seen as complementing the apparent reduction in state power resulting from the break-up of the old bureaucratic hierarchies through which control over policy implementation was traditionally conducted. Such an analysis also leads to rethinking 'fragmentation' – the break-up of state power – in terms of a process of *dispersal* of power (Clarke and Newman 1997: Chapter 2 and Chapter 9 of this volume).

Questions can also be raised about the notions of partnership with users and communities which pervade the discourse but which get scant reference in analyses of central/local or inter-agency collaboration. Attempts to forge such partnerships open up debates about the nature of 'representativeness', issues of equality and diversity, and the problems and possibilities of enhancing public participation. The inclusion of users, communities and citizens in public policy decision-making networks and collaborative projects is of critical importance. It has a major impact on the sustainability, legitimacy and accountability of partnerships as a means of coordinating public policy and public services, and in the possible failure or success of networks as a mode of governance. These are discussed in the next chapter.

7   Public participation: the politics of representation

Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People. (title of a White Paper on local government, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions 1998)

'Men in suits make me fall silent'. (title of a paper on the experience of black and ethnic minority women in urban regeneration, Razzaque 2000)

In this chapter I explore recent policy developments around the themes of democratic innovation[1] and public participation,[2] and ask how far these can be viewed as signifying a form of governance adapted to an increasingly complex, diverse and dynamic society (Kooiman 1993). The governance literature highlights the development of a plural and differentiated set of connections between state, service deliverers, users, citizens and other stakeholders. These connections are viewed as providing greater flexibility and sophistication than the blunt instrument of party voting, especially since the dispersal of state power means that representative bodies can no longer control decision-making. New forms of connection between state and citizen are viewed as a means of responding to the fragmentation of authority and the problem of accountability in complex societies (Hirst 2000; Mulgan 1994; Peters 2000).

Democratic innovation and public participation, however, raise some significant theoretical and political challenges. First, direct public involvement in debate and decision-making cuts across the existing institutions of representative democracy, potentially undermining the role of officially elected representatives (MPs or local councillors). Secondly, such developments raise questions about our understandings of 'the people' who are to be consulted and involved, including questions about what notions of equality and difference are to be incorporated into the process of participation. Thirdly, new forms of decision-making can present challenges to state power, in both local and central forms. Such challenges centre on the issue of how discussions and decisions within new fora are connected to the policy processes of the state.

This chapter explores each of these challenges in turn. It begins by situating democratic innovation and public participation in the context of shifts in public policy and the politics of the Third Way. It goes on to discuss some of the developments in participatory democracy, and the challenges these raise for assumptions about representation and accountability. The

chapter then traces the ways in which issues of equality, diversity and the politics of difference inflect debates about public participation. The final section returns to the question of how far the current emphasis on public participation can be viewed as signifying a form of governance adapted to an increasingly complex and differentiated society.

The Third Way and democratic renewal

The Third Way emphasises the importance of the public sphere in a revitalised social democracy. Giddens argued that:

> The Third Way . . . emphasises the core importance of active government and the public sphere. The public sphere does not coincide with the domain of the state. State institutions can diminish or discredit the realm of the public when they become oversized, bureaucratic or otherwise unresponsive to citizen needs. (Giddens 2000: 163–4)

State institutions, then, need to be renewed – made more open and responsive – in order to foster confidence in government. But, more than this, the public needs to be engaged in and involved since, in Blair's words, 'diverse democratic debate is a laboratory for ideas about how we should meet social needs' (Blair 1998b: 17).

An emphasis on public participation can be linked to a range of developments in public policy and management before the election of the Labour government in 1997, of which the most significant was undoubtedly the consumerist ethos of the late 1980s and the 1990s. This was influenced by changes in public management (the importation of business techniques into the public sector), by government reforms (e.g. the Citizen's Charter of John Major's administration), and by the rise of 'user' movements (Barnes 1997; Prior et al. 1995). Throughout this period public services were also experimenting with democratic innovation and public participation, involving the public in local decision-making fora, in the planning and commissioning of health and social care, in urban renewal initiatives and other arenas (Audit Commission 1999; DETR 1998; Stewart 1995, 1996, 1997; Seargeant and Steele 1998). New governance arrangements were established which gave tenants direct roles in the running of housing associations and which involved parents in school governing bodies. Some of these developments were based on experiments in Europe, the USA and elsewhere (Rao 2000a). There was much interest in the Scandinavian experiments with referenda, local self-government and community consultation. Citizen juries, panels and other consultative mechanisms in the USA had formed the basis for innovation in the NHS and local government in the UK (J. Stewart et al. 1994).

The Labour government built on and extended this agenda. The *Modernising Government* White Paper talked of 'responsive public services' that catered for the 'needs of different groups' (Cabinet Office 1999a) and

the government introduced a range of direct consultative processes with stakeholders and citizens (see Chapter 4 of this volume). The Social Exclusion Unit (1998a) focused on the need for better strategies of public involvement as a means of building social capital and overcoming social exclusion. But the main emphasis was on the role of citizen and user involvement in the process of transforming local government. The White Paper introduced mandatory reforms of local government political structures, and made it a statutory duty for councils to consult and engage with local communities on a range of issues, including the production of local community plans, and talked of wishing to see consultation and participation 'embedded into the culture of all councils' (DETR 1998). In some policy documents the nature of participation was tightly prescribed (e.g. Best Value user satisfaction surveys), while in others there was ambiguity about what consultation meant, leading to considerable variation in both the scale and depth of participation (Leach and Wingfield 1999). But the requirement to find new ways of engaging the public in decision-making was clear.

Why did new Labour place so much emphasis on democratic innovation and public participation? A number of different themes can be traced in the discourse, including those of rebuilding trust between citizens and government, improving the policy process and enhancing the legitimacy of government and local government decisions. The 1995 Labour Party document *Renewing Democracy, Rebuilding Communities* and the Local Government White Paper of 1998 both talk repeatedly of councils keeping 'in touch with the people':

> Local Councils exist to serve and speak up for local people. They can only do that properly if they keep in touch with local people and local organisations. Democratic elections are the bedrock on which the whole system is built. . . . But the ballot box is only part of the story. It is therefore imperative that councils keep in touch with local views between elections. (Labour Party 1995: 13)

A key theme was the use of new forms of citizen and user involvement to enhance the accountability of local government and other providers directly to citizens. This underpinned the reform of political structures to make leaders more visible and accountable, and the move towards more direct forms of accountability to citizens for performance and quality. These were simultaneously viewed as a means of driving up standards. For example, the Local Government Act of 1999 required local authorities to consult local taxpayers, service users, partners and the 'business community' in the setting of performance targets. Local authorities were also encouraged to set up fora through which to explain council policies and to act as a setting for democratic debate.

Public consultation on local authority service plans and performance was viewed as an important means of continuing the shift of power away from the providers and towards community charge payers and service users

(DETR 2000). Both 'modernising government' and the Best Value legis-
lation represent what Foley and Martin term a 'quasi-consumerist' model
of participation:

> By virtue of the 'closeness to the community', user groups, citizen's panels and
> area/neighbourhood forums, are seen by ministers as an important means of
> exerting pressure for service improvements on public sector managers,
> professionals and frontline staff. (Foley and Martin 2000: 485)

Labour's drive to enhance public participation and involvement, then,
may have been more about sharpening the accountability of the public
sector downwards to citizens and users, eliciting pressure to drive up
standards, than about new ways of engaging citizens in decision-making as
a form of co- or self-governance. However, other themes were also strongly
present, notably the importance given to local involvement in decision-
making in area-based initiatives, the New Deal for Communities and other
programmes. Such developments opened up new potential challenges to the
institutions of representative democracy, challenges that are addressed in
the next two sections of this chapter. These review a range of theories and
critiques to help illuminate the subsequent discussion of Labour's approach
in the final sections.

The challenge to representative democracy

Through the 1990s there had been a growing interest in viewing consumer
and citizen involvement as twin strategies for enhancing service quality and
enlarging public involvement in decision-making (Barnes 1997). Citizen-
based participation developed alongside, rather than displacing, the con-
sumerist focus of the 1980s and 1990s, and drew on many of the same
techniques of market research. But it also flowed from critiques of liberal or
representative democracy itself. This model of democracy is based on the
role of free and equal citizens in electing representatives to a legislative
assembly. Decision-making is based on the aggregation of individual
preferences (voting) and is governed by an intricate body of rules and
conventions. Knowing the rules is an important condition of being able to
participate in decision-making, whether in parliament, the council chamber,
or any of the host of organisations, from trades unions to the boards of
many voluntary organisations, which have adopted the conventions of
representative democracy. Participation through elections is viewed as the
most legitimate form of engagement, and decisions by representative bodies
as carrying super-ordinate legitimacy over decisions by non-elected bodies.

Barber (1984) views liberal democracy as 'weak' democracy in that its
primary role is to ensure that citizens are able to remove tyrannical or
ineffective governments. Advocates of 'strong democracy' seek the more
active involvement of citizens in decision-making. The traditional institutions

of representative democracy, while the ultimate guarantor of accountability,
are also viewed as insufficient in complex and differentiated societies. More
sophisticated methods are called for to enable decision-making bodies to
respond to the multiplicity of views and interests which no longer – if they
ever did – follow simple lines of class or party loyalty. There are, however, a
number of perspectives on how to respond to these challenges. Hirst (1994)
argues that existing political institutions lack accountability and fail to foster
citizen participation because of the size of the state and the constraints of
voting as a mode of communication between state and citizen. He advocates a
move towards 'associative' democracy in which functions are taken out of
state control and restored to citizens through the channel of associations
controlled by their members. Fishkin (1991) argues that while democracy
worked well in small, elite systems of government, mass suffrage has under-
mined the capacity of citizens to engage in deliberation and that the mass
media has distorted the political process, and advocates the introduction of
'deliberative opinion polls'. Elster (1998) suggests that the aggregation of
preferences through voting, while an ultimate arbiter where disagreements
cannot be resolved, produces decisions that are inferior to those reached after
dialogue and deliberation. The benefits of deliberative democracy are pre-
cisely those which governments interested in better policy decisions,
'community capacity-building' or 'social capital' might seek because they:

- Lessen or overcome the impact of bounded rationality.
- Help generate new alternatives rather than just debating existing ones.
- Induce a particular mode of justifying demands, based on rational
  discourse and recourse to the 'public interest' rather than secticonal
  interests.
- Produce Pareto-superior decisions.
- Produce better decisions in terms of distributive justice.
- Create a larger consensus and thus legitimates the ultimate choice.
- Have important process outcomes, e.g. educative effect on participants
  and on the bodies which sponsor deliberative fora.

(Based on the contributions to Elster 1998)

Elster follows Habermas in supporting the idea that democracy revolves
around the transformation rather than the aggregation of preferences.
While representative democracy is based on a relatively static notion of
interests that can be aggregated, deliberative democracy assumes that
interests can be reshaped or transformed as a product of engaging in
dialogue with others. Miller (1992) takes this distinction further by arguing
that liberal and participative democracy are based on different conceptions
of human nature. He notes that while liberal conceptions stress the import-
ance of giving due weight to each individual's preferences, participative
democracy assumes that individuals can transcend particular interests or
opinions in deference to common interests. Deliberation can also have a
'moralising' effect in that preferences regarded as narrowly self-regarding

are likely to be eliminated from the debate. The transformative possibilities of deliberation and the 'responsibilisation' flowing from collective processes of decision-making are viewed as major benefits: 'Broadly speaking, discussion has the effect of turning a collection of separate individuals into a group who see one another as co-operators' (Miller 1992: 62).

While the transformation of preferences is a possible outcome of deliberation, this is not, of course, necessarily the case. Deliberative arenas are sites in which many different forms of power operate that may work to favour certain interests over others. The most obvious is the power of the sponsoring agency itself, which can set the agenda, decide how participants are to be selected and orchestrate the process of deliberation. Power differences between participants are less obvious because they tend to be masked by the dominant discourse of rationality and the unstated norms of public dialogue. These norms are worth a brief mention. Habermas (1987, 1989) talks of an 'ideal speech situation' based on communication directed towards mutual understanding in which questions of power are suspended. Information is conceived as an objective item of exchange rather than as something that is shaped and expressed within a set of power relations. Participants are assumed not to come as the delegates of others, but to be open to having their views transformed by the debate. The public sphere is conceived as one in which rationality dominates and in which status hierarchies are suspended. But as Nancy Fraser notes, 'declaring a deliberative arena to be a space where extant status hierarchies are bracketed and neutralised is not sufficient to make it so' (1997: 74). Individuals may express a narrow interest discursively constructed as the 'public interest'. The norms of rationality and the impersonal mode of discourse that are privileged in participative fora may marginalise cultural styles based on personal, affective or value-based modes of expression.

These debates highlight the importance of questions of power in the process of participation, and open up issues of how equality, diversity and difference are to be accommodated in democratic innovation and public participation. Those seeking to enhance participative democracy may be constrained by questions of 'how much' power is given to citizens rather than 'what forms' of power may be operating in the conduct of participative fora themselves. The 'how much' question is often expressed in terms of a ladder of participation, following Arnstein's work in the 1960s. This extends from weak delegation of power (e.g. information giving) at one end of the spectrum, through consultation and then involvement, to full citizen control at the other extreme. The question of *forms* of power is rather more challenging, covering agenda-setting power, normative power, discursive power, legitimising power as well as the more usual focus on decision-making power. Burns, Hoggett and Hambleton provide a helpful distinction between civic developmental conceptions of power and instrumental power (Burns et al. 1994). The civic developmental model views power as the property of the collective; the more who share in it, the greater it becomes. This conception of power often underpins the rhetoric of

'empowerment' frequently found in discussions of the capacity-building and social benefits of community-based participation. Opposed to this is an instrumental model that views power in terms of the capacity of one party or set of interests to dominate another. The instrumentalist view tends to deny the possibility of transformation, alliance-building or collectivities outside the interests that are officially recognised. While the former is captured by the phrase 'power to', the latter suggests 'power over'. Neither conception adequately captures the different forms and relations of power that operate in the interactions between public officials and citizens, interactions in which the 'rules' of engagement and the norms of behaviour are set by officials. For example, one challenge raised by some disability groups is that the state should seek to draw on the expert power of those with experience of disability in forming its policies and strategies rather than relying on professional expertise (Barnes 1997). This transforms the way in which the power relations between citizens and state are normally conceived: rather than seeking the crumbs from the table of the powerful, user groups have valuable resources to offer to the public realm. The issue is then raised about the costs (to users and citizens) of engaging in consultation or participation initiatives, and how they might be reimbursed for their contribution to the planning, improvement or evaluation of services.

Equality, diversity and the politics of difference

Innovations in public participation have developed in part from concerns about how far the institutions of representative democracy can adequately represent the multiplicity of identities and interests in complex and differentiated societies. The liberal conception of equality – institutionalised in the law, the electoral process and the administrative justice of the welfare state – has, however, been challenged from a number of different perspectives. First, the notion of citizenship on which formal equality is based has been shown to be both gendered (e.g. Phillips 1992) and racialised (e.g. Lewis 1998, 2000a, 2000b). Secondly, formal political equality has been shown to be insufficient as a means of redressing social inequality. For those – including the Labour government – concerned to tackle issues of social exclusion, other forms of participation which reach beyond the ballot box are viewed as vital. Thirdly, the 'un-representativeness' of those elected to parliament or local councils has become a topic of concern. Bias can arise in the selection of representatives and institutional discrimination may disadvantage 'non-typical' candidates who succeed in being elected. The institutions of political party fail to cope adequately with demands that elected representatives reflect the diversity of identities and interests in society (e.g. Rao 2000b), while the institutions of government fail to respond to the requirements of non-traditional representatives (Coote 2000). As a result there have been attempts by some political parties to

broaden the representativeness of elected bodies. Women-only shortlists in the Labour Party significantly increased the proportion of women MPs in the House of Commons after the 1997 election, though the practice was subsequently abandoned. There have been continuing concerns about recruiting more black and ethnic minority representatives into public services and to stand for both local and national elections. There were reports of a 'row' following the selection of just one additional Labour party candidate from a black or minority ethnic group for the 2001 general election (*The Guardian*, 31 August 2000: 1), and dismay at the number of women MPs who had been elected for the first time in 1997 who had decided not to stand for re-selection.

If the mainstream institutions of representative democracy fail to reflect social diversity adequately, do the new participatory and dialogic forms of democracy offer a more promising source of change? The picture is, initially, not very promising. Many of the advocates of participatory democracy hark back to a 'pure' concept of democracy, based on the Athenian city state, which large-scale societies, mass communication and populist politics have distorted. Equality is viewed in terms of formal political equality, and the defects of the Athenian system (restricted citizenship) tend not to be much debated. Elster, for example, defines deliberative democracy as 'decision making by discussion among free and equal citizens' (1998: 1). Fishkin defines political equality as 'equal consideration to everyone's preferences' plus 'equal opportunity to formulate preferences on the issues under consideration' plus an 'effective hearing for the full range of interests that have significant followings' (1991: 30–2). These acknowledge different dimensions of influence but are underpinned by a traditional, rather than radical, form of pluralism. Feminism, black politics and the post-structuralist challenge to essentialist conceptions of identity have not happened in this world. However, participatory democracy is also associated with more radical perspectives which seek to engage citizens in deliberation as a means of challenging processes which reproduce patterns of social exclusion or power inequalities. Some organisations have tried to broaden inclusiveness by targeting initiatives at particular groups, perhaps co-opting members of such groups to conduct the consultation on the agency's behalf.

Participatory democracy has the capacity to build conceptions of difference into the political process, and to address the challenges to liberal democracy from the 'new social movements'. As Hirst comments: 'Citizens need a political community that will enable them to be different, not one which exhorts them to be the same' (Hirst 1994: 14). But conceptions of what is meant by difference, and how this relates to the political process, have tended to develop outside, rather than within, the disciplines of political science. It has been a common concern of feminist writers. Young, for example, talks of the value of heterogeneity, diversity and difference – the 'new pluralism' – and supports developments in deliberative democracy. However, she also suggests that their capacity to produce a general perspective is an 'establishment myth': the process of transcendence can mask

subtle forms of control. She argues that citizenship may mean organising politically around group identities but then interacting with others (Young 1990). This is more fully developed by Fraser in her notion of 'counter publics'. She suggests that Habermas casts the emergence of additional publics, based on the new social movements, as 'a late development signalling fragmentation and decline' (Fraser 1997: 80). In contrast, Fraser views them as an essential element of the democratic process because of their capacity to formulate oppositional views, though they lack formal equality within the public sphere.

> History records that members of subordinated groups – women, workers, peoples of colour, and gays and lesbians – have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these *subaltern counter-publics* in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs. (Fraser 1997: 81, original emphasis)

Although some such groups may be explicitly anti-democratic, '[i]n general, the proliferation of subaltern counter-publics means a widening of discursive contestation, and that is a good thing in stratified societies' (1997: 82). Such groups have a twin function: on the one hand as spaces of withdrawal and regrouping, on the other as bases for engagement with the wider public domain. 'It is precisely in the dialectics between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides' (1997: 82).

Such 'counter-publics' are formed through collective processes of engagement and action, through which identities and interests are forged. They cannot be simply equated with fixed categories such as 'women', 'black and ethnic minority communities', 'the disabled', 'older people' and so on, categories which tend to be constructed by public agencies in their search for 'representative' forms of engagement with the public. Indeed, post-structuralist perspectives highlight the relational and fluid character of identity. Lewis, for example, highlights the difficulties involved in using categories such as 'black and ethnic minorities':

> While members of these groups still have a common experience of racial exclusion, there is also evidence of an increasing complexity of experiences and internal diversification. This suggests that any tendency to homogenizing categorisation may lead to an elision of differences among and within racialised populations of colour; and to the denial of the possibility and effects of agency on the part of members of these populations. (Lewis 2000a: 262)

The point about agency is significant. Squires (1998) views deliberative arenas as the sites in which identity is potentially constituted and mobilised, rather than as a site in which participants with fixed identities engage in political dialogue. This makes the task of trying to ensure 'representativeness' in a forum problematic. Commonality of experience or identity may

facilitate discussion and produce a depth of understanding that a more 'representative' sample might not elicit. The authors of a DETR research report on public participation suggested that 'developing a range of participation methods to reach different citizens may, in many instances, be more important than seeking the elusive goal of "representativeness" within a specific initiative' (Lowndes et al. 1998: 4).

A further difficulty is that many of the experiments in democratic innovation and public participation are locality-based, and assume a commonality of interest and identity within a given community. The dominant image of community typically rests on un-gendered, un-racialised and non-antagonistic conceptions of 'the public' (Hughes and Mooney 1998). Differences of interest, of identity, and of social or economic position are dissolved in a general orientation towards inclusiveness. Despite successive challenges which have highlighted the significance of differences of interest and of identity within them, geographical communities still tend to be viewed as homogenous – a single entity which can be consulted with, engaged in dialogue or even have some forms of power delegated to it. Such conceptions have, rather than being challenged, been reinstalled in the communitarian ethos espoused by Labour in some policy documents (see Chapter 8 of this volume).

The existence of multiple lines of interest and identity, of overlapping and competing 'publics', are rendered invisible precisely through the attempt to constitute the public realm as a realm of equal subjects. But the public realm, in which people are invited to participate, cannot be viewed as an entity able to assimilate differences of interest and identity into a homogeneous whole. Rather, there is a need to recognise the multiplicity of sites in which dialogue is conducted and interests and identities shaped. Many of these are constituted outside the formally constituted political sphere. Concerns about lack of interest in politics (among the young, for example) reflect a concern about an unwillingness to participate in officially defined political spaces, perhaps linked to a disillusionment with formal political institutions. This could make the task of democratic innovation and public participation one based in part on the recognition of counter publics and the validation of informal political processes. Notions of participation which are drawn from formal models of representative democracy are unlikely to acknowledge the validity of challenges to dominant norms and discourses, and may seek to marginalise any 'oppositional interpretations' as being 'unrepresentative'.

New Labour, modernisation and the limits to public participation

The challenges outlined in the previous two sections highlight the importance of issues of power in the process of participation, and open up debates about the politics of equality, diversity and difference. The third challenge I

want to highlight is the challenge to institutional power bases raised by new forms of public involvement and participation. Labour has drawn on many of the developments in participatory democracy, introducing citizen panels, focus groups, 'roadshows' which engage in direct debate with citizens, and other forms of innovation. It has also incorporated a limited view of diversity in the sense that it emphasises the need to cater for the needs of different groups. The *Modernising Government* White Paper, for example, talks of responding to the needs or problems of particular groups (of older people, of women, and, interestingly, of 'business'), while the Social Exclusion Unit has acknowledged the particular processes of exclusion which may be experienced by black and ethnic minority groups (Cabinet Office 1999a; Social Exclusion Unit 2000). But the increasing emphasis on public participation, and the limited acknowledgement of social diversity, was traversed by other shifts that limited organisational responses. The pressure on mainstream organisations (Health Authorities, civil service agencies) to deliver on targets cascading from government meant that their capacity to respond to local pressures or demands was severely constrained. The expansion of competitive bidding for special initiatives tended, as the lessons from SRB show, to produce fast and relatively unsophisticated consultation strategies in order to meet the tight timescales imposed by funders (M. Stewart 2000). As a result, many exercises in participation can be viewed as a response to isomorphic pressures, being more about presentation and legitimacy than about a genuine willingness to transform decision-making processes.

The traditional institutions of representation sit uneasily with the idea that the public should have direct involvement in decision-making. For example, many local authority members viewed public participation as undermining their representative role. Official guidance (e.g. Audit Commission 1999) sought to reassure them that the role of consultation and participation exercises, is to inform or influence their decisions rather than to supplant their role, and that councillors retained an important role in reconciling conflicting views and balancing public opinion against resource and other constraints. However, resistance to consultation, participation and new deliberative forms of citizen engagement (citizens juries, panels, fora) remained strong among both officers and members. Rather than heralding a new form of democracy, public participation was often viewed as anti-democratic in that the views expressed were constructed as 'unrepresentative' (Davis and Geddes 2000). But it is important to question what is meant by the term 'representative' in this context. What was at stake appeared to be an uneasy configuration of political notions of representation (based on liberal democracy) and the notions of statistical representativeness (based on population sampling) underpinning market research. Oscillations between these different notions of representativeness pervaded official documents (e.g. Audit Commission 1999) and discussions with managers and local authority members. Each may be challenged by alternative models derived from theories of diversity and difference.

Overall, organisational responses to the outcomes of participation tended to be weak. The DETR study on participation in local government found that strategies were predominantly informal and *ad hoc* (Leach and Wingfield 1999). While there were major developments in the number and range of initiatives, few organisations were able to highlight specific outcomes which have been directly influenced by the findings of participation exercises (Seargeant and Steele 1998). The Audit Commission study of participation initiatives in local government found that 'Many authorities report that much of the consultation they carry out is not used effectively. Nearly three-quarters of authorities surveyed for this paper thought that a failure to link the results of consultation with decision making prevented the results from being used effectively' (Audit Commission 1999: 34). The DETR research also highlighted the gap between public and 'official' perspectives on participation: for example, while the public viewed the council as remote and bureaucratic, the council viewed the public as ill-informed and prone to unrealistic expectations; and while the public were unaware of opportunities to participate, the council viewed the public as unwilling to participate or uninterested in participation (Lowndes et al. 1998).

These findings raise important issues about the relationship between institutional power and the political process. Public participation is a site of contestation. Political disagreement about appropriate channels of participation occurred between, on the one hand, 'modernisers' seeking to introduce greater transparency and responsiveness and, on the other, those seeking to defend the primacy of existing channels of decision-making. Conflicting views about appropriate forms of participation arose between 'marketeers' importing the techniques of consumer feedback and market research from the private sector and those seeking to develop innovative and more focused ways of engaging with citizens and communities. Different views about who should participate, and through what methods, were frequently found among stakeholders in partnership initiatives, for example between voluntary and statutory sectors. Problems also arose in the gap between the expectations of organisations sponsoring consultation and those whom they were consulting about the goals and intended outcomes of participation. Exercises in community participation sometimes exacerbated, rather than resolved, tensions between different interests and identities. As the previous section argued, the expectation that there would be a neat homogeneity of views expressing a 'community perspective' is rarely, if ever, realised.

However, participation processes also opened up new spaces which could be 'captured' by user groups, voluntary organisations and community groups seeking to claim a stronger role in decision-making. More usually, however, such groups presented challenges to which the sponsoring organisations were unable, or unwilling, to respond. The gap between agency expectations and those of the public were often considerable. Groups who felt that they did not fit the notion of the public whose views were valued

('This is not for people like us'), who did not trust the agency concerned ('They didn't take any notice last time so it's not worth bothering now') or who were defined by the agency concerned in what are perceived to be stigmatising terms ('I may be short of money but don't see myself as socially excluded') sometimes refused to participate on the agency's terms. This reinforced a 'vicious circle' in which agencies concluded that the public were apathetic about participation, or did not have the necessary skills to engage in dialogue with them. Participation may, then, worsen relationships between users and providers, between communities and public bodies, between citizens and government, rather than enhance them. Better techniques, for example communicating clearly about the aim and scope of any exercise in consultation, and giving feedback about the outcomes, are clearly important. But the political tensions in the process, and the potential conflicts these give rise to, cannot be massaged away: more effective management cannot solve problems in the political domain.

Towards a new form of governance?

Kooiman regards new forms of state/society interaction, based on co-steering or the emergence of self-steering systems, as a response or adaptation to societies characterised by greater complexity, diversity and dynamic processes of change. The proliferation of new democratic sites and fora might be linked to the reconfiguration of state/society interactions and to what Kooiman terms 'communicative governing' (Kooiman 2000: 150). The arguments of this chapter, however, suggest that only rarely is public participation allowed to challenge existing norms and established power structures. More often it can best be viewed not in terms of a new form of governance but as an adjunct to traditional forms of decision-making or models of service delivery. Rather than a shift in the mode of governance, the arguments of this chapter suggest that public involvement and participation is a site in which tensions between different discourses and practices are played out. Some of these can be mapped using the governance framework introduced in earlier chapters (see Figure 7.1). As previously emphasised, this is not intended as a typology of forms of participation but as a means of exploring the dynamics of institutional change.

The bottom left-hand corner, the *hierarchy model* of governance, is strongly associated with the formal processes of representative democracy. Accountability flows upward through clear lines of responsibility to the elected representatives. The model is based on formal notions of citizenship and individual equality. This model was strengthened by the modernisation agenda, which had introduced greater rules and norms designed to safeguard legitimacy (e.g. standards committees and scrutiny committees in local government). Modernisation also, however, produced a pull towards the two right-hand quadrants: the lower right-hand quadrant to demonstrate

Emphasis on self-governance | *Emphasis on democratic innovation*

Delegation of powers to self-managing associations

Flexible, responsive forms of participation

'Counter-publics' recognised as legitimate political actors

Fluidity of interests and identities acknowledged

SELF-GOVERNANCE MODEL

OPEN SYSTEMS MODEL

HIERARCHY MODEL

RATIONAL GOAL MODEL

Dominance of representative democracy

Managerial framing of participation, limited delegation of power

Formal equality based on free and equal citizens

Diversity of consumer preferences acknowledged

Emphasis on legitimacy of process

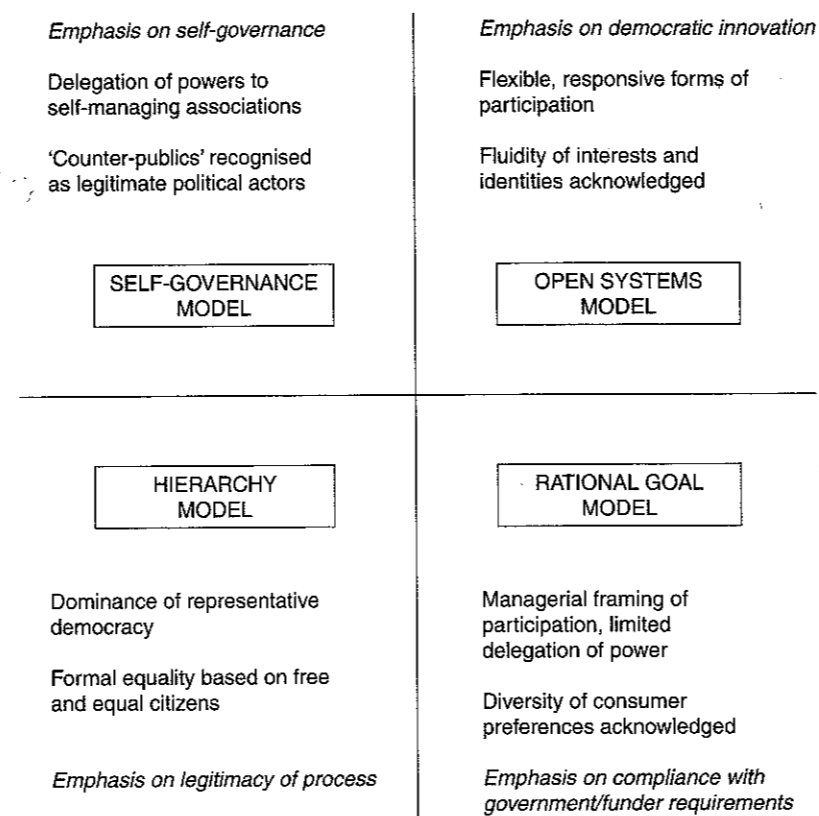*Emphasis on compliance with government/funder requirements*

FIGURE 7.1 *Democratic innovation and public participation: models of governance*

compliance with the requirement of legislation and competitive funding regimes; the upper right-hand quadrant to demonstrate responsiveness to the public and to address issues of social exclusion.

The bottom right-hand quadrant – the *rational goal model* – captures a range of responses, from service-based consultations to token consultations conducted at speed in order to meet the requirements of funders. Organisations tend to reach out to existing groups or community leaders already known to them in order to demonstrate that consultation has been built into a funding bid (M. Stewart et al. 2000). This can, however, lead to difficulties in building longer-term, more sustainable, involvement since those excluded from the process may not trust the groups or individuals brought in. Issues of diversity are acknowledged in the form of attempts to respond to the diversity of consumer choices and preferences, but more expansive or collective conceptions of diversity are not easily accommodated within the framework of 'representative sampling' linked to managerial technologies of consultation.

The *open systems model* – the upper right-hand quadrant – suggests the development of multiple and responsive forms of contact between state and citizen to enable the state to adapt to growing social complexity and diversity. Formal systems – voting and market research techniques – are supplemented by a range of informal strategies designed to enhance the connections between state and citizen. Issues of representation are of marginal concern; what matters is capturing a diversity of voices and perspectives and fostering dialogue. The transformation of citizen views through dialogic techniques is valued. Many of the new participatory techniques belong most readily to this model. However, they can open up challenges which organisations may resist on the grounds that those making them lack legitimacy or 'representativeness'.

The final model – *self-governance* – presents even more significant challenges to traditional conceptions of the relationship between state and citizen in that it involves real delegation of power and the recognition of 'counter-publics'. The language of some of the government's policy documents – notably those of the Social Exclusion Unit – suggests a focus on capacity-building and community empowerment representing a shift (however partial) towards this model. However, as Chapter 4 argued, the limits to delegation within a highly centralised state mean that this model of governance has a very marginal presence. Symbolic compliance with the government's requirement to engage communities in decision-making is unlikely to produce substantial change.

This framework can be used to highlight the relationship between different political imperatives – those of modernising local government political management, of improving the relevance and accessibility of services, of educating and involving citizens, of improving the legitimacy of decisions and of restoring trust between government and citizen. Not all are incompatible but some of these ambitions produce tensions which are extremely difficult to reconcile. For example, an internal focus on political management reform has produced a tendency to centralise power, which may be in tension with developing responses to the diversity and complexity of citizen views, a diversity which cannot easily be aggregated through the simple mechanism of party voting. Tensions also arise between conceptions of the public as consumers and as citizens. These imply different forms of engagement with decision-making: the former often drawing on market research, the latter on more direct forms of engagement in decision-making.

There is a great deal of emphasis in the policy literature, and among practitioners, on selecting techniques which are 'fit for purpose' (Audit Commission 1999; Lowndes et al. 1998). There is also a frequently found suggestion that representative and participatory democracy can be viewed as complementary (Leach and Wingfield 1999; Rao 2000a). While not arguing against these common-sense propositions, I do want to raise questions about the relationship between managerial and political forms of engagement, and between consultation and the new techniques of citizen engagement in decision-making. These are not necessarily easily reconcilable in that they

invoke different images of the public which are located in conflicting political philosophies, incorporate diverse conceptions of difference, and rest on different models of governance.

Public participation and democratic innovation open up a set of difficult questions about the nature of power and decision-making, about how different political values can be reconciled, about social inclusion and exclusion, and about the process of institutional change. Such developments present potential challenges to traditional conceptions of democracy, of the public sphere and of equality/difference. However, such challenges are subject to a range of responses through which they may be contained, managed, resisted or deflected. One strategy of containment has been to focus innovation primarily around local initiatives or marginal innovations rather than to use new dialogic or participative techniques to look at mainstream policies, budgets or political priorities. A second has been the constitution of citizen participation within a consumerist discourse, with enhanced public accountability being viewed as a lever to drive up public sector performance 'from below'. However, democratic innovation and participatory democracy open up the possibility of challenges to the political process itself through questioning dominant forms of discourse and rules of engagement, and by challenging the boundaries of 'what counts' as formal politics. It is through such challenges that *political* renewal may be carried forward.

Notes

1 This chapter uses the term 'democratic innovation' to denote experiments in participatory democracy, such as citizen's juries, rather than to refer to constitutional change or to the reform of political structures in local government. These latter topics were discussed in Chapter 4.

2 'Public participation' refers to a range of initiatives, from consultation to user or citizen panels and through to the involvement of the public in decision-making bodies.

8   Remaking civil society: the politics of inclusion

> We seek a diverse but inclusive society, promoting tolerance within agreed norms, promoting civic activism as a complement to (but not a replacement for) modern government. An inclusive society imposes duties on individuals and parents as well as on society as a whole. Promoting better state and civic support for individuals and parents as they meet their responsibilities is a critical contemporary challenge, cutting across our approach to education, welfare and crime reduction.
>
> (Blair 1998a: 12)

This chapter explores the involvement of civil society in the process of governance. It traces Labour's attempt to remake the relationships between state, citizen and community in the search for a new social settlement. Such a settlement invoked an image of a modern society in which conflicts around class, 'race' and gender had largely been resolved. The constitution of new subjects – self-reliant and responsible, moral and familial, community-oriented and at the same time seeking new opportunities for themselves as individuals – can be viewed as an important strand of Labour's political project.

Labour attempted to resolve the fracturing of the postwar social settlement that took place under the neo-liberal regime of Conservative governments of the 1980s and early 1990s. This postwar settlement was based on particular assumptions about work (based on male full employment), the family (based on a sharp division between male breadwinner and female homemaker) and nation (based on the legacy of Britain's imperial role and particular conceptions of 'race') (Williams 1993). These assumptions had not only underpinned particular social policies (e.g. policies on unemployment and welfare benefits based on the centrality of the male breadwinner), but had also played a wider ideological role. They had produced a unifying imagery of 'the people', based on a clearly defined conception of Britishness and on a notion of citizenship that combined a nominal equality of access to universal welfare services and benefits with collective investment in the nation's future. The notions of universalism and equality in this relationship had been challenged from a number of directions, with feminism highlighting the limitations of class-based notions of equality and anti-racist movements pointing to the contested and limited equation of citizenship with nationality (Hughes 1998; Hughes and Lewis 1998). But the