



Civil renewal and active citizenship

a guide to the debate

Véronique Jochum,
Belinda Pratten
and Karl Wilding

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NCVO's vision, mission and values

NCVO's vision

NCVO's vision is of a fair and open society, which encourages and is supported by voluntary action.

NCVO's mission

NCVO aims to:

- give a shared voice to voluntary organisations
- cultivate an environment that fosters their development
- help voluntary organisations to achieve the highest standards of practice and effectiveness
- provide leadership to the voluntary sector in tackling new issues and unmet needs.

NCVO's working values

NCVO will:

- reflect the priorities and needs of member organisations both in its services and policies
- provide services which are characterised by high quality, integrity and respect for recipients
- encourage voluntary organisations to learn both from each other and from wider best practice
- provide information in an open way with due regard to confidentiality
- reflect the diversity of the voluntary sector in its work
- provide continuing professional and personal development for its staff
- apply equal opportunities practice in its governance, services and as an employer.

NCVO membership

Our goal is to support members by creating an environment in which voluntary organisations can flourish and develop. We provide a wide range of information and support services, as well as representing the sector when dealing with government and policy makers.



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Preface

Debate over the role and future of voluntary and community organisations in the UK has, in recent years, been dominated by some familiar concerns: how to sufficiently manage and finance organisations; independence from the state; accountability and governance; and perhaps above all, the role of organisations in delivering public services. But in facing the challenges of how a more professional, mainstream sector operates, there is a danger that we might neglect our understanding of how voluntary and community organisations relate to wider associational life and indeed democracy. Politicians and the media certainly have concerns regarding democracy in what are perceived to be insecure times. Unease about the health of representative democracy in particular have led to renewed interest in participative democracy, and ideas of how a civic renewal might be underpinned by more active citizens. This report provides a welcome overview of active citizenship, including new research that highlights the perspective of voluntary and community organisations.

The dimensions and complexities of the debate on civil renewal and active citizenship elude easy explanation. Yet this is an agenda that is central to the mission of many voluntary and community organisations, and one that should not be displaced by our ongoing dialogue over public services. In fact, we should be linking these separate but related discussions more closely so as not to falsely pigeonhole the sector into unrelated component parts.

This report offers an introduction to the active citizenship debate, and in doing so highlights the challenges, contradictions and tremendous opportunities for voluntary and community organisations in a reinvigorated civil society. However, it is a guide to the debate thus far. NCVO is currently considering its own direction for the next five years, and a deeper understanding of the links between active citizenship and the sector will surely underpin our future work. This will include the broadening of our work on the size and scope of the sector, our intention being to produce a *UK Civil Society Almanac*. We will also take forward our plans for a new programme to develop the sector's capacity for effective advocacy and campaigning. In the meantime, we would therefore welcome your feedback on this report.

**Stuart Etherington,
Chief Executive, NCVO**

June 2005

Introduction

The need to renew the institutions and processes of civil society and indeed wider democracy has long been the concern of commentators from across the political spectrum. Whether this be the perceived unfairness of our 'first past the post' electoral system, the erosion of civil liberties, the governance of our public services (and private charities), or the passing of a 'great generation' – those who lived through the second world war and built the post-war settlement – has led to calls for change in a number of areas.

Not the least of these worries is a perception that the habits and social norms associated with participation and collective action are disappearing. Whilst we are not yet at the stage of moral panic, the already low and falling turnouts at elections, falling membership rolls (such as in political parties and trade unions), plus widespread reporting of the difficulties of recruiting volunteers and trustees have all been aired as evidence of a problem. This has in turn raised some difficult questions: are the old institutions of civil society still relevant, particularly since the onset of new technologies? does civil society actually require renewal, or are problems limited to civic participation? And where will the next generation of active citizens come from? Inspired by Robert Putnam's influential work on social capital, public policy consensus is increasingly that the renewal of civil society needs to be underpinned by more (and more active) active citizens. In other words, it is perceived by some that we need to find ways of creating a new 'great generation' who are prepared to engage with our public and private institutions.

Much thought has been given to these issues by academics and policy makers in particular. The vast literature on civil society is increasingly matched in its scope and depth by policy reports and documents on civil renewal and active citizenship. To knowingly add to this burgeoning field may appear mistimed or indeed unnecessary. However, much of this literature is aimed at academic audiences (and therefore potentially inaccessible to practitioners), while the public policy literature is predominantly from a governmental perspective. We have therefore tried to do two things in this report: highlight some of the latest thinking and perspectives on this set of

issues, and secondly identify the policies and perceptions of government and voluntary and community organisations respectively.

Civil renewal and active citizenship are issues of no little significance for the voluntary and community sector. However, our concern in the sector has recently centred upon issues of the day-to-day: the changing funding environment; managerial capacity and development; the implications of greater involvement in the delivery of public services; and how best to be accountable to stakeholders. The challenge for the voluntary and community sector lies in how to take the increasing policy interest in civil renewal and active citizenship and use it to its advantage.

Our report is split into four main chapters. The first chapter aims to provide an overview of the ideas and concepts that underpin the civil renewal and active citizenship debate. A number of key ideas are explored here: the different concepts of civil society and their implications for citizenship, and the differences between civil and civic renewal. The distinction is important and is further discussed in the fourth chapter.

As has already been noted, the Labour government has been a key driver of this public policy agenda (although it is worth noting that all the main political parties are interested in civil renewal). Much of this has been associated with the former home secretary, David Blunkett, yet the establishment of the Civil Renewal Unit and an Active Citizenship Centre are testament to the importance of this policy area. The second chapter therefore reviews the key policies of the Labour government, including the links between civil renewal and the delivery of public services. Whilst the civil renewal agenda is being coordinated from within the Home Office, it is clear that a number of departments' policies are linked.

In contrast, chapter three reports the views and perceptions of voluntary and community organisations of active citizenship. Based upon qualitative research undertaken by NCVO in 2004, our findings highlight the differing

and conflicting views on the role of the sector in relation to active citizenship and civil renewal. Whilst organisations can see a number of positive ways of engaging with the sector; it is clear from our findings that the sector has a much broader understanding of active citizenship than the Labour government.

The final chapter begins to highlight issues both for the sector and government where changes in policy or action might further our mutual aims for civil renewal and active citizenship. This is a developing agenda however, particularly as this report was mostly written prior to the general election of 2005. Whilst a shift in departmental responsibilities might lead to a shift in policy, the challenges and recommendations for the sector are likely to remain the same. As is inevitable in a report of this length, we have been highly selective in what we have covered, so an appendix identifies further resources that are likely to be accessible to the majority of readers.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank those who participated in the development of this report, including those academics, think tanks and voluntary and community groups and organisations who participated in interviews, focus groups and a seminar in the summer of 2004. Many thanks also to those who suggested the resources at the end of this report. We would also like to thank Campbell Robb and Ann Blackmore for their comments on earlier drafts.

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A political discussion website recently posed the question “What the hell is civil society?”¹ Indeed. Whilst the timing of this question post-dates our decision to produce this report, a similar tone of enquiry might equally be applied to the terms civil renewal and active citizenship. To further complicate matters, the answer in relation to any one of these terms is in a state of perpetual flux. This first section represents our attempt to answer this question for ourselves, but it is an answer that will continue to evolve.

Our approach to answering these questions is to provide a concise overview of the key ideas underpinning civil renewal and active citizenship, and how they fit together. Therefore, an explanation of civil society is followed by a clarification of the meaning of the terms citizenship and active citizenship. The narrative throughout relates these ideas to the overarching pursuit of a ‘good society’.

What is civil society?

Historically the concept of civil society has not been extensively used in the UK. Other terms such as charity sector, voluntary sector and more recently voluntary and community sector or third sector have been far more popular. However, civil society has begun to gain wider currency, especially amongst policy-makers and politicians.

But defining civil society is no easy task. In a very brief review of voluntary sector related terminology, the *UK Voluntary Sector Almanac*² considers civil society to be the broadest term, encompassing “all organisations operating in the space between the state and the market”, including voluntary and community organisations. This is one of the many definitions for civil society available and as a consequence the concept of civil society has been surrounded by a certain amount of confusion and controversy. The term civil society might be contested, but for Michael Edwards³ the way forward is to embrace a more holistic approach that reconciles what the three major schools of thought have to offer.

Civil society as the ‘good society’	Civil society as an adjective – a <i>kind</i> of society	A kind of society that aims for social, economic and political progress
Civil society as associational life	Civil society as a noun – a <i>part</i> of society	A part of society composed of voluntary associations and organisations providing opportunities for people to act together and an environment where civic values and skills are developed
Civil society as the public sphere	Civil society as a space	A space for argument and deliberation, in which citizens can express their different viewpoints and negotiate a sense of the common interest

¹ Chandhoke, N. (2005) *What the hell is civil society?* www.opendemocracy.net/xml/xhtml/articles/2375.html

² Wilding K et al (2004) *UK voluntary sector almanac*, NCVO

³ Edwards, M. (2005) ‘Civil society’, *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/association/civil_society.htm.

Civil society as the 'good society' is a vision of what society should look like; it is about ideals and goals (such as equality or the reduction of poverty). Voluntary associations and organisations clearly help to achieve this vision: however, they are only one of many contributing factors. Equally important for example is what happens in families, schools or workplaces. Structural definitions that confine civil society to a sector (i.e. the third sector) tend to forget that the public and private sectors have a role to play in building the 'good society', which requires action and collaboration across the board. The public sphere is where societal choices about what constitutes the 'good society' can be negotiated, where the development of shared interests beyond competing views (i.e. the public interest) can take place. Civil society as a public sphere provides spaces in which differences can be debated and taken forward. It is this function of civil society as a public sphere that is so crucial to democracy. Key here is civil society as a space in which citizens can debate what the 'good society' means – how social, economic and political progress might be defined. It is also a space in which people are able to come together voluntarily, i.e. the space within which voluntary association and voluntary action occur. It is not synonymous with the third sector but it is the space in which third sector organisations exist.

At the 2005 NCVO annual conference, a seminar provocatively entitled 'There is no such thing as (civil) society?' was organised to explore current thinking around the idea of civil society. Adalbert Evers, one of the presenters, argued that a narrow definition of civil society that equates civil society to the third sector is understandable since it is often within third sector organisations that civic virtues are the most visible. However, he considered this sectoral definition to be flawed because it failed to acknowledge the role played by the wider institutional context in promoting a civic climate within society more generally. Supporters of a broader definition of civil society, such as Evers and Edwards, consider that a civil society is different to a society with a large third sector. They both refute the idea that a more civil society can be achieved simply by setting up more third sector organisations or by increasing the number of volunteers. Civil society

is more about strengthening the interaction between associational life, the public sphere and the 'good society'.

Civil society, the state and the market

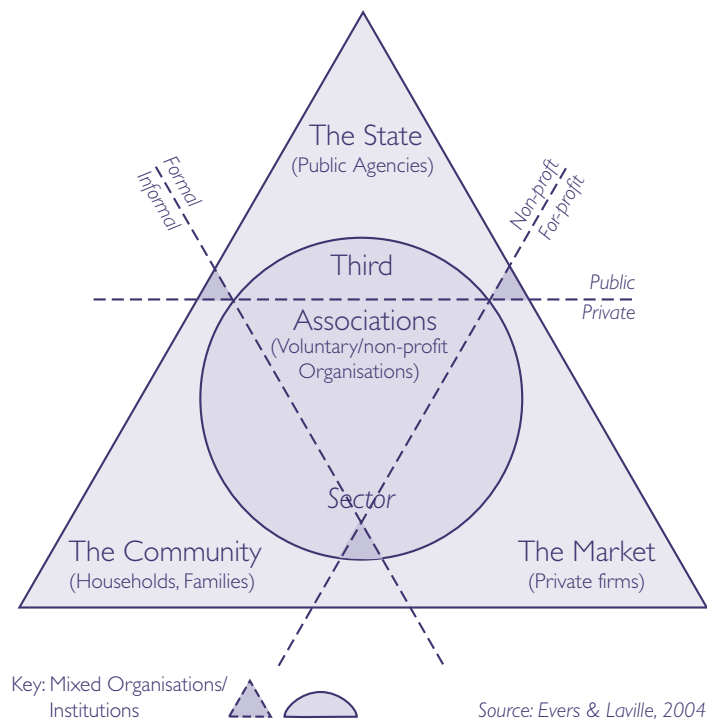
The relationship between the third sector, the state and the market has always been at the forefront of debates around civil society. Of late, there has been growing concern about the changing landscape of the third sector and the influence of both government and business on the way it is expected to run and on the functions it is there to fulfil. The increased professionalisation of the sector and the resulting polarisation between large and small organisations are, to a great extent, linked to the influence of government and business. Target setting, performance management and monitoring are all part-and-parcel of the audit and funding culture that prevails today. Voluntary and community organisations have adopted a wide range of management techniques and tools originally designed for corporates or the public sector. The contracting out of public services by government (to both private and third sector providers) and the requirements for efficiency, value for money and quality have intensified the push towards effective management.

The sector is undoubtedly one of the key elements of Labour's Third Way. However, the Government's efforts to include and work with the sector in the development and implementation of policies and strategies raise a number of issues as to what the role of the sector should be. The potential risk of too close a relationship between government and the sector is a well-rehearsed theme⁴. Lack of independence and co-option are perceived to be the biggest threats. Is the sector to become an instrument of government rather than a force for change in its own right? Will public service provision and financial dependency on government funding diminish the advocacy and campaigns function of the sector? Will they erode the sector's distinctive value and change its model of delivery? These are some of the recurring questions that current debates have brought up. Despite many groups and

organisations not delivering public services and having little to do with government, the Government's instrumentalist approach to the sector is a cause for concern. The main fear is that the role of non-service providers will be neglected and that only those organisations and groups that directly improve the outcomes of government policy will be supported. Civil society is described by Nicholas Deakin and Adalbert Evers and Jean-Louis Laville⁵ as the space bounded by the state, market and informal sector (i.e. personal and family relations).

In this model of civil society, the three sectors create a 'force field' (see Fig. 1), with a public space at its centre inside which voluntary and community organisations exist and operate. Deakin evokes the continuously shifting nature of these boundaries – as the activities and objectives of these sectors expand, contract or change, the space available to civil society changes. In some instances this leads to the development of hybrid institutions at the boundary, as Evers and Laville show in the diagram. By focusing on the greater involvement of voluntary and community organisations in public service delivery, it has been argued that government is reducing the space available to civil society and failing to recognise its wider role.

Fig. 1



Citizenship and active citizenship

Government and statutory institutions have equally been at the centre of political discourses and public policies around active citizenship that have focused principally on voting, participation in local governance and user involvement in public services. According to the Government, active citizenship is primarily about re-examining the relationship between citizens and the state and, ultimately, to increase confidence in government. What seems to be the focus of the Government's attention is how citizens relate to the state and its institutions rather than how they might relate to each other, and how civic participation rather than civil participation can be encouraged. This partly stems from its understanding of citizenship, another much debated term.

The distinction is often made between three theoretical approaches to citizenship⁶. Much of the contemporary literature on citizenship seeks to link these together: citizenship is then conceptualised as both a status and an active practice.

⁵ Evers, E. and Laville, J.-L. (2004) *The third sector in Europe*, Edward Elgar. See also *Commission on the future of the voluntary sector (1996) Meeting the challenge of change: voluntary action into the 21st Century*, NCVO

⁶ Gaventa, J. and Jones, E. (2002) *Concepts of citizenship: a review*, IDS

Theoretical approach	Main features	Where the emphasis lies
<i>Liberal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenship is a status entitling each individual to the same formal rights that are enshrined in law • The function of the political realm is to protect and maximise individual interests • Citizenship is conceptualised at the level of the nation-state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent and self-interested individuals • Equal rights • Rule of law
<i>Communitarian</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenship arises from an individual's sense of identity and belonging to a community, to a group • Citizenship is socially-embedded: an individual's identity is produced through its relations with others of individual interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of belonging • Group identity and group rights • Common good rather than the pursuit
<i>Civic republican</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenship is an overarching civic identity shaped by a common public culture (stronger than separate group identities) and produced by a sense of belonging to a particular nation-state • Citizenship is defined by rights and obligations, leading to the idea of citizenship as a practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility and civic virtues • Participation in public affairs

These different theoretical approaches have informed and influenced diverging political discourses. In the 1980s and 1990s Conservative governments used citizenship in very individualistic terms reaffirming the liberal-individualist perspective of citizenship. Citizens were above all private individuals. Personal freedom was at the heart of their idea of citizenship and defined the relationship between citizens and the state. Individual interests took precedence over collective ones as the move towards the reduction of state involvement in the provision of public services exemplified. Active citizenship, an expression used by Douglas Hurd as far back as 1983, was promoted but very much as a way of discouraging reliance on the welfare state. Initiatives (e.g. 'Make a difference' scheme launched by John Major)

were geared towards volunteering and giving, rather than increasing political participation beyond voting. Citizens were considered private individuals and were increasingly treated as consumers. With the Citizen's Charter, emphasis was placed on the individual citizen rather than on citizens collectively (as the position of the apostrophe so clearly illustrated) and on customer entitlements and expectations: public services were to become more accountable and more responsive to users.

New Labour's version of citizenship is more in line with the civic-republican model. Citizens are defined by duty: rights of citizens are dependent on the fulfilment of their responsibilities. The emphasis is equally based on active

participation. The move from government to governance is about sharing risks and responsibilities between citizens and the state, and expanding democratic participation by re-engaging citizens with decision-making processes. New Labour's take on citizenship is also greatly influenced by the communitarian model: citizen participation in governance is essentially promoted at the community level. In wanting to develop participatory democracy, New Labour aims to promote a new reciprocal relationship between the state and citizens, in which citizens are to become partners. Nevertheless, the shift of emphasis towards a more participatory form of citizenship is challenging: as Catherine Needham argues, the consumerisation and the resulting individualisation of citizenship are still happening through the way government communicates, consults and delivers services⁷.

Civic and civil participation

In his presentation at the NCVO seminar, Evers reflected on the tensions between two interpretations of civil society, which he referred to as the two sides of the civil society coin: active citizenship (i.e. citizens participating in state affairs) and the right to be left alone (i.e. citizens distancing themselves from the state and politics, associating for apolitical reasons). As Barry Knight (also a speaker at the mentioned NCVO seminar) pointed out, the 'right to be left alone' side of the coin goes back to the very origin of the concept of civil society: when the idea of civil society first appeared in the 18th century, it referred to the right for individuals to associate freely, without any interference from the state or the church.

Both sides of the civil society coin are equally mirrored in the literature on community involvement and community development. Gabriel Chanan⁸ has often made the distinction between vertical participation relating to governance such as participation in a Local Strategic Partnership or in a council committee (i.e. civic participation) and horizontal participation relating to community activity such as participation in a sports club or faith group (i.e. civil participation). If civil society is defined more broadly to

include both vertical and horizontal participation, the portrayal of a declining civil society is somewhat altered and there is more scope for optimism. In 2000 NCVO was commissioned by the Commonwealth Institute to assess the nature of civil society in the UK. For the purpose of the research civil society was loosely defined by Andrew Passey⁹ as 'any kind of association or organisation which works on a voluntary basis to achieve certain aims'. This definition included informal associations such as residents associations, local protest groups and sports clubs as well as trade unions, political parties, and charities, but excluded profit-making, state-organised and family-based activities. Much of the associational activity identified in the research was neither public policy nor politically orientated. For research participants, civil society was not so much about engaging with political processes and institutions; it was more about engaging with others, at a community level. The research findings supported the view that people felt a sense of alienation from formal institutions and were reluctant to engage in political processes and institutions (i.e. civic actions). However, they did not necessarily feel a sense of alienation from each other, and were more likely to engage in less formal associational and community activity (i.e. civil activities).

To a great extent the current emphasis on active citizenship and civil renewal has been driven by concern at the continuing decline in formal political participation, such as electoral activity and party political membership. For example, the number of people voting in the 2001 general election reached a post war low and there has been an even greater decline in participation in local elections. It is feared that this is calling into question the legitimacy of democratic institutions, leading to a loss of public trust in decision-making processes. Therefore there has been a strong emphasis on civic renewal: increasing citizen participation in governance, particularly in relation to the management and scrutiny of public services. And initiatives to enhance the accountability and responsiveness of state institutions are to be welcomed, whilst recognising that the two are not synonymous. However, the political realm is much wider than this: politics is also a value-laden process, concerned with identifying the public interest amidst the competing, and

⁷ Needham, C. (2003) *Citizen-consumers*, Catalyst

⁸ Chanan, G. (2003) *Searching for solid foundations*, ODPM

⁹ Passey, A. (2000) *Civil society in the new millennium*, NCVO

sometimes conflicting claims of different groups as well as the self-interest of individuals.

A strength of the active citizenship agenda is that it implies that citizens have a political relationship with the state, and not simply a consumerist one. That is, they have a collective interest in the wider aims and objectives of policies and their underlying social values (such as equity and social justice) over and above their self-interest as users of services. A strong and vibrant civil society enables citizens to exercise their rights and obligations to each other and learn to recognise and respect differences. It is therefore valuable both in its own right (developing trust between citizens) and as a means of generating shared understandings and perspectives of the public interest and making collective action possible. However, whilst it enables a plurality of views to be voiced and discussed, it leaves open the question of how the public interest is to be determined. This has led David Held to argue for what he calls 'a double process of democratisation' of both state and civil society, or what we have termed civic and civil renewal. This is because:

Without a secure and independent civil society, goals such as freedom and equality cannot be realised. But without the protective, redistributive and conflict-mediating function of the state, struggles to transform civil society are likely to become fragmented, or the bearers of new forms of inequality of power, wealth or status.¹⁰

An independent and autonomous civil society is an essential condition of democracy, but there is also a need for strong representative institutions. For one, a strengthening of representative institutions is necessary to counteract the 'uncivil' tendencies of civil society¹¹: it should be recognised that voluntary associations may be positive or negative, for example some have the potential for anti-social action (e.g. gangs) and others may represent particular or sectional interests that exclude (e.g. single-issue groups dominating an agenda). It is the role of democratic institutions to arbitrate between different interest groups and ultimately take decisions in the public

interest. Secondly, as argued above, representative and participatory democracy may be mutually reinforcing. However, there is inevitably a tension between the two, because government must manage competing demands and the right to dissent is as important as the right to participate.

Participation and social capital

The relational element of participation is essential to civil society. As Barry Knight and Colin Ball wrote¹², civil society 'is about association, both formal and informal, with others, to do things that need to be done, which are not or cannot be done, or be done better, by the state or the market. And it is about connection – between citizens and their institutions of governance and between citizens and their organizations and associations'. The keywords here are association and connection, which are thought to be a pre-condition of effective participation. This is very much the social capital argument supporting the idea that social ties and shared values or norms (such as trust or reciprocity) binding people together facilitate participation and collective action, which in turn strengthen social connectedness. Often considered a formidable resource by policy-makers and politicians alike, social capital is autonomous and spontaneous in nature and cannot be engineered or controlled: as Halima Begum argues, social capital starts with and belongs to individuals and communities, although government can influence the conditions in which it can flourish¹³.

Voluntary and community organisations play an important part in the life of communities, enabling people to come together for their own purpose and take part in community activity – for example to engage in social or leisure pursuits, help themselves and/or others, or to promote or defend a cause they feel strongly about. Horizontal participation in such activities should be valued in its own right because the social ties and interactions it supports are the very fabric of community life. But, horizontal participation is equally valuable because it frequently stimulates or reinforces vertical participation. The passage from horizontal to vertical participation is neither automatic

¹⁰ Held, D. (1989), *Political theory and the modern state*, Cambridge: Polity Press

¹¹ Keane, J. (1998), *Civil society: old images, new visions*, Cambridge: Polity Press

¹² Knight, B. and Ball, C. (1999) *Civil society at the millennium*, Kumarian Press

¹³ Begum, H. (2003) *Social capital in action*, NCVO/CCS

nor compulsory, however effective vertical participation is more difficult to achieve without the social connectedness that horizontal participation encourages¹⁴.

Particularly relevant to debates around participation and governance is the distinction made between bonding, bridging and linking social capital, associated to the different types of participation and contributing in a different way to civil society.

The different research projects on social capital conducted or commissioned by NCVO have confirmed that voluntary and community organisations (one of the main organisational forms operating in the third sector) have the ability to generate and mobilise these different types of social capital¹⁵. The very existence of many voluntary and community organisations is based on

people getting together because they share common features (values, goals, problems, experiences, interests, localities etc), which help create bonding social capital. However, the main challenge for the voluntary and community sector is to go beyond bonding social capital and promote bridging and linking social capital by engaging with a wider cross-section of the community, as well as power institutions. The social capital literature has demonstrated that high stocks of bonding social capital, around narrow self-interest, can considerably undermine the development of bridging and linking social capital that enable 'public good' outcomes and ultimately the emergence of the 'good society'¹⁶. The research showed that voluntary and community organisations had the potential to generate bridging social capital. Their capacity to do so depended on their objectives, range of members/users and approach. Whereas bridging social capital was greater in organisations that provided services/activities for people of different

Type of social capital	Type of participation	Role in civil society
<p>Bonding <i>Relates to common identity (i.e. ties amongst people who are similar to each other)</i></p>	Horizontal participation	Shared common purpose
<p>Bridging <i>Relates to diversity (i.e. ties amongst people who are different from one another)</i></p>	Horizontal participation	Dialogue between different interests and views in the public sphere
<p>Linking <i>Relates to power (i.e. ties with those in authority)</i></p>	Vertical participation	Access to power institutions and decision-making processes

¹⁴ Chanan, G. (2003) *Searching for solid foundations*, ODPM

¹⁵ Yates, H. and Jochum, V. (2003) *It's who you know that counts*, NCVO and Begum, H. (2003) *Social capital in action*, NCVO

¹⁶ Stone, W. and Hughes, J. (2001) *Sustaining communities: an empirical investigation of social capital in regional Australia*. Paper presented to SEGRA 2001 Fifth National Conference, 10-12 September 2001, Townsville.

backgrounds or in organisations that engaged in collaborative working, those catering for a homogeneous group of members/users or working in relative isolation were better at developing bonding social capital. With linking social capital, again it depended on organisational objectives and organisational processes and practices. Some of the organisations unquestionably contributed to reducing the distance between power institutions and people, acting as advocates, representing the interests of their members/users and putting pressure on government bodies to solve specific issues. Although the organisations demonstrated some success in building bridging and linking social capital, at the same time, they also stressed the challenges that this involved: bridging social capital raised internal issues around diversity and inclusiveness, linking social capital issues around legitimacy, representativeness and accountability.

The work of Robert Putnam¹⁷ has greatly contributed to strengthening the idea that associational membership is key to democracy. In his much quoted research on Italian regions, Putnam considered that community activity, in the form of membership of neighbourhood associations, choral societies or sports clubs, was a determining factor in regional differences in effective government: in communities where people were actively involved democracy worked. His findings have captured the attention of many politicians and policy-makers and their interest in Putnam's work was further increased with the publication of his book *Bowling alone*¹⁸ on the decline of community activity and the erosion of social capital in the United States. However, critics have often argued that localised trust resulting from bonding social capital in community activities is not easily transferable and does not necessarily lead to greater trust in governance institutions and increased political participation, which is more to do with linking social capital and the wider institutional context. Research by Vivien Lowndes and Gerry Stoker¹⁹ established that the relationship between social capital and political participation was not as clear as often implied. Their findings revealed that an important role was played by localised 'institutional filters'

that determined whether social capital 'converted' or not into political participation. The three main filters were party politics (i.e. the way political institutions functioned and political leadership was organised), public management (i.e. the way public institutions operated and their openness to citizen participation) and the infrastructure of the voluntary and community sector (i.e. the way voluntary and community organisations cooperated and provided channels of communication to policy-makers).

Within the literature on the democratic contribution of voluntary and community organisations, much attention has been paid to the influence of internal organisational processes and structures. As part of his work on social capital, Putnam highlighted that organisations privileging face-to-face interaction were more effective at preparing people for political participation. He and authors such as Theda Skocpol²⁰ argued that large membership organisations, professionalised to such an extent that the active participation of supporters is no longer needed, contribute far less than other forms of association driven at the grass root level by their own constituents. Some consider this to be equally the case of large charities contracted to provide services on behalf of the state, thought to have little to do with civil society. However, the reality is often more complex: service provision if combined with advocacy and campaigning and/or practices of user participation can influence decision-making and lead to improved services, likewise passive supporters in making a statement about a cause they care about and joining forces to exert influence should not be completely dismissed. As outlined by Per Selle and Kristin Stromsnes,²¹ current changes in society require us to rethink the relationship between support and influence, between internal and external democracy: organisations may not always be democratically structured but they still have a role to play in securing a pluralistic democracy. Organisations with different experiences of participation and governance co-exist and contribute to civil society and democracy in different ways.

¹⁷ Putnam, R. (1993) 'The prosperous community: social capital and public life', *The American Prospect*, Vol. 4, No. 13.

¹⁸ Putnam, R. (2001) *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of the American community*, Simon and Schuster

¹⁹ Lowndes, V. and Stoker, G. (2002) *The locality effect*

²⁰ Skocpol, T. (2003) *Diminished democracy: from membership to management in American civic life*, University of Oklahoma Press

²¹ Selle, P. and Stromsnes, K. (1997) *Membership and democracy: should we take passive supporters seriously?* paper presented to the regional conference on social movements, September 10-12, Tel Aviv

Conclusion: a review of the key themes

The different conceptions of civil society each have implications for approaches to civil renewal and active citizenship, and in particular for the role of voluntary and community organisations. Some of the questions are

asked in the table below, which summarises the main concepts put forward in this section.

Themes	Summary	Questions for the voluntary and community sector
Civil society	There are three main schools of thought regarding civil society: civil society as a <i>kind</i> of society (i.e. the 'good society'), civil society as a <i>part</i> of society (i.e. the third sector) and civil society as a <i>space</i> (i.e. a public sphere for debate and deliberation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do voluntary and community organisations contribute to defining what the 'good society' looks like? • Do they contribute to transmitting civic values and to encouraging democratic practices? • How do they provide opportunities for deliberation and debate? • What is their contribution to embedding a culture of participation?
Active citizenship	Citizenship is now conceptualised as both a status and an active practice. Different political approaches have informed political discourses around citizenship and active citizenship. New Labour's take on active citizenship is about re-engaging citizens with decision-making processes (especially at the local community level) and sharing risks and responsibilities between citizens and state.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does active citizenship mean for voluntary and community organisations? • How do voluntary and community organisations perceive their role in active citizenship? • What issues and challenges do they face in developing active citizenship?
Civil participation	Civil participation (or horizontal participation) relates to participation in community activities and in less formal types of association. It includes participation in residents associations, sports clubs, faith groups etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they succeed in tackling the issue of non-participation? • How do they create opportunities for participation and reduce barriers to participation? • Are participation structures and processes in place that can maximise involvement? • How does engagement in the voluntary and community sector spill out into other areas of engagement (such as community governance and politics)? • How can voluntary and community organisations demonstrate the value of their wider contribution?

Themes	Summary	Questions for the voluntary and community sector
Social capital	The social ties and shared values or norms (such as trust or reciprocity) that bind people together facilitate participation and collective action, which in turn strengthen social connectedness. Voluntary and community organisations play a key role in generating and mobilising social capital, both within (bonding social capital) and between (bridging social capital) communities and in involving (linking social capital) people in formal decision-making processes, giving voice to their concerns and enabling their voices to be heard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do organisations facilitate bridging (to allow for diversity and social inclusion within communities) and linking social capital (to enable communities to engage in processes of governance and decision-making)? • How can the sector facilitate the transition between bonding, bridging and linking social capital?
Civic participation	Civic participation (or vertical participation) relates to participation in state affairs. It includes participation in political processes and participation in governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do voluntary and community organisations provide an enabling environment that empowers citizens and communities? • Do they support those who want to participate but lack the networks/skills/confidence to do so? • How do they tackle issues around representativeness and legitimacy when voicing community concerns? • How do voluntary and community organisations engaging with state institutions manage to retain their independence?
Democracy	An independent and autonomous civil society is an essential condition of democracy, but there is also a need for strong representative institutions. It is their role to negotiate and arbitrate between the different interests and concerns (including dissenting and society unpopular views) expressed in civil society, and ultimately take decisions in the public interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the balance between participatory and representative democracy maintained? • How can voluntary and community organisations complement representative institutions? • How do you recognise and mediate those groups within civil society who may not be a force for good (e.g. extremist groups)? • How do single-issue organisations take into account the wider public interest?

This section aims to map out the Government agenda around civil renewal and active citizenship. It will firstly look at the policies and initiatives of the Home Office that are largely driving this Government agenda, outlining the key concepts that underlie its work and the questions that it raises. It will secondly examine how relevant this agenda is to other government departments such as the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The rhetoric on civil renewal is very much associated with the former Home Secretary David Blunkett, who set out the foundations of the agenda and took it forward through the creation of the Civil Renewal Unit and the Active Citizenship Centre. However, civil renewal is based on ideas that New Labour's 'Third way' has promoted such as partnerships, community engagement and governance. It has certainly been the subject of a number of speeches from other key figures including Tony Blair and Gordon Brown in addition to David Blunkett. Although each has emphasised different aspects of the agenda, a common theme is the need to recast the relationship between state and citizen.

An agenda driven by the Home Office

Our vision is of a society in which citizens are inspired to make a positive difference to their communities, and are able to influence the policies and services that affect their lives.²²

The call for civil renewal is based primarily on the assumption that citizens in modern Western societies (where individualism and consumerism both thrive) are increasingly disengaged from public life. Political participation is at an all-time low, falling public trust towards institutions and declining membership in political parties are cause for concern. Disengagement is not only seen as posing a threat to democracy, it is also considered as having a negative impact on community cohesion, with individuals progressively losing their sense of common purpose and belonging.

The motivation is therefore a desire to re-engage citizens in decisions that affect their lives and the life of their community; restore trust in political and state institutions; and promote social cohesion and social inclusion. The solution is to give citizens more opportunity to participate in decision-making and the skills and support they need to do this. The key idea behind government thinking is that individuals must move away from being passive, self-centred consumers to become more active, community-spirited citizens who contribute to the 'common good' through engagement. If civil renewal is to happen, then Government must have a facilitating role, helping individuals and communities '*not by doing things for them but by doing things with them*'²³ and empowering them to participate.

The report 'Active citizens, strong communities: progressing civil renewal'²⁴ outlines the three main ingredients of the Government's civil renewal agenda, which are active citizenship, strengthened communities and partnership in meeting public needs. These are of course heavily inter-related and artificially separated for the purpose of clarity. A brief presentation²⁵ of the principles that lie behind these different components follows along with a small selection of Home Office initiatives and programmes that have been put in place to promote them.

²² Blunkett, D. in Civil Renewal Unit (2003) *Building civil renewal: a review of Government support for community capacity building and proposal for change*, Home Office

²³ Blunkett, D. (2004) *Renewing democracy: why Government should invest in civil renewal*, speech to the Ash Institute

²⁴ *Active citizens, strong communities – progressing civil renewal*, based on D. Blunkett's Scarman lecture delivered on 11 December 2003

²⁵ Both the presentation and selection are descriptive of what the Government has set out to do or is currently doing. A discussion follows in chapter 4.

Active citizenship

Citizens should be given more opportunities and support to become actively involved in defining and tackling the problems of their communities and improving their quality of life.²⁶

Active citizenship is primarily about individuals participating in the decisions that shape their lives and the well-being of the communities they belong to. It is about self-determination coupled with the values of mutuality and solidarity. Government views its role as removing barriers to participation and increasing opportunities in:

<p>Citizenship education and lifelong learning</p>	<p>It entails building capacity through formal and informal education to develop the confidence, the skills and knowledge needed to engage. It includes citizenship education in schools but also education and training initiatives for adults developed as described in the Civil Renewal Unit's Active Learning for Active Citizenship strategy. To date, seven regional hubs (Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire, Black Country, Lincoln, London, Stoke-on-Trent and the South West) have been put in place to promote citizenship education for adults.</p>
<p>Volunteering</p>	<p>The Government aims to raise the level of community participation and volunteering (in voluntary and community organisations and in mainstream services) by 5 per cent by 2006. The Russell Commission (co-launched by David Blunkett and Gordon Brown), looking at innovative ways of encouraging volunteering amongst young people, is one of several initiatives that the Government is putting in place to achieve this ambitious target.</p> <p>2005 is the Year of the Volunteer. The initiative, aimed at raising the profile of volunteering and increasing the number of volunteers, is funded by the Home Office in a partnership led by Community Service Volunteers and Volunteering England.</p>
<p>Civic participation</p>	<p>Civic participation covers engagement with state institutions. The Civil Renewal Unit, in partnership with the Local Government Association and the Society for Local Authority Chief Executives, have launched the Civic Pioneer scheme aimed at local authorities that are actively committed to the principles and ethos of community engagement. At present, 14 local authorities have obtained the 'civic pioneer' status.</p>

Strengthened communities

Communities should be helped to form and sustain their own organisations, bringing people together to deal with their common concerns.²⁷

The community groups, networks and relationships that are part of strong and vibrant communities build social capital, an invaluable resource for tackling the challenges communities face. The Government sees strengthened communities being achieved through:

<p>Community development</p>	<p>Building community capacity is key to community development and effective community action. A review of government support for community capacity building, including a public consultation exercise, was completed in 2003. Early feedback from the consultation informed the Government's capacity building and infrastructure framework for the voluntary and community sector; ChangeUp. The final report on community capacity building, <i>Firm Foundations</i>, was published in December 2004.</p> <p>Another aspect of community development is asset ownership that helps sustain community activity. The Government, with a number of partners from the voluntary and community sector, has established the Adventure Capital Fund, a pilot 'patient capital'²⁸ fund designed to strengthen the asset base of community enterprises.</p>
<p>Community cohesion</p>	<p>Strong communities can be exclusive. Building links between groups of different backgrounds are needed to increase understanding and mutual respect, and build a sense of common purpose. Community cohesion is about valuing diversity as well as ensuring equal life opportunities. Three units within the Home Office are contributing to the promotion of community cohesion – the Community Cohesion Unit per se, the Race Equality Unit and the Faith Communities Unit. The Government has developed a Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy, which it consulted on in Summer 2004. The final report <i>Improving opportunity, strengthening society</i> was published in January 2005.</p> <p>Community Cohesion Pathfinders, a joint Civil Renewal Unit and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit programme, has funded a range of projects and initiatives promoting community cohesion in 14 selected areas. The Connecting Communities race equality grant scheme, managed by the Communities Funding team in the Race Equality Unit, has supported projects that provide new opportunities to the most disempowered members of minority ethnic communities.</p>
<p>Community safety</p>	<p>A sense of safety is integral to the building of strong, cohesive and active communities. Promoting active communities and enforcing law and order are mutually reinforcing. Reducing and tackling crime, drugs and anti-social behaviour help build confident communities. Securing borders and managing migration contribute to community cohesion.</p> <p>The new Safer and Stronger Communities Fund announced in the 2004 Spending Review will be used to address local priorities in high crime areas. It brings together various ODPM and Home Office funding streams aimed at tackling crime and anti-social behaviour and improving local environments.</p>

²⁷ Active citizens, strong communities – progressing civil renewal, based on D. Blunkett's Scarman lecture delivered on 11 December 2003

²⁸ Civil Renewal Unit (2004) *Patient capital: a new approach to investing in the growth of community and social enterprise*

Partnership in meeting public needs

Public bodies, within the established democratic framework, should involve citizens and communities more effectively in improving the planning and delivery of public services.²⁹

The focus of government policies aimed at reforming public services has been greater choice and personalisation. Partnership between public service providers and citizens aims to improve the quality and responsiveness of public service provision in line with users' and citizens' needs and expectations. It has two dimensions:

<p>User involvement</p>	<p>Citizens need to be able to express their views and engage in local decision-making. Consultation, used to inform service and policy development, has now become a key feature of increasing user involvement. Involving citizens in governance structures is equally encouraged.</p> <p>The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act placed an obligation on local authorities and the police, in partnership with other agencies (i.e. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships), to consult locally in drawing up strategies to tackle crime. Community engagement is central to the Home Office strategic plan 'Confident Communities in a Secure Britain'. Crime fighting is to be driven by people's local priorities. Key measures in the strategy include powers for local people to call on the police to take action to combat local problems.</p>
<p>Co-delivery</p>	<p>Government is increasingly interested in contracting with voluntary and community organisations to deliver specific services. It involves the transfer of delivery of public services to voluntary or community organisations and the provision of non-statutory services by voluntary or community organisations.</p> <p>In 1998, the Compact was established and developed by the Home Office and the voluntary and community sector to govern relations between the sector and the State. As a result of the Treasury's review of the voluntary and community sector's role in public service delivery, the Active Communities Unit has been given £93m to implement the recommendations of the Cross-Cutting Review, £80m of which was allocated for infrastructure development. Another of the review's outcomes was the creation of Futurebuilders, a £125m capital investment fund to assist the sector in its public service delivery work.</p>

Review of the themes underlying the Home Office agenda

In examining the existing Home Office policies and programmes and the case studies on the Active Citizenship Centre website, looking at civil renewal in practice, a number of recurring themes emerge and, with those

themes, a series of questions that reveal potential tensions and issues within government policies.

Themes	Summary	Questions
<i>Rights and responsibilities</i>	Citizens do not only have rights, they have responsibilities and duties. The civil renewal agenda is about promoting a sense of individual and social responsibility. It is about individuals and communities taking responsibility for tackling their problems and taking responsibility for their actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are rights conditional on the fulfilment of responsibilities? • Are they dependent on good behaviour? • Is civil renewal a clever way for government to share risks and accountability?
<i>Law and order</i>	The Home Office's vision is one of people working together to find solutions to problems. It is largely focused on community safety targets such as the reduction of anti-social behaviour and crime.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is active citizenship purely a means to an end? • Will support go only to those initiatives aimed at meeting Home Office objectives?
<i>Local communities</i>	<p>Although the Home Office literature mentions communities of interest, it is the community of place that is most often referred to. It is clearly at the local level that communities are seen to contribute the most.</p> <p>Civil renewal concerns all communities, however many Home Office initiatives are aimed at communities in the most deprived areas of the country.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is government in danger of idealising what communities are and what they can achieve? • Are its expectations unrealistic and do they put too much pressure on community members? • Will communities be given the power to really make a difference? • How will government ensure that the needs of marginalised and vulnerable members of the community are taken into account? • Can raising community hopes backfire and damage trust?

Themes	Summary	Questions
Cohesion	Cohesive communities are considered key to building trust, tackling insecurity and reducing crime. Interestingly, the Home Office talks primarily of community cohesion rather than social cohesion concerning the wider society. In most cases the emphasis is on ethnicity and religion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does community cohesion necessarily lead to social cohesion? • Localism may lead to services being closer to the needs of local communities, but will it not lead to further fragmentation at the national level, increase inequalities and impact negatively on social cohesion?
Participation	Participation is seen as the answer to much of society's ills. Participation (and the social capital that goes with it) leads to strong shared values and a whole range of positive outcomes in terms of quality of life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is participation always needed? • Has people's willingness to participate been overestimated? • Are participation initiatives likely to attract the usual suspects? • Is enough support available to those who want to participate but lack the networks/skills/confidence to do so? • How sustainable is engagement? • Has government neglected the complex process of engagement, which is often slow and somewhat 'messy'? • Is government failing to take into consideration participation that goes beyond localities (e.g. single-issue campaigns)?
Public realm	Civil renewal is about citizens being committed to the common good and taking part in the public realm. Initiatives to date have been principally geared towards participation in local governance and public service delivery. They involve a redefinition of the relationship between citizens and the state.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the common good reflect society's growing diversity? • Is the Home Office's vision of the public realm placing too much emphasis on state institutions? • Is it taking for granted that government is setting the rules of engagement? • Has government ignored the failures of the public realm? • Is it trying to encourage citizenship without addressing the structural or system failures? • Is it neglecting other public spaces in which the mobilisation of citizens is taking place?

Themes	Summary	Questions
Civil society	Voluntary and community organisations within civil society are an essential element of the Government's vision of strong local communities, active citizens and improved public services. The 'added value' they bring to the delivery of public services is seen as a major plus, as is their role in building social capital.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the voluntary and community sector a force for change in its own right or is it a training ground for involvement in the government priorities of the day? • Is the Government's focus too much on public service delivery to the detriment of the sector's other functions (e.g. advocacy and campaigning)? • Are Government requirements for public delivery placing too onerous a burden on the sector? • How is Government to respond to those groups within civil society who may not be a force for good (e.g. single issue or extremist groups)

Relevance of the civil renewal agenda to other government departments

Blunkett talked of the 'ethos of civil renewal' that needed to be embedded not only in the activities of the Home Office, but also in those of other Government departments. The Home Office strategy, *Firm Foundations*, has the potential to develop a broader agenda for civil renewal. It sets out a framework for community capacity building to support community engagement across the range of Government policies. Underpinning this framework is a strong emphasis on community development, both as a way of working and as a set of values. This suggests a commitment to a 'bottom-up' approach to civil renewal and to facilitating both vertical and horizontal participation.

The Home Office has been the driving force for *civil renewal*, nevertheless the commitment to a civil renewal agenda is intended to cut across all government departments, encompassing, for example, support for social enterprise by the Department for Trade and Industry; citizenship education and training from the Department for Education and Skills; and new

incentives to encourage volunteering from the Treasury. It also has been central to specific initiatives such as Sure Start and the New Deal for Communities as well as being a component of programmes such as the former Health Action Zones, which sought to engage local communities in their work. However, there are two areas in addition to the Home Office where the agenda has been most explicit:

- the reform of local government has sought to promote democratic renewal by ODPM (and before that the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions); and
- the focus on consumer choice and user involvement in public services.

The table on page 22 is an attempt to map out how different initiatives and programmes of the main Government departments relate to the three components of the civil renewal agenda, as defined by the Home Office. Needless to say this mapping exercise is far from comprehensive as it focuses on programmes and initiatives that have resulted in specific funding streams. Although it does not cover departmental strategies it nevertheless allows us to see where the emphasis is placed, highlighting commonalities as well as differences in priorities that reflect the departments' particular remit.

	Active citizenship	Strengthened communities	Partnership in meeting public needs
Home Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active citizens active learning regional hubs • Civic pioneers • Year of the volunteer • Citizenship day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adventure Capital fund • Community Cohesion Pathfinders • Connection Communities scheme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ChangeUp • Futurebuilders • Safer and Stronger Communities Fund
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Community Forum • Neighbourhood Renewal Fund • Single Community programme • (Community Chest, Community Learning Chest, Community Empowerment Fund) • New Deal for Communities programme • Safer and Stronger Communities Fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beacon Council Scheme • Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders • Local Development Framework (statement of community involvement) • Local Area Agreements • Local Strategic Partnerships
Department of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for Volunteering scheme • Patient and Public Involvement Forums • Foundations Trusts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Action Zones • Healthy Living Centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health • Strategic Agreement "Making Partnerships Work" • National Strategic Partnership Forum • Section 64 general scheme of grants
Department for Education and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenship curriculum • Millennium Volunteers • Young Volunteers Challenge • Active Citizens in School (pilot programme) • Higher Education Active Community Fund • Foundations schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Champions • Pathfinder Young Community Champions • Local Network Fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Track programme • Y Speak Consultation Fund

Whilst the Home Office has been the driving force in terms of developing a theoretical and policy framework for civil renewal, in practice much of this relates to activity at a local government level and therefore to the work of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Community engagement has been, and continues to be, a central underpinning of the ODPM agenda, which seeks to modernise and strengthen local government and local governance, with an emphasis on the role of councillors (as elected representatives) as leaders of their communities. A key aim of the ODPM agenda has been to give people a greater say in the decisions that affect them in order to create stronger links between public services and those they serve and, at the same time, to 'reconnect politics' with the issues that concern local people most. Key policies include:

- requiring local authorities to undertake best value reviews and to consult with service users as part of this to ensure that public services meet their needs and expectations;
- giving local authorities new powers to promote and improve the well-being of their area and to work in partnership with other bodies to achieve this;
- developing a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, to address social exclusion in the 88 most deprived areas of England, and recognising the value of community engagement to the success of the strategy as well as the links between neighbourhood renewal and civil renewal;
- creating incentives for local authorities to establish Local Strategic Partnerships with participation from local communities and voluntary organisations, (initially for the 88 most deprived areas as part of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, but subsequently recommended for all councils);
- giving local people a choice about how their council is constituted, e.g. whether they want a directly elected mayor, by encouraging councils to hold referendums;

- encouraging the take up of new constitutional arrangements for local government, to provide more visible leadership through an executive cabinet and more effective accountability, by giving 'backbench' councillors responsibility for scrutinising decision-making and holding the executive to account; and
- strengthening the role of councils as champions of local people and councillors as community leaders by devolving decision-making wherever appropriate, including to neighbourhood level and creating opportunities to give citizens greater influence over decision-making.

In July 2004 the ODPM published *The future of local government: developing a ten year strategy*, setting out its proposals for the future of local government, building on developments identified above. Community engagement is a central theme: it is seen as a means of both improving public services and re-engaging citizens with the institutions of government. This document is now being consulted on and responses to it will inform the Government's strategy, due to be published in late 2005 or early 2006. More detailed proposals on aspects of the strategy have been published in a series of 'local vision' documents. These include:

- *Local Area Agreements: A prospectus* (July 2004) LAA's are agreements between central and local government which allow the local authority more flexibility in how it allocates budgets to address community needs in the areas of children and young people; safer stronger communities; and health and older people. This is currently being piloted in a number of authorities.
- *Vibrant Local Leadership* (January 2005): This aims to further embed the new constitutional arrangements for local councils, strengthening both the executive and scrutiny roles of councillors and their links at a neighbourhood level, enhancing their role as community leaders.

Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why neighbourhoods matter (January 2005): This calls for more decentralised decision-making, with more decisions being taken at a neighbourhood level where appropriate and greater citizen involvement in those decisions.

Clearly a key aspect of the Government's approach to civil renewal is the need to ensure that public services better meet the needs of the public. This might be in terms of making services more responsive to community needs, by strengthening collective action and community participation; or in terms of giving citizens a greater say in the democratic process that governs decision-making, as in the ODPM agenda. Another strong strand of policy focuses on people's involvement as consumers, giving them a greater say in decisions about the services they, or their family, personally receive. This has been most apparent in relation to education and health, for example: in education there has been a shift away from a comprehensive system with the creation of specialist schools and city academies; in health care the Government's 'choice and book' policy will enable patients needing elective treatment to choose from four or five hospitals.

Conclusion

Despite the breadth of interest in civil renewal and active citizenship across Government departments and their policies, it is clear from our analysis that such interest aims to further Government's own agendas, whether they are community safety or better public services. For voluntary and community organisations and wider civil society the aims, perceptions and processes of civil renewal and active citizenship are likely to be different – and possibly in opposition to those of Government. This is the focus of the next section.

Recent policies and initiatives demonstrate that the Government considers the voluntary and community sector to be one of the key elements of its civil renewal agenda, but the nature of the relationship between organisations operating within the sector and active citizenship remains unclear. Research, carried out by NCVO in Summer 2004, aimed to explore how voluntary and community organisations viewed their contribution to active citizenship and what issues and challenges this entailed. A small number of interviews and focus groups with academics, policy-makers, and practitioners from a range of organisations (including individual membership organisations, local community groups, service providers, and citizenship education organisations) were organised. The initial findings from the research were presented at a seminar in October 2004, at which participants were given an opportunity to express their views on the data, and on active citizenship in general. Their comments have been fed into the analysis below.

Different understandings of active citizenship

On the whole, it is fair to say participants did not warm to the term 'active citizenship'. Their interpretation and understanding of the term confirmed its contested nature (see 'Citizenship and active citizenship' in chapter 1, page 7).

Often perceived as politically loaded – a buzzword used by policy makers and politicians – it was considered ambiguous, vague and remote from people (i.e. is 'active citizenship' an expression that people would actually use?). Criticism came especially from those who were wary of the concept of citizenship, which they saw as being potentially discriminatory (i.e. citizenship conceptualised solely as a status at the level of the nation-state). But it was not all negative: for some, using a term like 'active citizenship' could provide a useful framework to encourage participation.

From the interviews and focus groups, active citizenship appeared to have three co-existing dimensions (political, social and individual), to a large extent already present in the theoretical approaches discussed in the first chapter. The key features that the participants associated with these different dimensions, however, provided a more rounded view of active citizenship than the Government's. It highlighted, for example, its subjective and yet normative nature, and emphasised the tensions arising from this.

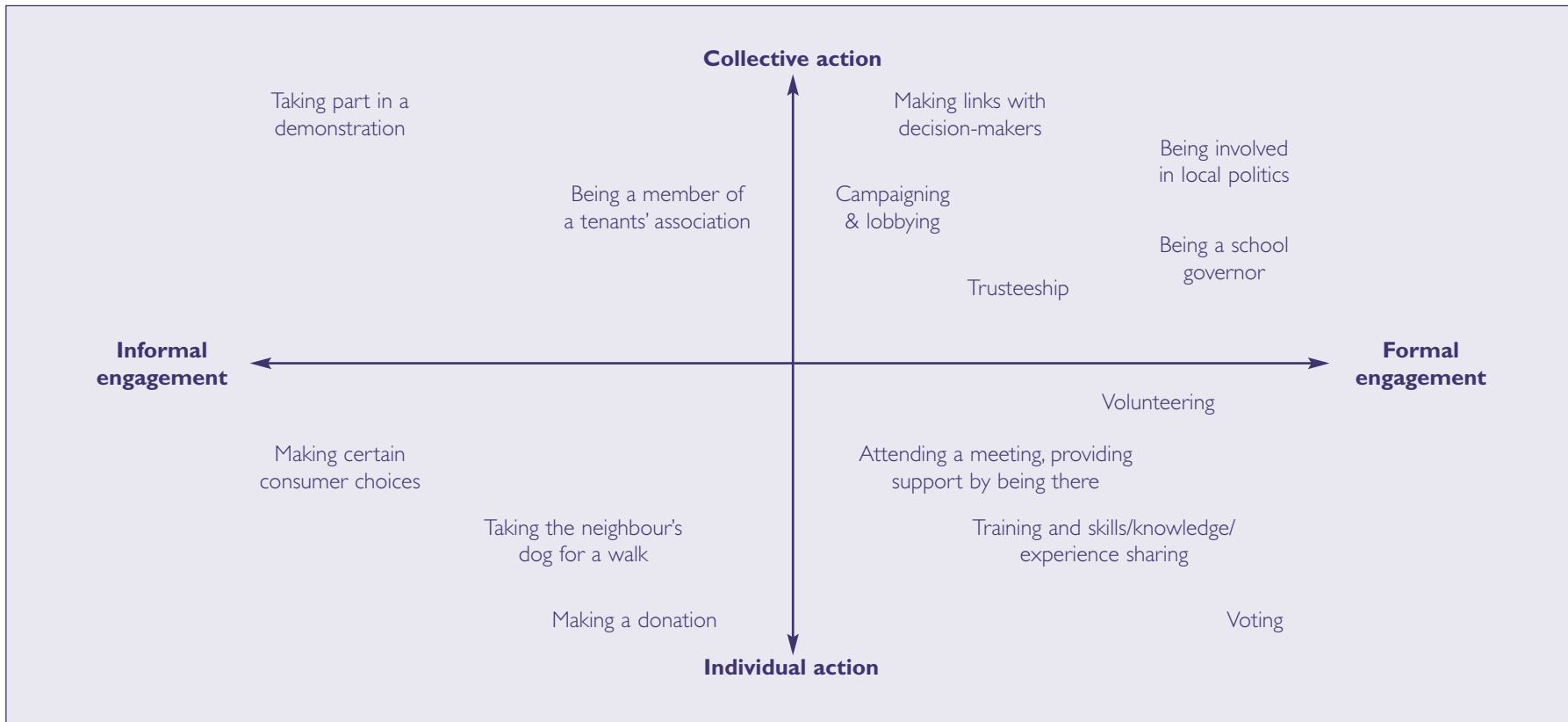
The following table summarises the participants' views on the different dimensions of active citizenship:

Political dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active citizenship relates to the relationship between the state and its citizens through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in political processes and governance • holding power to account • citizenship as a status (related to the idea of nationality and national identity) • citizenship as a set of rights and responsibilities/duties • Active citizenship was seen as being a very normative concept, opposing the good/law-abiding/active citizens to the bad/law-breaking/passive citizens and leading potentially to exclusion and discrimination. • The concept of active citizenship has been used by government in the past (with Thatcher's 'there is no such thing as society' the focus was on the individual) and by government today in its civil renewal agenda (with this agenda the focus is on community engagement and social capital).
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of tensions were identified between participatory democracy (that lies behind the idea of active citizenship) and different government policies (such as active citizenship and the delivery of public services, active citizenship and the criminal justice agenda). • Active citizenship was sometimes perceived as a potential counterweight to the increasing focus on public service delivery, but there was a great deal of scepticism and suspicion: the active citizenship label/rhetoric could for example be used to better control participation if government failed to recognise and value the spontaneous nature of active citizenship, possibly critical of government initiatives.
Social dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active citizenship also relates to the relationship between the individual and wider society, between the individual and others. • Active citizenship goes beyond the individual ('it's not just about me') and reflects the collective dimension of individuals (i.e. the recognition of their role as members of a community, of society). • It is often related to a sense of belonging, of feeling part of a community. • It is often used in reference to communities of residence: more opportunities for active citizenship are perceived to be available at the community or local level, which is considered more accessible to people and less intimidating. • It is associated to collective action and to the idea that there is strength in numbers: 'no community change can happen without others'.
Individual dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active citizenship has a subjective nature: what might be considered a demonstration of active citizenship by one person might not be seen as such by another (such as taking the neighbour's dog for a walk). • The diversity of activities means that active citizenship cannot be top-down driven: there is no control over the way active citizenship might express itself. • Active citizenship implies a sense of agency (the idea of empowerment, of exercising choice – including the choice to not get involved). • It is frequently motivated by self-interest (such as becoming a school governor in your children's school).

Although participants found active citizenship a confusing and somewhat controversial term, it was much easier for them to talk about the activities they considered were expressions of active citizenship. The range of activities mentioned was long and varied. Activities varied in their formality (such as

the need for an institutional setting) and collective nature, as the diagram on page 27 illustrates. The diagram is of course a simplification of some complex realities, but this highlights the breadth of what active citizenship means for civil renewal.



Some of these activities, fell under the 'vertical participation' category³⁰ associated with civic engagement (e.g. voting) and others fell under 'horizontal participation' associated with civil engagement (e.g. volunteering). They were sometimes, but not always, connected to voluntary and community organisations. However, a number of activities were more difficult to classify (e.g. buying fair-trade products) and related to more informal individual actions. These actions nevertheless went beyond the individual, because of their wider potential impact on society, and often

reflected values people lived by. In all of the interviews and focus groups, volunteering was talked about extensively, although volunteering was not considered a synonym of active citizenship. For some it was one of the many 'active citizenship' activities people could get involved in. For others (and this was particularly clear amongst participants working in citizenship education organisations), active citizenship had a more radical dimension than volunteering. Active citizenship was almost seen as a mindset linking action to understanding and knowledge.

³⁰ See page 9 in chapter 1.

The diversity of the above activities implied different levels of involvement and commitment and showed that, in the case of the research participants, there was no single model of active citizenship. The idea of an 'active citizenship spectrum' was thought more appropriate and far less prescriptive.

I'm actually just interested in what the Samaritans do, or I want to get involved in local politics or I'm joining Friends of the Earth because I'm campaigning about telephone masts. I would never describe myself as an active citizen.

Active citizenship for me is about having individual benefits but also having some wider benefits for other people, it's like doing good, it's having a positive impact on where you live or where you work, it's actually about benefiting others.

For me it's about exercising choice and putting pressure on service delivery, making the community what you want it to be rather than just volunteering or being nice. It's much bigger than that.

What is the role of the voluntary and community sector in building active citizenship?

Participants saw voluntary and community organisations as having a number of different roles in relation to active citizenship. They were seen:

- primarily as providing a wide range of opportunities for active citizenship to express itself: the issues they addressed, their aims and objectives acted as a powerful catalyst to engagement;
- as a platform for individuals, including for those who were marginalised, to voice their concerns and challenge what was happening (including government actions and policies);

- to contribute to personal and community empowerment by providing the skills that effective participation requires (including soft skills such as self-confidence);
- to bring people together and build social capital, which facilitates collective action;
- to transmit and develop the values that underpin democracy (such as dialogue and respect) and familiarised people with democratic processes (such as debating and voting); and
- a good entry point to active citizenship: positive experiences of involvement in the sector provided a taste for involvement and could lead to further involvement (including in other types of activities outside the sector).

As with the general notion of active citizenship, the participants' vision of active citizenship in relation to the sector was often much broader than the Government's. There were concerns that the Government's thinking focused too much on public services delivery and was reducing the role and space of the sector to suit its own agenda. They felt it was important for the sector not to simply respond to the Government's policies and strategies, but to define and promote its own view of active citizenship that took into account the wider role of the sector.

What are the sector's key assets in building active citizenship?

The participants were asked if they thought the sector offered any specific or distinctive features that facilitated the development of active citizenship. Much of what was said related to different aspects of the relationship that voluntary and community organisations had with users, beneficiaries, members and volunteers. It was felt that organisations were successful at building active citizenship when they:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided services and activities that were based on and adapted to people's needs and aspirations. 	<p><i>"It's that bottom-up thing. It's people looking at their community and saying what's needed, rather than something coming down. That's an important asset that the sector has to keep – listening to grassroots and making decisions that way rather than the other way."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered an environment in which people could feel safe and supported (especially important for vulnerable and marginalised groups). 	<p><i>"There's the whole thing about going back to people and saying you are the ones who know about this. And the voluntary and community sector does that very well. You might feel like a nobody and you might never have spoken but our organisation is saying that you have the knowledge."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted a sense of ownership and belonging. 	<p><i>"Instead of pushing people into structures, you give people opportunities to find their own way."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responded to people's search for authenticity. 	<p><i>"I think it's quite hard to put a price on authenticity and that's probably the single trait that the voluntary and community sector has in abundance compared to other sectors. It has that authentic, personal, local appeal that most other institutions, most larger institutions find very, very hard to match and that's got mileage."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responded to people's need for conviviality. 	<p><i>"They're having fun, they're feeling good... it's not just that they're doing good, they're feeling self-sacrificed, it's not that sort of 'holier than thou' thing. They're nattering and having cups of tea."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brought people together; broke down barriers and built trust. 	<p><i>"A lot of the assignments and projects that we do are about partnership building, getting people into a room together, trying to break down the baggage they bring with them – I won't go to the meeting because blah, blah, blah – but we all want the same end result, so let's work together, otherwise there'll be all those disparate things going on without the critical mass to really change things."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on personalised contacts. 	<p><i>"It's personalisation. If you establish trust with them individually, people believe you."</i></p>

These perceived strengths constitute what is often referred to as the sector's added value. However, participants stressed that it was difficult to generalise and that the ability to develop or encourage active citizenship depended greatly on the organisations' primary purpose and on organisational structure, culture and capacity as well as on the wider context.

What are the challenges associated with active citizenship?

The starting point for our participants was a long-established viewpoint, describing voluntary and community organisations as the locus of active

citizenship (i.e. individuals learning the value of collective action and democratic processes through participation). Nevertheless, they considered that numerous societal and institutional trends (evocative of the tensions described in 'Civil society, the state and the market' in chapter 1, page 6) challenged the sector's capacity to develop active citizenship, by affecting internal processes and the relationship they had with individuals. These limiting trends and factors identified by the participants can be categorised under four different levels:

<p>At the institutional level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much emphasis has been placed on public service delivery: the Government's instrumentalist approach to providers' impacts on the sector's own delivery model based on personal interaction and participation. • Performance management systems are often not adapted to organisational needs and capacity. Not only are they rarely successful in valuing what the sector achieves, but they can also restrain or even damage participation. • The search for efficiency and effectiveness has produced a risk-averse culture, which fails to take on board that participation is a complex and dynamic process that is highly unpredictable and difficult to control. • Short-term funding arrangements fail to recognise that participation is a slow process that develops over time. • Community engagement may be the focus of many government policies, but practices remain poor (e.g. unrealistic timeframes for consultations) and the devolution of power, which would lead to meaningful engagement, is not taking place.
<p>At the sectoral level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding opportunities for the delivery of public services is leading to increased competition and driving organisations into silos. • There are also potential threats in terms of independence, mission drift and trust (i.e. the lack of trust towards national and local politics could trickle down to anything to do with government funding). • The sector is increasingly polarised: between organisations that deliver public services and those that do not, between large professionalised charities that tend to keep supporters at arm's length ('direct debit citizenship') and smaller local groups/projects for which those engaged may have a greater sense of ownership but that struggle to have a voice. • There are significant tensions between professionalisation and engagement:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance management and quality systems fail to take into account the 'messier' side of engagement. • In highly professionalised organisations, volunteers/members/supporters can be seen purely as a resource. Relatively passive forms of engagement are encouraged. People may benefit from training to do a specific task but they are not given the opportunity to deepen and broaden their involvement. • Restricting engagement to what can be managed or measured reduces the sector's role in providing spaces for debate where people can express their views. • Calls for accountability have led to greater transparency but also to the existence of more control mechanisms that can be damaging for participation (e.g. Criminal Records Bureau checks). The danger is for the sector to be perceived as "another tier of officialdom".
<p><i>At the organisational level</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The increased professionalisation of voluntary and community organisations has led to a managerial approach to involvement. Volunteers are treated like unpaid members of staff (i.e. they have a contractual relationship to do a specific task). • Different organisational models influence participation: power distribution and decision-making processes within organisations influence the way different stakeholders relate to one another and to the organisation. • Democratic and participatory processes (or the lack of) within organisations have implications in terms of accountability and legitimacy – with consultations, for example, how does an organisation legitimately speak on behalf of its members? And how does an organisation deal with conflicting views? • Organisational capacity to implement participatory processes (that are time-consuming and resource intensive) is often insufficient. • Poor sustainability of funding interrupts participation effort.
<p><i>At the individual level</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumerism has changed the way people engage: engagement is now more episodic, individual membership organisations (based on duties and responsibilities) requiring longer term commitment are now considered less attractive. • Consumerism combined with individualism has meant that people increasingly want their engagement to be fulfilling and self-expressive. • Modern lifestyles (lack of time, strong work culture, greater mobility etc.) impact significantly on people's availability. • Growing cynicism towards decision-making processes and politics is leaving people unsure as to whether their engagement will make a real difference. • Inappropriate or tokenistic approaches to participation are discouraging people from future engagement (consultation overload, lack of feedback, formality of committee culture etc.).

- A range of barriers is making participation more difficult for a large number of people:
 - Economic barriers – engagement has a cost (e.g. childcare costs), plus the current benefits system prevents unemployed people from engaging.
 - Skills barriers – current practices often privilege those with skills (e.g. good communication skills).
 - Access barriers – the needs of disabled people or of those whose mother-tongue is not English are not always recognised.
 - Cultural barriers – the culture of participation/non-participation varies in different groups and communities (e.g. women in governance).

What is the way forward?

Organisations are having to respond to these challenges and adapt to this moving environment. A number of key principles and effective practices were put forward by participants for the sector to continue providing the conditions in which active citizenship could happen, such as:

- taking people's own agenda as a starting point (including consumerism) and building on that;
- providing a wide range of opportunities and activities to suit different people, different aspirations and skills;
- publicising opportunities for engagement and improving access – to get involved people need to be asked;
- removing as many barriers to participation as possible (including internal barriers within organisations) so that people can choose whether they want to get involved or not, and how;
- making participation as accessible as possible by adapting to people's needs (i.e. 'appropriateness' of participation processes) and constraints (e.g. breaking down projects into more manageable and doable tasks to suit our time-poor society);
- providing an environment where people can express their diverging views (i.e. agree to disagree)
- promoting role models and champions to inspire people;
- creating pathways so that people can move from one type of involvement to another;
- creating more links between groups, organisations and institutions (including schools) to facilitate that process;
- ensuring that practices are not too formal to maintain the spontaneous/fun/social nature of involvement; and
- being more assertive as a sector in defending its take on active citizenship rather than responding to policy agendas.

Conclusion

These principles and recommendations for more effective practice are consistent with the earlier idea that a flexible 'active citizenship spectrum' is more appropriate to an increasingly complex society and more adapted to its diversity. They are also oriented towards action by voluntary and community organisations, a perhaps unsurprising conclusion given that participants felt that responsibility for active citizenship was not just the preserve of government. Yet these actions are likely to require embedding within a wider, supportive policy framework, particularly as some of the barriers identified by voluntary and community organisations are structural, political and economic. The final chapter of this report therefore concludes with recommendations for action to be taken by the sector and its stakeholders, including the Government.

This chapter aims to bring together some of the themes raised in earlier sections, making links between the Government agenda, the perceptions of participants who took part in the research for this study and the wider debates concerning civil society and citizenship discussed in chapter one. It examines the different dimensions of citizenship, suggesting that, to date, Government policy has focused primarily on the political dimension, on civic renewal as a means of strengthening civil society. Our conclusion is that in practice civic renewal (horizontal participation) may be a prior condition of civic renewal (vertical participation), by encouraging social solidarity and facilitating collective action. A focus is therefore the potential contribution of voluntary and community organisations to both.

Whilst civic renewal is a key element of the Government agenda, an emphasis on community participation and collective decision-making sits uncomfortably alongside other elements that give greater priority to involving individual consumers. These tensions are also explored below.

Civil or civic renewal?

In the previous chapter, research participants suggested that 'active citizenship' describes a range of activities from neighbourliness to political activism. In categorising the range of responses given we also suggested that the concept encompasses three distinct but overlapping dimensions: political, social, and individual. It is important that policies designed to promote active citizenship and civic renewal recognise the distinctions between these domains and how they inter-connect.

The political dimension has been the strongest theme within Government policy: the relationship between citizens and the state and between public services and their users. Blunkett, for example, has described this dimension as being 'absolutely critical' to civic renewal³¹. And there is much to be welcomed in this agenda, for example, commitments to:

- strengthen local democratic institutions;
- promote a community development approach, both as a way of working and a set of values; and
- give people a greater say in the design and delivery of services.

These policies have the potential to make a real difference. But in general there has been a far greater emphasis on what we have defined as *civic* rather than civic renewal; on community governance: giving communities a greater say over local services³². The aim is to enable people to engage with government and in political processes, thereby enhancing trust and confidence in democratic institutions. This is an important aim: there is a need to reverse the decline in political participation identified above. However, there is also a need for government to engage more directly with people's concerns. As a recent MORI poll revealed, people may have little interest in politics, but they are interested in national, and particularly local 'issues'³³. This suggests a broader notion of engagement and of politics, a need to engage people in a wider dialogue and debate about the issues that concern them, as well as in the governance of public services.

But this is only one aspect of civic renewal. Many people will choose to participate in civic society for reasons that are not in any way political, motivated more by their faith or values; their sense of community, whether of identity, interest or place; or simply a desire for friendship and conviviality. A key issue is the fact that people join voluntary and community organisations out of choice, exercising their right to free association, not to meet government targets. As William Plowden notes, voluntary action is, by its nature, spontaneous, 'undirected and unprogrammable': it is driven by people's choices and concerns³⁴. And this is what makes it socially valuable and distinguishes it from other sectors. Attempts by government to direct such activity for its own purposes would undermine this spontaneity, reducing the space for independent action and participation in community

³¹ *Active citizens, strong communities – progressing civic renewal*, based on D. Blunkett's Scarman lecture delivered on 11 December 2003

³² Corry D. and Parker I. (2005) *The modernisers tale*, New Local Government Network

³³ Electoral Commission/Hansard Society (2005) *An Audit of Political Engagement 2*

³⁴ Plowden, W. (2001) 'England five years after Deakin' in *Next Steps in Voluntary Action*, CCS/NCVO

life. It could also be counter-productive, weakening people's willingness to engage or volunteer.

A consistent theme throughout this report is that civil participation, even for fun, is socially valuable in its own right. It contributes to wider goals of social inclusion and solidarity, whether or not it leads to political engagement. It is through voluntary associations in civil society that social capital is generated and mobilised, strengthening relationships between citizens, developing a sense of connectedness and fostering norms of trust and reciprocity.

However, voluntary associations also facilitate collective action by creating a 'space for argument and deliberation in which citizens can express their different viewpoints and negotiate a sense of the common interest'³⁵. In this way they have the potential to facilitate a dialogue on local issues, bringing people's concerns to the attention of decision-makers and linking people into formal decision-making processes, giving voice to their concerns and enabling their voices to be heard. They therefore can be a catalyst for political engagement, particularly for marginalised communities who otherwise have the greatest difficulty in making their voices heard³⁶. This suggests that civil renewal in the widest sense may be a prior condition for more broad-ranging civic participation.

A broad agenda for civil renewal is needed, which recognises the autonomy of civil society and highlights the importance of building connections within and between communities as well as with government: strengthening civil society must be an end in itself as well as a means of achieving other ends.

- Government policies should be directed towards creating the conditions that enable associational life and social capital to flourish and not to directing the outcomes of such activities.
- Voluntary and community organisations need to generate greater public understanding of the value of voluntary action and the range of

contributions they make to this broader agenda as organisations of civil society.

- Voluntary and community organisations need to identify ways of demonstrating the value of their wider contribution; these mechanisms must support activities developed in response to the expressed needs of users and communities and take into account the fact that activities and outcomes may be difficult to predict in advance.

Role of the voluntary and community sector

Voluntary and community organisations have a potentially significant contribution to make to civil renewal and civic engagement, reflecting their origins in civil society and their public benefit purposes. As noted above, voluntary and community organisations are an expression of active citizenship. They promote associational life, creating opportunities for people to come together for a variety of purposes or activities, from making model aeroplanes to making poverty history. They often have considerable knowledge of the needs, interests and concerns of the communities they work with, particularly at a local level. And they have experience of developing activities, services and campaigns in response to these needs.

Relatively less attention has been paid by Government to the sector's wider contribution to civil renewal, particularly in terms of practical initiatives. This is reflected in attitudes towards voluntary and community organisations, seen primarily as 'delivery agents'³⁷, promoting choice, rather than voice. Therefore greater emphasis has been given to measures that make it easier for voluntary and community organisations to deliver public services and to do so on a level playing field with other sectors. This was the aim of the Treasury cross-cutting review, for example. These measures have been warmly welcomed by the sector as a means of enhancing support to those voluntary and community organisations that want to play a greater role in delivering

³⁵ See chapter 1 page 5

³⁶ Begum, H. (2003) *Social capital in action*, NCVO/CCS

³⁷ ODPM (2005) *Sustainable communities: people, places and prosperity*, ODPM

services. However, it has also raised concerns that this emphasis has given rise to a more instrumentalist view of the sector; one focusing on its contribution to government objectives for public services rather than its wider role within civil society.

As we saw in the last chapter, there is real concern within the sector that current policies and funding arrangements favour those organisations that provide public services at the expense of those that do not. Evidence that larger organisations are doing relatively well in this environment, while small and medium organisations are struggling, suggests that there is some foundation for these concerns³⁸. At the same time, however, it is also clear that voluntary and community organisations themselves do not want to be divided between a more 'professionalised' service delivery sector and a voluntary community sector. Individual organisations do not see a divide between these different aspects of their role: an organisation's relationship with and knowledge of its users or beneficiaries not only enables it to deliver more responsive services, where this is appropriate, but also enables it to campaign on their behalf to ensure that their wider needs are met. A preliminary analysis of contributions to NCVO's consultation on the future of the sector, for example, shows that there remains a strong view that the sector should encompass a wide range of organisations and activities: what they have in common is greater than their differences.

Greater attention needs to be given to the wider role of voluntary and community organisations, their contribution to civil life and community cohesion.

- Voluntary and community organisations must give clear messages that their purpose is to benefit their users or members; that they may engage in a range of activities to achieve this, including community development, campaigning or service delivery; and that it is this that adds value to their role, not just the fact that they are not-for-profit and non-governmental.

- Umbrella bodies across civil society – ranging from councils for voluntary action to the trade union movement – need to strengthen their collaborative efforts and communications, so as to maximise the recognition and value of civil society amongst stakeholders and address the challenges increasingly brought about by 'blurred boundaries' between the sectors.
- Government needs to recognise and respect the autonomy of voluntary and community organisations and their contribution to civil society and to see them as partners in the process of civil renewal and civic engagement.
- Relationships between government and voluntary and community organisations should be based on the principles of the Compact and its codes so that the independence and autonomy of voluntary and community organisations is respected.
- Funding should be available to support the wider roles of voluntary and community organisations including community development work, campaigning and advocacy, as well as service delivery. It must be sufficiently flexible to facilitate the building of social capital, initially for its own sake, as well as sufficiently secure to enable trusting relationships to become established and sustainable in the long term.
- Future developments should build on existing networks and associations within and between communities, before creating new structures and relationships. Voluntary associations should be developed by and for communities: structures imposed by government will not work.
- The Government's 10 year strategy for local government should recognise the value of the sector's contribution at this level; voluntary and community organisations should engage with the development of this strategy in the coming year.

³⁸ Wilding, K. et al (2004) *The UK voluntary sector almanac*, NCVO

Participation and representation

As advocates and campaigners, voluntary and community organisations can enable community views and concerns to be expressed (although they are not the only means of doing this). They may do this directly, supporting self-advocacy, or indirectly, drawing on their knowledge and experience of the communities they work with. This may include knowledge of user needs and preferences and expertise in engaging users, both in their own work and more widely, for example through community development approaches. To a great extent their legitimacy is derived from their work 'in the field' and their relationship with their users or members. Their contribution to partnerships with government, for example, may be their ability to represent the interests of their users, members or communities and to provide a link to them, rather than, or as well as, representing them in a strictly democratic sense.

But it is also important to remember that individual voluntary and community organisations only represent the partial perspectives of their specific constituencies and some can be more concerned with their own mission than with the wider public interest. That does not make their views illegitimate: rather they play a valuable role in enabling a diversity of views to be expressed and giving voice to a range of different interests and concerns, including dissenting and unpopular views. As such they are a vital component of the democratic process, as the Strategy Unit review of the sector recognised³⁹. But it remains the proper role of government to negotiate and mediate between competing claims; to meet, and where necessary reconcile, the needs of an increasingly diverse citizenry. Voluntary and community organisations can facilitate community participation in ways that enhance, but cannot replace, representative democracy.

There is a need for representative institutions that have the trust and confidence of citizens and the legitimacy to take decisions in the public interest and for independent organisations that can facilitate broader participation in decision-making processes.

- There needs to be clarity about the respective roles of the state and voluntary and community organisations and how they can work together based on mutual understanding and respect.
- Central and local government leaders must develop and articulate consistent messages about local decision-making and the interplay between representative and participatory processes within local democracy.
- Voluntary and community organisations must be clear about their relationship to their users or the communities they work with and the extent to which they have been involved in shaping the organisation's views and contribution to national or local debates.
- Both government and voluntary and community organisations should be committed to high standards of transparency and accountability in their decision-making processes.
- If civic participation is to be meaningful, local citizens must be able to shape the decision-making agenda and not simply respond to that set by government or by political parties. Independent voluntary and community organisations can facilitate this and this role should be recognised and respected by government.

Involving individuals

For individuals, questions of autonomy and agency are paramount. This includes the right to define one's community, whether of interest, identity or place, and to choose to participate in the life of that community or not – the right to be left alone. It also involves choices about how individuals spend their time or money. Individual choices and motivations are therefore intrinsic to the civil renewal debate: why do people choose to participate (and what are they choosing to participate in)? Participation can be costly,

not only financially, but more especially in terms of time, both the time taken to attend meetings or events and the 'opportunity costs' of time not spent doing other things. For some groups there may also be cultural or communication barriers to participation.

Moreover, contemporary society is diverse and complex: one individual is likely to have cross-cutting interests, allegiances and connections. Thus someone who has very little connection with where they live may be a very active member of a church or sports club elsewhere. Too narrow a focus on communities of place will fail to engage those who do not have a strong connection to their locality.

There must be maximum support and opportunities for individuals to participate in the life of their community as well as in decision-making structures.

- Organisations need to identify ways of working that facilitate participation and to review their strategies from time to time to take account of changing social trends and attitudes. For example, making use of the new forms of participation offered by developments in information technology, creating virtual networks as well as face-to-face interaction.
 - Citizens need to have impartial advice and information to enable them to make informed choices about participating in decision-making and in choosing the services that most appropriately meet their needs. Voluntary and community organisations are well placed to take on such a role.
 - Organisations need to work together to create a range of opportunities for individuals to become involved in ways that suit them, providing information and signposting people to the opportunities that may be open to them, both between organisations and sectors.
- The links that voluntary and community organisations can provide between government and individuals should be valued. Engaging with people through their church or social group, for example, may be a means of widening participation at little cost to participants.
 - Voluntary and community organisations need to regularly review and update their accountability and representative structures to ensure that they are listening and responding to the views and concerns of their stakeholders.

Citizens or consumers?

However there are competing and contradictory strands within Government policy: on the one hand there is a desire to strengthen community ties and to foster values such as mutuality, solidarity and altruism; on the other the focus is on individuals as consumers, rather than as members of communities. At times the distinction between the two is blurred: as Alison Crow has argued, many of the processes introduced to facilitate participation in local government, such as citizens' juries, focus groups, or deliberative panels, have involved 'local people as consumers of services rather than citizens discussing wider issues.' As a consequence councils have been able to maintain control of the agenda and there has been limited scope for citizens to shape debate, either individually or collectively.⁴⁰

However, a consumer focus has been most evident in policies directed at increasing personal choice. For example, policies such as open enrolment in schools or the NHS' 'payment by results' enable individual consumers to have a direct influence in the services they or their families receive, at least in theory. At the same time the creation of Foundation Hospitals has created an element of direct democracy within the NHS, but involving individuals as members, not as citizens.

⁴⁰ Crow, A. (2005) *The community activist challenging councillor's views on 'acceptable' levels of participation*. INLOGOV, University of Birmingham

There is a danger that too narrow a focus on the relationship between public services and citizens/consumers could detract not only from the goals of a broader agenda for civil renewal, but also from the narrower focus on civic renewal identified above. This is because decisions about where and how services are provided and resources are allocated will be largely determined by individual consumers pursuing their self-interest. Notions of collective decision-making therefore inevitably become less important. Of further concern is the fact that both education and the NHS, for example, have a public as well as a private function: we all benefit from having a healthy, educated population. A focus on current users (parents or patients) ignores the claims of potential users and a notion of the wider public interest also becomes less important.

Conclusion

This discussion has examined some of the tensions within the civil renewal agenda. It has highlighted the contribution of voluntary and community organisations both in terms of strengthening civil society and developing social capital and facilitating civic engagement. Civil renewal needs to encompass both elements, to promote Held's process of 'double democratisation' discussed in chapter one, which requires a clear understanding of the relationship between representative and participatory democracy and a recognition of the relative autonomy of civil society on the one hand and the legitimacy of democratic institutions on the other.

Whilst the focus on civil renewal and active citizenship is welcome, to date it has tended to be linked to particular initiatives and funding streams which have themselves been subject to changing policies and priorities. Recent developments have the potential to bring the agenda more into the mainstream. *Firm Foundations*, for example, seeks to promote common principles and a common language for civil renewal, to bring together existing initiatives and resources within this framework, recognising that community capacity building is a long-term process. However, it has also

been suggested that the values it seeks to promote, such as social justice and solidarity run counter to policies that emphasise personal choice and involvement in individual services.

The civil renewal agenda is very important to the voluntary and community sector and critical to continuing its longstanding role of promoting voluntary association and action within civil society. As this agenda develops in the coming years it will present new opportunities and challenges for the sector. Voluntary and community organisations will need to broaden their approach and ensure they work with all relevant stakeholders to support and maximise participation in community life and in decision-making structures. NCVO will be working with its members to strengthen this aspect of their role and we will be working with government and others to ensure that the sector's role in civil renewal is recognised and respected.

This section lists some of the sources we have used to write this report. It also provides a list of resources (websites, toolkits, manuals etc.) that voluntary and community organisations may find helpful in taking some of this forward.

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- ODPM (2005) *Sustainable communities: people, places and prosperity*
- ODPM (2005) *Vibrant local leadership*
- Rogers, B. and Robinson, E. (2005) *The benefits of community engagement: review of the evidence*, Active Citizenship Centre/ippr

Websites

Citizenship and active citizenship

Active Citizenship Centre

Centre launched and funded by the Civil Renewal Unit providing research on civil renewal and best practice to inform policy making in this area.

www.active-citizen.org.uk/

Citizen Organising Foundation

National umbrella organisation of community organising movement, including alliances such as Telco Citizens in East London.

www.cof.org.uk/

www.telcocitizens.org.uk/

www.londoncitizens.org.uk/

Civic Practices Network

Collaborative project on civic renewal in the United States. List of resources and toolkits covering a number of sectors (community, environment, health etc.).

www.cpn.org/

Common Purpose

Charity running educational activities for leaders. Includes resources such as the online toolkit 'Skills for citizens', a toolkit to provide citizens with all the information they need to get involved and take a lead in community and public life, including sections on planning a campaign, public speaking, getting funded and finding others to help.

www.commonpurpose.org.uk/home/public/civilsociety/skills.aspx

ican!

BBC site to 'help people take first steps in addressing issues which concern them'. Sections on campaigning, lobbying political representatives etc.

www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ican/

Involve

Research and development programme on the practice of public participation.

www.involving.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=main.viewSection&intSectionID=71

participation.net

Global online network, based at the Institute of Development Studies, participation in development, citizenship, governance and rights.

www.eldis.org/rights/about.htm

We are what we do

Project of the charity Community Links on 'everyday actions that can change the world'.

www.wearewhatwedo.org/

Politics

Electoral commission

Independent body set up by the UK Parliament to promote effectiveness and integrity of UK democratic processes.

www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/

Hansard Society

Independent charity to promote parliamentary democracy. The publication 'Your Parliament' explains in simple terms how the country is run and how you can make your voice heard in Parliament.

www.hansardsociety.org.uk/node/view/198

Power inquiry

Independent body set up to explore how political participation and involvement can be increased and deepened in Britain.

www.powerinquiry.org/

Participation and governance

Logo Link

Global network of practitioners from civil society organisations, research institutions and governments focusing on greater citizen participation in local governance.

www.ids.ac.uk/logolink/index.htm

The Toolkit Partnership

Network of civil society and local government organisations from all over the world, working together to promote participatory local governance.

www.toolkitparticipation.com/

Volunteering

CSV

Volunteering and training organisation. Reports covering various themes including citizenship education and civil renewal.

www.csv.org.uk/

Do it

National database of volunteering opportunities.

www.do-it.org.uk/

Timebank

National campaign promoting volunteering. Useful contacts directory to locate organisations and resources.

www.timebank.org.uk/

Volunteering England

Umbrella organisation promoting volunteering. Resources for those managing or working with volunteers and those wanting to volunteer.

www.volunteering.org.uk/

Citizenship education, participation and young people

Changemakers

Charity working around three key themes: citizenship, enterprise and youth participation. Guides include the toolkit 'Making citizenship real'.

www.changemakers.org.uk

Citizenship Foundation

Charity promoting more effective citizenship. Resources and events on citizenship and citizenship education. Latest free publication is 'Creating cross-community citizenship education forums'.

www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/

Institute for Citizenship

Charity promoting active citizenship and greater participation in democracy. Resources and events on citizenship and citizenship education. Many publications are free, such as 'Learning through elections' and 'Learning through local elections'.

www.citizen.org.uk/

Teachers in Development Education

Support network for development education. Several publications on citizenship.

www.tidec.org/Catalogue%20pages/citizenship.html

Printed publications

Citizenship and active citizenship

Kingham, T. and Coe, J. (2005) *The Good Campaigns Guide*, NCVO

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/asp/search/ncvo/main.aspx?siteID=1&subSID=86&slD=6&documentID=2417

Niace (1999) *Making a difference: a resource pack for those who want to become more active citizens*

www.niace.org.uk/publications/M/MkgDiff.htm

Signalong (2001) *Independent living*. Manual contains a section of signing vocabulary for playing a part in society, including political terms and voting.

www.signalong.org.uk/pubs.htm#selfadvocacy

VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V. (2002) *A new weave of power, people and politics: the action guide for advocacy and citizen participation*

www.wn.org/wnstore/PDFs/WeaveofPowerintro.pdf

Community participation

Burns, D. et al (2004) *Making community participation meaningful: a handbook for development and assessment*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/details.asp?pubID=620

Chanan, G (1999) *Local community involvement: a handbook for good practice*, European Foundation for the Improvement of living and working conditions

www.eurofund.eu.int/publications/files/EF9873EN.pdf

New Economics Foundation (1998) *Participation Works: 21 techniques of community participation for the 21st century*

www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/doc_1910200062310_PWA4.doc

Young People and children

Perpetua, K. et al (2003) *A handbook: building a culture of participation*, Department for Education and Skills

www.dfes.gov.uk/listeningtolearn/downloads/BuildingaCultureofParticipation%5Bhandbook%5D.pdf

Save the Children (2001) *Re:action consultation toolkit*

www.savethechildren.org.uk/temp/scuk/cache/cmsattach/960_reactiontoolkit.pdf

Willow, C. et al (2004) *Young children's citizenship: Ideas into practice*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/details.asp?pubID=625

This booklet can be made available in large print and alternative formats on request.

Please contact NCVO on 020 7713 6161 for more information.



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