PARTICIPATORY ACTION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

A LITERATURE REVIEW

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for the

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1.   INTRODUCTION

This Review

This literature review was commissioned by the Countryside Commission in February 1997 to:

- examine the wider policy context in which participatory action in the countryside operates
- test some of the underlying assumptions about participation
- make recommendations on how the lessons from the literature can be applied to the Commission's programmes.

The review was undertaken essentially as a desk exercise, culminating in a complete first draft in April 1997. It is not a review of practice (generally or within the Commission), nor is it a practical guide to 'doing participation'.

The findings of the research were presented to two seminars of Commission staff, in York and in London, in June 1997. These seminars were invaluable in relating sometimes highly abstract analysis to specific policy priorities for the Commission. The key issues in those seminar discussions have been incorporated, wherever possible, into this final report.

The brief for the review identified a number of key questions to be addressed, including:

- Is the assumption that participation is a 'good thing' borne out by documentation on principles and practices?

- How much is actually known about how far participation is understood, applied and achieved by public officers, professionals, companies, educationalists, communities and individuals?

- Is there a consensus view on all (or any) aspects of the debate on environmental participation?

These questions are specifically addressed in the Conclusions section of this report, together with proposed actions for the Commission to consider, in order to support increasing participation in the Commission's programmes and strategy development.

The Countryside Commission and participatory action

The Countryside Commission already has a long tradition of supporting participatory action in the countryside.

It has developed the concept of Participatory Action in the Countryside (PAC) which it has defined as "the principle and means by which decisions are made, action is taken and management applied by and on behalf of all the stakeholders in a locality or community affected by countryside conservation or recreational change" (Brief). This approach is based on its own experience (from its Groundwork programme, its community action programme, its involvement in Rural Action for the environment, and numerous other initiatives) that programmes which develop wider ownership by stakeholders result in more effective and more sustainable solutions to the issues it wishes to address.

The Commission's overall aim is "The Countryside Commission aims to make sure that the English countryside is protected, and can be used and enjoyed now and in the future" (Countryside Commission 1996). This can be interpreted as a twofold mission, encompassing conservation and participation: conservation through protection of the countryside, and participation through the use and enjoyment of the countryside.

The participatory element of the Commission's overall work can itself be seen as twofold: participation as *involvement in activity*, and participation as *involvement in planning and decision-making*. The Commission's ten year strategy, *A Living Countryside*, attaches great importance to both types of participation. As well as promoting leisure uses of the countryside, it argues for "more open public commitment and partnership in decision-making and project management [with the expectation that] greater local or community ownership of problems and solutions will ensure the sustainability of action taken to protect the countryside itself" (Brief).

Taken together, these statements all incorporate a clear recognition that participation is not an optional extra for the Commission's work: it is an essential element. This is reflected in the numerous participatory mechanisms and approaches being developed in the Commission's current priority policy areas (see Section 5 below, and Appendix 2, for details).

The Commission's commitment to participation appears to have developed as a result of a number of factors:

- **Broader policy developments.** The Commission's own priorities are set within the broad principles of sustainable development. The Commission recognises that "the Government wants sustainable development to be reflected in all policies ... [and has] outlined the action needed in this country to protect the world's wildlife. We expect to play a full part in taking this action forward" (Countryside Commission 1996, 2).

  The Commission's policy and strategy are explicitly set within the guiding framework of the overall UK policy on sustainable development, which is itself set within the principles of Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration agreed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992. The European Union's 5th Environmental Action Programme, *Towards Sustainability*, also influences Commission programmes (Commission of the European Communities 1992).

  All these programmes and policies place great emphasis on public and community participation as key mechanisms for engaging in sustainable development (see Section 5, and Appendix 1, for details).

- **Public service principles.** In an era when public trust in public institutions is at an historically low level, the Commission recognises the need to validate and gain support for its approaches and programmes through public debate and involvement: rebuilding trust through dialogue and collaborative participatory action.

- **Desire to widen constituency**. The Commission understands that the countryside has an importance which includes and goes beyond local interest, and that the interests of all stakeholders need to be taken into account by extending participation to those who may in the past have been excluded from involvement.

- **Limited resources.** The Commission accepts that it cannot achieve its ambitious objectives for the countryside alone: its programmes require participation from others in a range of relationships.

  These relationships vary, depending on the specific programme objectives and the interests of stakeholders and potential partners such as local authorities, other public bodies, local residents, farmers and other landowners and managers, visitors, conservation groups, voluntary organisations, community groups and the public in general.

  However, the Commission also recognises its limits in terms of developing participatory action:

  - It has statutory duties in relation to conservation, which need to be fulfilled

  - It has time constraints
    - It usually operates relatively short term programmes
    - There is a lack of staff time for new developments

- It has size constraints
  - The organisation is too small to work locally throughout the country

- It has priority constraints
  - It must work strategically and nationally, not in an executive role at local level
  - It is not neutral: it has its own agenda (and therefore cannot simply 'facilitate', even if it wanted to)
  - it is not a community development organisation but it wishes to work in a way that supports sustainable community development, and to work in partnership with agencies and groups which are concerned with community development (particularly local authorities and through Local Agenda 21 groupings)

In spite of these constraints, the Commission remains committed to investigating ways of increasing participation in its work. This Review is just one element of the Commission's continuing work in this field.

2.   WHAT IS PARTICIPATION?

Definitions

Participation means different things to different people but it is essentially to do with involving the people affected by decisions in making, implementing and monitoring those decisions. Numerous attempts have been made to define participation, although it is generally recognised that "Participation defies any single attempt at definition or interpretation" (Oakley 1991, 6).

However, it is crucial that some common understanding of participation is achieved in order to progress the debate. Some contributions to the debate are given below:

- "Participation is concerned with human development and increases people's sense of control over issues which affect their lives, helps them to learn how to plan and implement and, on a broader front, prepares them for participation at regional or even national level. In essence, participation is a 'good thing' because it breaks people's isolation and lays the groundwork for them to have not only a more substantial influence on development, but also a greater independence and control over their lives" (Oakley 1991, 17).

- Participation can also be understood in terms of its difference from conventional project management: "Participation is radically different from conventional project practice ... experimentation is the order of the day; structured but sensitive, manageable and yet not controlled" (Oakley 1991, 270).

However, even though there seems to be a consensus on paper about what participation is, there are "clearly fundamentally opposed views as to what participation means in practice" (ibid 269). Oakley argues that there is a fundamental difference between participatory development (top-down), and participation in development (bottom up).

Some attempts at definition of some of the other key terms in participatory practice are given below:

- **Capacity building**: "Training and other methods to help people develop the confidence and skills necessary for them to achieve their purpose" (Wilcox 1994, 31). Chambers prefers the term 'capability', by which he means "the quality of being capable; the ability to do something" (Chambers 1997, xiv) .

- **Community action**: Describes those activities which people undertake themselves to improve the quality of their own lives within their communities. In environmental terms it can range from direct action to save or improve land or buildings, to lobbying for changes in policy or legislation, with activities as diverse as setting up housing co-operatives, allotment societies, village appraisals, revitalising local customs, traffic campaigns, city farms and large scale multi-objective organisations like development trusts. The key aspects of community action are that it is done by people for themselves, it is done locally and it involves control by local people.

- **Community development**: The method or approach used by community workers, agencies and others to encourage and support community action. Three useful definitions of community development are given below:

  - "Community development is concerned with change and growth - with giving people more power over the changes that are taking place around them, the policies that affect them and the services they use. It seeks to enable individuals and communities to grow and change according to their own needs and priorities rather than those dictated by circumstances beyond their boundaries. It works through bringing people together to share skills, knowledge and experience in the belief that it is through working together that they will reach their full potential" (Taylor 1992).

- "Community development is a process which aims to make real and to extend participative democracy. Through its activities, the rights of citizenship are claimed for traditionally unheard and powerless people. Social needs and individuals problems are turned into public issues to be tackled through collective activity, so that the people involved build up their personal skills and confidence and take a greater control of their communal life" (Flecknoe & McLellan 1994, 5).

- "Community development is seen as assisting people to: 'tackle for themselves the problems which they face and identify to be important'. The community then plays the leading role in defining both the problems to be addressed and the manner of responding to them" (Voluntary Activity Unit 1996).

- **Community education**: "Community education is a process by which education workers engage with local people in a learning programme ... a process whereby small groups of people are gathered together around a clear set of objectives to engage in a learning process which has tangible outcomes for them as clients" (Fagan 1993, 9)

- **Community involvement**: This takes place when a process or project is defined and controlled outside the community: for example, involvement in a woodland conservation project proposed and managed by an outside organisation. Community involvement can work at a number of levels from simply giving information about the project to local people, to substantial involvement in the design and aftercare of the scheme, but always stops short of ultimate responsibility or control.

- **Community work**:   The profession (whether paid or not) of encouraging and supporting (or enabling) community action. There are numerous links between community action, community work and community development: experienced community activists may become paid community workers engaged in a community development project.

- **Consultation**: Have deliberations (with person); seek information or advice from; take into consideration (Concise Oxford English Dictionary)

- **Empower**: Authorise, license (person to do); give power to, make able (person to do) (Concise Oxford English Dictionary)

- **Participation**: Have share, take part; have something of (Concise Oxford English Dictionary)

- **Voluntary action**: Essentially undertaken for the benefit of others (eg Meals on Wheels) and well-established, with some very large and influential voluntary organisations as well as many smaller bodies. Some argue that community action is part of voluntary action, and some voluntary organisations have for many years adopted a community development approach to their work.

Beyond defining terms, the literature identifies two main issues in debates about participation:

- Whether participation is, or should be, an end or a means
- The question of power.

Ends or means

There is a key distinction between participation as a method for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of projects by using the resources of local people, and participation as a part (at least) of the *purpose* of the project (Oakley 1991). This has been described as a distinction between *instrumental* and *transformative* (or developmental) participation (Nelson and Wright 1995).

The literature suggests that unless participation is explicitly part of the overall purpose of the project - an end as well as a means - the initiative is unlikely to be sustainable.

Power

Arnstein's ladder of participation recognised in 1969 that power is a key issue in participation. The ladder remains a useful analysis of power relations in participation (Arnstein 1969; Hart 1994). It consists of eight levels:

Level 1 Level 2	Manipulation Education	These levels assume a passive community, given information which may be partial or inaccurate
Level 3	Information	People are told what is going to happen, is happening or has happened
Level 4	Consultation	People are given a voice, but no power to ensure their views are heeded
Level 5	Involvement	People's views have some influence, but traditional power holders still make the decisions
Level 6	Partnership	People can begin to negotiate with traditional power holders, including agreeing roles, responsibilities and levels of control
Level 7	Delegated power	Some power is delegated
Level 8	Citizen control	Full delegation of all decision-making and action

Participation can be defined as encompassing everything from Level 4 (consultation), depending on how it is done, to Level 8 (citizen control).

Oakley's more recent analysis suggests three broad levels of power and control related to participation (Oakley 1991, 6):

- **Participation as contribution**. At this level, control and direction are not passed to local people; they are just asked to contribute resources.

- **Participation as organisation**. The creation and/or the development of organisations and institutions is an important element in participation. Formal organisations (such as trusts) may result from a participatory process, as well as informal groupings. There is a distinction between organisations externally conceived and introduced, and organisations which emerge and take structure as a result of the process of participation. However, in both cases, the development of a new (or changed) organisation will involve some delegation of power and control.

- **Participation as empowerment**. At this level, the relationship between power and participation is made explicit: participation is developmental and power and control are devolved. There is debate about the notion of empowerment. Some see empowerment as the development of skills and abilities to enable people to manage better, or negotiate better for services. Others see it as enabling people to decide upon and take the actions they believe are essential to their development.

Oakley stresses that the first of these types of participation (contribution) is fundamentally different from the other two: both organisation and empowerment involve a transfer of control (Oakley 1991).

There is much debate in the literature about power: whether it is 'power to' or 'power over'; the differences between power which is coercive and power which works through covertly creating contexts within which all overt power is exercised; whether power should be envisaged as finite, like a cake (so the more you have, the less I have); whether power should be envisaged as a flow, so we all have it, and just manipulate and collect it differently; how power is exercised through aesthetic choices which confer status (Bourdieu 1986). It can also be argued that power grows by being shared: the more people who share power, the more power there is.

Overall, the literature suggests that, to be effective, participatory initiatives must include a sharing of power: "Participation implies a more active form of public involvement, where decisions are taken jointly between the community and decision-makers. It requires decision-makers to be willing to share their power and responsibility" (Bell 1995).

Almost all the benefits of participation only accrue when people involved feel they have some say in the decision: some level of ownership of solutions is essential to sustainability. Without this sense of agency (being able to influence things and make changes), people soon lose interest and trust in the process.

3.   WHO PARTICIPATES?

Community

There is still much stress on 'community' as the key focus for participation, but there is also more recognition that this is not the only way of defining who participates. The concept of community is confusing because it relates to place as well as people, and can also be applied to all sorts of collectivities not related to place at all (eg Muslim communities, the gay community).

The literature on community in relation to environmental management suggests that definitions of community only begin to have relevance when the links between community and place are recognised:

- "Concern for familiar topography, for the places one knows, is not about the loss of a commodity, but about the loss of *identity*. People belong in the world: it gives them a home. The attachment to place - not just natural places, but urban places too - is one of the most fundamental of human needs ... The important thing about places, of course, is that they are shared. Each person's home area is also other people's. The sense of place is therefore tied to the idea of 'community'" (Jacobs 1995, 20).

- "'Community' is that web of personal relationships, group networks, traditions and patterns of behaviour that develops against the backdrop of the physical neighbourhood and its socio-economic situation. Community development aims to enrich that web and make its threads stronger, to develop self confidence and skills, so that the community (the people) can begin to make significant improvements to their neighbourhood (the place and its material environment)" (Flecknoe & McLellan 1994, 8).

Community is usually understood as being to do with "locality", with "actual social groups", with "a particular quality of relationship" which is "felt to be more immediate than society", and when used in conjunction with other activities, such as 'community politics', is "distinct not only from national politics but from formal local politics and normally involves various kinds of direct action and direct local organisations, 'working directly with people', as which it is distinct from 'service to the community'" (Williams 1988).

However, the idea of community is easily over-romanticised and, as Taylor points out, "Communities ... can be scene of conflict and exclusion as well as togetherness, and many of the stresses of modern life work against a community 'spirit'" (Taylor 1992, 2). Community does not mean consensus. Living in the same place does not guarantee a common view about local issues.

Geographically defined communities are convenient for agencies who want to be able to draw lines on a map and develop participation within those boundaries. Where those geographical boundaries exist (such as district council or parish council boundaries) they may be appropriate in certain circumstances. However, these sorts of externally defined boundaries should not be regarded as immutable.

Community is more than just a place on a map: "Despite easy cynicism, 'community' is more than an empty rhetoric-word. And it represents more than nostalgia too for a bygone age of monolithic classes and localities. Community is the recognition that people are not just individuals, that there is such a thing as society to which we belong, which makes us who we are, and without which there can be no true human flourishing" (Jacobs 1995, 20-21). Community can therefore be seen almost as an aspiration as much as a place, and as a collection of certain sorts of relationships which are related to place but not defined by the physical place.

In many participatory initiatives, the debate has gone beyond the 'what is community' issue, concluding that defining 'community' is less important than identifying who are the people affected by the decisions under debate: stakeholders is often the preferred term, signifying a practical personal interest.

Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that the community (in terms of the people who live and work in a particular location) will still be the most important group to be involved in any initiative focused on a specific place. They are the people who will have to live with the consequences of whatever happens; others may care about it but their lives are less likely to be affected by the ultimate decision.

Other interests

Alongside local people, other groups have been identified in the literature as having a stake in decisions about countryside or environmental management including visitors and users, sociations, viewers, the common or public interest, professionals, disadvantaged groups and volunteers.

All these groups go beyond the obvious stakeholders in any local area, but all care and all would be affected in different ways by changes to specific places. Recognition of this wider constituency will require the development of a wider range of participatory mechanisms than has been the norm in the past. The possible interests of each of these groups is outlined below.

Visitors and users

People may not live in an area of countryside, but may have a strong commitment to it and concern about it because they regularly use it for a range of purposes. These purposes may be economically based or for leisure: dog walkers who are known to have fought to preserve and then managed woodlands (Warburton 1995); or people who have traditionally collected produce from areas (from coal on beaches to fruit from hedgerows).

'Sociations'

Other groups also visit and use the countryside for leisure purposes, and will often vehemently defend their access and their activities.

'Sociations' is a term which refers to the networks created by individuals involved in specific areas of interest or activity, such as cyclists, rock climbers, walkers etc (Clark et al 1994). These groups develop a mutuality and collective action around what could be called 'hobbies', although that term goes nowhere near expressing the commitment and identification people feel within these groups (Hoggett and Bishop 1986). These groupings may be maintained through regular publications, organisational structures and occasional events.

It is suggested that people are using these links to create new forms of social identity through sharing their commitment to these activities, and that this lies behind the strong feelings aroused by threats to their access to the places they use for their activities - especially the countryside (Clark et al 1994): "the individual is creating his or her sense of self through a series of consciously adopted commitments - manifested in consumption patterns ... and in chosen affiliations with other individuals reflecting particular aspects of his or her patterns of moral or practical concern" (Clark et al 1994, 31), including, particularly, leisure activities.

Clark et al argue that "people are now moving in their everyday behaviours towards new forms of social identity, linking themselves in fresh ways with other people sharing, and perhaps giving concrete form to, their commitments" (Clark et al 1994, 32). These links can result in people's attachment to their activities (such as climbing or nature conservation) being deeper and more complex than expected, which may explain why conflicts become so heated: a threat to the activity becomes a threat to personal identity.

Viewers

Landlife (Liverpool) has argued that by planting fields of sunflowers which can be seen from the tower blocks in inner city Liverpool, an improvement has been made to the lives of the people living there. Landlife's research (unpublished) with the residents of the block has shown the truth of this, even when only a few of the residents (although there are some) have any practical participation in planting, looking after and harvesting the crop: the seeds from the sunflowers are collected and sold to raise funds for the overall scheme. It connects people with the land, and it makes their lives more beautiful.

Even less involved, but still caring, are people who pass through a particular area of countryside regularly, see it and care about it. On the Brighton to London train line there is a small area of beautiful countryside visible when the train passes over a viaduct; it is one of the rare bits of 'unspoilt', but not uninhabited, countryside between London and Brighton. Many commuters will put down their papers and look out the window when passing this spot, and have been heard to express the worry that all these people looking at it so often will use it up. It is consumption of the countryside, but consumption which leaves the object unscathed.

Common or public interest

There are also people who want the countryside just to be there, and to be beautiful, even if they never see it or use it. Green economists call it 'existence value' because people do not want to use it, they just want it to exist: "Ordinary people are concerned about whales and dolphins, tropical rainforests and Scottish peat bogs, polluted molluscs and threatened snail darters, despite not having any use for these things, never having seen them and not even particularly wanting to. Many parts of the environment, they say, have *existence value*: people want them to exist, irrespective of any conceivable 'use' they might get from them." (Jacobs 1995, 19).

Further, there is a view that there are certain aspects of common property which people just want to exist (and want to protect) because they are good for society as a whole: "Environmental goods are public goods; it is collective and not individual choice which they require ... There is also quality of life: those contributions to wellbeing which come from public goods. Some of these public goods such as education, policing and parks - must be publicly provided and collectively paid for. Others are brought into being by regulation and the democratic control of externalities - pleasant urban centres, clean air and beautiful countryside" (Jacobs 1995, 18).

Professionals

A wide range of professionals influence the state of the countryside: planners, architects, agricultural economists, foresters, farmers, conservationists. The literature suggests that, if programmes are to become more participatory, a new relationship will be required between professionals and lay people (Chambers 1997; Freire 1996; Oakley 1991); a relationship that is different from the conventional approach of professionally generated top-down solutions.

This is not a simple matter, as many professionals would argue that at least part of their role is to represent and protect the wider public interest against narrow sectoral concerns: professionalism in this sense is linked to a public service ethic. Essential and admirable as this ethic is, it can become hardened into an attitude that professional judgements alone must always define the best solution in any circumstance.

A more participatory approach requires that the professionals involved in planning or managing countryside programmes develop a new world view and paradigm. The old paradigm involved professional solutions generated in isolation and imposed on a context; the new paradigm involves a willingness to listen to others and to be flexible about solutions. This requires changes which are personal, professional and institutional (IIED 1994).

However, the balance between participation and professional responsibility for quality is not very different from having to balance (as professionals often do) potentially conflicting demands such as between tight budgets and political pressures, their own aesthetic judgement and that of committees and many other demands on their professional tact and discretion.

Participation can be seen as a meeting of different kinds of experts. Action Planning Weekends and urban design action teams have used intensive sessions to work through specific problems and solutions to greater creative effect, recognising that all those involved are experts in their own fields. One developer involved in one of these events said that "meetings can take place amongst experts in their own fields discussing issues to the bitter conclusion. This is incredibly stimulating since thought processes build on themselves exponentially and realistic solutions to seemingly impossible problems become apparent" (Michael Baynes, quoted in Wates 1996, 16).

Professionals involved in participatory initiatives need to have certain attitudes and skills to make schemes work. These skills are likely to include flexibility, trusting and respecting the other people in the process, listening to and hearing what other people say, being prepared to change plans and ideas, being clear about the limits (if any) to the participation, and being honest and open (Bishop 1994; Chambers 1997).

There are different approaches to a new professional role which supports participation:

- Facilitation. In this approach, the professional remains outside the process, and acts as a neutral technician to manage the process (Bishop 1994; Campbell 1994).

- Capacity-building. This approach aims to enable the lay person to acquire new skills and confidence (Wilcox 1994; Chambers 1997). It can also involve a more structured educational or training input (Fagan 1993), and training for the professional involved (IIED 1994).

- Dialogue. Dialogue allows the professional and the lay person to learn from each other, respect each others skills and to be equally involved in the process (Dudley 1993; Freire 1996).

- Support. The professional may also act by responding to requests for specific help, in which case they may not be proactive in relation to content or process.

- Accountability. In a participatory approach, professionals become not only accountable to their peers, their employing organisation and/or paying clients, but also to those people who are participating. This may require a far greater level of dialogue about professional judgements to a wider range of people.

The literature suggests that the focus is shifting towards dialogue, because it implies an equality between the participants and requires them to be equally responsible for the process. Taking dialogue as the key approach extends capacity building to apply to everyone in the process, not just lay people. It places the professional at the centre of the process: they are not simply the servants of the participatory process but key players. Their stake in the final decision is recognised, and they are no longer outside the process.

The importance of joint working in this way is widely recognised: "The environment is too important to be left to environmental professionals; it is also too important to be conserved, managed, developed and sustained without them. Agenda 21 agreed at Rio makes clear that progress will *only* come when *all* agencies work together" (Bishop 1994, 3; original emphasis).

Disadvantaged groups

There is sometimes a sense that participatory initiatives are aimed *entirely* at disadvantaged groups, whether defined as the poor, older people, people from ethnic minority communities, young people, women, people with physical disabilities.

People with disadvantages may find it especially difficult to participate because they have more immediate concerns, such as economic survival. Special efforts will therefore *always* be needed to reach and include people with disadvantages, and to ensure that no-one with an interest or concern is excluded from the process.

There are, however, dangers in limiting participation to disadvantaged groups. It may be that the participation process itself becomes marginalised along with the people: democracy and influence for the privileged, participation for the less privileged. This risks demeaning both the people and the process (Freire 1996, 27). It may also perpetuate the inequity between certain groups and strengthen hostility (or apathy) towards the participatory process.

Volunteers

The involvement of volunteers in any participatory process is often taken to mean a free work force. However, recruiting and managing volunteers requires resources and expertise and can place great demands on the recruiting organisation for support, resulting in the consumption of an enormous amount of (paid) staff time. In practice, there is no such thing as a free work force.

The literature on volunteers suggests that volunteers must be involved voluntarily (and not coerced by threats to benefits or similar circumstances), and that the needs of the volunteers must be considered as a priority (National Centre for Volunteering 1989; Allinson 1978).

Where the literature records successful volunteer input, such as on environmental monitoring, the volunteers would perhaps be better described as local activists who are prepared to organise and contribute to a larger process (Alexandra 1996; Wildlife Society Bulletin 1995; Campbell 1994). The important lessons from these experiments seem to be that the feedback to the volunteers on the relevance and impact of their information is crucial, and that volunteers should have a role in designing the process in which they will be playing a part.

Where should participation happen?

Allied to the question of who is involved in any participatory process is the issue of at which geographical level participation should take place. There are two elements to this question, relating to notions of community and of the 'local'.

Community

As already noted, there is much debate in the literature over the nature of community, and the notion that participation is fundamentally linked to 'community'. However, while community may be both a set of people and/or a location, it is clear from the literature that community boundaries and identities are not fixed and are not understood in the same way by all those involved.

In terms of people to be involved in participation, stakeholders may be a better concept (as stated above). In terms of *location* for participation, the literature suggests that it should perhaps depend on the particular case: some initiatives may be of primarily local concern, some may have national importance and therefore require wider participation involving different groups.

Local

There has been much debate about the lack of commitment to the local in these days of a mobile workforce, extended families and easier travel. However, the mobility of people, at least in the UK, may have been overplayed: "over half of British adults live within five miles of where they were born" (Gray 1997).

Moreover, recent research by MORI suggests that "Overall, there is a clear focus of attachment on the most local area ... where strong attachment is found to a significant extent, it only exists at the most local level of the village or neighbourhood" (Gosschalk and Halter 1996, 14). In this country at least, local connections and local attachments do clearly still exist and remain important to people.

The traditional global concerns of the environmental movement remain, but there is also recognition that "Most people have an environmental horizon which is very local - the end of the street or the top of the next hill. Sustainability has first to make sense at that neighbourhood level, if it is every to reach global proportions" (Baines 1995, 14). The phrase 'Think global, Act local' was first widely used in the 1980 World Conservation Strategy, and reflects these conceptual links.

Locality is where environmental issues matter most to most people: "locality is crucial: it is local landscape, traffic and litter that make 'the environment' real for most people as a fundamental political issue" (Christie 1996, 30). The local remains important to people, and any exercise in participation would need to take local issues and concerns into account.

Beyond the local

There will be some initiatives which are of importance beyond the local area, and participation will have to involve people beyond the local context. Stakeholders will always include those who live and work in a place but also all the other interests who have a stake in public goods (see above).

4. PARTICIPATION IN OTHER FIELDS

Although the key focus of this review is on environmental management, it is recognised that other fields, particularly social welfare, housing and international development, have substantial experience in developing programmes of participatory action, on which the Commission and others can draw. This section summarises the areas of expertise in these fields.

Social welfare

Social welfare services, provided by local authorities and other public bodies, and by voluntary organisations, have been developing participatory mechanisms for many years, especially in relation to community care.

Participation in this field has recently grown enormously (Upton 1994). The participation of volunteers in providing services (from meals on wheels to more technical services) has been a feature of social welfare for many years. More recently, there has been much more focus on user involvement in setting service and resource priorities, on identifying new service needs and on developing self help (Bemrose 1996; Lindow and Morris 1995; Tozer 1995; Wann 1995; Wilson 1994).

There has also been an increasing focus on the difficulties, and the importance, of maintaining an inclusive approach and reaching all parts of society, especially those who are often excluded, such as people from ethnic minorities, people with learning difficulties, disabled people, elderly and housebound people, people in isolated rural areas (Burton & Harrison 1996; Hallett 1987; Thornton & Tozer 1994; Thompson 1991).

The experience of participation in the social welfare field has also established lessons from longstanding debates on the ethics of participation (why involve users in the services provided for them), and the need to balance participation and statutory responsibilities (including legal responsibilities).

Housing

Public housing programmes, by local authorities, housing associations and other voluntary organisations, have involved tenants and residents at various levels for many years. Some of the priority areas which have emerged are outlined below.

- There has been participation in the design of new housing, including appropriate designs for specific circumstances, locations and in response to special needs (CDG 1992; Towers; Turner 1976), as well as self-guild groups (Ospina 1987; Turner 1976). This participation in the design and planning of housing has sometimes been referred to as the community architecture movement (Knevitt 1986; Wates and Knevitt 1987).

- Tenants and residents have been involved in housing and estate management (AMA/LGMB 1994; Blewitt and Garrett 1995; DOE 1987 and 1977; Ospina 1987; Rao 1984; Taylor 1995), especially through tenants associations and federations (Davies et al 1991; TPAS 1988) and through housing management companies and housing co-operatives (Ospina 1987).

- There has been extensive participation in the regeneration of housing estates (Cole and Smith 1996; Fordham 1995; Hastings et at 1996; Huntley 1980; Stewart and Taylor 1995; Taylor 1995). There is also increasing experience of participation in housing issues leading on to involvement in broader issues such as economic development, environmental improvement and cultural activities.

Participation in housing design, building, management and regeneration has led to the development of sophisticated support mechanisms and resources, such as training courses and materials (Birchall 1994), and the establishment of a national training centre for tenants. Second tier agencies such as secondary co-ops and tenants federations also provide support, training and other resources for participation (Ospina 1987).

International Development

It is generally accepted that the major institutional support for participation in development began in 1953 when "the UN began using community development as a general description for self-help activities taking place in developing countries" (O'Gorman 1995, 207). Community development, which has the twin aims of tackling poverty and social inequality, and increasing participation, has been closely linked with international development ever since.

Participation, through community development, became a vital element in UN programmes for the next decade, having been "incorporated in the proposals for the United Nations Development Decade, where community development was linked to the need for the mobilisation of human resources" (O'Gorman 1995, 207). Participation continues to play a central part in most recent United Nations development plans, as outlined in their *Human Development Report 1993* and subsequent editions.

In international development, participatory action, based on community development models developed over past decades, has become central to many international aid initiatives. Programmes established over many years to fund people's collective initiatives to improve their economic and social status have "progressively grown into a new worldwide culture of development action termed 'popular participation in development' or simply 'participatory development'" (Rahman 1995, 25). Indeed, "International development co-operation agencies, including most UN agencies, are affirming popular participation as a necessary element of a strategy for poverty alleviation" (ibid, 26), especially as part of sustainable development.

Much of the most original, radical and profound thinking on participation comes from this international development experience. Concepts of empowerment, indigenous knowledge as an essential complement to Western professional knowledge, participatory evaluation techniques, participatory action research and community development have been current in this field since the 1950s and 1960s, and their use and acceptance have increased substantially over recent years. The material in this field covers issues such as:

- The changing role of professionals, in recognition of the increased contribution expected from the rural poor (Chambers 1983 and 1997; Warren et al 1995 on the value of indigenous knowledge).

- Participatory approaches and techniques developed and assessed, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) (Chambers 1983 and 1997; Fals-Borda 1991 on participatory action research; IIED 1994 on RRA; Messerschmidt 1995 on rapid appraisal for forestry).

- Training and support for participatory approaches including Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) (Goethert and Hamdi 1988 on training to do microplans; IIED on PLA; Pretty et al 1995 on PLA; Srinivasan on training in participatory techniques).

- Evaluation for participatory projects and programmes (Feuerstein 1987; Marsden et al 1996; Marsden and Oakley 1990; Rubin 1995).

- Principles of participation (Cernea 1992; Chambers 1983 and 1997; Drijver 1990; Dudley 1993; Hamdi 1995; Oakley 1991; Paul 1987; Rahman 1993; Scoones and Thompson 1994; United Nations 1981; World Bank 1994).

An approach developed by voluntary international development agencies brings together a number of these strands, based on a recognition that the *process* of change is as important as the *products* of change. The Primary Environmental Care (PEC) approach, which has been promoted by Oxfam, Action Aid, IIED and IUCN (Oxfam 1992), reflects this link between process and product through its three linked elements:

- Empowering communities
- Meeting basic needs (such as food, water, shelter)
- Caring for the environment.

This conceptual model is designed to provide a framework for development in future, and to guide specific programmes. It is recognised by these agencies that such an approach could work equally well in the UK.

In addition, international organisations including the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Labour Office (ILO), World Health Organisation (WHO) and Organisation for European Co-operation and Development (OECD) have all invested in promoting participatory development through source books, policy statements, resolutions and some funding programmes. The World Bank established a Learning Group on Participatory Development in 1990 (Nelson and Wright 1996, 5), and the World Bank's latest *Source Book on Participation* is now available in full (and free) on the World Wide Web.

Summary of participatory action in other fields

In essence, experience in other fields shows that:

- Participation has long been accepted as a central principle in many public service sectors and programmes, in the UK and internationally: it has a long pedigree and increasing status.

- There is a great deal of experimentation, experience and learning about participation in principle and practice from other fields that can be drawn upon to increase the quality and quantity of participation in environmental management in the UK.

5.   PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

This review is concerned primarily with participation in environmental planning and management, and there is a substantial literature on policy, principles and practice, specifically in this field. Some of the key issues from the literature on participation in planning, regeneration and sustainable development, as well as approaches promoted by national NGOs and the Countryside Commission itself, are outlined below.

Planning

Participation in planning is generally recognised to have been formally incorporated into mainstream planning practice following the report of the Skeffington Committee on Public Participation in Planning (Skeffington 1969): *People and Planning.* Skeffington advocated a number of mechanisms for increasing public involvement in the planning process, including community development techniques to increase participation in areas where there was little knowledge and experience of planning processes.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, and to date, there has been increasing participatory activity co-ordinated by planning departments in local authorities, both around the formal development of local, structure and unitary plans (Bishop 1994; RTPI 1996), and also, increasingly, associated with environmental audits, environmental policies and environmental strategies (LGMB 1993; NEST 1993). More recently, participatory action in planning has been focused around Local Agenda 21 plans (Church 1995 and see below under sustainable development).

The literature offers guidance associated with planning activities including for community action programmes and funding schemes (such as Manchester City Council 1992) and environmental networks and forums (Krishnarayan 1993; LGMB 1993). It also covers an increasingly wide range of participatory techniques associated with planning (AMA/LGMB 1990 and 1993; Bishop 1983; Bishop 1994; LGMB 1993 and 1996; RTPI 1996; Stewart, J. 1996).

Regeneration

National government regeneration programmes, usually operating through local authorities, have increasingly promoted public and community participation in local and regional strategies and initiatives. Urban regeneration policies, from the Urban Programme, through City Challenge to the Single Regeneration Budget, have increasingly demanded community participation, and partnership, as criteria for funding. Similar criteria operate on rural regeneration programmes such as Rural Challenge.

There is a rich literature on the benefits and problems of this approach, including the gap between the rhetoric of community participation in regeneration initiatives and the practice on the ground (Aston Business School 1991; Atkinson 1995; Carley 1995; Community Development Foundation 1995; Development Trusts Association; Forbes and Paddison 1985; Landry et al 1996; MacFarlane 1993; McConnell 1993; McGregor 1994; PIEDA 1995; Rural Development Commission 1997; Skelcher et al 1996; Smith 1983; Thake 1995; Warburton and Wilcox 1988; Women's Design Service).

Participatory partnerships have been particularly strong in this area: some partnerships to regenerate the built environment and neighbourhoods have been established for over 20 years (Bemrose 1996; Bishop 1983; Civic Trust 1994; Clark 1994; DOE 1994; LGMB 1993; Main et al 1989; Payne 1984; PLCRC 1996; Vittery 1989; Wilson 1997).

Sustainable development

Global

Sustainable development has become an extremely influential concept in all environmental programmes, particularly following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio in 1992. Participation has been central to sustainable development before that time (having a long history in international development, as outlined above), and continuing since.

The original definition of sustainable development, from the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, remains generally accepted and has been used as the basis for national and international policies on sustainable development. Brundtland defined sustainable development as follows:

> "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable - to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, 8).

The links between meeting human needs and environmental management have a long history. The 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment "brought the industrialised and developing nations together to delineate the 'rights' of the human family to a healthy and productive environment" (WCED 1987, xi). This was followed by the Brandt Commission on International Development Issues (on which Brundtland herself served), which published its report *North-South: A Programme for Survival* in 1980.

Also in 1980, IUCN launched the World Conservation Strategy (WCS) in the UK and 33 other countries. WCS was concerned with "matching the superficially conflicting goals of development and conservation: development as a means of meeting human needs and improving the quality of life and conservation and the use of resources, especially living ones, in a sustainable way, safeguarding all their benefits for future generations" (Davidson and MacEwen 1982, 1). The importance of participation and community action was recognised: "Increasing pressure by individuals and community groups to participate in decisions which affect their locality has been a notable movement of the past decade ... there is increasing enthusiasm for local action which offers great scope for building a resource saving society" (ibid, 70).

The Brundtland Commission was set up in 1983. Brundtland argued that "In its broadest sense, the strategy for sustainable development aims to promote harmony among human beings and between humanity and nature" and the very first requirement in the pursuit of sustainable development is "a political system that secures effective citizen participation in decision making" (WCED 1987, 65).

Brundtland recognised that "The law alone cannot enforce the common interest. It principally needs community knowledge and support, which entails greater public participation in the decisions which affect the environment. This is best secured by decentralising the management of resources upon which local communities depend, and giving these communities an effective say over the use of the resources. It will also require promoting citizens' initiatives, empowering people's organisations, and strengthening local democracy" (ibid 63).

The issues raised by the Brundtland report were discussed at the UN General Assembly in 1989, leading to resolution 44/228 which called for a UN Conference on Environment and Development (HMSO 1994 (b), 27). At UNCED, in Rio in 1992, sustainable development was agreed in principle by national governments from around the world, and participation became formally established as a central element in the approach.

The importance of participation in sustainable development is reflected in Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration (see Appendix 1 for details). The European Union's 5th Environmental Action Programme, *Towards Sustainability*, took a similar view of the importance of participation. Within the UK, *Sustainable Development. The UK Strategy* (published in 1994 as the UK Government's response to Agenda 21), and in *Biodiversity. The Action Plan* (also published by the Government in 1994), both take up the theme. The importance of participation in these documents is outlined below.

Europe

The European Commission's 5th Environmental Action Programme, called *Towards Sustainability*, recognised the importance of participation: "The strategy for achieving sustainable development can be really successful only if the general public can be persuaded that there is no alternative to the action proposed. Therefore the public *must be informed* about the issue and means for protecting the environment and, crucially, *involved* in the process" (CEC 1992, 7, original emphasis).

United Kingdom

The UK Government's strategy for sustainable development, developed in response to Agenda 21, echoes the commitment to participation (HMSO 1994(a)), and the UK Biodiversity Action Plan spells out that "the conservation of biodiversity requires the care and attention of individuals and communities, as well as Government processes" (HMSO 1994(b), 94).

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan argues that "Biodiversity is ultimately lost or conserved at the local level. Government policies create the incentives that facilitate or constrain local action ... In addition to the role of public bodies and landowners the attitudes and actions of local communities have an important part to play in supporting these strategies" [to conserve and enhance biodiversity] (HMSO 1994(b), 111). To this end, the Plan recognises that "To exercise appropriate environmental care local people need motivation, education and training ... In this context it [capacity building] can be defined as the process through which people and organisations develop the skills necessary to manage their environment and development in a sustainable manner". It stresses that "the starting point for promoting biodiversity is the resident community, calling on others for assistance according to the circumstances" (HMSO 1994(b), 111).

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan suggests that community groups are well placed to undertake:
*   inventories and databases of biodiversity
*   observing and monitoring changes
*   improvements such as developing community forests and restoring local vegetation
*   making reports and giving evidence to local planning and conservation bodies
*   joining networks linking centres, groups and bodies

Additional opportunities for local participation in environmental management are suggested (HMSO 1994(b), 112-114) including:
*   local distinctiveness
*   helping with local nature reserves
*   participation in local authority environmental planning and management
*   co-ordinating these activities through a national citizens environmental network to build a register of local initiatives and link people together.

The UK Plan asserts that "The principle that an informed and supportive public is necessary for the full achievement of good environmental management is accepted by the main nature and landscape conservation agencies" (HMSO 1994(b), 115). Initiatives by these agencies to increase understanding of biodiversity are expected (in the Plan) to include:

*   Stimulating local action, strengthening local commitment and pride in the environment, involving local communities in setting conservation objectives and in managing protected sites
*   Encouraging and supporting volunteer activities, and the work of voluntary and community organisations in the field

Others include
*   Providing interpretation facilities to increase public understanding
*   Supporting environmental education
*   Providing training for own staff and those in partner organisations
*   Building partnerships with landowners, industry and others
*   Producing materials for use in these initiatives
*   Providing grants and demonstrations of good practice in environmental management
*   Countryside rangers, community wardens
*   Environmental centres and services.

Local government

Local government has also developed a range of innovatory approaches to participation in environmental management often linked to Agenda 21 through the process of producing Local Agenda 21s.

The importance of participation here is equally apparent: the first guidance notes produced by the Local Government Management Board for local authorities were on *Community Participation in Local Agenda 21* (Bishop 1994). Similarly, the Local Government Management Board's analysis and summary of Agenda 21 identifies seven key themes, of which *four* relate to public participation (Levett 1993):

•   Equal rights and empowerment

•   Education and personal development (including to assist empowerment and involvement)

•   Capacity building ("as much concerned with enabling people and organisations to make the necessary changes as with the changes themselves")

•   Information (both for the strategic policy decisions and to support public participation).

The approaches of local government, through Local Agenda 21s, have produced some impressive innovation in local participation (Church 1995) including:

•   Bottom-up neighbourhood-based LA21s
•   Working groups
•   Forums (including some specifically for young people)
•   Visioning and other 'future search' exercises
•   Community audits and other mapping exercises
•   Work with schools
•   State of the environment reports
•   Environmental networks
•   Round tables

National NGOs

Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on environmental issues, including some of the largest and therefore most difficult to change, have embraced participation as an essential element of their work. In spite of very real practical and structural difficulties, organisations including the National Trust, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) have fundamentally re-appraised their approaches in what they recognise to be a changed world and a new policy framework following Rio (Byrne 1995; Clark et al 1994; National Trust 1995).

These organisations have grasped sustainable development as an opportunity, not just in terms of what they do but also in how they do it; including an increasing focus on participation. Indeed, the participatory approach has become a central priority for many of the environmental and conservation bodies in the UK over recent years (NEST 1993).

Countryside Commission

The Commission's own work has made a major contribution to increasing participation in environmental management programmes. In the past, the Commission has developed a number of community-based approaches to environmental and countryside management.

The Commission initiated the Groundwork Trust movement from the original urban fringe management experiment (UFEX 80) during the 1980s. Also in the 1980s, the Commission's countryside community action programme became the central thread of their work on community participation. The programme began in 1984 and was followed (in 1986) by the launch of a direct experimental programme of seventeen local and national projects. The programme was judged an enormous success in the independent appraisal published in 1991:

"The experiment was bold and visionary, tackling a very great range of issues, many quite new to the Countryside Commission ... it is important to establish that the work as a whole has been extremely successful - not just in the ways hoped for by those setting it up, but also in unanticipated ways ... [the projects] leave behind a world - be it very local or covering England and Wales as a whole - much more ready, willing and able to go forward in engaging people with their local environment" (BDOR 1991, 1)

The experience and lessons from the programme led directly into the establishment of Rural Action for the Environment in 1992, in which the Commission remains a key partner alongside English Nature and the Rural Development Commission. The development of an independent organisation to take forward many of the principles of the countryside community action programme has resulted in community action no longer being a separate policy area within the Commission. However, interest, commitment and participatory activities have continued to be developed as part of the newly reviewed policy themes and initiatives for the next ten years.

The theme of participatory action in the Commission's programmes continues in its current policy programmes. There are several specifically participatory initiatives:

• The Millenium Greens programme for community open space

• The Countryside Design Summaries and Village Design Statements, which aim to encourage participation in high quality new design

• Countryside Character programmes to strengthen awareness and action on local distinctiveness and character

• Community Forests on derelict land around towns and cities

In addition to these, many other programmes support participatory action in order to achieve increased understanding and awareness, to encourage local communities to take action, to generate local support and interest, to develop consensus and reduce conflict and to develop new structures. The elements of these programmes are outlined more fully in Appendix 2.

All the Commission's participatory objectives and mechanisms, as outlined in numerous internal documents, are entirely consistent with policy and good practice elsewhere. As participation is now a mainstream concept in public policy programmes, the Commission is clearly keen to be part of that. However, participation in practice is still a minority activity in the Commission as elsewhere, and conventional technical and professional solutions remain the norm.

There is now potential for participatory activity to be expanded, and for the Commission to make a major contribution to that development.

6. WHY HAS PARTICIPATION GROWN IN RECENT YEARS?

The amount and sophistication of the material available on participation has grown enormously over the past five years. Until then, there had been a steady trickle of papers on principles, mechanisms and case studies in a number of different disciplines, but the slow growth of experience in participation over the last 30 years seems to have been suddenly triggered into life five or six years ago. The concept of participation has become mainstream, at least in principle.

Overall, the literature recognises a positive political commitment to participation: "Community participation enjoys broad political support. It is difficult to find policy makers, practitioners, or representatives from the voluntary sector who oppose the principle, although many may be uncertain about how to work closely and effectively with local communities" (Hastings et al 1996, 1).

Indeed, "A near consensus exists that in order to achieve successful regeneration it is essential to involve the residential community. For many advocates of community involvement and partnership, the deepening of the consensus is itself proof that community partnership works" (ibid 27).

Any analysis of participation must include a review of the possible reasons why it has become so popular in recent years. Putting it down to the simple good sense of policy makers is inadequate. There are two levels of analysis which can help explain why participation has grown to be so important in public policy in recent years:

- An analysis of the practical benefits of participation
- An analysis of the changing political context for public programmes.

The practical benefits of participation

Some analysis of why participation has grown focuses on its practical benefits and advantages, and on how the alternative (ie non-participatory programmes) have failed.

Conventional approaches to development of any sort were expected to be technically logical (according to the argument that science is neutral) and professionally delivered (by specially trained professionals). These conventional approaches have been judged to have failed in a number of ways (Hastings et al 1996; Oakley 1991; Rahman 1995) including:

- Inappropriate designs and solutions for specific local contexts which were often unacceptable to local people who objected to, protested at, and rejected (or at worst destroyed) the development.

- Projects failed because they did not take account of the knowledge in the heads of local people, who knew local circumstances, past histories and invisible facts which came to light too late to be incorporated in project designs.

- Conventional approaches resulted in a number of technical, social and commercial failures (such as some tower blocks, shopping precincts and peripheral housing estates in the UK; and the promotion of cash crops and intensive farming methods in other countries).

- Projects often had increasingly high capital costs, and even larger revenue costs due to expensive maintenance, neither of which could be easily justified in a climate of reduced public spending.

- Top down programmes failed to make any substantial impact on poverty or any other social problems they addressed.

Recent research continues to operate on the assumption that these conventional approaches often fail: "In setting the context for this research study, an emphasis was placed on the perceived failure of traditional approaches to urban regeneration in the 1970s and 1980s, where regeneration was a top-down process - programmes and projects were delivered *into* communities and not in collaboration *with* them. This led to uninformed approaches over which local communities felt no sense of ownership" (Hastings et al 1996, 42).

This analysis is not intended as a criticism of the intentions of these initiatives. Indeed, many of the developments and initiatives which resulted in these failures happened for the best possible reasons: feeding the hungry, moving people out of slums. However, the technical and professional solution alone has proved not to work in many cases, and alternatives have been sought.

The literature suggests that most participatory mechanisms were developed, within this context of the failure of conventional approaches, for three reasons:

- Efficiency and effectiveness
- Ethics
- Public demand

Efficiency and effectiveness

Participatory programmes have been seen to be more effective in delivering project and programme objectives, and more efficient in resource use. The practical benefits for institutions which can use participation in their programmes (PIEDA 1995; Hallett 1987; Oakley 1991; Wilcox 1994) have been articulated as:

- Participation at an early stage can reduce, or avoid altogether, conflict at a later stage.

- Incentives may be available for participatory approaches from government including community participation being one of the criteria for funding from schemes such as Rural Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB).

- Participation brings in new ideas, and helps develop innovatory approaches.

- It releases and brings in additional resources not available to purely public or private initiatives.

- It is more sustainable in that local people are more likely to maintain the project's dynamic and continue development if they have been involved in setting it up. More simply, developing local ownership means that local people are more likely to look after something they have been involved in creating.

- Local people bring local knowledge, so projects are more appropriate to local circumstances.

- Better decisions are made by people for themselves than are made for them by others who may be inadequately aware of the specific circumstances.

- Policies and services are more appropriate to needs if the 'target groups' are involved in their formulation.

- It is possible to obtain more accurate and more representative information about the needs, priorities and capabilities of local people, including better feedback on existing programmes, through participatory mechanisms than through conventional information gathering exercises.

- Programmes can be adapted to local circumstances so scarce resources can be used more efficiently.

- Participation usually leads to improved use of facilities because they are more closely based on people's needs and expressed wishes.

- The coverage of programmes can be extended beyond the scope of a centralised delivery system by working with and through informal community networks.

Clearly, participation also has to have substantial benefits for the people who join in institutionally promoted programmes, or their participation will be very limited. These benefits may fall into two types:

- Developmental and transformative factors (Hallett 1987; Oakley 1991; Wilcox 1994), including:
    - Participation helps people develop their own confidence and skills. Skills learned through participatory action can help improve people's lives, and be used in the wider community.

    - Involvement builds understanding, trust and confidence, which can improve relationships with public institutions as well as between individuals and groups locally.

    - Participatory initiatives can create easier and lower cost access for local people to education and other benefits through local institutions which may be newly established or changed.

    - Participatory action can break dependency and improve self-reliance, increasing self awareness and confidence and enabling people to take greater control of their own lives.

- Personal benefits (Drijver 1990; Mostyn 1979; Oakley 1991), including:
    - Direct economic benefits: cash and other resources to support what people want to do
    - Indirect benefits: improved access to services
    - Non-material benefits: social status, social pressure, interest, a wish to learn, and satisfaction from helping with a wider cause or issue.

It has been argued that without a developmental (or transformative) element in the participation process, no programme will be sustainable: if the people do not benefit from the approach, they are unlikely to continue with it. Indeed, the more obvious benefits to participants need to be recognised so that motivation can be better understood and built upon. However, the motivation behind people's participation in public programmes is not fully understood, and more research may be needed in this area.

Ethics

The two main aspects of the ethical basis for increased participation outlined in the literature are:

- Participation in the institutions and programmes which shape our lives is a 'right': "Forgotten somehow is the fact that participation in the institutions which shape one's life is not a gratuitous privilege, but a basic right" (Kasparson, quoted in Hallett 1987, 5).

    It is argued that participatory democracy should develop alongside representative democracy, based on the belief that people have a right to participate in the decisions which affect their lives beyond the possibility of voting once every few years.

- Participation creates mechanisms and institutions which encourage marginalised groups to be brought into the process: so participation helps reduce the divisions in society by bringing excluded groups into the mainstream of society and community (Hallett 1987; Oakley 1991; LGMB 1996).

Public demand

There is also increasing demand for, and expectation of, greater participation: "local people and visitors increasingly expect to be able to have a direct influence in protecting the places they most value" (National Trust 1995, 1).

The National Trust argues that "Conservation is no longer an activity undertaken by specialists on behalf of society. People want to be involved and have an increasing influence in determining what is special about places and is in need of protection" (ibid 2); and "Conservation is now recognised to be a fully participative cultural activity, not solely the occupation of experts and not restricted in its application to the richest and rarest features of the countryside" (ibid 7).

A different reflection of the demands for participation are the protest movements against developments which may damage the countryside. This sort of protest has often been against road developments but also against other developments such as nuclear power stations and waste dumps. This type of action is considered more fully below under the analysis of new social movements.

Possible costs and dangers of participation

There are also dangers and costs which, the literature suggests, may occur when programmes involve participation, including:

- Participation may hide the fact that less money is available by shifting the burden on to the voluntary effort of local people (Hallett 1987).

- In times of resource constraint, voluntary effort can be seen as the one infinite resource and over-exploited (Taylor 1995).

- Participation in major projects may overload local people who become expected to do for free what professionals are paid to do (Taylor 1995).

- When consulted, people may oppose the initiative (Oakley 1991, 14).

- Participatory mechanisms may be unpredictable (Oakley 1991, 14).

- Extra (and different) staff may be needed to support participation (Oakley 1991, 14).

In general, however, the literature concludes that the benefits of participation enormously outweigh the costs.

Changing political context

Much of the early material on participation in the UK leaned more towards the polemical than the analytical, and indeed much of the rationale for participation has tended to focus on the benefits (and sometimes the costs) rather than the reasons why it has become so much more widespread in recent years. Some of the key underlying social and political influences identified in the literature are outlined below.

Changing role of government

It has become fashionable to see government, at local as well as national level, changing from an 'executive' to an 'enabling' role (LGMB 1991). This has been partly ascribed to a neo-liberal agenda to reduce the role of the state and roll back big government, and partly to perceived resource constraints and the wish to find new ways of achieving improvements without major new investment.

Another view is that increased public participation is an inevitable consequence of a mature democracy placing more rights and responsibilities on its citizens and less on the state (eg Etzioni 1995).

Whichever view is taken (and that depends as much on political inclination as objective analysis) the new approach is towards an enabling role for government and greater public participation. Indeed, the current Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown MP, argues that what is required is "new thinking about the role of government, not so much as owner or employer, as traditionally conceived, but as partner, enabler, catalyst and co-ordinator" (in Crouch & Marquand 1995, 4-5).

Changing view of management

It has been argued that changes in World Bank policy towards participatory development were stimulated by new ideas from North American organisational management theory which emphasised decentralisation, trust, rapid adaptation and diversity, "empowering workers to operate flexibly in teams, responding to situations as they arise and communicating ideas for improvements directly to senior management" (Nelson and Wright 1995, 6). Indeed there is evidence that the term 'stakeholder' was introduced from this new management theory into World Bank thinking by a 1993 report on portfolio management (Nelson and Wright 1995, 201).

There are many contradictions here, not least a conflict in many organisations promoting participatory development (including the World Bank itself) between the overt message among workers on the ground who are working to increase citizen involvement in programmes, and the rigid, hierarchical structure of the organisation within which they work, which sees participation as purely instrumental in project management terms: a means to a more efficient and effective end. This was not entirely the philosophy even of new management theory, which included within it some principles about the development of workers and continuous innovation as well as the importance of completing tasks successfully.

Changing world view

There is another whole range of options for explaining the growth of the participatory approach to management and development, all based on the view that Western industrial society is going through a decisive transitional period (or 'crisis'). Two of the critiques which address different aspects of this current period of history are the post-modernist cultural critique and the post-Fordist economic critique.

The post-modern view offers "analyses which celebrate fragmentation and the atomisation of decision-making at the expense of social planning and government intervention" (Whitty in Bocock & Thompson 1992, 290), with a rejection of overarching concepts (like patriarchy and capitalism) and meta-narratives (like Marxism). The post-modern pluralist, pragmatic and relativist analysis can be seen as reducing all moral or ethical judgements to mere opinions. Social analysis of this sort describes, creates and re-makes social behaviour, and the post-modern critique has undoubtedly both described and supported a distrust of traditional institutions and structures, and encouraged the focus away from the social and the collective and on to the individual and personal choice.

The post-Fordist view provides a different perspective on the changing context. As controversial as post-modernism, post-Fordism argues that while Fordism involved manufacturing industry based on certain industrial technologies and leading to mass production and mass labour forces, in a post-Fordist world new technology has reduced the need for these types of labour. Employment is much more episodic, flexible and diverse with no more jobs for life. This is linked with growing unemployment and job insecurity for all classes of workers, alongside all the social and environmental consequences of these changes. This is contested by those who argue that there is still mass employment and traditional heavy industry, but it is no longer mainly located in Europe or the USA.

While post-modernist analysis tries to explain the loss of commitment to traditional political institutions and action in terms of fragmented, single issue and consumer protests, post-Fordist analysis explains the changes in terms of the disappearance of a working class along with weakened trade unions and other traditional political allegiances. The growth of participation has been advanced as a response in both types of analysis: a response to the loss of strength, power and credibility of traditional forms of political participation leading to the growth of new forms and mechanisms, including initiatives which may be alternative or complementary to representative democracy.

These analyses have focused on the wide social context and the behaviour of groups and individuals wishing to participate more or feeling disenfranchised. The institutional motivation has also been analysed. It is argued that, without strong institutions to anchor people, give them identity and make them feel part of a wider society in which they can make a valued contribution, society can become unstable and that does not provide a context in which it is easy to do business (Wybrew 1995). In this analysis, participation becomes both an *activity*, replacing paid employment (and to prevent idle hands creating trouble), and a *force for stability*, binding people into society through socially worthwhile tasks.

New political action

The changing political and economic context has, it is argued, created new political philosophies and new forms of political action. Among those most closely related to participatory action in environmental management are communitarianism, the concept of social capital, and the development of new social movements.

Communitarianism and social capital

Communitarianism has been envisaged as the social 'glue' which shores up the social, moral and political foundations of society through local participation in traditional social institutions such as the family, church, school and civic societies (Etzioni 1995).

Similarly, social capital is based on the analysis that a strong social culture, expressed in local social networks of organisations from choral societies to political clubs, is what makes strong and (economically) successful communities: "Happiness is living in a civic community" (Putnam 1993, 112).

While Etzioni argues that the moral foundations of society need to be rebuilt through traditional community and civic structures, Putnam addresses the question of "What are the conditions for creating strong, responsive, effective representative institutions?" (Putnam 1993, 6). Putnam argues that "the prospects for effective democracy depend on social development and economic well-being" (ibid 11); his assessment of social development being strong social institutions and networks in civic society (from labour unions to choral societies).

Indeed, "Putnam has found convincing proof that norms of reciprocity embedded in networks of civic engagement are the critical social conditions which make 'strong, effective, responsive, representative institutions' possible" (Sullivan 1995, 27). Putnam argues that the key to social success is "the development of moral norms embedded in social networks that operate to reduce incentives to defect, reduce uncertainty, and provide models for future models for future co-operation, so that trust is itself an emergent property of the social system as much as a personal attribute" (Sullivan 1995, 28).

Putnam's analysis of the strong 'civic community' as "marked by an active, public spirited citizenry, by egalitarian political relations, by a social fabric of trust and co-operation" (Putnam 1993, 15) provides evidence that a strong civic culture "turned out to be the best (in fact the only strongly significant) predictor of economic success for a locality over the long term ... The key differential factor is the presence of community, specified as those norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement which Putnam calls social capital ... social capital is thought of as a moral resource and public good which activates the latest human capital of individuals and populations" (Sullivan 1995, 28-89).

Putnam and Etzioni's analyses are useful in identifying ways of rebuilding and strengthening communities through participation, particularly through strengthening institutions and civic society. However, they lack any analysis of global changes, particularly the growth of transnational companies, global markets and increasingly mobile production which are recognised in both post-modernist and post-Fordist analysis as leading to the loss of trust and belief in traditional institutions. They also do not recognise any need for radical social change to make social opportunities available to all, nor of the need to tackle existing inequalities before such a desirable state of affairs could exist universally.

New social movements

The term new social movements usually includes political protest movements such as environmental campaigns but also peace campaigns, animal rights, land rights, community action and cultural action. Many of these movements are overtly political, and challenge political stereotypes, hierarchies and traditional democratic mechanisms.

Social movement analysis is based on specific notions about collective action and social change, and on changing values through collective experiences. Scott quotes Weber's analysis that "value changes are accredited a central role in bringing about fundamental change, and these value changes are said to have their origin in social ... movements" (Scott 1992, 131). However, it is recognised that these value changes will be extremely slow (Inglehart refers to them as 'glacial' (Scott 1992, 146)), and that new social movements reflect changed values as well as continuing to challenge them.

The link between collective action, values, and social change has also been fundamental to community development, in that it is through collective action that people "change and grow according to their own needs and priorities ... in the belief that through working together they will reach their full potential" (Taylor 1992, 6). Collective action has always been essential to the concept of community action (Chanan 1992, 3), and is generally seen as one of the goals, and one of the mechanisms, for participatory action. It is usually described in the following terms: "By 'collective action' we mean co-operative action taken by a number of individuals taken in concert and with common goals" (Scott 1992, 128).

Social movements are seen as operating through collective action, and as having five main characteristics: "at least occasional mass mobilisation; a tendency to a loose organisational structure; spasmodic activity; working at least in part outside established institutional frameworks; and bringing about social change ... as a central aim" (Scott 1992, 132).

Recent studies of new social movements have stressed that they must be seen as a 'plurality of resistances', as well as having a major focus on the politics of everyday life: they are "characterised by an increasing politicisation of social life (remember the feminist slogan: 'the personal is political')" (Laclau 1985, 29-30).

They are also referred to in terms of networks: "a network of small groups submerged in everyday life which require a personal involvement in experiencing and practising cultural innovation" (Melucci, quoted in Escobar 1992, 407).

The networks element in new social movements is important. Melucci argues that "In the 1980s collective action came to be based on 'movement areas' ... These take the form of networks composed of a multiplicity of groups that are dispersed, fragmented and submerged in everyday life, and which act as cultural laboratories. They require individual investment in the experimentation and practice of new cultural models, forms of relationships and alternative perceptions and meanings in the world" (Melucci, quoted in Scott 1992, 137).

Journalistic analysis of the networking of community protests supports this analysis: "communities [which] are linking in common local protest at everything from toxic waste to asthma, electro-magnetic fields, airports, supermarkets and waste tips and are coming up with solutions" (Vidal 1995).

Melucci argues that, although political protest and collective action may make the demands from social movements clearer, "those demands are grounded in alternative values and lifestyles in the community" (ibid). Melucci considers these networks to be 'cultural laboratories' for new and innovative social relations in the same way as Taylor sees people reaching their full potential through collective action as a result of community development (Taylor 1992). The links between lifestyles and political objectives has echoes of the 1970s radical initiatives (Landry et al 1985).

The analysis of new social movements suggests that, in Western Europe, the environmental movement is entirely typical of the phenomenon: it is not focused specifically on class, it is single issue, it is expressed through alternative attitudes and lifestyles. New social movements are essentially linked to a shift away from 'material' to 'postmaterial' values, and their support for environmentalism reflects this concern (Scott 1992, 147).

New social movements tend to be "organised around specific demands (housing, urban services, the liberation of women, environmental conservation, anti-nuclear struggles etc)" (Coraggio 1985, 203). All these factors (the nature of the involvement, the disparate issues, the complex links between different specific objectives, and between personal and political change) are also common to much analysis of community action and participatory initiatives.

Participation: conservative and radical?
It can be argued that these new forms of political action fall into two fairly clear categories, which can be understood by reference to specific phenomena:

• Conservative (in the sense of retaining or recreating traditional social structures), which can be understood by reference to concepts such as communitarianism and social capital

• Radical (in the sense of aiming for social change), which can be understood by reference to the analysis of new social movements.

Communitarianism and notions of social capital stress the importance of civic institutions which engage people in society - institutions such as church, school and voluntary organisations from unions to choral societies. In these cases, participation is seen as strengthening the structure, the framework, of society by developing commitment to existing (now or in the past) social institutions.

In the case of new social movements, participation is a political act, aiming for social change through actions which challenge and resist existing social institutions and structures and aim to develop a plurality of alternatives.

In spite of their fundamentally different political perspectives, all these analyses share one theme: a recognition of the need for increasing participation in civic institutions - from social institutions such as the family, to civic institutions such as the law and public institutions such as government and public agencies. Participation is seen as an antidote to social disorder caused by excessive individualism on the one hand, and the failure of conventional political mechanisms to effect lasting change on the other.

Institutions and participation: risk and trust

One final analysis attempts to explain further how this type of individualism and social breakdown has developed. This analysis relates to how environmentalism itself has led to a questioning of the neutrality and objectivity of institutions which have been supposed to act in the public interest.

Beck argues that environmentalism has allowed society to question, on political and moral grounds, what before had been seen as rational and technological progress: "business and techno-scientific action acquire a new political and moral dimension that had previously seemed alien to techno-economic activity" (Beck 1992, 186). Through this, environmentalism has drawn attention to the fact that modern industry has created not just 'goods' but also 'bads'.

As well as creating wealth, modern industrial society created risks (the worst ones being mostly environmental risks). Those risks were not only unquantifiable, so more threatening, but also more individualised. Individuals faced the risk of pollution-induced health problems or loss of employment through changes in industrial practices or location.

Beck's argument is that the increasing focus on individual responsibility has led to different relationships with institutions, indeed "the primary risk ... is therefore that of social dependency upon institutions and actors who may well be - and arguably are increasingly - alien, obscure and inaccessible to most people affected by the risks in question" (Lash and Wynne in Beck 1992, 4). Individual risk leads to different relationships with institutions: individuals no longer believe that institutions (legal system, government etc) will protect them from risk - trust and credibility are lost.

In this analysis, a focus on participation is both an answer to a lack of faith in democratic (and other) institutions, and a response from those institutions to regain trust and credibility.

Similar conclusions about the lack of trust and credibility of public institutions was expressed more concretely in the study of public perceptions of participation in sustainability in Lancashire (Macnaghten et al 1995). This concluded that "People display a pronounced degree of fatalism and even cynicism towards the country's public institutions, including national and local government. This is reflected in an apparently pervasive lack of trust in the goodwill and integrity of national government, and in doubts about the ability or willingness of local government to achieve positive improvements in the quality of people's lives (not least because local authorities' powers are seen as diminishing)" (Macnaghten et al 1995, 3).

This gap between institutions and the public can result in hostility or, more likely, in apathy: "There are signs of a new cleavage between two social classes: the privileged 'decision makers' and the 'administrees', the majority of the population. As can be seen by reading any newspaper, the typical reaction to this situation is indifference or aggression" (Dienel quoted in Stewart et al 1994, 9).

Civic institutions (such as government and its agencies but also others) cannot operate without the consent of the people: they need credibility to do their work on people's behalf. This credibility has been severely damaged in recent years. Indeed, "Big government has lost its lustre. Distant institutions are felt to be less trusted than ones close at hand. Here, as elsewhere, people want ... a sense that power is responsive" (Mulgan and 6, 1996, 3), and much more local.

Participation is often seen as the key method for renewing and strengthening the relationship between people and institutions. In this scenario, it is in the interests of institutions to encourage participation, to secure and repair trust and credibility. However, the problem has often been reduced to simply considering "how institutions can adapt procedures and self-presentation in order to secure or repair credibility, without fundamentally questioning the forms of power and social control involved" (Lash and Wynne in Beck 1992, 4).

The Lancashire study showed the extent to which people were fatalistic and cynical about public institutions. They had little trust in the goodwill and integrity of those institutions, including whether those institutions would (or even could) do anything to improve their quality of life. This lack of trust and the low credibility of institutions affected people's willingness to participate.

The study found that people will not even **listen to** information about the environment if they feel they cannot do anything about it: they bear the risks but feel powerless to change anything, so they feel there is no point listening to information or participating (Macnaghten et al 1995, 3 and 17). As Macnaghten et al point out "It would be a serious mistake to judge people's capacity or motivation on specific initiatives ... without taking into account these less explicit dimensions and attempting to understand and address them" (Macnaghten et al 1995, 18). People's willingness to participate will be determined by how worthwhile they judge it to be, in terms of how likely it is that they will be able to change things for the better.

Institutional and practical barriers to increased participation

Clearly, participation will only be increased, and be more effective, if trust and credibility can be restored by creating new types of relationships between institutions and the public. The basis for these new relationships already exists in some innovative developments by public agencies.

Unfortunately, the literature suggests that participatory action on the ground can be undermined or even neutralised by a lack of willingness to change in the governing institution: "there remain some pervasive attitudes and institutional cultures which are a formidable constraint to landcare groups taking the step from raising awareness of problems to being key players in developing solutions" (Campbell 1994, 14-15); this is not to do with individual people but with "the organisations and cultures within which these people work" (ibid 15).

Institutions have to recognise that a participatory approach is not just another initiative, but a fundamental change in philosophy. This can be difficult for some in government agencies, who are used to coming up with their own solutions away from the public gaze. It is argued that "The involvement of other sectors of the community in land conservation is highly desirable, but for state soil conservation agencies, this means 'letting go', being less proprietorial about land conservation" (Campbell 1994, 14-15).

The institutional context is recognised as a crucial element affecting success in participation processes. The literature suggests that institutions need to become 'learning organisations' to deal with the dynamics of local initiatives over time (Bryden et al 1995). Indeed it has been argued that hierarchical agency structures present more barriers to participation because the tiers reduce communication and understanding as issues progress (Baxter 1996).

Simpler, more practical barriers to increasing participation in environmental programmes have also been identified, such as difficulties in getting access to information on environmental issues, and on campaigns and opportunities in which to get involved, lack of resources for community programmes (for practical work and for support), and lack of consultation on new environmental programmes as well as deadlines which are too tight when consultation is undertaken (Warburton et al 1993).

Summary of analysis of the growth of participation

In summary, the reasons given in the literature for the increase participation in public programmes include:

- **Efficiency and effectiveness**. The literature gives many reasons why projects which are participatory are designed better, implemented better, managed better, maintained better and cared for better than projects which are imposed on people without any participation.

- **Ethics**. One of the elements of the debate about participation which has remained constant over the past 20 to 30 years has been the assertion that participation is a 'right' - that people have the right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

  In addition, participation has always been seen by some practitioners and commentators as an essential part of egalitarian and democratic practice (Hallett 1987; LGMB 1996).

- **Public demand**. People want more participation in the places they visit, the services being provided on their behalf, and in the decisions about change and development which affect their lives.

- **World view**. Whichever analysis of the 'modern condition' is taken (post-modern or post-Fordist), there is a consensus that the Western industrial world is going through a major economic and social transition.

  Communitarianism, notions of social capital and new social movements have all been identified as actual or desirable responses to this transition, based on a changing view of traditional institutions, including government and democracy.

  Public distrust of traditional democratic institutions, and their loss of credibility, has led to demands for more participation (participatory democracy as well as representative democracy) from the people, and a willingness in public institutions to encourage participation to restore their credibility and regain the trust of the people.

The literature shows that the reasons for increasing participation in public programmes are complex, but the overall message is clear:

- Participation works in practical terms and in ethical terms

- It meets the policy priorities of social, civic and public institutions

- Participation provides a response to many of the problems identified in much of the analysis of the changing world.

All the circumstances are right for participation to continue its recent dramatic growth as a central element of all environmental (and many other) programmes.

However, the literature also suggests that there are a number of barriers to be overcome before participation in environmental management can be fully realised:

- The lack of trust in institutions means that people doubt the goodwill and integrity of institutions and the willingness and capability of these bodies to do anything to make their lives better. Institutions and public bodies need to repair their reputations and demonstrate their public worth by changing their relationships with the public.

- If people have little faith in public bodies, they also lack faith in themselves. People lack a sense of agency: they do not believe that anything they do will have any impact. They remain to be convinced that it is worth the effort of becoming involved. The ways in which participation is developed may begin to overcome these doubts, if done *with* people and through greater understanding of the processes and underlying uncertainties.

- Simple lack of resources to support participation, and of information and understanding about how the priorities of environmental programmes are set, as well as lack of opportunities to get involved, also reduce participation.

- Institutional rigidity and unwillingness to change can reduce the effectiveness and value of participatory action by limiting feedback from the grassroots into wider policy decisions.

7. HOW TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMMES

The literature suggests that the ways in which institutions are perceived will be as important to the success of their participatory initiatives as their actions (Uphoff 1992; Macnaghten 1995).

There are a number of key issues which institutions need to address in order to change public perceptions to increase their credibility and restore trust - essential precursors to any future productive relationship. These are covered in full below and are, in summary:
*   Willingness to change
*   Commitment to participation
*   Balancing participation, statutory duties and public accountability
*   Clarity of purpose and stance
*   Recognising the importance of context
*   Following principles of good practice
*   Recognising that participation requires resources
*   Choosing the appropriate techniques
*   Assessing whether participation has been successful

Willingness to change

The response of institutions to faltering public trust may be no more than attempts to "adapt procedures and self-presentation in order to secure or repair credibility, without fundamentally questioning the forms of power and social control involved" (Lash and Wynne in Beck 1992, 4). Indeed, the willingness (and ability) of major institutions to respond to these changes is generally questioned: "there remain some pervasive attitudes and institutional cultures which are a formidable constraint to ... groups taking the step from raising awareness of problems to being key players in developing solutions" (Campbell 1994, 14-15); this is primarily the responsibility of "the organisations and cultures within which ... people work" (15).

It has been argued that hierarchical agency structures present particular barriers to participation because the tiers reduce communication and understanding as issues progress (Baxter 1996). It is suggested that institutions need to become 'learning organisations' to deal with the dynamics of local initiatives over time (Bryden et al 1995).

Commitment to participation

It is clear from the literature that participation will not be effective in the short term, or sustainable in the long term, unless it is promoted in its own right and not just as a method for implementing project strategies.

Participation needs to be seen as an end in itself and not just a means to an end: "Participation as a means implies the use of participation to achieve some predetermined goal or objective ... [and] stresses the results of participation ... Participation as an end is an entirely different process. Here we see participation essentially as a process which unfolds over time and whose purpose is to develop and strengthen the capabilities of rural people to intervene more directly in development initiatives ... Participation as an end is an active and dynamic form of participation which enables rural people to play an increasing role" (Oakley 1991, 7-8).

Balancing participation, statutory duties and public accountability

The Commission, and other public institutions, have to balance broad public service imperatives and growing participation in programmes and policy. This issue has been addressed extensively in the literature on democracy and participation, particularly in relation to local government.

There are varying views on the balance between community responsibility, traditional government and public services, and there is considerable potential for developing new relationships in this area. It may be that it is in working with local authorities that the greatest opportunities for community-driven sustainable development are located.

David Donnison has pointed out that "There is, in short, no magic about community. The age-old tasks of government still have to be performed - creating legitimate authority and transferring it to new leaders when necessary, accounting for public money, providing rights of appeal of staff and customers ..." (Donnison 1993).

The balance in this relationship between community organisations and government is being developed through experience, and by establishing new protocols of accountability and democracy which begin to answer questions about how accountable or representative institutions and community groups are, can or should be.

Very often, questions of the accountability and representativeness of community groups are raised by government and other public agencies which may find it easier to consult, or invite into participation, a neatly delimited 'community' or 'neighbourhood' as an administrative block, but then have difficulties in establishing a common 'community view' (or possibly finding a view which does not fit the parameters they had set for the exercise). This leads to questions about the representativeness and accountability of the community groups which do participate in public programmes, based on the (clearly mistaken) view that community interests are, or should be, homogenous.

The proper balance between public service responsibilities and community participation is difficult to achieve, but it can certainly be argued that "Every profession and public official should respect those who depend on their services and find ways of giving them a voice which cannot be disregarded. That calls for *more* sensitive and effective civic leadership, not less of it, from democratically accountable public authorities" (Donnison 1993). These relationships are not fixed, and "claims of autonomy and governing power are not absolutes, but make sense only in complex and ever-shifting structures of interlocking power, competence and legitimacy" (Mulgan and 6, 1996, 3). Movement and change may allow the space for new approaches to be tried and new balances found.

It has been argued that there is at present a unique opportunity for democracy and sustainability to revitalise each other: "revitalising local democracy depends crucially on the environmental policy agenda for two reasons. First, the emerging agenda of environmentally sustainable development requires *strong local government* if its goals are to be recognised. Second, the re-energisation of local democracy requires strong commitment to sustainable development. No other source of civic energy is a plausible contender for the task" (Christie 1996, 29).

Agenda 21 stresses extending participation and developing partnerships between all interests, while recognising the existing imbalances of power and resources which need to be addressed before such partnerships can begin to work. Developing the basic support for participation is one of the key strategies proposed for redressing that balance.

A possible model for increased participation alongside a greater role for public institutions is outlined by Cannan (1995). She argues that participation and development initiatives are totally compatible if the approach is defined "as a strategy concerned with the relationship between people (citizens, residents, consumers) and institutions (governmental, local authorities, private organisations)" (Cannan 1995, 239). The approach is then seen as a continuing relationship to promote partnership and participation by people in public affairs, to empower people to help them influence change, and to enhance community by adopting an integrated approach to meeting community needs.

This is precisely the approach already outlined in the Commission's view of Participatory Action in the Countryside, which is that "Participation is defined in terms of collaborative action between communities and authorities" (Brief), recognising that both communities and authorities will have other responsibilities and duties and that collaborative action offers new paths forward.

Principles of good practice

Participation for its own sake

The over-riding principle of good practice in participatory initiatives is that participation must be promoted as an objective in itself, and not just used as a means to an end (eg Oakley 1991, 7-8).

The reason for this is that a new relationship of trust must be developed between the institution inviting participation and those being invited to participate. People will not participate if they are not going to get anything out of it, and simply picking people's brains and then excluding them from the rest of the process will not develop a positive new relationship.

New relationships are essential because, in the long run, the success of any project will depend on the commitment of the people participating. Those people may need to discover new reasons for doing something new, but their contribution must be respected if they are to be convinced to take on long term responsibilities. If this long term participation is crucial to the success of an initiative, developing and maintaining their trust and involvement must be a primary objective.

If this principle is ignored, all other attempts at restoring institutional trust and credibility are unlikely to be effective.

Clarity of purpose and stance

Any agency initiating participatory action must be clear about why it is doing it in the specific instance. This report contains many general reasons why participation has developed, and why it is a good thing. However, before approaching anyone outside their agency, the staff involved must be clear about the specific objectives in the specific context. This allows them to display the clarity, honesty, transparency of process and all the other principles of good practice in participation outlined in all the guides (Bishop 1994; Bishop et al 1994; Hart 1994; Wilcox 1994).

Once the purpose of the approach has been clarified, the agency can identify its own position, or stance, in relation to the participatory process. The stance taken will depend on the specific context, including issues such as:
- the local circumstances
- the resources available (time, personnel, skills)
- the importance of maintaining participation and involvement in the longer term

The stance taken can be defined by reference to Arnstein's ladder, which articulates levels of participation according to the amount of *power*-sharing (Arnstein 1969 and see above). Useful though Arnstein's model is, it is primarily an analytical tool rather than a guide to action. Three alternative approaches to choosing a stance for a participatory programme, policy or initiative are outlined below.

- An approach based on Arnstein but focused more on *activity* than power. In this analysis (Wilcox 1994), the stances are:
  - information
  - consultation
  - deciding together
  - acting together
  - supporting local initiatives

- Alternatively, the stance could be identified according to the *motivations and constraints* of the initiating agency (NEST 1993). In this analysis, the stances are:
  - agency takes action
  - agency needs help
  - agency helps others

In this approach, the first stance is likely to apply when there is some statutory responsibility the agency has to deliver, but still would wish to give information, consult and may invite participation but cannot (formally) share responsibility for the decision. The other two stances are varying degrees of participation and the responsibility for the final decision may rest with the agency, may be shared with the other participants, or may be delegated entirely to the others.

- Oakley's analysis (Oakley 1991, 6) of levels of participation have already been outlined (see page 10). The levels are, in summary:

  - **Participation as contribution**: where the participants are only asked to contribute resources.

  - **Participation as organisation**: where an organisation is established, and takes on some control and power.

  - **Participation as empowerment**: where participation is one of the desired outcomes, and power and control are more fully delegated so that the participants can exercise control over their own futures.

  Oakley stresses that the first of these types of participation (contribution) is fundamentally different from the other two: both organisation and empowerment involve a transfer of control.

The importance of context

The literature suggests that both purpose and stance will also be affected by the specific context. Techniques will be different depending on whether the initiative relates to a specific site, or a wide area, an area of local or national importance, whether local people are already concerned about the issue, whether there is already conflict established, whether the location is an isolated rural area or an area close to centres of population and a whole range of other factors.

It is clear from the literature that no blueprint can be given in terms of techniques or approaches simply because the circumstances in each case will be different.

Timing

The literature offers an unusually clear consensus on the issue of when participation should happen:

- It should happen at the **beginning** of any programme, indeed it should help in the detailed formulation of programmes. The earlier the better.

- It should happen **now**. The time is right for all programmes to develop their participatory mechanisms: if they have already started, participation should be introduced; if they are being planned, participation should be designed in from the start (Oakley 1991, vii; Demos 1996, 37).

General principles of good practice

The literature identifies several principles of good practice in specific participatory initiatives (Bishop 1994; Hart 1994; Wilcox 1994). These suggest that all participatory processes must be based on:

- Honesty: about limits, constraints, etc

- Accessibility: physically in terms of timing and location of meetings; and philosophically in terms of openness to new ideas

- Relevance: starting with people's own concerns

- Achievement: ensuring that it all adds up to something

- Learning from experience: and taking risks to gain new experience

- Commitment

The principle of commitment can be expanded by suggesting that participatory exercises need (Hart 1994, 10):

- Commitment to shared goals

- Commitment to openness and flexibility

- Commitment to working with communities as equal partners at their own pace and with the skills and knowledge available to them

- Commitment to building the skills of the community

- Commitment to share power with communities who are affected by its use

- Commitment to mutual respect, tolerance and trust

- Commitment to multiple forms of representation

- Commitment to continuous, if not continual, communication

- Commitment to relationships with community which are voluntary and facilitate their independence

In addition, Oakley (1991, 37) suggests that there are four principles which need to be borne in mind for successful participation:

- Understanding in the first instance: if people understand where their interests lie in relation to the proposed initiative, they will be more likely to support it

- People make rational decisions in the context of their own environment and circumstances, not in the context of externally defined ones

- Voluntary commitment is essential to break passivity and indifference

- Local control of benefits is directly related to activities becoming self-sustaining.

Participation requires resources

The literature suggests that all participatory initiatives need a range of resources in order to be able to operate effectively (Bishop 1994; Burridge 1990; National Coalition for Neighbourhoods; Warburton et al 1993). The key requirements for successful participation include:

- **Workers**. The literature suggests that the most important single resource in supporting effective participation is face-to-face workers, either based in the locality or working closely with local people (Aston Business School 1991; Baxter 1996; BDOR 1991; Bishop 1994; Bryden et al 1995; National Coalition for Neighbourhoods).

  The literature stresses "the indispensability of good people operating face-to-face with local communities to handle the key tasks of explanation, motivation, provision of information and, more generally, transferring ownership" (BDOR 1991, 1).

  These may be called community development workers, animators, community agents, facilitators, support workers but the important task is to keep the process going and provide any support, information and advice, access to training and other resources and other help that might be needed at any stage.

Workers are always considered an expensive resource, but new initiatives are finding new ways of providing these services. They may be employed by local umbrella organisations, by the initiating agency or by a local group. They may be full-time, part-time or even self-employed local people who are brought in to specific initiatives eg community agents (CSV 1995).

- **Support bodies**. Organisations which provide practical resources such as printing, photocopying, meeting spaces, access to computers, access to training, advice and information and general support are very important and can ensure the continuation of fragile participatory action (Chanan 1992; Hastings et al 1996; Horsbrugh et al 1994; Kean 1992; Taylor 1983; Warburton 1994).

  The literature stresses the need for 'interface organisations' which "should be *locally accountable* catalysts which release local energy and act as a structure that provides *ongoing support* at the local level" (Baxter 1996, 21).

  Rural Community Councils and Councils for Voluntary Service are able to provide these services in some cases (Warburton 1994) and there are also environment centres and other umbrella bodies already established that could be developed to take on this role (Adatia 1995; Chanan 1992; Horsbrugh et at 1994).

- **Funding**. All participation requires funding. Some participants require funding for even basic costs such as telephone, printing, stationery and postage. Others require funding for costs in more formal participatory processes such as attending hearings, obtaining technical advice, travel to meetings (National Coalition for Neighbourhoods; Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 1996). Funding may also be needed for training, additional or different workers and meeting costs.

- **Time**. Participation takes calendar time in terms of allowing days and weeks for responses to new ideas, and for all the participants to generate new ideas and to talk to each other about them. Actually talking to different people, aside from the conventional project management approach, also takes time (hours of a working day). Both demands on time need to be planned for in any participation process.

Choosing the appropriate techniques

The literature suggests that participation is too often based on a particular technique rather than choosing *appropriate* techniques within an overall process: "The process of mobilising local participation for sustainable development initiatives depends very much on a consultative, problem-solving approach. Approaches like participatory or rapid rural appraisal carried out with communities and groups are a good starting point. By themselves such approaches are not sufficient, however. It is important to have an appropriate *philosophy* since local people form quick, usually correct, opinions about how genuine the outsiders approaching them are ... They are to be regarded as partners more than 'beneficiaries' or (worse) 'target groups'" (Uphoff 1992, 12).

The following list of techniques is not exhaustive, but covers most of those mentioned in the literature. They are divided up into some general categories, although these are not rigid and the techniques may be of wider use than the category suggests.

The main sources for this material are *The Guide to Effective Participation* (Wilcox 1994); *Innovations in Public Participation* (LGMB 1996); *Creating Involvement* (Hart 1994) and *Community Involvement in Planning and Development Processes* (Bishop et al 1994). Additional sources are mentioned alongside the specific technique.

Preparation for participation

- Adult education (Scott et al 1989)
- Community development (Taylor 1992)
- Community education (Fagan 1993; Webster 1995)
- Environmental education (Bishop 1994; Newcastle Architecture Workshop 1992)
- Management development (Bishop 1994)
- Participation training (Bishop 1994).

Participatory approaches

- Broad-based organising: mass community mobilisation (Farnell et al 1994; Pitt & Keane 1984)
- CADISPA: community education approach to sustainable development for rural areas (Fagan 1993)
- Community development (Harris 1994; Flecknoe 1994; Taylor 1992)
- Institution building (Oakley 1991; Uphoff 1992)
- Landcare: Landcare in Australia is a community-based initiative where a group come together to tackle environmental issues and develop more sustainable systems of land management (Campbell, A. 1994)
- Local distinctiveness (King & Clifford 1993)
- Organisational development (Batson and Smith 1997)
- Participatory Learning and Action (Pretty et al 1995)
- Partnership (LGMB 1993; Wilcox 1994)
- Permaculture (Mollison 1995)
- Primary Environmental Care (Oxfam 1992)
- Self-help (Wann 1995)

Participatory techniques and mechanisms

- Action plans (Wilcox 1994)
- Art (Common Ground 1988; Landry et al 1996; Tinniswood & Woodhead 1997)
- Citizens' juries (LGMB 1996; Stewart et al 1994)
- Community architecture (Kean 1992; Wilcox 1994)
- Community computer networks (Schuler 1996)
- Community Design Summaries (Countryside Commission 196)
- Community Environmental Monitoring (Alexandra et al 1996)
- Conflict resolution (LGMB 1996; Wilcox 1994)
- Consensus building (Acland 1992; Baines 1995; Bishop 1994; LGMB 1996; Wilcox 1994)
- Design Game: from CLAWS (Wilcox 1994)
- Design workshops (Bishop 1994; Wates 1996)
- Evaluation (Oakley 1991; Voluntary Action 1996; Wilcox 1994)
- Feasibility study (Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation)
- Focus groups: discuss planned set of topics (Bishop 1994; LGMB 1994)
- Forums (Bishop 1994; LGMB 1994; LGMB 1996 (issue forums); Wilcox 1994 (community forums))
- Future search (Cheshire Landscape Trust 1996; LGMB 1996; Weisbord & Janoff 1995)
- Games and simulations (Wilcox 1994)
- Ideas for community projects (Community Links; Countryside Commission et al 1996)
- Indicators (Dodds 1996; LGMB 1995; LGMB 1994)
- Joint management strategies (Blackdown Hills Project 1996)
- Learning Service Teams: linking service providers across teams and organisations and with users (Hart 1994)
- Local Agenda 21 (Jones 1996+97)
- Mediation: conflict resolution (Mediation UK)
- Mind maps: to identify problems and solutions (Wilcox 1994)
- Monitoring and evaluation (Oakley 1991; Voluntary Action 1996; Wilcox 1994)
- Networking (Hart 1994; Wilcox 1994)
- Nominal Group Technique: brainstorming (Wilcox 1994)
- Parish maps (Common Ground 1996; Crouch, D. 1996; LGMB 1996; LGMB 1994)
- Pictures and visual symbols (Murray-Bradley 1995)
- Planning for Real (Bishop 1994; Crouch, C. 1996; Hart 1994; Kean 1992; LGMB 1996; LGMB 1994; Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation 1994; Wilcox 1994)
- Role play and trails (Bishop 1994)
- Round tables (Bell, D. 1995; LGMB 1996; LGMB 1994)
- RUDATs and CUDATs: Regional Urban Design Action Teams or Community Design Action Teams and action planning weekends (Bishop 1994; Hart 1994; Kean 1994; Wates 1996)

- SAST: Strategic Assumption Surface Testing, to examine options and develop community action plans (Wilcox 1994)
- Small group work: regular or one-off ((Bishop 1994; Wilcox 1994)
- Socials (Wilcox 1994)
- SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats; way of starting to plan or review progress (Wilcox 1994; Hart 1994)
- Village Design Statements (Countryside Commission 1996; Crouch, C. 1996)
- Visioning (Bell, D. 1993; LGMB 1996)
- Visits (Bishop 1994; Hart 1994)
- Volunteering (Allinson 1978; Joseph Rowntree Foundation 1996; National Centre for Volunteering 1989; Pinkney-Baird 1993)
- Workshops (Hart 1994; Wilcox 1994)

Participatory fact-finding and analysis

- CATWOE: customers, actors, transformations, worldview, owners, environment (Wilcox 1994)
- Community Appraisals (Rural Forum Scotland 1995)
- Community audits (Policy Research Unit 1992)
- Community environmental monitoring (Alexandra et al 1996)
- Community needs analysis (LGMB 1996; Scottish Community Development Centre 1995)
- Community Operational Research (Wilcox 1994; Hart 1994)
- Environmental audit (Crouch, D. 1996)
- Future Search (Cheshire Landscape Trust 1996; LGMB 1996; Weisbord and Janoff 1995)
- Global Action Plan (LGMB 1994)
- Indicators (Dodds 1996; LGMB 1994; LGMB 1995)
- Nature Mapping: uses local volunteers to monitor wildlife and natural resources, collect and feed in data (Wildlife Society Bulletin, USA, 1995)
- Neighbourhood profiles (Smith, G. 1993)
- Participatory Action Research (Fals-Borda 1991; Rahman 1993)
- Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (Chambers 1997)
- Priority Search (Hart 1994; LGMB 1996; Wilcox 1994)
- Questionnaires (Bishop 1994; Hart 1994)
- Rapid Rural Appraisal (IIED 1994)
- Skills audit: internal to group (Wilcox 1994)
- Stakeholder analysis (Wilcox 1994)
- Surveys (Bishop 1994; Wilcox 1994)
- Village appraisals (ACRE; Hart 1994; LGMB 1996; Wilcox 1994)
- Visioning (Bell, D. 1993; LGMB 1996)

Information giving

- Computer-aided design (Bishop 1994)
- Events: for example, in Environment Week   (LGMB 1994)
- Exhibitions (Bishop 1994; Hart 1994)
- Leaflets (Bishop 1994; Hart 1994; Wilcox 1994)
- Mock-ups: full size models, rarely used in the UK (Bishop 1994)
- Newsletters (Bishop 1994; Hart 1994; Wilcox 1994)
- Press releases (LGMB 1994)
- Public meetings (Bishop 1994; Hart 1994; Wilcox 1994)
- Publications (CETU 1994; Zehr 1992)
- Reports: including State of the Environment reports (Bishop 1994; Hart 1994; LGMB 1994)
- School visits and talks (LGMB 1994)
- Slide shows and videos (Bishop 1994; Wilcox 1994)

Structures for participation

- Committees (Wilcox 1994)
- Community business (New Economics Foundation 1996; Pearce 1993; Wilcox 1994)

- Community development trusts (Bishop 1994; Development Trusts Association; Hart 1994; Kean 1992; Wilcox 1994)
- Community enterprise (New Economics Foundation 1996; Pearce 1993; Wilcox 1994)
- Consensus conferencing: mix of citizens juries and consensus building (LGMB 1996)
- Decentralisation (Bishop 1994)
- Development trusts (Bishop 1994; Development Trusts Association 1997; Hart 1994; Kean 1992; Wilcox 1994)
- Environmental networks (Krishnarayan 1993; Warburton & Wilcox 1988)
- Forums (Bishop 1994; LGMB 1994; LGMB 1996 (issue forums); Wilcox 1994 (community forums))
- Groups (Wilcox 1994)
- Institution building (Oakley 1991; Uphoff 1992)
- Research citizens panels (LGMB 1996)
- Standing citizens panels (LGMB 1996)
- Study circles (LGMB 1996)
- Teledemocracy: using new technology to provide information and open up debate (LGMB 1996)
- Trading companies: associated with registered charities (Wilcox 1994)

Support agencies and techniques for participation

- Architecture workshops (Kean 1992)
- Environment centres (Adatia 1995; Horsbrugh 1994)
- Facilitation (Bishop 1994; CETU; Wilcox 1994)
- Resource centres (Taylor 1983)
- Technical aid centres (ACTAC 1991)
- Umbrella bodies (Aston Business School 1991; Chanan 1992; Warburton 1994)

Overall, it is important to recognise that:

- Techniques and methods are developing all the time. Current favourites will be superseded by new approaches.

- Methods and techniques are only as good as the context and process in which they are employed.

- Planning a whole process is more important than choice of techniques. The main complaint from participants about participatory techniques is being left in the dark after the event (eg RTPI 1996), not about the effectiveness of a particular technique.

Assessing whether participation has been successful

Useful literature on evaluating participatory processes has been scarce in the past. It has been recognised that quantitative evaluation is necessary but not sufficient, but qualitative evaluation methods have not generally been available.

Many schemes which aim for participatory approaches may not be receiving the recognition they deserve because the indicators used to assess their success are designed to collect statistics rather than assess the quality or the relevance of the scheme: "Quality relates to the manner in which the service is provided and the judgement of it by specific individuals with unique characteristics, needs and aspirations" (Voluntary Activity Unit 1996).

A number of issues are emerging from the literature on evaluating participation:

- Criteria for evaluation purposes are likely to need to be negotiated between communities, other stakeholders, sponsors and agencies. The values underlying the initiatives, and all stakeholder involvement, will affect this negotiation.

- Evaluation needs to take into account action on specific projects, wider programmes and the policy context. For example, evaluation of any local initiative will need to take into account the impact of wider policy on the performance of that initiative, and whether the local initiative has in turn influenced policy.

- Evaluation always needs to cover inputs (resources, policy constraints), processes (how inputs are applied), outputs (specific products) and outcomes (the consequences of the outputs).

- Success will need to be judged in terms of *efficiency* (ratio of inputs and outputs) and *effectiveness* (measuring outputs against targets set) but also in terms of *equity* (to ensure actions do not affect some people less favourably than others, within an understanding of direct and indirect discrimination and the role of positive action).

- Unanticipated outcomes may sometimes be as important, or even more important, than planned outcomes. Evaluation processes need to account for this.

- Non-tangible outcomes, such as new interactions and relationships, or individual satisfaction with a process, are important and need to be recorded.

- Goals may change as initiatives progress and original goals are achieved. However, this needs to be consciously done and recorded.

- Base-line indicators may need to be set, possibly through initial community profiles or audits of need (Voluntary Activity Unit 1996). However, an alternative approach is to set directional indicators (Lawrence 1997) which show whether the situation is generally seen to be improving.

- "Evaluation needs to be able to distinguish between ... short term alterations to previous conditions and long term, systemic change which redefines the status quo. If emphasis is given to sustainability, it is only the latter which can claim to be effective" (Voluntary Activity Unit 1996, 27).

Recent material on evaluating community development (eg Voluntary Activity Unit 1996) recognises the equal importance of process and task (product) and suggests a model for setting indicators which links the two themes of community empowerment and improving quality of life:

- Community empowerment
    - A learning community: personal empowerment
    - A fair and just community: positive action
    - An active and organised community: development of community organisations
    - An influential community: power relationships and participation

- Changes which improve the quality of life in communities, including
    - A commonwealth: economic development
    - A caring community: social development
    - A green community: environmental development
    - A safe community: community safety
    - A good place to live: community satisfaction
    - A lasting community: long term viability

The literature suggests that these broad headings can be used to develop detailed indicators for specific initiatives. There is also work on creating sustainable development indicators specifically to assess the quality and quantity of participation (Dodds 1996). This builds on previous work on sustainability indicators done by the New Economics Foundation and others (WWF et al 1995)

The Voluntary Activity Unit stresses that evaluation is a continuing process, rather than an afterthought at the end of a piece of work: they suggest that a minimum of 10% of the project costs should be set aside for evaluation. More detailed guidance on designing the evaluation process based on this model, identifying indicators and using the evaluation positively, are given in their two handbooks (Voluntary Activity Unit 1996).

Oakley (1991, 241-268) discusses the difference between qualitative and quantitative measures. He suggests that quantitative evaluation moves from measurement to judgement, and qualitative evaluation moves from description to interpretation (Oakley 1991, 243). He argues that evaluation must be both quantitative and qualitative, dynamic rather than static, based on monitoring, and participatory. Oakley suggests an alternative set of indicators as outlined below.

- Quantitative indicators, including
  - Economic indicators: such as measurable economic benefits, and who benefits
  - Organisational indicators: such as who knows about the initiative, attendance at meetings
  - Participation in project activities: such as number of work days contributed, attendance at meetings, links between the initiative and other projects
  - Development momentum: such as number of people receiving training from the initiative, links to other groups

- Qualitative indicators, including
  - Organisational growth: such as emerging leadership structure and formalisation of group structure
  - Group behaviour: such as changing nature of involvement of group members, emerging sense of collective will and solidarity, involvement in group discussions, ability to analyse issues and problems
  - Group self-reliance: such as increasing ability of group to propose and consider courses of action, changing relationship with facilitator, independent action taken by group

The process of setting and agreeing indicators of success and progress is being increasingly recognised as an essential part of any participatory action. Increasing links between the evaluation of participation through community development (Voluntary Activity Unit 1996), participation in development (Oakley 1991), the development of indicators for participation in sustainable development (Dodds 1996), community-based indicators of sustainability (Lawrence 1997) and environmental indicators (WWF et al 1995) may begin to make more rapid progress in this area.

All the literature agrees, however, that the evaluation of participation is still at a relatively early stage of development. Indeed, these models and approaches will only have any real impact when they begin to influence the performance indicators set by bodies (government and others) which fund environmental management, so that participation begins to be recognised as a valuable activity in its own right and not simply a means to an end.

8.   OVERALL SUMMARY

In summary, this report shows that the literature suggests the following key points:

- Participation
    - Has become mainstream in principle
    - But is not universal in practice
    - The Commission and other agencies have a responsibility and an opportunity to increase participatory initiatives

- However, there are a number of barriers to overcome before the extent and effectiveness of participation in environmental management can be increased:
    - Lack of trust in civic and public institutions
    - People do not feel they have any ability to make any difference, which limits their willingness to become involved in participatory action
    - Institutional rigidity and unwillingness to change limits the effectiveness of participatory programmes
    - Lack of opportunities and resources for increased participation limit the potential for involvement

- Key issues emerging are that
    - Participation must be seen as an end in itself, as well as a means to an end
    - Participation is about sharing power, not about giving it away
    - Participation must include the community and beyond: all stakeholders
    - Participation must be focused on the local area and beyond
    - The choice of techniques depends on the overall process and the specific context
    - Principles of good practice must be followed, including flexibility, openness, willingness to experiment and take risks, willingness to change and commitment to participation itself as useful and important

9.   CONCLUSIONS

General conclusions are drawn from the literature throughout this report. However, conclusions and recommendations specifically relating to the Countryside Commission's own position and future work are outlined below in response to the questions in the Brief for the research.

Is participation a 'good thing'?

There are two ways of looking at this: from the point of view of participants, and from point of view of the promoting institutions.

There were some reservations in the 1970s, on behalf of participants, about the potential for participatory activities to 'co-opt' and neutralise protest and alternative views (eg Hallett 1987). However, it was accepted even then that, for the public, being part of a participatory process was more likely to create positive social change than remaining outside that process.

For institutions, the literature is even less equivocal. It clearly shows the political imperative for increasing participation, and demonstrates extensive practical experience which shows that public programmes are more efficient, effective and sustainable with participation than without it (eg Hastings et al 1996; Taylor 1995).

Is participation understood, applied and achieved by public officers, professionals, companies, educationalists, communities and individuals?

An enormous amount of material since 1990 has attempted to provide greater understanding of participation as it is practised (and understood in practice). In the past, much of the material was polemic: participation was a good thing and that was the end of it.

The literature suggests that *understanding* has grown enormously among academics, practitioners and policy makers, although it has been suggested that participation is sometimes more evident as an emotional commitment than a practical aspect of the work (Oakley 1991).

Less is known in detail about how far participation is understood by the public officials, professionals, companies, educationalists, communities and individuals involved. More research may be required in this area.

As to how far participation is *applied* by these people and institutions, there is some information in particular fields:

- There is material on participatory approaches taken by local authorities on Local Agenda 21 (Church 1995; Jones 1996; Jones 1997).

- The RTPI has done a survey of consultation on formal planning processes, asking both councils and consultees about how successful they feel consultation mechanisms are (RTPI 1996).

- The DOE commissioned a review of participation in formal development and planning processes, which also examined the extent and nature of participation (Bishop et al 1994).

- Some material on participation in international development has attempted some assessment of how far development projects have become participatory (eg Oakley 1991; Rahman 1995).

- Other examples of specific sources are quoted throughout this report.

All these sources agree:

- The majority of planning and development projects in all contexts are still done in the traditional top-down way by professionals.

- However, the number and quality of projects involving participatory processes is increasing (dramatically in recent years).

- There is a good chance that the participatory approach will soon become the mainstream approach, in practice as well as in theory.

Finally, as to how far participation is *achieved* by the various agents listed, it is clear from the literature that much more is being achieved now than in the past. In particular:

- There are now better mechanisms available for evaluating the achievements of participatory initiatives.

- There is more evidence (in case studies and in detailed analysis) to show these achievements.

- There is much more understanding about what success in participation actually means, and

- There is more understanding that there is not just one preferred outcome in all circumstances: context is as important in judging achievements as it is in choosing methods and approaches.

Is there a consensus on any aspects of the debate on environmental participation?

There is consensus that:

- Environmental projects are more cost effective, more appropriate and more sustainable if undertaken with full participation.

- Participation means different things to different people but it is essentially to do with involving the people affected by decisions in making and monitoring those decisions: it includes, but is more than, participating in activity and more than consultation.

- Environment and conservation issues cannot be left to professionals alone; many others have an interest and a contribution to offer.
- Participation is an essential element in sustainable development.

- To be sustainable, participation is not an optional extra in any particular project or programme, but must be a central element in the *purpose* of the project.

- Participation is a continuing process, both in terms of specific projects and programmes, and also in terms of the development of participation itself. More is being learned about participation all the time and there is a sense that, although a great deal of progress has been made, there is still room for more development and improvement.

There is also consensus that there are numerous barriers to increasing participation including:

- Lack of trust in institutions, and therefore doubts about their goodwill, their integrity, their willingness and their capability of listening and changing

- Lack of belief in the ability of ordinary people to influence or change anything (in their own minds and in the views of institutions)

- Institutional rigidity and unwillingness to change to incorporate the implications of participatory action

In summary, the situation is very different from five years ago. The quantity and quality of material on participation generally, and on participation in environmental management specifically, has grown enormously. The field has grown in confidence through experience, and the material now addresses some of the key underlying questions.

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