

Four perspectives on political participation in the city

DAVID L. UZZELL*

INTRODUCTION

There is some dispute as the origins of contemporary urban participation. Firstly, it has been seen to be a product of a grass roots reaction to the increased planning in and of society and the supposedly increased alienation felt by individual to the centralisation of decision-making (Lemon, 1974; Gyford, 1977; Nelkin, 1977; Sewell and Coppock, 1977). Probably the majority of writers subscribe to this view. Cole (1974), however, suggests an alternative source: «Before it became public policy», participation «like much social legislation, was associated principally with the academic and intellectual community». This as an opinion is shared by Groombridge (1972). A third view is that the inspiration for participation came from central and local government. Paris (1979) argues that government has positively encouraged and in many cases sponsored participation. Chamberlayne (1978), echoing this view, suggests that it has been seen by central government as a means of compensating for the crisis occurring in various areas of local government: the breakdown of communication between local Councils and their public; the inefficiency of services; the failure to respond to new problems and the upsurge of protest over plans from specific sections of the public.

* Geógrafo e Psicólogo. Department of Psychology, University of Surrey, Guildford, England.

The origins of participation raises certain questions concerning its function. If participation is part of an historically well established populist movement, then its objectives might be very different than if it is the product of recent government initiatives. For example, a populist origin may suggest the participation debate is concerned with the decentralisation of decision-making. Government may see participation as a form of consumer protection, token decentralisation or even manipulation. Obviously such origin is not mutually exclusive and it might be argued that the statutory introduction of participation was a reaction to and affirmation of a developing social movement. The simultaneous desire for participation by *both* planners and planned, government and governed appears at first paradoxical, but may be explained by examining the different political ends each sees it serving.

Four perspectives on participation

Paris (1979) usefully divides participation into four «perspectives»: co-operation; concession; incorporation; and, control. It should be recognised that these four perspectives are not definitive: for example, participatory intergroup relations could be examined from the perspective of degrees of conflict (Kramer, 1969). It was suggested above that the success of participatory exercises cannot be evaluated without looking at the origins of parti-

cipation and the purpose for which participatory structures are established.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that the effectiveness and success (and failure) of a pressure group cannot be understood within any one perspective. One must look to *each* perspective to explain the differential success and failure of the group in its relations with government over different issues at different points in time. The fact that one perspective is not sufficient at all times for even one group suggests that the nature of the interest group, the nature of government and the issues which bring them together is a complexity which makes question such as «Does participation work?» and «Is participation successful?» inappropriate, if not naive.

The success and failure of participatory groups can still only be understood in the context of Paris's four perspectives, if a further factor is taken into account; the communication style which relates the interest group to the Council and its intergroup relations. In this respect Dearlove (1973) makes an extremely useful contribution to the participation debate when he discusses the categorisation of pressure groups in Kensington and Chelsea by councillors as «helpful» or «unhelpful». The success of interest groups in achieving their aims is dependent upon three factors: the worthiness, reliability and helpfulness of the group in the eyes of the Council; the policies the Council feel they should or should not be pursuing; and the style in which interest groups present their requests and demands. Therefore, the acceptability and image of the interest group, the ideology of the Council and the method of communication are crucial factors determining the success of an interest group. It is apparent that each of these factors play an important part in the influence process and that the location of the community or interest group in any one of the four perspectives is dependent upon the operation of this categorisation process.

Studies of public participation in planning and the conflicts between the planners and the planned have usually focused on the problems of the inner areas of large cities. This paper discusses a case study of public participation in planning in Guildford, England, a quiet and comfortable market town in the County of Surrey, lying approximately 50 km southwest of London. It may seem an unlikely place for a case study of urban change, planning conflict and public participation. The severity of problems facing Guildford is clearly not as extreme as those found in

the larger metropolitan areas of Britain. However, the processes of urban development, the destruction of familiar sights which constitute home and place and the role the public is able and allowed to play in promoting and controlling change and making it congruent with popular aspirations, needs and wishes is no less significant, meaningful and relevant in Guildford than it is in inner London or any large city.

A Case Study: Friary Ward, Guildford

Friary Ward is principally an area of late nineteenth and early twentieth century semi-detached and terraced housing. A high proportion of the housing has been improved and brought up to modern day standards by the residents. The existence of a General Improvement Area (GIA) containing 40% of the occupied dwellings in the ward has both encouraged grant applications to Guildford Borough Council for house improvements and made the area an attractive proposition for young, first-time buyers. Consequently, the age and social structure of the area has changed considerably. The population largely comprises two groups: elderly people who have lived in the area, if not their present houses for most of their lives; and young couples, with or without young children. Nearly three-fifths of the population (57,6%) fall within the 16-34 and over 60 age group, compared with 47,5% for the town of Guildford as a whole and 44,6% for England and Wales. The majority of the households live in privately rented accommodation (53,6%), which is considerably in excess of the national average, while owner-occupiers are under represented. Only a small amount of accommodation is provided by the local authority (4,9%).

According to the 1971 Census, 54,4% of the population were in Social Class III (manual and non-manual workers), which is comparable to Guildford as a whole, but only 7,7% of the economically active fall into Social Classes I and II, compared with 29% for Guildford and 18,4% for England and Wales.

The Friary Ward Residents' Association

The Friary Ward Residents' Association (FWRA) was established in the early 1970's to represent the interests of all residents in the area in matters of housing and the environment. It is organized by

means of a small group of volunteers, and has a limited budget derived from membership subscriptions. The research for this paper was carried out over more than six years as part of a larger action research project (Uzzell, 1979; 1982) in the Friary Ward community.

In terms of two of Dearlove's criteria it would be fair to say that the officers and members of Guildford Borough Council see FWRA as «helpful», gauged by the correspondence between FWRA and Guildford Borough Council. The Residents' Association have always attempted to make constructive comments when objecting to planning proposals. When objections are made to planning proposals, the Association ascertained why such proposals are being put forward and then, where possible, suggested alternative proposals which are considered more acceptable to the residents. This often involves a considerable amount of research. In one case the Chairman of FWRA searched through the literature on cost/benefit analyses to find out whether any studies had been carried out on the economics of residents' parking schemes. Councillors put considerable weight on such informed comment and are influenced by «those who know their stuff», despite the fact that one senior Planning Committee member told me, «You can have a situation where a person may have knowledge to the last detail but at the end does not carry the day because he lacks basic common-sense. And a person can stand up and win because he has the feel of the situation». In supplying objections based on detailed considerations and many hours' work, the FWRA has acquired considerable respect in the Council's eyes. FWRA does not only object to proposals, but actively supports by letter those which are considered to be in the interests of residents.

Secondly, FWRA can be considered helpful in terms of the style in which they communicate their objections and proposals. FWRA have never favoured petitions, street demonstrations or racy headlincatching interviews with the press. Such tactics in Guildford lead to antagonism and failure. The communication between FWRA and the Council is quiet and tends to be at an interpersonal level. The Chairman is particularly active in this respect, having frequent meetings with officers of both Guildford Borough Council and Surrey County Council. FWRA has also had a continuous and positive relationship with the Ward councillors.

In short, FWRA basically «plays the game» and is considered «helpful» by the Council. By Dearlove's criteria, FWRA adopts an acceptable style with the Council in order to influence political decisions and policies. However FWRA can have only minimal influence over the third criterion that Dearlove identifies: the policies the Council believes it should or should not be pursuing. In this instance it is a question of whether the prevailing political ideology of the local authority will either permit or resist policy changes when confronted with FWRA pressure. It will be seen that the ideology of the controlling political party is a crucial factor in determining the success of FWRA's attempts to influence policy and decision-making.

Participation as Co-operation

The first perspective, a traditional liberal-pluralist view, emphasises that the role of interest groups is to co-operate with government and to assist it with its decision-making. Such a stance obviously lays great emphasis on techniques, as the role of interest groups is to input information into the decision-making machinery so that decisions can be made more efficiently and effectively. Of course, for the system to operate properly conflict will be reduced to a minimum and decisions will be the product of a negotiated consensus. Skeffington (1969) reflects such a perspective: «... one cannot leave all the problems to one's representatives. They need some help in reaching the right decision, and opportunity should be provided for discussions with all those involved.»

There have been many instances when FWRA has actively co-operated with Guildford Borough Council by canvassing local opinion on issues and then feeding this information into the decision-making system. For many officers and councillors in the local authority this is participation, although a more accurate description might be consultation. Such activities should not be disparaged as they can play an important role in making residents' view felt. But it is little more than this.

Several years ago, before work was started on a major road widening scheme, a plot of land which was to be used became available through building demolition. As there was to be a time period of over a year between demolition and the road construction,

FWRA suggested, and it was accepted, that this land be leased to the FWRA at a low rent for residents' parking. It was the Council's proud claim that this was the first time in Britain such an agreement had been made between a Residents' Association and the local authority. Whether or not this is the case, as a scheme it did serve to benefit all concerned: the residents who were ensured of a guaranteed parking space off the road; and the Council who derived some rent from the leasing of the land, not to mention goodwill and the provision of a short-term palliative to a much longer-term deep-rooted problem.

Co-operation, as a participation strategy, was used for the benefit of Guildford Borough Council and the residents. In this case, one can interpret the co-operation as a simple form of exchange. The local authority exchanged the land for rent and goodwill.

Participation as Concession

The second pluralist position suggests through grass-roots pressure, interest groups have forced local government to be subject to outside influence. Participation in this instance must be regarded as a concession from the government. As long as urban community groups have no powers of their own, then it might be thought that such a perspective is necessary if one is to be able to explain the success of participatory group activity.

The incursion of offices and other commercial activities into the residential parts of Friary Ward has long been a major concern to the Residents' Association. This process has principally occurred through the conversion of large turn-of-the-century residential houses into offices, and the demolition of existing houses and the erection of new offices. This activity has typically occurred at the interface between the edge of the commercial district and the residential areas. In many cases such conversions have been undertaken by property development companies as speculative ventures, with little reference to the real needs for this type of accommodation in the town. It has been assumed that as Guildford is one of the most prosperous towns in Britain, there will always be a need for commercial property. The FWRA has pressurised Guildford Borough Council to halt the conversion of residential houses into offices, because these large houses provide exactly the type of accommodation (one and two bedroom flats for renting or

purchase) of which there is a severe shortage in the town. This has been a difficult struggle because in many cases the land is zoned under the Town Plan for commercial use, and therefore planning permission for change of use is virtually automatic.

Continuous pressure from FWRA and other organisations such as the Labour Party gradually resulted in a shift in policy. In one such case, a private language school purchased a house and began to use it for offices and teaching without acquiring planning permission. When the owners of the language school were eventually forced to apply for planning permission, the Local Planning Authority opposed the conversion with the support of FWRA. The spread of the commercial sector out into residential areas has now almost ceased, and it is quite clear that the Residents' Association played an important role in not only bringing this issue to the attention of the wider public and Guildford Borough Council, but also persuading local politicians to review and change their policy.

However, Pickvance (1976) warns us of over emphasising the part played by pressure groups in changing local government policies and cites Dennis (1972) and Davies (1972) as examples of those who have fallen into this trap. At the time property development companies bought the residential houses for conversion there was a boom in land and property prices. The market subsequently went into recession, and it no longer became economically feasible to redevelop the land, at least not with the profit expectations which were predicted in the early 1970's. Furthermore, a rapid rise in house prices in Guildford, and a shift in government policy since the late 1960's towards housing rehabilitation rather than redevelopment has only served to shift local policy to be in line with the needs and wishes of the local community. The Residents' Association was undoubtedly important in influencing local government policy.

Participation as Incorporation

In contradistinction to the liberal-pluralist perspectives, Paris suggests there are two radical perspectives on participation — those of incorporation and control. However, before these two radical perspectives can be understood, and Paris does not specify this condition, one has also to alter quite dramatically one's theory of the State. Within a pluralist philosophy the State exists as a body, *ipso facto*; it is an object

which «sits above» the people and acts as a arbiter between the competing claims of interest groups. It courts neither allegiance nor favour. However, it has been suggested (Lively, 1978) that the State can be conceptualised as an interest group with its own ideology, competing for influence and power like any other group. Saunders (1979) maintains that the State is not a «thing» as suggested by pluralists, but rather a relation. A Marxist analysis, for example, would inform us that is a relation between those in government and the dominant class interests, such as those representing urban finance capital. Consequently, it would be argued, State intervention in social movements is necessary to maintain the position of the State. Two radical interpretations of participation can now be made. The first suggests that grass roots demands are not so much concessions but rather a means of incorporation: popular protest is sucked in and redefined by those in power so that the aspirations and demands of interest groups are transformed and made congruent with those of the prevailing State ethos.

Examples of attempts by Guildford Borough Council to incorporate and redefine the aspirations and demands of the Residents' Association are difficult to find. However, a good example can be found in the campaign by the Guildford Women's Aid group to make Guildford Borough Council provide a refuge for battered women. Guildford Women's Aid generated much publicity in the local press: this was «unhelpful». They squatted in empty properties (largely Council-owned) in an effort to pressurise the Council: this was «unhelpful». And finally, they projected a radical image: this was «unhelpful». Furthermore, the Council refused to believe that the battering of women could possibly happen in Surrey. If it was not seen to occur then it was not possible to have a policy towards it. If it was recognised in any way, it was defined as a welfare or criminal problem and thus the responsibility of the Social Services Department or the police. When eventually enough evidence was presented to Guildford Borough Council to show that battering did exist, even among the more affluent section of Guildford's population, the Council agreed to provide a refuge. However, it was on the condition that it could be used by the Council for the temporary housing of homeless and single-parent families. Guildford Borough Council refused to recognise that family violence was (and is) a problem demanding particular attention and special

solutions, not least of which is a temporary protective refuge for the victims. Guildford Borough Council totally incorporated the demands and wishes of the Guildford Women's Aid by redefining only the problem but also the solution. Incorporation took place at every level from the Management Committee which was set up to oversee the scheme, to the actual provision of accommodation.

Participacion as control

The final perspective offered is most forcefully expressed by Cockburn (1977). In this, participation is sponsored by government as a means of control. In the last 1960's, while genuflections were made towards increasing public participation in a wide variety of government services such as planning, education, health and social services, there was a parallel movement towards «corporate management». As Cockburn asks «Do corporate management and community development pull in opposite directions — or are they the tough and the tender aspects of one principle: management?». Rather than a decentralisation of power, participation is seen by the State as a means of control. Such a perspective requires that the initiative and maintenance of participation rests firmly with the local authority. However, it becomes difficult to use such a rationale when the initiative and maintenance of participation lies with sections of the public. Such a criticism does not necessarily invalidate Cockburn's critique of participation, but rather points to the importance of examining the context in which such sponsorship occurs.

At the time of Cockburn's study in Lambeth, South London, Lambeth Council was securely under the control of the Labour Party. As Cockburn herself states, there is an assumption generally made that the Labour Party represents the true interests of the working-class and that, when the Labour Party is in power, this is synonymous with popular power. This view is supported by Chamberlayne (1978). There is thus an *expectation* that the Labour Party will democratise public institutions and make them more accountable, democratic and responsive to public demands. In Lambeth, neighborhood Councils and their advice centres were established in addition to the Consumer Advice Centre, Citizens Advice Bureau, Community Law Centre and Town Planning Advice Centre — all of which were sponsored by the

Borough Council. Lambeth Council also supported a Community Relations Committee, wary as it was of racial strife. It might be argued that the Labour Party found it necessary in the light of these expectations to sponsor such participatory organisations. As to whether such sponsorship was also seen as a means of controlling the public is a different question, although from Cockburn's evidence, this would certainly appear to be the case.

When Guildford Borough Council has not agreed with FWRA's proposals, control rather than incorporation has been the strategy used to manage the situation.

Since the 1894 Local Government Act provided for every Parish with over 300 population to have its own Council, urban areas have had unequal representation vis a vis rural areas. This has meant that urban areas have been under-represented at a grass-roots, parish level. Recent Government Circulars (DOE 12/77; DOE 33/78) and the report of the Boundary Commissioners (Report Number 286) emphasise quite forcefully the need to examine the representational needs of urban areas. The 1972 Local Government Act made provision for the establishment of Parish Councils in urban areas. Therefore, an anomaly which has existed for 85 years is now able to be corrected.

The Friary Ward Residents' Association decided to seek parish status for part of Friary Ward. It was hoped that by doing so a Parish Council could be established which would bring representative government down to grass-roots level. The Residents' Association considered that the existence of a Parish Council in Friary Ward would have many benefits. Parish Councils can provide recreational facilities and improve the environment and amenities according to the wishes of the local community. They also have a statutory right to be consulted on all planning applications. Parish Councils raise income by levying an annual rate or tax on each property in the parish. The tax levied is extremely small and forms a minor proportion of total local taxes. Therefore the Parish Council would raise its own money for the direct use and benefit of the community.

It was strongly and rightly emphasised by the Boundary Commissioners that the establishment of a Parish Council should wholeheartedly reflect the will of the residents of the areas to be parished. Indeed the Clerk and Solicitor to Guildford Borough Council, David Watts, wrote in a letter to the Friary Ward Residents' Association, «The Council will also

need to be conclusively convinced that any desire of the establishment of a Parish Council in a presently unparished area is truly representative of the whole of the residents in such an area» (24 October 1978). Every encouragement was given to the Residents' Association to canvass the residents' opinions. In a later letter David Watts wrote that the Policy and Resources Committee «considered it desirable, before the Council gave any detailed consideration to the proposals... affected local residents and associations be canvassed» (24 November 1978). To this end the FWRA conducted a comprehensive survey of residents in November 1978 to ascertain whether or not they wanted a Parish Council.

The results of the Parish Council survey can be summarised as follows: just under one-third of the households in Friary Ward were interviewed (454 interviews), representing the young and old, males and females, owners and tenants of property, members and non-members of the FWRA, and those who have lived in the Friary Ward for under a year to those who have lived in the Ward all their lives. Three-quarters to those interviewed (72%) said that they would like to see a Parish Council representing the interests of the residents, while slightly fewer residents (69%) said that there was a need for a Parish Council. The results satisfied the criteria of the Policy and Resources Committee and the Boundary Commissioners.

The Policy and Resources Committee rejected the proposal to recommend the establishment of a Parish Council in Friary Ward by twelve votes to one. Therefore, having encouraged a survey to gauge the true feelings of the residents, the Committee completely disregarded the findings because they did not coincide with their own preferences. According to one of the Council officers there was not one request from any councillor to obtain a copy of the ten page report which was available from the Council offices. Only a summary of the report's findings was included in the Committee's agenda. The arguments in the Council Chamber against the establishment of a Parish Council in Friary Ward revolved around four issues.

But even on the matters of principle the councillors' arguments can be seen to be ill-founded, if not biased. In terms of the cost, it was shown that 70% of the residents said that it would be worth the penny in the pound rate increase. If the Council would argue that the whole Borough contributes to the Parish rate,

then it is surely inequitable that the urban areas subsidise rural Parish Councils?

The second argument was that Parish Council are not appropriate in urban areas. This was the whole point of the Boundary Commissioners's Parish Review. The 1972 Local Government Act suggested that urban areas should be considered for emparishment, ridding an inequality which has existed since the nineteenth century.

Thirdly, it was made quite clear by the Boundary Commissioners that no area would be forced to have a Parish Council just because others desired one. It would be entirely possible to parish some areas while leaving others unparished.

Finally, it was argued that if a (good) Residents' Association is in existence there is no necessity for a Parish Council. This is the most serious example of obfuscation. Residents' Associations and Parish Councils are very different bodies. Parish Councils have a right to be consulted on all planning applications; they can on their own initiative do anything they think will be in the interests of their constituents that is not the statutory responsibility of some other Council; they can levy a rate which can be spent on environmental improvements not provided by the Council; and finally, they have the power to speak for their community. It is often argued that Residents' Associations are not representative of the community, a charge which cannot be levelled at Parish Councils.

The most serious consequence of the decision of the Policy and Resources Committee and eventually the full Borough Council in not recommending to the Boundary Commissioners that a Parish Council be established in Friary Ward is that it has questioned the status of participation in Guildford. When the Council found itself in disagreement with the opinions of the majority of residents, it was forced into controlling the situation by challenging the rules and disregarding the residents' application on matters of principle.

As a consequence of Guildford Borough Council's decision not to recommend to the Boundary Commissioners that a Parish Council be established in Friary Ward, the FWRA wrote directly to the Boundary Commissioners presenting them with the survey evidence. The Boundary Commissioners called a public inquiry to allow the Residents' Association to put forward its case and Guildford Chamber of Commerce, an organisation representing shops and

commercial interests in Guildford spoke against the proposal arguing that it would lead to an increase in the local tax burden, as did one national store which employed a barrister to oppose the creation of a Parish Council. Although several other community groups spoke in support of the Residents' Association, and despite the fact that the application for Parish Council status met all the requirements laid down by the Boundary Commissioners, the application was rejected.

Discussion

It should be apparent from this paper that questions such as «Does participation work?» and «Is participation successful?» fail to recognise the complexity of intergroup relations and political psychological processes in the city. Paris's four perspectives on participation are useful, but they have to be seen in conjunction with alternative theories of the State and particular intergroup communication strategies.

The «helpfulness», method of communication and informed nature of FWRA's approaches to the Council were crucial factors in the success of FWRA's attempts to influence the Council. It must also be recognised though that in several cases FWRA's policy stance was congruent with that of the Council. It might have expected that FWRA would not have been particularly successful with regard to the incursion of office and commercial developments in residential areas. However, a number of factors external to the local situation (changing Central Government policy; world economic recession) conjoined to act in FWRA's favour. However, economic circumstances forced the Council to adopt policies which were in essence no growth/conservationist in orientation and in contradistinction to the ideological position of economic growth which Guildford Borough Council typically promoted.

FWRA's pressure on Guildford Borough Council was not always successful however «helpful» it tried to be in its communication and relationship with the local authority. In these cases FWRA's policies were diametrically opposed to those of the Council. This would suggest that the correspondence of policy between the community group and the local authority is the overriding factor in successful participation. Helpfulness and communication style may only play

an important part after policy conflicts have been resolved.

An «arbiter» theory of government is not particularly useful as it cannot account for those governments which support particular ideologies and thus become interest groups themselves. Party politics would have no place in elections if this were not the case. If one is to accept that governments do support particular interests, then it becomes possible to accept more radical critiques of participation which view participation as another technique of urban management. Local government can be seen as an interest group like any other body, competing in the arena of urban power, and whose interests may conflict with those of other urban groups. When conflict does arise, the resolution of that conflict may not take the form of co-operation or concession. Incorporation or control by government is an alternative strategy: a strategy which is best labelled urban management.

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have witnessed an increasing public demand for and involvement in the planning, design and management of the urban environment. This paper explores four alternative perspectives on participation — participation as co-operation, concession, incorporation and control. Using a case study from Guildford, England, it is demonstrated that local government uses each of these to modulate its relations with community groups. As a consequence, participation ceases to be simply a device to decentralise power and promote self-determination by community groups in the planning and design of the environment, but instead becomes a tool of urban management.

RESUMO

Tem-se assistido nos últimos anos a uma crescente reivindicação pública de um maior envolvimento no planeamento, projecto e gestão do ambiente urbano. Este artigo analisa quatro perspectivas alternativas da participação: cooperação, concessão, incorporação e controlo. Usando um estudo de caso (Guildford, Inglaterra), demonstra-se que as autoridades municipais utilizam cada uma destas formas de participação para modular as suas relações com os grupos desta comunidade. Consequentemente, a participação deixa de ser simplesmente um instrumento de descentralização do poder e promoção da auto-determinação das comunidades no planeamento ambiental, para se tornar um instrumento de gestão urbana.