

**Social Capital and the Participation of Marginalized Groups in Government: A
Study of the Statutory Partnership between the Third Sector and Devolved
Government in Wales.**

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Abstract

This paper outlines the initial impact that recent constitutional reform has had in reframing governance and changing the role of the third sector in Wales. In the wake of devolution it shows a civil society in transition. It examines two democratic innovations; a new and singular statutory partnership between national Welsh government and the voluntary sector, and a unique legal duty requiring that government promote equality of opportunity for all people in the exercise of its functions. Here the emerging findings of research into the prevailing levels and types of social capital are outlined as part of an evaluation of the way such reforms are being used further the political aim for a more broad-based, participatory system of governance. Attention is focussed on measures designed to engage in the work of government hitherto marginalized social groups such as women, disabled people and people from an ethnic minority background. The nature and working practices associated with new structural and procedural arrangements that include government-sponsored consultative third sector networks for 'minority' groups are explored. The emerging evidence presented here suggests that whilst reframing governance and state intervention may have the potential to foster top-down social capital in ways that promote activism and political participation, significant barriers remain to achieving 'inclusive' governance.

Introduction

During the 1990s, the British Labour Party advocated a partnership approach to government relations with the voluntary sector. The constitutional reforms that it implemented between 1997-9 afforded the opportunity to effect such a realignment of the third sector. These measures were part of the wider political aim of, 'transforming politics' and 're-draw[ing] the boundaries between what is done in the name of the people and what is done by the people themselves' (Blair, 1996). The creation of a new national legislature formed the centrepiece of the Party's revised constitutional arrangements for Wales. Those advocating, and later implementing, limited self-government for the country sought to create what was described as 'inclusive government'. According to its proponents this meant ending the longstanding marginalization of so-called 'minority'

groups and fostering the participation of all sections of society in the work of government. At an early stage the third sector was identified as a key arena for furthering this aim. It was asserted that involving 'minority' voluntary sector groups would not only increase the democratic legitimacy of government, but also, according to the government's plans, it would produce better government because of, 'the special contribution which voluntary organizations can make in a wide range of policy areas' (Welsh Office, 1998, p.19). In contrast to the situation in Scotland and Northern Ireland, the reframing of governance in Wales placed a unique statutory duty upon the new Welsh legislature to enter into a legally binding partnership with the voluntary sector. Under the terms of the Government of Wales Act (1998), the National Assembly for Wales was obliged to publish a Voluntary Sector Scheme that set out how it proposed to involve voluntary organizations in the work of government. This statute also contained a singular legal requirement that the legislature promote equality of opportunity for all people in the exercise of its functions. Both statutory duties were designed to achieving better government by increasing the participation of marginalized groups.

This paper examines the effects of these reforms on voluntary associations representing women, disabled people, people from an ethnic minority background, as well as homosexual and bisexual people. It uses social capital theory in order to understand and evaluate these changes. Existing work, such as that by Putnam (1993), suggests that the principal aim of constitutional reform, i.e. better governance, can best develop in areas where there are significant prevailing levels of social capital. This assessment is based upon the fact that social capital, or the norms and networks that bring people together and

promote social interaction, is a resource that governments can utilize to strengthen democracy and promote wider engagement by the citizenry in politics. However, despite politicians' talk of participation and increased activism, little is known about the prevailing types and levels of social capital in Wales. This paper begins to address existing lacunae and reports on the first phase of a two-year study¹ that is exploring the relationship between associative third sector activity, social capital and democratic reforms aimed at achieving better governance.

The following section of this article locates the present research within the literature of social capital and explores the notion of inclusive governance. This is followed by an outline of salient aspects of Welsh society that includes the current knowledge of volunteering and social capital in Wales, and the structural impact of constitutional reform on the Third Sector. Following an account of the research methodology, the main 'findings' section of the paper assesses the progress made towards inclusive governance through an analysis of the effectiveness of the new arrangements introduced by devolution and the impact that they are having on the working relations between devolved government and 'minority' voluntary sector organizations.

Social Capital and Inclusive Governance

This paper adopts the more theoretically sophisticated definition of social capital which is customarily used in the literature and refers to the social networks and norms which underpin civil society and patterns of active citizenship (for a full discussion see: Putnam, 1993; Granovetter, 1985; Fukuyama, 1995; 1999, and Portes, 1995). According to this conceptualisation, social capital, or the ‘features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions’ (Putnam, 1993, p.167). Government is one arena that can benefit from social capital because the formation of social networks founded upon trust and sociability between individuals serves to enhance their capacity to perform the key tasks that comprise the political process; the pursuit of common ends and resolution of collective problems (cf. Jacobs, 1961; Coleman, 1988; Tonkiss, 2000). This view is consonant with the egalitarian pluralist strand of contemporary constitutional-political argument where social networks are seen as central to modern democratic politics and the process of democratization (Cohen and Rogers, 1992, p.394; Gibson, 1998). According to Rose (1998, p.5), social networks fall into two broad, non-discrete categories: ‘informal’ (characterized by ‘face-to-face’ relationships between limited numbers of people bound by kinship, friendship or propinquity) and ‘formal’ (constituting rule-bound, bureaucratic, arrangements that often possess a legal personality, and benefit from state or market funding).

However, social capital is more than the stock of social networks, or the ‘recurring relationships between individuals’ (Rose, 1998, p.5). It is also about the types of human capital and non-financial ‘resources’ that can be capitalized in ways that shape society’s capacity for economic development as well as political participation (cf.; Tonkiss, 2000). One such resource is trust. For the present purposes this can be defined as a ‘discrete form of human interaction and an ideal model of communal life’ (Seligman, 1997, p.7). It is a concept that allows democracy to function properly for it shapes the propensity of individuals to participate in political or society-oriented associations and thus it, ‘operates to link ordinary citizens to the institutions that are intended to represent them thereby enhancing both the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic government’ (see Fennema and Tillie, 2000, p.5; Hooghe and Stolle, 2000, p.14; Mishler and Rose, 2001, p.30).

Within the literature on social capital, Moore and Whitt (2000, p.310) highlight the need to broaden the focus of existing studies so as to examine social networks amongst marginalized groups and, moreover, to explore the processes at work in the voluntary sector. The present discussion begins to address these lacunae by examining contemporary patterns of social capital within the context of the reframed system of governance presented by recent constitutional change in the UK. This article also engages with current theoretical debate by determining whether the present findings challenge the widely held assumption that social capital cannot be created by top-down state intervention (Putnam, 1993; Granovetter, 1985; Fukuyama, 1995; 1999). This is because,

according to some, it is a product of pre-existing patterns of social interaction, or 'embeddedness' (Portes, 1995, p.13; also see Granovetter, 1985, p.481). However, others assert that governments can intervene to create top-down social capital by structural innovations in government (e.g. Rico et al, 1999) and by promoting education that provides the skills for active citizenship (e.g. Rubenson, 2000). As the following discussion reveals, contemporary political thinking has emphasised the twin concerns of activism and participation. This paper reports on the early stages of what amounts to an empirical test of the relationship between the effectiveness of government and social capital.

Reframing Governance - The nature of the Welsh Third Sector and the Position of Marginalized Groups

Existing studies suggest that Wales presents an interesting socio-political context in which to observe the UK government's aim of reframing the relationship between the state and the voluntary sector. Commentators have described a Welsh tradition of activism and, an 'inheritance, unmistakably rooted in decentralized libertarian socialist community values of solidarity, social justice and co-operation' (Hain, 1999, p.6; see also Williams, 1985, p.267). This historical assessment is based on the evidence of local medical aid societies (the nineteenth and twentieth century forerunners of the National Health Service), miners' welfare societies, chapel-based activities and other community and cultural organizations; the majority of which operated on a voluntary basis. However, recent data suggest that since this era it is probable that there has been a secular and

religious decline in levels of social capital in Wales and a loosening of the close bonds between social capital and politicisation and participation (Rees et al, 1997; Fevre et al, 1999, 2000).

Official figures from the WCVA provide a snapshot of the present day Welsh voluntary sector. It has a £570 million annual income, contributes voluntary activities worth the equivalent of £3.4 billion to the Welsh economy and employs 13,000 staff. Current data on the level of voluntary activity in the sector present a mixed picture. They indicate that from a total population of three million citizens, 1.8 million volunteers currently take part in the activities of 23,700 third sector organizations in Wales (WAG, 2001, p.5, para 8.). However, this suggests a much higher level of voluntarism than identified in other data sources. When gauged by the propensity of people to join organizations, and the number of citizens defined as ‘not civically engaged’, the prevailing levels of social capital are shown to be lower in Wales than in other British countries. Yet other evidence, relating to informal social networks, contradicts this assumption. It shows that people in Wales have greater network contacts than the residents of Scotland and England (Table 1.). Notwithstanding the limitations and contradictions in the official data, it would appear that the political aim for the National Assembly for Wales to promote a more participatory system of governance by successfully utilizing prevailing levels of social capital in the third sector is a particularly challenging one.

Social Capital Indicator	Wales	Scotland	England (except London)	England	London	GB
Membership of community organisation	17	19	26	-	34	-
Membership of environmental, country or green organisation	8	18	18	-	83	-
Percentage agreeing with the statement 'most people can be trusted'	45	59	44	-	40	-
Per cent participating one or more times in volunteer political activities	2	3	2	-	3	-
Satisfactory friendship network†	74	71	-	65	-	66
Satisfactory relative network†	60	51	-	57	-	52
Not civically engaged†	15	16	-	16	-	16

(Sources: Park et al, 2001², except indicators marked †. The latter are derived from ONS 2002³).

Table One., National Contrasts in Social Capital Indicators in Great Britain, circa 2000. (Percentage of All Respondents Sampled Matching Each Social Capital Indicator).

Weighed against the foregoing outline of the third sector in Wales, we have to turn to the interplay of UK policy and the aims and actions of the Welsh Assembly, in order to

contextualise and understand the implications of constitutional change for the participation of marginalized groups in government. The political doctrine promulgated by the British Labour Party in the 1990s - the 'third way' (Blair, 1998) – sought to develop the links between civil society and government. Such thinking identified the third sector as one arena where such ideas were to be applied. Proponents argued that, 'a key challenge of progressive politics is to use the state as an enabling force, protecting ... voluntary organizations and encouraging their growth to tackle new needs, in partnership as appropriate' (Blair, 1998, p.4). The stated aim of this revised role for the third sector was to, 'make a crucial contribution to our aim of a just and inclusive society' (Blair, 1998a, p.3). Reflecting upon this shift in government thinking, Taylor (2001, p.95) concluded that, 'in consultation and participation exercises voluntary and community organizations were initially outsiders in a policy process dictated by the top-down. The language of partnership apparently moves them to the inside'.

In Wales too, the voluntary sector was identified as a key locus for modernizing government. Here it was argued that, 'in recent years the growth of the "social economy" or "third sector" ... offers the prospect of a successful community enterprise alternative to unbridled capitalism on the one hand, and failed bureaucratic, centralized public ownership on the other' (Hain, 1999, p.19). The Parliamentary White Paper that set out the institutional blueprint for the new national legislature promised that, 'the Assembly will be able to develop ... [a] partnership; the Government will encourage it to harness the special contribution which voluntary organizations can make in a wide range of policy areas' (Welsh Office, 1998, p.19). This was one of a number of innovations

designed to establish, 'a new, more inclusive and participatory democracy' (ibid, 1998, p.19). These plans highlighted the need to fully engage in the work of government disabled people and members of ethnic minority communities. They also stated that 'greater participation by women is essential to the health of our democracy' and concluded that; 'by establishing the Assembly the government is moving the process of decision-making closer to the citizen' (Welsh Office, 1998, 15, paras 3,1-3.2, and 24, para 4.7; NAAG, 1998, 26, para 4.). Such inclusive language (cf. Chaney and Fevre, 2000) was thus used to argue that increasing citizen activism and securing greater involvement of groups in civil society in government had the potential to deliver more effective governance (Paterson and Wyn Jones, 1999, p.183). From the outset, the umbrella body representing the third sector, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), recognized that the non-profit sector was central to the process of reform. It observed that, 'if the Assembly is to fulfil the expectations of operating inclusively and in partnership with others, then it will need to work closely with voluntary and community organizations' (WCVA, 1999, p.8). The remainder of this paper is concerned with the initial evidence of the Assembly's first term and the nature and extent to which progress has been made towards these goals.

Over recent years, partnership between the voluntary sector and government has become an increasingly common feature of European governance (cf. Harris et al, 2001, p.12). However, the terms of the new statutory partnership with national-level government in Wales are, within a UK context, singular and make the realignment of the sector of particular interest. The partnership's terms are set out in section 114 of the Assembly's

founding statute. This provides a broad definition of the term ‘voluntary organisation’ and states it that:

‘114 – (1) The Assembly shall make a scheme setting out how it proposes, in the exercise of its functions, to promote the interests of relevant voluntary organisations. (2) In this section “relevant voluntary organisations” means bodies (other than local authorities or other public bodies) whose activities – (a) are carried on otherwise than for profit, and (b) directly or indirectly benefit the whole or any part of Wales (whether or not they also benefit any other area).

The text of the Voluntary Sector Scheme, the contract drawn up in response to the statutory duty, restated the wider goal of inclusive governance and set out the future agenda for this new partnership:

‘The Assembly values volunteering as an important expression of citizenship and as an essential component of democracy ...the goal is the creation of a civil society which offers equality of opportunity to all its members regardless of race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, language preference, religion or family/domestic responsibilities; [and] is inclusive and enables people to participate in all its economic, social and cultural activities’ (NAW, 2000, chpt 2., para 2.7).

Crucially, in order to realize this goal, the Scheme states, ‘the Assembly recognizes ... the role they [voluntary organisations] play in formulating and delivering public policy’ (ibid, chpt 2., para 2.10).

Some observers were sceptical of these plans. Their doubt centred on the role of the sector’s representative body the WCVA. Fears were expressed about its ability to successfully stand for the diverse views of all the country’s voluntary organizations. Such reservations are still being voiced. Interviewed in the course of this study, a manager of one voluntary organization expressed a widely held view: ‘it is a concern that certain areas will be lost as they [the WCVA] will not flag up all of the issues. This is because

the voluntary sector is so huge really, isn't it? How could they possibly be experts on everything?' Thus one of the main challenges in implementing the partnership, identified by interviewees, was to successfully institute democratic and enabling structures.

The Welsh executive has taken measures to respond to such concerns in developing the Voluntary Sector Scheme. New consultative networks have been created such as the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council (VSPC). This comprises 21 interest groupings designed to reflect the breadth of voluntary activity in the country, from environmental issues to the arts. Three VSPC groupings, that total 3,800 organizations and constitute 16 per cent of the third sector, are dedicated to representing hitherto marginalized groups and deal with gender issues, disability, and ethnic minority interests (see Table 2.). Representatives from all 21 interest groupings in the Partnership Council hold regular meetings with Assembly Members (AMs), officials and WCVA managers. In addition, they have the right to hold bi-annual meetings with Assembly Government cabinet ministers in order to raise issues of concern to their volunteers.

Forum Heading	Classification	Total number of Organisations	% of Welsh Voluntary Sector
Disability	All	1651	7.0
	Learning Disabilities	997	4.2
	Physical Disabilities	1250	5.3
Ethnic Minorities	All	315	1.3
	Ethnic Minorities	302	1.3
	Refugees	13	0.1
Gender	All	1806	7.6
	Men	278	1.2
	Women	1546	6.5
TOTAL		3772	15.9

Table Two., Voluntary Sector Organizations Representing Marginalized Groups c. September 2001. (WCVA, 2001).

As part of the post-devolution arrangements, the Welsh legislature's unique statutory equality clause requires that the National Assembly: 'make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people' (cf. Chaney and Fevre, 2002). It is an example of a 'fourth generation' equality law in that it requires government to actively *promote* equality. As Fredman (2000, p.154) observes: 'a particularly important dimension of fourth generation equality laws is their potential to encourage participation by affected groups in the decision-making process itself'. From the outset, the legislature's Standing Committee on Equality of Opportunity, which has primary

responsibility for ensuring the mainstreaming of equality in policy making, identified ‘partnership working with ... the voluntary sector’ (NAW, 1999, p.2) as a key way of promoting equality of opportunity and inclusive governance.

In addition to the VSPC arrangements, the statutory equality duty has prompted government to develop four additional, *separate* consultative ‘equality’ networks. These are predominantly comprised of voluntary organizations that represent the interests of marginalized groups. They have been given Assembly funding to support dedicated staff, expand their membership and feed into the Assembly’s policy consultations (Table 3.).

Assembly Sponsored Consultative Network	Membership Size
Disability Wales	400 affiliated groups
Wales Women’s National Coalition (WWNC)	Approx. 100,000 individuals in 20 affiliated groups
The All Wales Ethnic Minority Association (AWEMA)	300 individuals
LGB [Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual] Forum Cymru	Approx. 500 individuals. Mixture of affiliated groups and individuals

Table Three., National Assembly Sponsored Consultative ‘Equality’ Networks Set-up in Response to the Statutory Equality Duty.

The self-stated aims of one of these Assembly sponsored forums, the All Wales Ethnic Minority Association (AWEMA), are to promote ethnic minority participation in government and, ‘act as an effective vehicle for consultation, participation and communication between minority ethnic communities and the National Assembly’

(AWEMA, 2001, p.2). LGB [Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual] Forum Cymru is the first government-funded dedicated consultative forum based on a constituency of interest defined by sexual orientation in the UK. It has been described by its co-ordinators as, ‘a national voice that will articulate the concerns and needs of the community in Wales to the National Assembly’ (Jones, 2002, p.4).

The Welsh legislature has thus responded to its two unique statutory duties by implementing a range of structural measures to promote participation in government by ‘minority’ and other voluntary sector groups. Following an outline of the research methodology, we now turn to an analysis of the effectiveness of these arrangements and the impact that they are having on the working relations between voluntary sector organizations and government.

Methodology

These emerging research findings are based on a wide range of secondary sources, and analysis of the transcripts of 100 semi-structured interviews with managers and co-ordinators with voluntary sector organizations representing marginalized groups. The latter are membership organizations comprised of, and designed to serve the needs of, women, disabled people, ethnic minorities, and gay, lesbian and bisexual people. The organizational aims of these bodies ranged from social activities, service provision, consultation, and lobbying. These were selected in a theoretical sample designed to reflect the size, nature and geographical location of all such organizations in the country.

Thus, for example, organisations were chosen that reflected the breadth of each marginalized grouping category, such as covering the full range of disabilities – from sensory impairment, physical disability to learning disabilities and mental health issues. A fuller understanding of contemporary process of change affecting the voluntary sector, one that is informed by the nature and type of prevailing social capital, will be afforded by triangulation in the research methods employed. The present qualitative data will be complemented by the results of an extensive questionnaire survey that was distributed to the ordinary members of these organizations during the second data collection phase of this project in late 2002.

Research Findings

In the wake of devolution, the Voluntary Sector Partnership Scheme (VSPC) has had the effect of formalizing the participation in government of the marginalized or ‘minority’ groups under study. It has also had another important effect; it has conveyed *legal rights* to the third sector. Both the VSPC and the National Assembly’s statutory equality duty, set out what hitherto marginalized groups can expect in their dealings with elected representatives. Further binding contracts link government and individual voluntary associations. For example, the Black Voluntary Sector Network Wales (BVSNW) with a composite membership of 120 organizations and individuals, has entered an agreement or ‘compact’ with the National Assembly. This partnership underpins, ‘a joint commitment to taking forward the race equality agenda at all levels; [it operates to] improve consultation and participation in policy and implementation; [and to] provide recognition

of the role, contribution and needs of the [voluntary] Sector, [and will offer] capacity building, [and means of] developing infrastructure and sustainability'. The key areas of the Compact and are listed as follows (VSPC, 2001, p.4):

- Participation, representation and consultation developing inclusive government policy
- Fair Funding
- Partnerships and the local relationship
- Tackling racism, inequality and exclusion
- Capacity building, economic development and training
- Volunteering, mentoring and peer education

As with all the new Assembly sponsored networks, BVSNW promotes and facilitates activism and voluntary activity amongst its members and is a source of advice on funding, legal issues and administrative practices. A senior civil servant stated that 'the Black voluntary sector has a particular role ... to bring together the views of the grassroots'. Accordingly, it has lobbied for consultation with ministers on a range of issues that include: housing, financial resources, and domestic violence.

The development of these third sector networks is an attempt to create a locus for lobbying and participation in government in a way that did not happen prior to devolution. With support from the National Assembly these networks are expanding their memberships. In the words of one interviewee this process has encouraged new groups and individuals to come 'out of the woodwork'. Another said, 'there's been a lot of interest from people willing to join.' Such a positive response has surprised some of those involved. One respondent concluded of the new system of governance: 'there seem to be a lot of open doors, people who want to hear what we have to say, a lot of the members

are coming to us wanting to help in any way they can'. However, the comments of interviewees also reveal contradictions and challenges, not least between utilizing pre-existing social capital in the policy process – tapping into the associative life that is already present - and the need to actively create it by bringing people together in the new consultative networks. The words of one Assembly government minister suggest that, in her view, realizing the aim of a participatory mode of governance was a straightforward matter of reaching out to existing associations, or what she described as 'such representative groups'. For her, they are: 'our arm in the community ... and we can use them as our sounding board and vice versa. So what we'd like is a bottom up process so people can say actually these are the genuine equality issues'. Yet, in the opinion of some interviewees, associative activity is not yet sufficiently developed to enable this to happen. The manager of one of the third sector networks highlighted the role of leadership and the need for *issues* to draw people together in voluntary associations representing marginalized groups. For him inclusive governance meant, 'that you have got to generate that informed opinion as widely as possible. And that means developing ... these forums ... that take responsibility for pulling groups of people together, so you get groupings of people working on a *specific issue*, once they start meeting together, once we've found them, we can start feeding other issues in'.

A further tension exists between the notion of broad-based grass root engagement, or a 'bottom-up approach', and a selective strategy that uses experts and managers to represent the various voluntary organizations. The words of a senior civil servant suggest that parts of the Assembly bureaucracy are more at home with the latter mode of

engagement. He described the role of the Assembly sponsored networks as, ‘find[ing] the *right* people ... to actually be able to put an input in from experience, through their own knowledge of a policy area’. Balancing reliance upon expertise and technocratic solutions with the need for broad-based engagement with the ordinary members of the voluntary organizations presents a major challenge. It has been highlighted as a key issue in a recent VSPC publication. This stated that: ‘the numbers, independence and diversity of those involved of volunteering makes it both very important and very difficult to present a ‘volunteering’ perspective on issues. It can be particularly difficult to reflect the voice of the volunteer as distinct from that of the volunteer manager or the organisation itself’ (VSPC, 2001a, p.3). This is a dilemma that is linked to a number of issues that together constitute voluntary associations’ role in ‘interest mediation’. These include: the organizational structures of the groups themselves, their administrative efficiency, their existing skills-base, and the level of resources available to individual groups.

At present, creating efficient decision-making structures that facilitate broad-based meaningful consultation with members is a particular problem. Some interviewees were critical of both the complexity and inappropriateness of some of the new Voluntary Sector Scheme structures. Similar problems face the Assembly sponsored consultative ‘equality’ networks. Given their often-complex organizational and administrative structures, developing effective and democratic decision-making processes is posing a particularly difficult task. As the minutes of the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council record; ‘consensus is difficult when the structures to achieve it do not exist’ (VSPC, 2000, para 2.8). In the case of the WWNC this was highlighted in an internal survey of

member organizations. When asked to identify their policy priorities for the Coalition diverse responses were received. These ranged from: banning the cultivation of genetically modified crops, through to raising awareness of carers' issues, and ensuring the future of the Welsh language. In a further sense, these emerging findings suggest that a lack of adaptability and efficiency in organizations' practices and procedures may also hinder future participation for a number fail to keep accurate membership records or have a poorly managed branch structure that precludes engagement and dialogue with their constituencies.

The skills-base within the voluntary organizations is also of key importance in fostering the participation in government of voluntary sector groups (cf. Rubenson, 2000). Both the historical absence of a Wales-specific policy process in many areas of government and the legacy of marginalization that the reframing of governance is designed to address, mean that, in many cases, voluntary sector organizations are currently suffering a skills deficit. New skills in areas such administration, leadership, lobbying, consultation and publicity will need to be developed in order to overcome this problem. This point was acknowledged by a number of interviewees. One said, 'it's a whole new set of skills and experience and understanding that we need to develop. To engage properly and put something useful into the policy process we have got to educate, we have got to give people the experience; we have got to build up that knowledge base. Then we can do something useful. But it's not happening that quickly'.

The internal correspondence of one of the new networks provides an insight into how some consultations are currently being conducted. One example, a document entitled 'Consultation Process', states that:

'[Our] organization in Wales, like many organizations, is on a steep learning curve! The reality is that consultation responses are often staff-led with little member input. Nonetheless we do try to achieve member input. The format at the moment is to mail out a [Assembly Government] consultation document to as many members as can be identified as being 'interested' or have expertise on that particular topic ... It is often difficult to identify who the experts are ...[we are] currently developing a database and collecting information from members about their areas of expertise and their willingness to respond to consultation documents...'

Such a targeting of experts mirrors the 'official' response of the voluntary sector umbrella body, the WCVA and its statutory partner the National Assembly. In the first Annual Report on the Voluntary Sector Scheme (c. September 2001) the action plan on 'consultation and participation' sets out technocratic solutions to fostering consultation. It outlines 'a web-based consultation template', a 'central database of potential consultees' and 'push technology ... so that organizations or individuals can select information in which they are interested' (WAG, 2001, p.14, para 31). The danger here is that technology is seen as a replacement for, rather than an aid to, genuine broad-based consultation and participation. The comments of interviewees suggest that such an approach can act as a barrier to wider engagement.

In a structural sense, the evidence of the first term of devolved governance supports the assessment made by a manager of a disabled people's organization that, 'perhaps the most significant aspect of the recent reforms is the way that the Assembly has given impetus to a lobby and created more opportunities'. The new administrative arrangements linking the voluntary sector and government have acted to unite groups around a common

interest such as women's rights or disability issues with a focus on Welsh government; often for the first time. Thus, for example, the number of organizations comprising the women's coalition, the WWNC, has grown from six to around twenty in three years (and a total of 50 potential member organizations has been identified).

Further opportunities have also been based upon the new levels of accessibility to officials and elected representatives that contrast with the marginalization that 'minority' groups experienced prior to constitutional reform as evidenced in the comments of a number of interviewees. One reflected that, 'the Welsh Office [- the territorial ministry of the UK government that served Wales 1964-1999 -] was seen as some "ivory tower" that wasn't welcoming to ethnic minorities ...It wasn't a place we had access to.' Another said, 'black and ethnic minorities in Wales had no access to the Welsh Office at all... and therefore there were no points of contact; understanding of race equality and multiculturalism was absent.' The co-ordinator with the Assembly-sponsored disability network concluded that; 'the advent of the Assembly has meant that the focus is on Wales rather than on London. The very fact, that I could attend a meeting with the minister for education in Wales, I mean that sets up new opportunities that didn't exist before'. A project worker with BVSNW made a similar point and said, 'we have good contacts now... they're more open, the idea that a group like ours would meet with ministers would have been laughed at when things were still based in London'.

In other respects, not all voluntary groups have been satisfied with the way that the new policy process is working. In particular, they were often unaware of whether their

comments had influenced matters until the finished policy documents emerged, at which point it was too late to influence them further. Amongst those interviewed, short notice and unrealistic submission deadlines for policy consultations were also areas of greatest concern. This general point was acknowledged by the Minister responsible, who stated that officials were: ‘increasingly accepting the need to engage with statutory and voluntary sector bodies at the outset of initiatives rather than playing catch-up at the end’ (Hart, 2000, unpaginated). As a result, ‘developing and implementing procedures that allow voluntary organizations sufficient time and resources to participate in consultation exercises’ has been prioritised in the Voluntary Sector Scheme Implementation Plan (VSPC, 2001b, section 3). This sets out a minimum eight weeks time frame for consultation exercises and offers the assurance that the ‘voluntary sector [will be] engaged in the formative stages of policy development’.

Recent analysis has concluded that voluntary sector groups should, ‘press ... for the continued and long-term investment in social capital that will spread involvement and bring in new voices and new groups, even if they don’t sing from the same hymn sheet as established groups’. According to this view, this is, ‘the price of participation in partnership’ (Taylor, 2001, p.105). Gaining sufficient resources to enable greater participation in the work of government is central issue for voluntary groups in the new system of Welsh governance. A ‘Summary Activity Report’ of one of the consultative forums states, ‘for the fieldworker [charged with developing the network’s membership] there is a tension between the range of groups “out there” and the constraints of the budget’. This dearth of funds is also limiting the capacity of the new voluntary networks

to respond to government policy consultation exercises. One project worker conceded that, 'we're just going to have to take a selective approach, there's a flood of paper, we can't possibly respond to everything; we'll have to pick and choose'.

Other aspects of the new arrangements were of concern to interviewees. A number of interviewees indicated ill ease when asked about the dual role that the new participatory structures required them to perform. In this respect voluntary organizations found themselves at once acting for the Assembly as (government-funded) co-ordinators of policy consultation exercises *and* operating as independent champions of members' interests as lobbyists of Welsh government in a manner that has the potential to undermine the autonomy of the sector (cf. Taylor and Bassi, 1998).

Developing trust - a key element in social capital - is a further challenge to those inside and outwith the National Assembly in their efforts to draw voluntary sector groups into the work of government. Early indications are that each of the marginalized groups under study has significant levels of *mistrust* of the new national Welsh government body. As Taylor (2001, p.97) observes, this can be a major setback to achieving voluntary sector participation. According to this view, when 'faced with a choice between inside and outside strategies ... some of these community organizations have chosen to pursue a consciously separatist agenda because of their distrust of a mainstream policy process from which they feel excluded'. Such mistrust is a problem that is particularly acute in respect of minority ethnic groups (Crook, 1995; Williams and Chaney, 2001) for in the first Assembly elections, despite widespread inclusive rhetoric, the political parties failed

to field Black or Asian candidates in winnable constituencies. Reflecting on this, one interviewee noted that, 'trust is about building up some sort of respect, of being able to deliver a sort of hope. I think the Assembly itself will have to demonstrate that trust - rather than us trying to trust them. I think they will have to show their worth. I mean why should we believe them'?

A further obstacle to greater participation in government by voluntary organizations representing marginalized groups that emerged during interviews with managers was how they perceived the role of their own organization. Frequently it was asserted that they had, '*nothing* to do with politics'. One interviewee asserted that, '*obviously* we are a *non-political* organization.' Another said, 'we *don't* get involved with politics'. From this evidence, the fear of being viewed as partisan, or party-political appears to be acting as a brake on the lobbying process. Geographical and historical factors present further problems. These arise from the absence of a distinctly Welsh policy process in many areas of government in the years prior to devolution and the weakness of Welsh civil society (- as opposed to civil society in Wales - cf. Wyn Jones and Lewis, 1998, p.2). This has meant that the Welsh-based offices of the majority of cross-border voluntary organizations have had limited or no autonomy within their organizational structures. The absence of devolved structures in these organizations presents a significant barrier to participation in the National Assembly's policy process. Constitutional reform is leading to a process of restructuring for some voluntary organizations. The manager of one women's organization interviewed stated, 'as an organization, I must be honest, we are *very* English and *very* white; and this must change'.

In another sense, geographical factors are important in building an inclusive, post-devolution mode of governance. Loopmans (2001, p.6) argues that, 'spatial embeddedness can contribute to explain path dependency of social structures: spatial structures are, due to their material character, relatively inert - contributing to the continued existence of related social practices as a local tradition'. It is likely that such spatial patterns will operate to shape the nature and form of political participation across the present study area. Wales has long been a fissiparous society in which the priorities of the anglicised eastern fringe of the country have contrasted with the Welsh speaking north and west. Contrasting social practices and networks also exist between urban and rural areas of the country. Not only will these shape the form and extent of engagement in the policy process but also the substantive issues involved and the priorities of third sector groups.

Further issues centre on notions of identity and relate to the distinction between 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital (Putnam, 2000). The former applies to intra-community relations and is inwardly focused. In contrast, bridging social capital is inclusive because it connects people from diverse social groupings by forming a bridge between them. Potentially, these types of social capital can operate in different ways. Alternatively they can build solidarity and/or link different communities through a common interest or idea. They apply in relation to national identity and notions of belonging as well as to whether people identify with the community of interest associated with a number of the marginalized groups under study. Thus one prominent British

women's voluntary organization studied in this project was largely unaware of the WCVA seeing it as somewhat 'other' - a specifically Welsh body - when hitherto their focus has been at a British level of operation. At an individual level, with one in five of the Welsh population born in England, notions of national identity may also operate to shape individuals' propensity to join what are some times seen as 'Welsh' organizations – and, thus in turn participate in a Wales-orientated policy process.

Conclusion

This examination of third sector organizations representing marginalized groups has shown how constitutional reform and the associated reframing of governance in Wales have effected a realignment of the voluntary sector. The new partnership between national government and the third sector, together with the Welsh legislature's statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity are examples of top-down state intervention designed to utilize prevailing levels of social capital and invigorate, formalize and broaden participation in the policy process in order to promote an 'inclusive' system of governance. These reforms have resulted in new structural and procedural measures that include a number of new consultative third sector networks. Such structures are providing unprecedented access to politicians and officials and are evidence of greater 'system-openness' in the institution of government. The new networks are presently engaged in recruiting new members and this development is improving the third sector infrastructure by drawing voluntary organizations together around 'minority' constituencies of interest

that are focussed on lobbying government. This suggests that government has the potential to more fully utilize, and even boost, prevailing levels of social capital in a way that promotes political participation.

However, the newness of these arrangements precludes a fixed assessment. Present understanding of the changes affecting ‘minority’ voluntary organizations is incomplete. From the current evidence it is clear that a range of problems need to be addressed before these groups become fully engrossed in the work of government. Some of these relate to the ability of organizations and networks to effectively mediate the interests of their members and foster political participation. These challenges are directly linked to a lack of resources, a skills deficit, as well as shortcomings in organizational structures and practices. Accordingly, the transition to inclusive governance based upon the full and effective participation of ‘minority’ third sector organisations is far from assured. In addition to the structural and legal innovations reported on here, it will depend upon a range of factors that shape volunteers’ propensity to engage in associative activity. These include notions of trust, identity and the operation of social networks. Thus the second, forthcoming phase of this research will provide a fuller understanding of the changing role of the third sector by studying these factors in order to identify the types and levels of social capital that contribute to more effective government through the participation of marginalized groups. At present Welsh governance would appear to be in a transitional phase. The initial findings discussed here show that at a structural level in terms of organizational networks, the realignment of the voluntary sector and associated innovations represent a significant shift in contemporary governance that offers the

potential for more inclusive government where the third sector has a greater role in political decision-making. Further time and additional research will be necessary before it is possible to fully evaluate whether the innovations that have accompanied the realignment of the third sector in Wales are indeed able to deliver broad-based participation in the work of government by ‘minority’ voluntary sector groups and end their longstanding marginalization in political decision-making.

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¹ ESRC Project no. R000239410.

² Sample size: for Wales and Scotland, 145 and 220 respectively. For England except London 1,707. The sample for London was 221.

³ Sample size: for Wales 400, Scotland, 700 and for England 6,700.