

11. 'WE ALWAYS INVITE RESIDENTS TO COME ALONG ...' DISCOURSES OF CITIZENSHIP AMONG LOCAL GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways in which managers of organizations delivering services to the public in Wales talk about and conceptualize the publics using these services. Topics covered in interviews with these stakeholders include: local democracy; responsibility; behavioural shifts; citizen participation; local specificities; responses to devolution. The themes are analysed in the context of neoliberal welfare reform and the impending financial crisis. The authors review the implicit assumptions in the data. They compare the results of the analysis with wider debates about the erosion of state accountability in relation to rights of citizens and explore the degree to which the views of the stakeholders equate with John Clarke's (2005) 'New Labour's Citizens: activated, empowered, responsabilized, abandoned?' The discussion engages with the question of whether policies in Wales since devolution have promoted a more positive approach to citizenship and participation than in Clarke's dystopian description.

INTRODUCTION

How do managers in organizations which provide services to the public in Wales talk about the publics in receipt of these services? In this paper we explore conceptions of citizenship under a devolved administration that had

rejected New Labour ideology and was facing the conundrum of maintaining public services whilst coming to terms with budgetary control imposed from Westminster. Drakeford (2012) provides an excellent account of the political and economic climate in Wales at this time, when many aspects of neoliberal welfare reform were rejected in favour of the 'new set of citizenship rights' based upon the provision of universal, unconditional public services, free at the point of use.

In the mid-1990s, Labour policy rebranded as New Labour explicitly assigned a public participatory role to the recipients of public services – 'service user involvement' or 'citizen participation'. The case for citizen participation was typically framed in terms of positive outcomes such as better services, more appropriately geared to the public's needs. The agenda of public service reform combined the previous Conservative government's vision of public service provision as new managerialism with these themes of citizen participation. Hall (2003) argued that New Labour had two strands, one neoliberal and one social democratic. The latter was constantly being transformed into the former and the citizen-consumer was an example of this – conceptions of citizenship were subordinated and transformed through the imagery of 'user choice'.

Critics have variously questioned this version of the case for participation. Eckert (2011, p. 310) maintains that: 'What we are witnessing is the diminishment of state accountability, particularly in terms of the social rights of citizens'. Yet at the same time there has been a proliferation of ways in which persons are created as legal and civil subjects by the minute administrative practices and classifications of everyday life such as granting tenancies in social housing, administering justice, visiting the doctor, being a member of a voluntary or civic organization and so on (Das, 2011). Good citizenship translates into trying to be a healthy citizen, a responsible tenant or householder and a proficient participant in a variety of therapeutic and wellbeing-enhancing activities, the areas in which the capillary state has been particularly active in infiltrating (Clarke, 2010). The arts of government and the way that governments attempt to produce citizens best suited to fulfilling the government's policies (Rose, 1999; Rose and Osborne, 2000; Rose and Novas, 2005) can be seen as a process of *étatization* – or growing state dominance – over a variety of spheres including minds and bodies (Mitchell, 2000). The claims that the state can make on the citizen have become 'flexibilized' (Ong, 1998), whilst at the same time the possibilities of citizens making equivalent claims on their states – the social democratic strand – have become less clear cut and, as Das (2004) says, more 'illegible'. In sum, notions of citizenship in terms of collectively held rights have been supplemented by a greater focus on the responsibilities of

citizenship exercised through new forms of subjection in workplaces, in public and in private life (Brown and Baker, 2012).

In their sustained critique of New Labour's response to neoliberalism, Clarke and Newman (Clarke 2004, 2005; Clarke et al., 2007; Newman and Clarke, 2009; Vidler and Clarke, 2005) have described the dissolution of the 'public realm' and how policies stressed partnership with communities of place and identity, making an issue out of the politics of representation, and the 'representativeness' of public services. The construction of 'citizen-consumers' was a mechanism for governing the social, and the citizen-consumer displaced the citizen in New Labour's public service reforms (Clarke et al., 2007; Vidler and Clarke, 2005). But representational accuracy does not necessarily rest on the faithful reproduction of the social profile of the wider population within the involved group. Martin (2008) has also argued that the qualities required of involved members of the public are not limited to 'representativeness' or 'expertise', but rather encompass various attributes seen as important in governing the interface between state and society.

An integral part of citizen-consumer participation is a particular type of valorization of the 'ordinary' person, based on the notion that ordinary people are not at heart political (Clarke, 2010). Ordinary people can be used as partners/participants in new assemblages of power and it is their assumed apolitical character, and their capacity to bring values, knowledge and other resources, that are valued as a strategy for governing the social (Clarke, 2010). Martin (2008) noted how ordinary people were used in governmental strategies to depoliticize issues – although they often repoliticized them.

Under New Labour, citizens were the objects of pedagogy, subjected to training for employment, developed to become active citizens and subjected to new governmental strategies on diet, exercise, smoking, parenting, recycling, volunteering and wellbeing. They were brought into closer encounters with government actors through co-production, participation and governance initiatives (Newman, 2010). Newman notes that this has continued under the present Conservative-Liberal Coalition Government, and as Brown and Baker (2012) note, its legacy can be seen in notions such as David Cameron's 'Big Society'.

The stakeholder research described below was designed to continue critical reflection on such themes by exploring the everyday assumptions, talk and practices used by managers of public services. Do they constitute a new rhetoric of citizenship? We focus on the degree to which the views of the stakeholders equate with John Clarke's (2005) 'New Labour's Citizens: activated, empowered, responsibilized, abandoned?'

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The research in this paper was conducted during the period of UK welfare reform under New Labour (1997–2010) and the subsequent period of transition during the first year of the Westminster Conservative-Liberal Coalition administration. The data are specific to the recent Welsh situation, which can be treated as a test case for alternative policies by a government whose policy-making ‘conceptualizes the relation between state and the individual as rooted in shared citizenship’ (Drakeford, 2012).

To explore and compare notions of publics and citizen participation across a variety of sectors of delivery, we present the findings of an analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted as part of the ‘Localities’ programme of the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD). The sample consisted of managers at the highest level in seven unitary authorities and senior managers in other bodies with responsibility for service delivery. The research partners collaborated to produce 122 individual interviews from three regions in Wales, north, central and south. The regions are significantly different in population size, and density, economic structure and local government organization so we have selected data from a single region in order to minimize these contrasts and achieve greater depth in the analysis. The aim was to provide insights into stakeholders’ perspectives on their localities, local knowledge, policy spaces and the impact of devolution at local and sub-national levels (see Jones et al., 2012). We use a sub-group of twenty-three interviews with senior managers in North Wales (excluding the Isle of Anglesey local authority) working in the following sectors: social care; economic development/regeneration; crime prevention (youth justice, community safety partnerships); education; careers services; housing. Multi-disciplinary working meant that many of the interviewees worked closely with their counterparts in other sectors; the same policies, strategy documents and aspirations were mentioned. Much of this region is disadvantaged socio-economically. It includes a large rural area with sparsely populated uplands, some predominantly Welsh-speaking areas, as well as a more heavily populated coastal region which is a popular retirement destination for migrants from England, and an industrial urban area near the English border. In parts of the region services are delivered bilingually. The interviews were conducted in the last year of the UK New Labour administration, when managers were aware of the forthcoming restrictions on public spending but before they had actually been imposed. Because of devolution, many of the interviewees and the organizations that they represented had responsibilities to, and were influenced by, the Welsh Assembly

Government (WAG, now the Welsh Government) as well as Westminster. A major recent change in the region has been the reorganization of the NHS by the Welsh Government, which resulted in one very big organization replacing a number of smaller ones.

Citizen engagement was one of the core themes of the interview. The largely open question design was informed by academic debates on deliberative democracy, 'upstream' public engagement, and how local knowledge shapes practices of citizenship and community participation. Interviewees were given full opportunity to comment on policies within Wales such as the 'citizen-centred' service delivery advocated in the Beecham Report (2006). We have concentrated our attention on the part of the interview which deals most directly with power, resources, citizenship engagement, consultation and participation. The questions included: 'who makes decisions that affect your patch?' and 'to what extent can people affect decisions about their locality?' Each interview was transcribed in full and each transcript was read independently by all three authors of this paper. A thematic analysis was conducted, with categories developed in a grounded way, that is by identifying what the interviewees see as relevant to the topic and significant in relation to their organizational role. Quotations are identified by the institutional role of the speaker but in order to maintain anonymity, further details such as title and location are not included.

FINDINGS

The views expressed were noticeably homogenous although those which concerned education, housing and economic regeneration showed some local specificity. The first general observation is the notable absence of references to local politics and democracy. The exception is the small number of interviewees who praised some local councillors (in personal terms, irrespective of political allegiance) for their dedication to the local population and area:

(crime prevention manager): *'the top people are very bothered about the real people at the bottom that they're serving . . . they genuinely seem concerned, . . . to . . . really care . . . councillors, the elected members, they definitely care . . . I know that they still have their politics games.'*

But despite the subject matter of participation there was strikingly little discussion of the public being involved in local democracy or even patterns of voting, and no comment on whether this was an issue of concern. Politics itself

is here sidelined into the notion of 'politics games', and what these might mean for the public and their voting behaviour was unexplored.

A second general observation is that the first person pronouns 'we' or 'our' were commonly used by the interviewees to refer to themselves as service providers, along with 'they' or 'them' to refer to the people in receipt of services. Typical phrases are: *'building their confidence so they can do it'*, *'helping people . . . develop themselves into a voice'* and *'these people need more support'*. It suggests that this is not an inclusive discourse of citizenship and that it is usually the service managers rather than the participating citizens who *'set the agenda'* or decide what should be prioritized. There is vocabulary that is specific to certain domains: for example, social care professionals routinely refer to 'service users', other sectors do not. Interviewees referred to 'community' frequently, but never to civil society or the public sphere. There is a single reference to *'our culture as Welsh people'* (which can of course be interpreted as a more inclusive way of speaking or not, depending upon how 'Welsh' is defined). When discussing active citizenship or people 'participating', the notion of 'participation' was used very broadly, usually with reference to aspects of everyday life – going to work or college, spending time on leisure activities, or taking exercise, where these activities involved facilities for which the interviewees were responsible. Their function was to *'service these people'* as one interviewee put it. Rather than espousing Marshall's (1950) classic notion of citizenship in terms of rights, the drift here is towards an altogether more managerial and paternalistic process. Its workings can be seen in the interviewees' talk about the need for behaviour change, their relationship with service users, power and participation, and the barriers to positive change. We will review evidence on each of these themes.

Changing attitudes and behaviour

Change, and the need for it, is a pervasive theme. Interviews were permeated by the assumption that the perceptions and cultures of people using services, the wider population and even the managers themselves needed to change. Culture change was invariably discussed within the context of convincing people to become 'independent' (especially through employment, if possible in the private sector) and not make demands upon public services or claim benefits: (social care manager): *'there's a culture in some families where it's the norm not to work and to survive on state intervention and . . . that's got to change'*. Thus, in common with governmental and popular press discourse, the citizen is a burden on the state rather than, for example an asset to the nation,

and the solution was cast in interior, psychosocial terms – changing cultures or perceptions.

Changing perceptions was deemed important in rather more specific circumstances: for example, in terms of encouraging people to accept tenancies in an area of ‘hard to let’ housing:

(community regeneration manager): *‘outside this area [there is] some feeling of not wanting to come and live here, it’s full of drugs, it’s full of this, full of that and it clearly isn’t and we’re trying to get that message across continually . . . it’s very difficult to do that if people are mindset in not wanting their children to go to certain schools but we know that the schools here are performing far better than any school within the county borough.’*

Despite the faith that this manager had in the solution proffered by changing perceptions of this estate, there followed an admission that perhaps the problem identified by potential tenants was indeed more than a matter of perception:

‘. . . the main crux of this estate is going to be housing . . . if the housing goes over to a registered social landlord I think there’s every opportunity that [this estate] will be one of the best communities . . . we are going to struggle if we don’t get the finances to change the environment . . . you can change mindsets in communities but you can’t change the environment without the money.’

This interviewee explained that if the housing stock was transferred from the council to a registered social landlord, a substantial investment could be made into the stock in the community regeneration area. However, the tenants of the borough as a whole had previously voted not to transfer the stock and it had now been decided to hold another vote. One group of enterprising tenants had acquired a housing grant and had used it to employ a consultant to advise them as to how to ensure that the housing stock was transferred. The interviewee was clearly anxious about the situation and feared another ‘no’ vote in the forthcoming ballot. McKee and Cooper (2008) noted that promised investment was often used as an inducement to persuade tenants to vote for housing stock transfer, and it was clear from the interviewee quoted above that investment in this housing estate was badly needed. There was a clash between two groups of ‘ordinary’ people with different ideas as to the best way of managing the housing estate and the situation had been repoliticized by the tenants.

Changing perceptions was also important for economic regeneration. One response referred to the attempt to persuade organizations to establish themselves or invest in the area:

'we're doing a lot of work recently [for the town] on branding and place marketing and understanding perception . . . until now we probably felt that we haven't got a product to market.'

And changing perceptions was believed to be a solution to the permanent out-migration of younger residents, particularly those deemed more able or aspirational:

(economic regeneration manager): 'young people get [the perception] in school . . . that not too much happens around here . . . once they get that into their mind then it's very difficult to remove that . . . it's good that young people are able to move away. The perception problem around here is that they leave without any thought of coming back ever . . . a lot of valuable work could be done on the perception.'

In this way, it is as if aspiration itself is being cast as the problem, tempting people away rather than remaining local and running the risk of failure.

It even appears that changing perceptions is a more important topic in crime prevention than detecting/reducing crime itself; talk focussed not so much on patterns of crime as on people's perceptions of crime, particularly whether people 'felt safer'.

The boundary between 'behavioural shifts' and 'changing perceptions' is blurred. Notions of changing perceptions seem to be deployed in the face of intractable problems – a notorious area where people refuse to live, a region that is having difficulty attracting investment or business, or a long history of outward migration of qualified young people. These are problems that Wales has faced for generations and despite numerous 'initiatives', the problems stubbornly remain and it is as if the solution is now to convince people that these are problems only in the eye of the beholder: (economic regeneration manager): *'it isn't what actually is that's the key, but it's the way people see what they think is . . . a lot of policies are done on the basis that people are rational beings and they're not'*. The sense of the citizen as somehow irrational and in need of guidance has permeated the broader policy sphere too (Institute for Government, 2010). Interestingly, elsewhere in the interviews the managers themselves acknowledged that although mindsets can be changed, environments – and perhaps other problems too – need money to change.

User involvement

Comments from social care managers illuminated some of the contradictions and limitations at the heart of the 'service user' notion of participation. This has been embraced by social care perhaps more wholeheartedly than any other sector.

Our interviewees undoubtedly were committed to this notion and believed it to be central to their practice:

(social care manager): *'I really would like to be able to be have a sustainable participation officer . . . there's a role for somebody like that [a children's rights officer] . . . within the department as well as . . . having people like the Children's Commissioner and us commissioning advocacy services outside as we do . . . trying to maintain children and young people's involvement is a bit like trying to paint the Forth Bridge . . . My head of safeguarding is also I think very committed to children's and young people's participation . . . she's working very hard with her safeguarding unit staff which are the independent reviewing officers and children's protection co-ordinator to really get them to buy in to how important children's participation is . . . we always put on some training events around children's participation every year . . . as a council . . . there are developments around advocacy . . .'*

The description of advocacy which followed shows that this organization has an uncritically positive view of institutionally designed user participation. However, another comment from the same interviewee reveals an underlying weakness:

'if the social worker has got children on the child protection register, actually having the time to engage directly with children and get to a point where they can really find out the child's views and help the child's views and help the child to express those views and play a part in any plans that are made for that child is fairly limited.'

This points to a generic problem with user participation, namely that the social workers are unable to engage with the clients. The reason given in this particular example is time pressure on social workers, yet the data suggests further obstacles too:

'we have new generations of social workers coming into the department all of the time . . . by its nature social work training has got to cover such a range of things it's very hit or miss as to how much experience or confidence workers have got about directly engaging with children and young people . . . if you've got an established participation officer, first of all they'd be putting the message across all the time you must directly involve the child and young person and secondly they'd be able to provide support and skills to social workers to help them to be good at engaging with children directly . . . if I have one wish it would be about being able to sort of really strengthen that . . .'

Thus many social workers may not have learnt how to engage clients and may not use their knowledge and experience creatively to do so. There is also the 'professional instinct' at work, in that the response to 'user involvement' not working as hoped is to import further expertise. Participation officers will also provide a defence for the service in the face of complaint, demonstrating that user involvement is alive and well in the service (Baker, Brown and Gwilym, 2008).

Power and participation

Participation is also a theme in other sectors such as housing and community regeneration. References to 'partnership', the value of 'local knowledge' and the 'user perspective' hint at a more developed, representative, view of power: (housing manager): *'we firmly believe for us to improve services and for tenants to have real influence they should be involved in the management of the organization'*.

This locally rooted housing association has been particularly successful in citizen participation and has a high proportion of tenants on its management board as well as in other decision making forums within the organization. On the other hand, a manager of a community regeneration organization revealed tensions regarding tenants' participation:

'we're looking into the board structure with the Welsh Assembly at the moment and the WCVA [Welsh Council for Voluntary Action] as to whether or not we can get more residents on it without sort of offending the voluntary and statutory bodies . . . because it is a community programme . . . [we could give local residents] some added training to go onto the board and build confidence and so forth.'

This suggests that as McDermont et al. (2009) maintained, the simple 'experience' of an ordinary person is not sufficient for tenant representatives; 'training' was required as well as confidence building before the tenant representatives could participate at board level. Furthermore, in this case citizen participation had to be squeezed in between the interests of other agencies. Comments from this interviewee are consistent with Cruikshank (1999) and Rose (1999) who argue that informing, tutoring, empowering and developing are part of modern governance and new governmentalities of the self. More was revealed regarding the model of citizen participation in this organization:

' . . . any resident in [the estate] [can be on the panel] . . . I set the agenda and I give feedback every month and invite people to come along . . . whoever we think is necessary to come along.'

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' . . . any resident in [the estate] [can be on the panel] . . . I set the agenda and I give feedback every month and invite people to come along . . . whoever we think is necessary to come along.'

The tenants then neither 'set the agenda' nor decide who is invited. However:

(community regeneration manager): '*... we rely a lot on the local people here to tell us what issues and what problems they may have, what knowledge they have of the estate because obviously they can go back many, many years ... most of our information comes from the local people ... they're the experts. If you go to the people here, that's where we believe the answers will come from.*'

So the 'people' provide the voice of everyday experience, they are characterized as 'real', spokespersons for '*real peoples' way of doing things*'. They fulfil a pedagogic role in which they teach the agency and supply everyday knowledge to the organization, in the expectation that this knowledge will allow the organization to better respond to the tenants' needs (Martin, 2008). This is a good example of 'vernacular ventriloquism' (Clarke, 2010), in which the voice of the people may be heard, but there is a tenuous and tortuous relationship to power.

The interviewees' view of, and orientation towards, the residents suggests new configurations of professional power which privilege professional conceptions of the purpose of 'empowerment' (Newman, 2010). Thus there seems to be a division between the 'residents-citizens' and the 'professionals-citizens' in this organization:

'... we held a child poverty conference which was extremely well attended, they had 120 delegates, we had some keynote speakers from the Assembly ... it went down extremely well ... there was residents ... clearly we always invite residents to come along ... but yes mainly it was statutory/voluntary groups that came.'

The view taken here seemed to be that residents' involvement was certainly welcome, that the information provided by them in some contexts was valuable, but 'experts' – or even merely non-residents (the 'professionals' from this organization didn't live on the estate) – were prioritized. The professionals faced dilemmas when the residents were consistently persistent on one matter:

'if you were to carry out a survey now ... a lot of people would say "more things for children to do" ... but we've done so much for children ... we're never ever going to get what people want ... if you had a playground in every corner that would be fine but you can't do that ... it is difficult at times.'

This demonstrates the paradox within citizen participation when the citizens request things that the professionals cannot do – or, as suggested by the quote

above, do not want to do. As Clarke (2010) noted, ordinary people are not wholly reliable – or predictable – agents. These dilemmas were demonstrated in the data again and again, particularly in community regeneration: *'there's a difference between wanting something and needing something and we have that issue with almost every project'*, and

'when somebody's justified the needs so much by you know just handing in a petition after questionnaires, after community appraisals, you do have to check it against real hard data. Now is there truly a need? So we do have the research unit who will provide us with the data. We have a policy manager who will give us an indication of how policy will impact on our work and then we've got the ears on the ground which is this network of officers ...'

The extent of such highly managed participation in community regeneration allegedly rooted in the 'expertise' of 'ordinary' people was clear:

'we've undertaken a regeneration strategy until 2014 ... [area plans] are designed by all of the projects and programmes coming down from the Welsh Assembly Government, environment agencies, Countryside Council for Wales, health board, the council, things they know they've programmed in the business plans for the next three or five years. So then you have all the community groups that we know we're working with and what they've got planned for the next three or five years ... what it also does ... is identify what should be done ...'

Community regeneration not only involves dissuading citizens from pursuing their desired projects, there is also another problem: *'there are always issues that statutory bodies will bring in which are not accepted by communities ... we take these issues on board'*. Yet despite such obvious micromanagement of citizen participation, an interviewee from the housing sector still felt that there was: *'much more consultation on those issues than would have been if you remain in a local authority ... now community participation is seen as the way forward ...'*

Ultimately though local authorities are seen as very powerful:

(education): *'Wherever you work in a local authority ... you have to work very carefully with your political leaders as it were in terms of the elected members of the council because at the end of the day decisions rest with them ... members here are very involved and very informed I think ... and very influential in ... terms of the policy direction that the authority takes.'*

Crime prevention partnerships are also expected to embrace citizen participation, but the data reveals obvious problems here as well as a greater scepticism as to whether it is effective or even wanted:

'it is only those concerned few who want to be involved really and the others . . . until something happens that they're not happy with . . . you're not going to hear from them . . . they're not going to engage with you . . . people don't come [to public engagement events] because they genuinely believe that unless they've got something they want to voice . . . basically it's just "oh get on with it", it's what they want you to do isn't it. Just want you to get on with it. So you always have those few people, the same ones really.'

This represents further confirmation of the contradictions and limitations in the language and practice of participation.

Barriers to change

The interviews provide consistent evidence across a number of sectors to show how discourses of participation are routinely employed to make sense of public service provision in a time of considerable pressure on resources. It is not surprising that the interviews are pervaded by a sense of large-scale, intractable problems. Despite the enormous ambitions of the services and the considerable expectations placed upon them, most interviewees expressed their powerlessness in the face of wider society and forces such as globalization and recognized that there were serious limitations on their ability to effect change. An economic regeneration manager speaks for many when he says: *'what societies are like these days, we have no influence over that'*. He continues,

'many authorities who have tried to invent strategies to change the world in their own little patch and failed dismally, because you can't change GDP, you can't change unemployment, you can't change economic activity rates in the global sense . . .'

and admits that forecasting the demand for skills in even five years' time is to venture into the unknown. Participation needs to be seen in this context of uncertainty. The realization that some social problems and disadvantage stubbornly remain through successive generations in the face of both carrot and stick approaches underlies the thinking which reconceptualizes communities that were previously thought of as wholly problematic in more positive ways according to their 'social capital' or 'resilience':

'There are strong pockets of social capital . . . especially in areas . . . considered to be deprived . . . communities that have nearly had to manage on their own in a way because there haven't been any public services in the areas and very few facilities and resources. The people have pulled together . . . we are trying to better understand . . . what makes people more resilient and enables them to cope with changes in the world surrounding them . . . how we are supporting people to be more resilient in order to prevent them from going into a crisis . . . then asking for more intensive services and more specialised services that are costly to us as a provider within the public sector and also costly to themselves on a personal level . . .'

The communities referred to above were housing estates with a reputation for being particularly resistant to regeneration. There is an admission of service inadequacy and defeat, yet the very survival of the residents is then repackaged as a tribute to their social capital and resilience. The residents' social capital and resilience may well bear fruit, but here it is used to justify further lack of services.

Interviewees using discourses of 'giving people a voice', 'empowering' or other ways of 'enabling' people did not show an awareness that this represents a 'top down' selective approach which is at odds with the universal conception of citizen rights in a democracy. Rather, it is one in which a powerful person decides how much power to share, for example by building 'their' capacity and confidence: (community regeneration manager): *'I hope that it will change in the sense of people having more ambition . . . giving them more confidence running things for themselves because that's what this . . . is all about'*. There is an obvious quality of 'them' and 'us' here, with the interviewees feeling that they have to make good the deficit in their fellow citizens. The publics the interviewees refer to are mostly publics with restricted financial resources and it is often this that is the main factor bringing them into contact with the services. There are certainly people who are disadvantaged or who have encountered problems that do not stem directly from limited income, but it was sometimes assumed that simply being in need of a certain service suggested personal deficit: (community regeneration manager): *'if you're homeless you have some sort of problematic background possibly or financial issues . . . and I think these people need more support . . .'*. Yet a housing manager from a neighbouring authority mentioned that there was a waiting list of 3,000 for a housing stock of six, suggesting that homelessness will not merely be experienced by people with 'problematic backgrounds'.

The context of relatively small local authorities in the study meant that there was much local specificity in the data. Detailed local knowledge not only assisted in the successful delivery of services but also made interviewees less

likely to construct the public as inherently problematic, or to use institutional discourses homogenizing publics. Interviewees were aware that delivering services or conceptualizing 'publics' and their needs in Wales is difficult, as one described it, because of, *'the misfits of your physical, political, transportation, economic, language, culture levels ...'*

Housing and education managers had a slightly different orientation to the public than interviewees in the other sectors. Education managers expected to provide a service that would see young people fulfilled and happy, not just simply achieving academically or, in the future, economically. As one put it, *'success is where our youngsters perform to the best of their potential ... being able to access a quality educational provision'*. Their responses contained far less neoliberal ideology than some other interviewees. The term 'citizen' is rarely used in other sectors but is found here, for example in the phrase *'providing a service to the citizens'*. Nearly all pupils in Wales learn in what the Welsh Government describes as 'community comprehensive schooling' and education managers are delivering their services in this context. We may speculate that this informs their view that barriers are external and linked to resource limitations rather than divisions within the public.

In other sectors the discourse is less equal and more closely reflects who holds power and their view of the people they serve. There seems to be an expectation on the part of many of the interviewees that people in receipt of their services should live a middle-class life in miniature on very restricted incomes, sharing the values and lifestyles of interviewees and policymakers. There was little awareness that the publics served by the interviewees might have stimulating interests or abilities of which those operating in top-down hierarchies knew nothing. One of the most interesting themes to emerge was the sense of an alternative to economic and even social regeneration: regeneration of people. This phrase was used by a Communities First manager who explained: *'My remit is broad ... concentrating on people rather than physical regeneration. It's the regeneration of people and how people can play a part in regeneration, regenerating their own communities ...'* This view of people as impoverished potential agents whose agency can be activated by the policies of experts corresponds with Martin's (2011) explanation that those 'in charge' are often responsible for feeding the outputs of participation into the management and delivery of public services. Their views of what is (or is not) a legitimate contribution will have crucial consequences for what is (or is not) drawn upon in informing service provision (Hodge, 2005; Mort et al., 1996; Williams, 2004). It echoes the theme of 'enrolling people' (Clarke, 2010); people have to

be discovered and enrolled into the practices and relationships of governmental strategies.

CONCLUSION

The experience reported here supports Touraine's (1995, p. 267) observation, informed by his critique of modernity, that 'today . . . we define ourselves by our needs, our interests, our values or by the communities and traditions we belong to. We no longer define ourselves as citizens . . .'. Against the background of the diminishing importance of class and collective identifications the citizen-consumer has come to prominence. But an underlying complexity reveals the citizen-service user to be a far from active player. Despite being 'consulted', 'involved', 'engaged with' and 'empowered', users of some services are still frequently in such powerless and vulnerable situations that they exert little force as citizens or consumers.

Clarke (2010) and Martin (2008) noted that citizen participation involves a valorization of 'ordinary people', yet our data revealed that the views of ordinary people are over-ridden when deemed necessary; they need to be enrolled and given 'training' and 'confidence building' before participating in decision making bodies, thus assuming a deficit on their part; and representatives from other organizations are sensitive if too many ordinary people are invited onto committees and boards. Our data also demonstrates just how highly managed 'participation' is (Newman, 2010).

Neoliberal assumptions are less prevalent in social policy in Wales than in England, and a different relationship can be expected between the state and the individual. The socio-political roots and affiliation of the managers interviewed for this study, the local councillors and the politicians in the Welsh Government are generally distant from New Labour neoliberalism. The data revealed that a local specificity provided one context in which homogenizing institutionalized discourses were not used. Yet the sometimes intractable problems that the public services are charged with managing or even eradicating, combined with a lack of resources, the consequences of long-term economic decline and a Government of a very different hue in Westminster exercising influence despite devolution, leads to people managing those services often behaving in ways and employing techniques which are very similar to those mobilized under neoliberalism.

The data illustrate the paradox discussed by Clarke (2005, 2010), that of 'empowered' 'valorized' citizens, yet also abandoned by the state in many

ways. A rather diminished and depleted view of the community was held by many managers. The citizens using services were seen as perpetually vulnerable, perhaps unable to care for their own children or to maintain their own health and wellbeing, even uneducable. Yet the same citizens were expected to be dutiful, active citizens, participating in pedagogic relationships with the services, sitting on boards and committees as 'equals'. A diminished view of the community by service managers does not yield a level playing field for citizen empowerment and involvement, or active citizenship. The citizen is decapitalized before entering the field of play. Although some of the publics discussed by the interviewees will be publics to whom it may be very difficult to deliver a service or offer improvements to their lives, stances of independence and initiative are also problematized in the data (especially where this might involve moving away from services), as are people who do not avail themselves of these services. Despite the many references to citizen participation or user involvement in the data, most of the interviewees expected to run the services and make decisions without the users presenting a serious challenge. It was often assumed that the users would not be interested or that if they were to become involved, that would be another task for the services themselves to facilitate, involving for example the 'training' of users. Neo-liberalism may never have been fully alive and well in Wales but the way that the public service managers talk suggests that they rarely challenge neo-liberalism's status as *lingua franca* for communication about participation.

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