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Participatory governance in Ireland: Institutional innovation and the quest for joined-up thinking

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Abstract

At a time when governments are grappling with increasingly complex problems, state-led participatory processes that facilitate citizen and community voice in decision-making and policymaking have become more common at national, regional and local government levels. In Ireland, citizen participation in government has achieved prominence in the last thirty years with the introduction of social partnership and more recent establishment of multiple and diverse forms of participatory governance, nationally, regionally and locally. This paper offers a critique of the evolution and operation of local participatory governance in Ireland. The paper argues that to be effective, participatory governance requires strong and inclusive participatory processes at all levels of government, a clear ideological and policy basis, a coherent ‘joined-up’ programme and receptive institutional foundations.

Keywords: Participatory governance, citizen participation, community participation, local government, policymaking

Introduction: Participatory governance

Participatory governance consists of ‘state-sanctioned institutional processes that allow citizens to exercise *voice* and *vote*, which then

results in the implementation of public policies that produce some sort of change in citizens' lives' (Wampler & McNulty, 2011, p. 6). Participatory governance relies on *state-led* venues and processes of participation, requires *citizen participation* and involvement in decision-making, and seeks *effective policy outcomes* for citizens.

Participatory governance has achieved a considerable degree of popularity in recent times. Fung (2015) points to the emergence internationally of a wide range of small and larger participatory governance initiatives, some of which have been initiated by governments, and others by civil society groups and other actors. There are several distinct but intersecting logics or rationales for the development of participatory governance; the most significant of these are *political legitimacy*, *deliberation* and *administration*.

The first logic is that of *political legitimacy*, which Fung (2015, p. 3) refers to as 'the strongest driver of participatory innovations'. Fung (2015) identifies a number of indicators – including declining rates of participation in conventional political activity such as voting – which suggest that democratic legitimacy has deteriorated in many advanced democracies. The *World Development Report* (The World Bank, 2017) indicates that global voter turnout has steadily declined in the post-WW2 period, from an average of 77 per cent in 1945 to 64 per cent in 2015. Fung (2015) suggests that the reasons for the deterioration in regular political activity are varied and range from lack of responsiveness of politicians and political parties to simple ineffectiveness and political corruption. Diminished democratic legitimacy has also been traced to the 'shrinking' of government, or the retreat by the state from its customary intervention in 'regulating economic growth and promoting redistribution and the overall weakening of the state as an institution in local/regional affairs' (Lobao et al., 2018, p. 390). By offering citizens and communities new or enhanced roles in policy development, structures of participatory governance may help to increase the responsiveness of democratic systems, thereby providing a fillip to political legitimacy during a period of democratic disillusionment.

The *deliberative* logic of participation emphasises the capacity of participatory spaces to generate common understandings and agreements through deliberation. Unlike more aggregative democratic forms, such as voting, deliberative processes emphasise forms of public reasoning that are free and open (Heinelt, 2018) and have a communicative rather than a strategic rationality. Dryzek et al. (2019, p. 1145) point out that deliberative approaches like citizens' juries and

panels, deliberative forums and polls, and citizens' assemblies are 'flourishing throughout the world', and that citizens are eminently capable of engaging effectively in these initiatives. They argue that deliberation promotes measured judgement, counters extreme views and 'can promote recognition, understanding and learning' (Dryzek et al., 2019, p. 1145) in situations of division and conflict.

The third and *administrative* rationale refers to ways in which the knowledge, skills and experience of a range of actors may be harnessed to improve governmental capacity (Gustafson & Hertting, 2016) to solve collective problems. This rationale may be understood as a response to two 'megatrends', the rise of wicked problems and declining trust in governance, which together produce a 'vicious cycle' (Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2015, p. 1) that undermines government's ability to address and successfully solve a range of intractable economic, social and cultural problems. Fung (2015, p. 5) points out that citizen involvement can be effective in addressing wicked problems because citizens often have direct experience of these problems and can therefore identify 'viable ways' to tackle them. Weymouth & Hartz-Karp (2015) describe the success of a series of mini-publics in a city in Western Australia: the aim of the initiative was to address wicked problems such as budget deficit, population growth and land use in a proactive manner through deliberative engagement between government and civil society groups. Deliberative processes used included deliberative surveys, citizens' juries and participatory budgeting panels, which facilitated citizen decision-making in the expenditure of large amounts of city funds. Outcomes of these deliberative exercises included increased trust in local government.

Fung (2015) identifies several potential advantages of participatory governance processes, including enhancement of the democratic values of legitimacy, effectiveness and social justice. Urbaniti & Warren (2008) point out that non-territorial and non-elected participatory bodies can enhance legitimacy and representation by offering 'discursively considered opinions and voices that are not necessarily represented either through electoral democracy or through the aggregate of self-authorized representatives in the public sphere'. Participatory governance can increase the *empowerment* of participating groups and individuals, enhance *deliberation* between participating citizen and state actors, and increase *accountability* as a consequence of the mobilisation and education of participants (Skelcher & Torfing, 2010).

The following section addresses some of the key issues in participatory governance, specifically its usefulness in the context of centralised political systems, its capacity to enhance inclusion and legitimacy, and the effectiveness of participatory governance arrangements if they are not supported institutionally and in policy.

Key issues in participatory governance

Participatory governance has several potential challenges and drawbacks, including a tendency to be seen as some kind of remedy for a growing spectrum of democratic challenges (Wampler & McNulty, 2011). Gaventa (2004) warns that the mere establishment of participatory mechanisms is not enough to guarantee their efficacy and transformative potential.

The first area of criticism questions the extent to which participatory governance can effect change in the context of centralised political systems. While participatory governance initiatives may be established at different levels from the international down to the local, many operate specifically at local level. This means therefore that while these initiatives are located at the level and arenas of governance closest to people's lives, they may also be remote from key decision-making locales, thereby limiting the extent to which participation can be genuinely empowered and efficacious (Mohan & Stokke, 2000). This can represent a particular problem in countries where decision-making is centralised at national level. Aulich (2009) argues that it is difficult to embed participatory governance structures into situations where local government is weak. In order to be effective, participation needs to occur at all levels, including the local, national and global (Mohan & Stokke, 2000). This problem of centralised government and weaker sub-central government affects participatory governance arrangements in Ireland and is discussed later in this paper.

A second thread of criticism highlights issues of inclusion and legitimacy. Warren (2009) points out that government-driven participation is usually driven by elites, thereby leading to possible bias in areas such as agenda-framing and the selection of participants. The legitimacy of many participatory initiatives may be challenged because they involve relatively small numbers of people, often self-selected, who may in their turn take on an elite status that separates them from the wider public (Warren, 2009). Top-down participatory initiatives may also enjoy purely 'advisory' powers rather than functioning as

genuinely ‘empowered’ structures (Warren, 2009, p. 9). Focusing specifically on power relationships within participatory spaces, Gaventa (2004, p. 37) emphasises the importance of capacity-building and awareness-raising amongst citizens so as to prepare them to use ‘countervailing power’ to combat ‘entrenched interests’ in invited types of participatory space.

A third question asks how effective participatory governance arrangements can be in the absence of integrated policies and receptive and compatible institutional foundations. Gaventa (2004, p. 27) argues that efforts to deepen democracy must pay attention to ‘working both sides of the equation’, by enabling citizen participation *and* developing state responsiveness simultaneously. Both are mutually reinforcing because ‘participation can become effective only as it engages with issues of institutional change’ (Gaventa, 2004, p. 27). Gaventa points to the plethora of state–citizen participatory forms that have emerged across the globe in recent times and suggests that critical attention needs to be placed on how these participatory spaces were generated, on places and levels of engagement and on the visibility of power within these spaces; each has an effect on the transformative potential of the participatory space. Newig et al. (2015, p. 359) argue that state actors need to ‘learn how to design and conduct participation processes’ in order to facilitate effective stakeholder participation, coordinate policy and encourage learning within and outside a country.

The following sections examine the influence of each of these issues in respect of participatory governance processes in Ireland.

Participatory governance in Ireland

In the field of participatory governance, Ireland has certain peculiarities which set it apart from other countries and contexts. While participatory governance has some historical precursors in Ireland, it did not achieve a significant foothold until the 1990s with the adoption of corporatism and social partnership at national and local levels. Furthermore, the reasons for the introduction of participatory governance are specific to the Irish context. Social partnership was introduced as a response to economic recession rather than as a concerted attempt to promote citizen participation in governance.

Over the last thirty years, participatory governance has attained some significance in Irish public policy and has branched into a

number of forms, including regular formal public consultations on policy formation and discrete national deliberative fora such as a constitutional convention (Carolan, 2015), a citizens' assembly on constitutional issues 2016–18 (Farrell et al., 2019) and, in 2019, a citizens' assembly on gender equality. Ireland also published its first *Open Government Partnership National Action Plan 2016–2018*, which committed to a range of specific actions, including promotion of 'meaningful citizen engagement in policy making' (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2016, p. 16). Despite these developments, the OECD *Better Life Index* (OECD, 2019) places Ireland thirty-sixth out of forty countries on the criterion of stakeholder engagement in law and public policy development, drawing on indicator measures such as the extent and nature of consultation methods, transparency and feedback mechanisms. Reasons for this poor rating may include the persistence of a centralised state, issues of inclusion and legitimacy of participatory governance arrangements, the diverse and somewhat disjointed nature of the participatory governance mechanisms that have been established and the absence of a strong policy and ideological basis for participatory governance in Ireland. Each of these issues is examined in the following sections.

Ireland: The ongoing challenge of centralisation

Since independence Ireland has been characterised by a centralised system of government. Coakley & Gallagher (2004, p. 31) note that Irish governments post independence have 'been disposed to exercise central control to a much greater degree than their predecessors'. The centralisation of the state had implications for both the system of local government and civil society. Instead of the establishment of a robust and autonomous system of local government, post-independence local government structures were located at county level and therefore relatively remote from the local communities that they served. The regular postponement of local elections until the publication of the Local Government Act, 2001, further weakened local government.

Despite several waves of reform, Irish local government remains subordinate to central government and is notable within the OECD for its limited functions (Callanan, 2018). The number of local government units has been reduced from 600 pre independence to 31 in 2019 (Quinlivan, 2019). A study of 39 European countries by the European Commission describes Ireland as having a 'particularly low

degree of local autonomy’ (Ladner et al., 2015, p. 75). As in the UK, in Ireland “localism” is mediated from the centre’ (Fenwick & Gibbon, 2015, p. 236). Reidy (2018) identifies some of the consequences of centralisation for local democracy:

Decisions are taken at national level by those with little sympathy or interest in empowering local communities. Local knowledge and local priorities get less traction and it takes longer for problems which arise to filter through layers of administration ... no other EU state allocates such an overbearing role to central government. We are truly aberrant.

It is difficult to see how participatory governance can grow, flourish and become sustainable at any level of government in a context where most of the decision-making power is concentrated in central government.

Over the last thirty years in Ireland new local and regional governance structures have been layered over the local government system. The following section explores their operation and specifically issues of inclusion and legitimacy.

Local participatory governance 1997–2008: Inclusion and legitimacy

In the 1980s corporatism or partnering with public and private bodies was introduced into national and local government at a time of deep recession and high unemployment and poverty (Forde, 2009). Corporatism became a central element of Irish economic policy in 1987 when the first of six national agreements, the *Programme for National Recovery*, was instituted between the government, trade unions and employers. Ten years later, neo-corporatism or social partnership arrangements were introduced whereby a broad range of civil society groups and organisations, known collectively as the Community and Voluntary Pillar, was included in negotiations leading to national agreements.

Neo-corporatism was extended to the local level where area-based partnership companies were established nationwide to generate socio-economic development in urban and rural areas which had experienced high levels of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Other new structures such as county and city enterprise boards (CEBs) and county and city development boards (CDBs)

offered tailored responses to the economic and social challenges of the period. All these initiatives followed the government policy of 'alignment' or integration between the local government and local development systems, as set out in the White Paper *Better Local Government* (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 1996).

From the 1980s regional governance began to take shape with the establishment of several EU-funded programmes, including INTERREG and two regional assemblies with specific functions in the areas of spatial and community planning and development. While the original regional assemblies were replaced by three new regional assemblies in 2015, regionalism did not gain a significant foothold in Ireland. It has been argued that the introduction of regionalism was based on attempts to comply with EU policy rather than on a deep-rooted desire to develop regional democracy (Callanan, 2020), and that the public does not identify with the regional level of administration (Rees et al., 2004). Quin (2010, p. 120) points out that despite some limited decentralisation, the:

role and powers of local authorities have not changed significantly and the regional structures that have been put in place lack authority and resources. Neither has the balance between pre-existing structures been altered so the centre still rules.

Evaluations of the impact of social partnership and local development initiatives tend to be qualified rather than zero-sum in nature. Teague & Donaghy (2015) acknowledge the deliberative elements of national social partnership, including the unprecedented inclusion of civil society organisations, but argue that these efforts did not represent a form of new governance because their impact was not sustained and did not result in the development of new policy initiatives. Similarly, Roche (2007, p. 412) contends that deliberative approaches offered by social partnership mitigated 'political deal making' but failed to change the behaviour of the traditional social partners or the state, both of which reverted to the traditional 'postures and tactics' of industrial bargaining when deliberation did not meet their expectations. Haase & McKeown (2003, p. 33) deem the extent to which government used the learning from local partnership successes to change central administrative arrangements as 'disappointing'.

The operation of social partnership also gave rise to substantial issues concerning inclusion. Gaynor (2009, p. 317) argues that ‘Claims of consensus, partnership and inclusion clearly ring hollow when participants dissent’, pointing to the manner in which the Irish state cut funding to several community and voluntary sector organisations which criticised its social partnership strategy (see also Harvey, 2016). Partnership working meant that community and voluntary groups and organisations were pressed into formalised, vertical arrangements which were managed and ultimately controlled by the central state, while an emphasis on achieving consensus in decision-making processes tended to divert or neutralise dissent (Forde, 2009; Forde et al., 2016).

Perhaps the most serious issue affecting social partnership concerned the extent of state control over the establishment, operation and existence of these structures, both nationally and locally, and thereby on their legitimacy. The economic crisis of 2008 brought an abrupt end to national social partnership (O’Kelly, 2010), although the Community and Voluntary Pillar continues to operate independently of government. Despite calls for a resumption of social partnership on grounds of democratic transparency and accountability (O’Toole, 2016), this has not happened; however, the Irish government has recently trialled forms of social and civic dialogue with stakeholder groups in the context of Brexit. Since 2016 there has been a series of all-island civic and sectoral dialogues on the theme of Brexit and involving stakeholders from a range of civil society, non-governmental, political and business groups (Department of the Taoiseach, 2017).

At local level, area-based partnership companies and other local social partnership bodies continued to function post-crisis but their number was significantly reduced. Following a report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group (2010), the numbers of social inclusion and rural development bodies were nearly halved, their support infrastructure removed and the bodies which survived were renamed as local development companies, which remain in operation (Forde et al., 2016). Meanwhile, a number of new, expanded or reconfigured structures have been established at city and county level to facilitate administration of local programmes and engagement between local government, state agencies and civil society organisations. These initiatives, which continue the long-standing government policy of alignment, are the subject of the following sections.

New and reconfigured local governance: Diversity, continuity and coordination

While the discontinuation of social partnership led to a severe reduction in the number of local development bodies, a raft of new, expanded or restructured bodies has been introduced to the Irish local landscape within the last twenty years. While these bodies are diverse in terms of goals and organisation and therefore challenging to categorise, all are primarily concerned with governance, offer some devolution of coordination and decision-making to local level, and incorporate an element of civil society input into decision-making in their areas of interest. All of these structures represent differing degrees of 'direct public engagement' (Nabatchi & Blomgren Bingham, 2014, p. 3), whereby citizens become directly and personally involved in local decision-making.

Two broad forms of local structure may be identified. Both forms are mainly state-led in that the initiative for their establishment emerged from central government, which also oversees their operation. The *first form* comprises initiatives which enable engagement between non-aligned individuals, civil society groups and authorities or decision-making bodies in the delivery of particular services. Examples include joint policing committees (JPCs) and children and young people's services committees (CYPSCs). While the first JPCs were established in 2005, they now operate in every county and city, while the first CYPSCs were established in 2007.

The *second form* of structure is concerned with civil society participation in local government and seeks to build on previous experience and structures. While representing a measure of continuity with previous initiatives, these structures also attempt to develop the role of local government as coordinator of services, in accordance with the policies *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government* (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012) and the more recent *Framework Policy on Local and Community Development* (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2015). Key examples which are explored here include local community development committees (LCDCs) and public participation networks (PPNs), while local authorities also coordinate the Age-Friendly City and County and Healthy City and County initiatives. Other discrete local-government-driven initiatives include local regeneration schemes and participatory budgeting exercises, both of which build community consultation and

engagement into their remits. The first local-government-run participatory budgeting scheme was run by South Dublin County Council. Local residents were asked to select and vote on local development projects, which were then funded (Shannon et al. 2019; South Dublin County Council, 2019). If expanded, initiatives such as this offer interesting and innovative participatory prospects for local authorities nationwide.

The Local Government Reform Act, 2014, provided for the establishment of LCDCs in each local authority area. LCDCs are made up of representatives from a range of interests, including local authorities, state agencies, business representatives and local civil society groups. The primary aim of LCDCs is to facilitate greater coordination on an area basis to publicly funded programmes and to oversee administration efficiencies across the local development landscape, while drawing on the capacity of local government (Community Work Ireland, 2015). While LCDCs bear some similarities to the CDBs that preceded them and that emerged from an earlier wave of local government reform, there are also some differences. Like CDBs, LCDCs operate within local authorities and their functions include the development and implementation of the community elements of six-year local economic and community development plans in each city and county. Unlike CDBs, LCDCs have the new role of coordinating and managing local and community development programmes that have been approved either by the relevant local authority or by agreement between the LCDC and a relevant public authority (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014).

LCDCs are supported by PPNs in each local authority area. PPNs are one facet of Ireland's commitment to the Open Governance Partnership but are also the successors of the community fora that operated in conjunction with local development agencies from 1990. One of the main roles of PPNs is to facilitate opportunities for networking, communication and the sharing of information between environmental, community and voluntary groups, and between these groups and the local authority (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014).

While LCDCs and PPNs are still at a relatively early stage of development, reception of these new local structures has been mixed. O'Connor & Ketola (2018, p. 51) regard the creation of PPNs positively and as 'perhaps the most formal institutionalisation of a participatory governance system', while Hall et al. (2016) suggest that

they potentially offer real consultative opportunities with local government. There has been some criticism of LCDCs, which emanate from and belong to the local authorities in which they are based, raising questions about their capacity to operate independently of local government, ‘on which they rely for their funding and administrative support’ (Hall et al., 2016, p. 61). Another concern relates to LCDCs’ tendency to emphasise bureaucracy over strategic development, and administration and regulation over a developmental approach (Worrall & O’Leary, 2019).

Recent research points to underdeveloped links and inadequate coordination between PPNs and LCDCs and between these structures and local government policymaking processes (Cullinane & Forde, 2018; Forde, 2019). Other recent research into the operation of one LCDC identified a number of issues, including a lack of understanding of members’ individual roles and of the function of the LCDC committee and a need for better communication between members (Worrall & O’Leary, 2020), but acknowledged the considerable challenges of collaborative inter-sectoral working. There is a sense that these new local bodies represent a chance to improve administrative efficiency, coordination and value for money (Hall et al., 2016) rather than offering substantive and effectual strategic, deliberative and decision-making opportunities. More generally, there is concern about the capacity of local authorities to act effectively as coordinators of local services ‘without sufficient hard power and core societal functions’ (Shannon, 2018, p. 19).

Discussion

The rate of development and innovation in participatory governance has been fast-paced in Ireland in recent years and the country has received considerable praise for its national participatory governance initiatives (Dryzek et al., 2019; Van Reybrouck, 2016). David Van Reybrouck (2016) references the work of the Irish Constitutional Convention and Citizens’ Assembly and calls Ireland ‘the most innovative democracy in Europe’. Furthermore, the progress of the Irish citizens’ assemblies has led to calls for the establishment of UK citizens’ assemblies on Brexit (Williams et al., 2018) and democratic reform (Mason, 2019). Despite this approval, three main conclusions surrounding the development of participatory governance may be identified. These issues arise in the context of the proliferation of participatory governance arrangements in Ireland but also reflect

broad concerns about the philosophy and operation of participatory governance.

The first conclusion stems from problems surrounding the *institutionalisation of participatory governance processes and their relationship to existing government systems*. This is a vexed issue, as too much institutionalisation and integration may strangle participatory innovation, while too little can lead to accusations of window-dressing and tokenism. In Ireland, new participatory governance structures have been grafted onto established and largely unreformed systems, thereby generating a number of challenges and problems that are difficult to resolve. For example, social partnership incorporated civil society actors into long-standing industrial bargaining processes without reforming these processes, while new participatory structures such as LCDCs have been inserted into a weakened local government system. Irish local government suffers from considerable handicaps, including limited functions and a lack of constitutional protection. Government's penchant for abolition of subnational bodies is echoed in the closure, amalgamation or reconfiguring of a large number of local partnership and development bodies after the economic crisis of 2008 (Shannon, 2016), and again in 2014 when the county and city enterprise boards and development boards were dissolved and their functions transferred to local authorities. Intermittent disestablishment of bodies can generate trust and legacy issues, including an unwillingness to engage by people who were involved in previous structures and by new participants who may be reluctant to invest time and energy in processes that may subsequently become defunct. Furthermore, layering new structures on top of existing systems tends to highlight and sometimes exacerbate the weaknesses of these systems, while doing little to address them. More generally, in order to have a chance of effectiveness and to achieve a measure of longevity, 'experiments in deliberative democracy need to be accompanied by significant institutional change' (Teague, 2006, p. 440; Gaventa, 2004) to existing government and organisational systems at all levels. Institutional change requires systemic developments including organisational reconfiguration, changes in organisational culture, and cultivation of positive and inclusive attitudes towards participatory decision-making processes. Without such change, many processes of participatory governance may represent sticking plasters and achieve little longevity themselves.

The second conclusion, and perhaps the most significant, is the need for a *clear ideology and set of policies* to underpin and guide the

development of participatory governance. In Ireland there is no specific or concerted policy underpinning or informing the establishment and operation of participatory governance initiatives, many of which have been established on an ad hoc rather than integrated basis. For instance, Ireland does not have an equivalent to the UK Gunning Principles, a set of four rules which are used to legally test the quality and effectiveness of public consultations, including those operated by local government (Local Government Association, 2019). The development of a similar set of principles in Ireland would help to fortify the role of public consultative processes and emphasise their strategic role. The Irish *Open Government Partnership Action Plan 2016–2018* (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2016), which offered a strong rationale for participatory governance, has yet to be renewed for a further period. Comparable countries like New Zealand are now into their third *Open Government Partnership Plan* (New Zealand Government, 2018). At the level of local policy, the *Framework Policy on Local and Community Development* (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2015) has been criticised for promoting a ‘self-help’ culture without a concomitant commitment to resourcing or encouraging empowerment, participation and democratic engagement (Community Work Ireland, 2015). This policy framework already runs the risk of inadequacy in terms of ambition and fulfilment of the principles that inform participatory governance, including legitimacy, effectiveness and social justice (Fung, 2015). The current programme for government envisages this framework policy as:

a coherent policy framework and ... a strategy to support the community and voluntary sector and encourage a cooperative approach between public bodies and the community and voluntary sector. (Government of Ireland, 2016, p. 131)

The language and approach used by government is redolent of neoliberalism and a public administrative logic that prizes problem-solving over an ideological perspective that seeks and values communicative action and engagement. Effective participatory governance should be about more than just a commitment to developing supportive and cooperative relationships, and needs to focus on the whole of civil society rather than just voluntary and community sector organisations. It should also be put in place ‘under

conditions of vibrant public debate and genuine perspective-based representation' (Gaynor, 2009, p. 303).

A third and linked conclusion concerns the importance of *joined-up thinking in the establishment and operation of new and different participatory structures*. The sheer number and diversity of initiatives mask the need for greater efforts to coordinate the working of structures, thereby enabling the clear and coherent articulation of citizen voice at every level, from local to regional and national. Inadequate coordination can adversely affect the experience of all actors engaged in these processes. Additionally, centralisation of key decision-making, bureaucratisation and the lack of a clear strategic element in several of the new and now defunct participatory structures suggest a reluctance to enable the nurturing of principles such as deliberation and to allow civil society to think for itself. Referring to the global proliferation of processes for citizen voice, Dryzek et al. (2019, p. 1144) note that the 'sheer quantitative overabundance overloads policymakers and citizens, making it difficult to detect the signal amid the noise'. If there is no joined-up thinking, it is unclear how citizen voice can be heard and participatory processes can be effective. Blomgren Bingham et al. (2005, p. 555) point out that participatory governance structures should be planned and introduced at different times and stages in the policy cycle, thereby enabling citizens to understand whether their role is in 'clarify(ing) preferences early in policy development, in choosing among concrete policy options later, or in enforcing policy after choices are made'. In addition, citizens need to know that their voices will be heard and their experiences taken into account. This issue reinforces the need for a clear ideology and suite of policies underpinning participatory governance.

Conclusion

This overview of the principal initiatives in participatory governance in Ireland illustrates the growing significance of citizen participation in decision-making and the evolution of new and alternative forms of governance. The political landscape in many countries includes many consultative, participative or deliberative fora that offer interest groups and members of the public varying degrees of input into decision-making and policymaking. This paper has argued that the rise of participatory governance in Ireland has the potential to enrich democratic policy and decision-making, but only if particular

conditions are met. These are strong and inclusive participatory processes at all levels of government, a clear ideological and policy basis, receptive institutional foundations and a coherent ‘joined-up’ programme. In addition, participatory governance needs to work for both state and citizen; otherwise ‘the notion that more intensive forms of citizen participation will increase democratic legitimacy is an ambition rather than a guarantee’ (Fung, 2015, p. 5).

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