A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION IN BRITAIN

ESRC AWARD L215252023

FULL REPORT OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

Background

The background to the study was a growing public concern about the state of British democracy and participation. In the 1990s, for example, a number of highly respected political journalists, among them Will Hutton, Andrew Marr and Jonathan Friedland, reported at length about a political crisis in Britain as exemplified by declining citizen participation, a lack of public confidence in exiting avenues for articulation and consultation, increasing protest activities outside the formal political area and a growing distrust in government institutions. There was a widespread feeling that politicians, political institutions and the political system as a whole were democratically unaccountable and illegitimate. Hutton and Maw were writing, of course, towards the end of eighteen years of Conservative government when there was a strong sense of political decay. Echoing these sentiments, Friedland urgently called on the incoming 1997 Labour Government to be radical in its reforms to increase citizen participation across the political spectrum. These concerns have not disappeared among political journalists, as Walker and Toynbee’s recent audit of Britain under Labour indicates, although there is now less hyperbole about a crisis of democracy and participation in Britain.

It would be easy to look back and dismiss the debate about a crisis of democracy and participation as reflecting the ‘temper of the times’. Concerns about the state of participation and democracy in Britain, however, are still important in the current political climate. Distrust prevails. Arguably, the lack of public confidence is demonstrated by the growing proportion of the electorate who did not vote in the General Elections of 1997 and 2001. The decline in voting certainly preoccupies politicians who see it as undermining their political legitimacy. It is in this context that the work of the American political scientist, Robert Putnam, has enjoyed so much attention. Extending his argument from the US to the UK, Putnam argues that the growing voter abstention, as just one example of eroding faith in political systems, is the product of a decline in social capital in civil society. In his book, Bowling Alone, he asserts that all sorts of voluntary activities generate and sustain social capital — networks and norms of reciprocity and trust — and these experiences of group life are the pillars of trust and confidence in wider society, including the political system. The decline of associational life and thereby social capital, therefore, accounts for dwindling trust and confidence in politicians, political institutions and the whole political system.
**Objectives**

Putnam’s work enjoyed so much attention because it was a big theory linking lots of things together. Thus, wider changes undermining altruistic voluntary activities in civil society – the growth of television watching, geographical mobility, the growing number of women in formal employment and so on – were also undercutting confidence and legitimacy in the political sphere. This made it an attractive theory for some. Putnam’s work has been subject to critical empirical by social scientists of course. There is now a widespread consensus among political scientists and sociologists in the US and European societies like Sweden and Britain that associational life, and thereby social capital, are not on the decline (see, for example, Ladd, Rothstein and Warde et al). Be that as it may, Putnam’s theory and his use of the concept of social capital in particular (Coleman and Bourdieu, among others, have used it before him and in different ways) are still interesting. A number of important empirical question are raised by the theory and its component concepts. Do voluntary activities generate social capital? Does group life sustain networks and norms of trust and reciprocity? Do positive experiences of group life instill wider feelings of confidence in political institutions and the system overall?

The main aim of the research was to conduct an in-depth study of activists and examine the processes of mobilisation, experiences of group life and evaluations of democracy and participation in Britain. This overall aim was achieved as is detailed in the rest of this report and the shorter summary of research findings. The five main objectives as set out in the original research proposal are outlined below as are the ways in which they were achieved.

1. Evaluate existing rival theories of civic voluntarism from the US, Europe and the UK and to contribute to a more sophisticated theoretical explanation of why some citizens participate while others do not.

   Before the fieldwork begun, there was an opportunity to conduct a extensive literature review to evaluate the different theories of civic voluntarism, and especially the most recent and popular theory of social capital. This led to a number of conference papers and articles. Please see nominated outputs and REGARD submissions.

2. To collect new qualitative data on participation and democracy from 120 interviewees resident in a range of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat constituencies in Britain.

   New qualitative data was collected from 120 interviewees in a range of constituencies across England, Scotland and Wales. This was achieved but not without considerable delay. Fieldwork started later than anticipated and took much longer to complete. These are outlined in the discussion of methods below. See also the discussion of difficulties in the main end of report form.
3. To develop ways of combining quantitative and qualitative methods by drawing on the Citizens Audit (CA) to generate a sub-sample of interviewees and bringing the findings together.

The sub-sample of activists was easily drawn from the CA by identifying activists as all those who did more than 20 hours a month in voluntary activities when asked how much time they spent on voluntary work. The soon to be published findings from the CA will be used to locate the in-depth study in context. It is anticipated that joint work will be undertaken to bring the findings together.

4. To contribute to policy and practice by highlighting the opportunities and constraints on participation and thereby enhance civic voluntarism and examine satisfactions and dissatisfactions with democracy and thereby increase positive evaluations of democracy.

The early empirical findings have been sent to non-academic users such as the Electoral Commission and IPPR who contribute ideas to the policy process. Please see the discussion of impacts below. The research warns policy makers not to overestimate the positive effects of associational life on wider political evaluations of politics and democracy in Britain.

5. To locate the project alongside current European research on citizenship and democracy and thereby add a comparative dimension to our understanding of the changing relationship between citizens and government.

Reading of the comparative literature on civic voluntarism is ongoing and has been enhanced by Professor Devine’s recent role as an international referee on the Academy of Finland’s new research programme on social capital and trust. It involved evaluating applications with a European perspective with Swedish and French colleagues. See below regarding contact with a German colleague.

**Methods**

The voluntary activists were selected from the mail survey component of the Citizen’s Audit which was a large scale survey examining the state of citizen participation in Britain that was undertaken by Professor Pat Seyd and Professor Charles Pattie. The mail survey consisted of 9,959 completed questionnaires. The questionnaire asked respondents a number of questions on associational activities. Respondents, for example, were asked how much time in total they spent on activities, in clubs, associations, groups, networks or in supporting other people during the last month and given a choice of answers ranging from nothing to more than 20 hours. The number of people who claimed to have devoted more than 20 hours on such activities in the last month was 713 representing 7.1% of the total sample (and what was in line from findings from the last major study of participation in the 1980s by Parry and his colleagues). Of this sub-sample, there were roughly equal proportions of men and women (51% and 49%) and there was a clear
middle-class bias in that 48% were classified as middle class, 18% as working class while 36% of this sub-sample was unclassified (as a result of not being employed as retired, students etc). The gender balance was not altogether surprising given the wide range of activities in which people could be involved. The dominance of the middle class was certainly anticipated. See Table 1 below.

Table 1: Activists identified from the Citizens Audit *

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclassified</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>713</td>
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* The question from the Citizen’s Audit was as follows: During the last month, approximately how much time in total did you spend on activities, in club, associations, groups, networks or in supporting other people?

- None
- Less than 1 hour in a month
- 1 to 4 hours in a month
- 5 to 10 hours in a month
- 11 to 20 hours in a month
- More than 20 hours in a month
- Don’t know

Activists were randomly selected from this sub-sample, stratified on the basis of region, and with names and addresses supplied by the Citizen’s Audit Team, letters were sent out asking informants if they would be willing to be interviewed in-depth about their voluntary activities. The letters were quickly followed up with a telephone call to ascertain their response and to set up interviews. A number of interviewees were listed as ex-directory so the same letter was sent out with a reply slip asking them to indicate their willingness to be interviewed further and requesting a telephone number to make follow-up calls too. The generation of the sample continued throughout the period of fieldwork. Fieldwork started in September 2001 and was completed in December 2002. A total of 120 interviewees were conducted across the country. The interviews were usually conducted in the informants’ homes and lasted about two hours on average. Using a semi-structured interview schedule, the focus of the interviews was on the informant’s activism, how they got involved, their experiences, both positive and negative, of group life, some reflections and evaluations of their activities and wider views about participation and democracy in Britain. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed and they have been analyzed using the computer package, Atlas.ti.

The research was undertaken according to the original design but there were considerable delays. Fieldwork was due to start in January 2000 and expected to take eight months.
For reasons beyond control, the activists’ details did not become available from the Citizens’ Audit until July 2001. Interviewing did not start until September 2001. Generating the sample was expected to be straightforward but over a third of the sample were ex-directory. Although letters with reply slips were sent out to people, the response to them was low. Fieldwork took much longer than anticipated because of train strikes in the early months of 2002. A number of interviews had to be rescheduled or delayed. Dr Roberts completed as many interviews as he could before his contract ended in July 2002. With 104 interviews done, Professor Devine completed the outstanding 16 interviews between August-December 2002. In effect, the fieldwork took sixteen months to complete. The transcription process was disrupted by the quick departure of a secretary who had to be replaced quickly. This was done easily enough. Only so many transcriptions could be done, however, before the secretarial contract was at an end. Overheads were used to pay for outstanding transcriptions. While some early analysis of the data was undertaken in 2002, analysis of the full set of transcriptions only began in March 2003. All of these delays impacted on the data analysis phases of the project that is ongoing.

Results

The 120 activists who were interviewed included roughly equal proportions of women and men (51% and 49%). The presence of women in the research was pleasing since their voluntary activism – often outside the formal political sphere – frequently gets overlooked in political science research. The sub-sample was slightly more skewed towards the middle class with 53% classified as middle class, 16% as working class and 31% unclassified (the overwhelming majority of whom were retired). The dominance of the middle class in the sub-sample is not altogether surprising since members of the middle class might be more willing to participate in (further) research than their working-class counterparts. A note of caution, however, needs to be expressed here. There is a tendency to summarize the findings of previous research by Parry and his colleagues by suggesting that all activists as white, male and middle class. Parry et al. did not say this even though they argued that being white, male and middle class increases the propensity to be active in associational life. What was striking in doing the in-depth interviews is that activism is not confined to a middle class of high-level of professionals and managers for it is evident among low-level white collar employees (the lower middle class) and manual workers too (the working class). The diversity of activists should not be overlooked. See Table 2.
Table 2: Activists across England, Scotland and Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclassified</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>120</td>
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The sample of activists was engaged in a vast range of formal and informal voluntary activities. The individual activists were often involved in numerous activities as the same time and they had long histories of activism. In a analysis of their survey, Moyser and Parry grouped voluntary associations into ‘five loose types organized around common interests or purposes’. They distinguished between (1) occupationally based associations; (2) educational associations; (3) community-orientated associations (4) recreational associations and (5) political associations. This typology was used to make sense of the profusion of associational groups and activities found among the 120 activists of this study. Examples were found of all five types of activities and some of the interviewees were active across the groupings. The majority of activists were clustered into either community-orientated activities and, to a lesser degree, recreational activities. Given the clustering of the interviewees into these two types of voluntary associational activity, a more refined typology may be useful as the analysis of the data continues. Among those engaged in ‘community activities’, for example, it might be useful to distinguish between those involved in religious organizations/activities of which there were a surprising number - and those engaged in other activities. Further thought needs to be given to those engaged in activities for children that invariably take the form of educational activities and/or recreational activities. See Table 3.
Table 3: Types of Voluntary Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupationally based activities (trade unions, staff associations, armed forces associations, professional societies)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational activities (evening classes, study groups, Art, literacy or cultural groups, self-help groups, Feminist groups)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community activities (religious organizations, Voluntary service groups, community or local civic groups)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational activities (social clubs, hobby or sports clubs)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political activities (non-party political clubs or Organizations, local political parties)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* many of the interviewees were engaged in numerous activities which explains why there are more activities recorded than activists.

The in-depth interviews revealed much about the micro-processes of mobilization. One of the problems with Putnam’s theory of social capital is that he does not explain how people come to be involved in voluntary groups in the first place. A key issue of debate is whether people ‘self-initiate’ (in a ‘bottom up’ way) or do groups mobilize people (in a ‘top down’ manner). Unsurprisingly examples of both were found the interviewees. Analysis is ongoing to establish whether there are any patterns between the type of associational activity in which people are involved and the processes by which they became involved. There was much voluntary activity that was self-initiated. It is important to stress, however, that such self-initiated action is rarely undertaken in individual isolation from other people. People’s association activities have to be situated within networks of informal support – especially from family, neighbours and friends in localities. In this respect, even self-initiated activism is prompted, encouraged and sustained by others whether ‘the other’ is an individual or an organization. These informal networks are significant in shaping people’s pre-dispositions towards group activity and the way in which other people often facilitate entry into associational life. These informal and formal networks help account for people’s propensity for participation.
At the same time, the interviews revealed the importance of organizations in pulling people into further activities as part of the mobilization process. Formal groups and, most especially, other activists in these groups, play a crucial role in mobilizing people to work alongside them in a top-down manner. There were examples in the research of activists being lured into greater involvement in seemingly successful organizations by fellow activities. An interviewee succinctly described the process by which he became very active in his church when he said, ‘by and large, it is most like voluntary organizations. You get a committed core and then that core drags other people in’. Involvement in one group often facilitated activism in another organizations too. Of course, there were instances of activists who were active because their voluntary groups were struggling and finding other people willing to be involved was proving difficult. Activism in this respect was the product of default rather than choice. Be that as it may, what was especially revealing from the in-depth exploration of the micro-processes of mobilization was the sequence by which individuals and groups led people to become activists. Once someone was prompted to join a group, it was the organization, especially fellow activists within it, who made a difference in propelling people to devote large amounts of free time to voluntary activities.

The interviewees were also asked about their experiences of group life. As was noted earlier, Putnam assumes that it is a positive experience where face-to-face interaction promotes feelings of reciprocity and trust. A key question is whether group life facilitates these norms and always does so? The interviewees were asked about their relationships with other people in the groups and activities in which they were involved. It has to be recognized, of course, that some voluntary activities are highly sociable involving close contact with other people while other activities are quite individualized. Even so, the vast majority of interviewees reported that they enjoyed good relations with other people as part of their voluntary activities. This finding is hardly surprising since belonging to a group and being heavily involved in voluntary activities is invariably based on shared moral values and beliefs or interests and enthusiasms. This was the basis of group solidarity that prompted people to work together well. There were, of course, interviewees who talked of poor relations with other people in their groups. Relations could be difficult between people, for example, if decision-making processes were not especially democratic and one person or a small group of people acted as a clique excluding other people in collective activities. These relations were the source of tension and distrust and led the interviewees to leave these organizations and go elsewhere.

For the most part, therefore, relationships with other people engaged in voluntary activities are good although it should be emphasized that activists are pre-disposed in this respect. Reciprocity and trust arise from shared beliefs and interests as well as the actual experience of being involved and working alongside other people. The interviewees were also asked about their experiences of contact with and working alongside other organizations including government bodies. Once again, it was found that the interviewees reported both positive and negative experiences in their engagement with public institutions. There were interviewees who felt their relations with local officials were good, they were listened to and treated with respect and any requests were met favourably. There were other interviewees, however, who described negative
experiences of dealing with council officials who did not listen to their concerns, for example, about council house repairs. In this respect, poor relations with such bodies created feelings of distrust. Indeed, even those with positive experiences expressed some concerns about the increasing bureaucratic regulation and surveillance of voluntary activities. While they appreciated the need for regulations around working with children and attending to issues of health and safety, there was some regret at the way in which the space in which voluntary activities took place was less informal than it used to be.

Finally, the interviewees were asked for their wider evaluations of participation and democracy in Britain. Unsurprisingly, most of the interviewees has a strong sense of civic duty believing, for example that people should vote as it was a democratic right that had been fought for in the past. They felt their own activities were worthwhile so they had a sense of self-efficacy. That said, they did not think that others be should be active like themselves. It was up to them to participate in voluntary associations. They were rather sanguine about government initiatives to increase participation and democracy. These issues aside, many of the interviewees held quite negative views about politicians and the political parties. The interviewees spoke of how they distrusted politicians, how their personal behaviour did not match with to their public personas, how they were good at making promises and not delivering on them and so on. Similarly, many of the interviewees spoke of how they disliked the political parties and how the parties in government and opposition spent too much time scoring points off each other and not enough time sorting out the solutions to pressing national problems. Revealing, the interviewees disassociated themselves from the label of ‘activist’ because it was too closely associated with politics, political infighting and the failure to take a problem-solving approach to various economic, social and political issues.

These empirical findings pose some difficulties for Putnam’s theory of social capital and how social capital, generated and sustained in everyday voluntary activities, is the basis of a faith in the political system. Earlier, it was noted that Putnam’s work has enjoyed widespread public attention because it is a big theory that posits relationships between different aspects of life (so the decline in civil society explains political disenchantment etc). This in-depth study has shown that Putnam’s account of social capital does not work as it is supposed to do. It is the case that associational activities are more likely to generate norms of reciprocity and trust between people with which they interact on a face-to-face basis. That said, group life is not always a positive experience and can be the source of exclusion, conflict and distrust too. Most importantly, experiences of group life do not predispose people to be more trusting towards politicians, the political parties and government. Evident among the interviewees was a widespread cynicism towards politicians and the political parties although not necessarily the political system as a whole. Arguably, explanations for that lack of confidence in politics should not be sought in changes in civic society but in the political sphere itself. Thus, a lack of confidence and trust in politicians and the political parties must be placed in the political context of the last thirty years and changes in the nature of governance over that period.
Activities

Both researchers have participated at conferences and been involved in networks related to the project. In the early stages of the research, Professor Devine and Dr Roberts read widely on the crisis of democracy and participation in Britain including various books by political journalists and the like. The academic literature on participation and democracy in political science and sociology was also consulted from the classic statements by Verba et al. on Britain’s civic culture to the more recent work by Putnam on social capital. Two conference papers focusing on competing theories of participation and especially social capital was presented in 2001 at the British Sociological Associations (BSA) Annual Conference in April at the University of Manchester, UK and at the European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR) specialist conference on social capital in September at the University of Exeter, UK. It was at Exeter that we made contact with members of the ESRC-funded Social Capital and Families research group headed by Professor Rosalind Edwards at South Bank University. It was Professor Edwards who facilitated our contributions to the International Journal of Social Research Methods and another article in Social Policy and Society. The opportunity to reply to an article measuring social capital by Jan W. van Deth’s work facilitated contact with him at the University of Mannheim in Germany.

Conference papers, focusing on the early empirical results from the qualitative study, were given at the Political Studies Association (PSA) Annual Conference at Aberdeen in April 2002 and at the Elections, Public Opinion and Parties (EPOP) in Britain annual conference in Salford in September 2002. We also gave a short presentation on the project at a seminar on social networks and social movements organised by Professors Mike Savage and Alan Warde at the University of Manchester in November 2003. This led to an invitation from Professor Mario Diani to present a paper at the European Sociological Association Conference (ESA) in Murcia in Spain in September 2003. From this conference, we have been invited to submit an abstract to the next ECPR workshop on the changing structure of civil society in Uppsala in Sweden in April 2004. We are very keen to write a paper on how our interviewees are anxious to disassociate themselves from the label ‘activist’ and politics more generally. Finally, Professor Fiona Devine, was invited to be an international referee, along with colleagues from France, Sweden and Finland on a new research programme, Social Capital and Trust, being funded by the Academy of Finland. This involved evaluating a number of research proposals that had got through to the second round of the competition, and attending a day’s meeting to consider all of the proposals and to decide on funding in Helsinki in October 2003.

Outputs

Details on the conference papers (referred to above) have been submitted to REGARD as have two journal articles. We valued the opportunity comment on van Deth’s article on measuring social capital in the International Journal of Social Research Methodology. Much of the research on social capital has drawn on survey data and it has been especially useful in establishing patterns and trends in social capital with reference to its alleged decline. In our piece, we made a case for a micro sociological exploration of
social capital including the processes of mobilization, interactions, relationships and experiences of group life, and how people draw on these experiences to evaluate wider issues of participation and democracy in Britain. We have also written a piece for the journal, *Social Policy and Society*, on social capital and the hollowing out of the welfare state. As Parry and his colleagues also found, the majority of our activists were engaged in activities in informal and formal groups that are not ‘political’ in any direct sense. This has led us to do more reading around the voluntary sector and engage in debates about changes in governance, the welfare state and the voluntary sector. Another article on the aesthetic dimensions of voluntarism, of the pleasures of activism, will shortly appear in *Social Politics*.

A theoretical paper on social capital, written by Dr Roberts is under consideration with the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. Over the next year and more, the plan is to write a number of papers on the empirical findings from the project and to submit these to the leading journals in sociology and political science. We plan to write a book out of the project too. Our colleagues, Professors Whiteley, Seyd and Pattie, will be publishing a book on the key findings to emerge out of the Citizen’s Audit with Cambridge University Press in 2003/4. (The book manuscript is currently with the publishers). Professor Devine has written a book with Cambridge University Press and she will explore the possibilities of publishing a jointly authored book, with Dr Roberts, on the qualitative project with them in due course. It would be an ideal opportunity to draw on some of the key findings from the national survey of citizen activity in Britain and to place the in-depth study of activists into this context. Finally, the data set of 120 in-depth interviewees with activists from the Citizen’s Audit is currently under consideration at QUALIDATA. The submission is to be considered at the next Acquisitions Review Committee and once all the interview transcripts have been fully anonymised, the whole data set will be deposited in the archive at Essex.

**Impacts**

Information on the project has been requested by two organizations at this juncture: the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) and the Electoral Commission (EC). Preliminary results from the study were sent to the Democracy and Public Involvement Team at IPPR. The team is considering ways at involving active citizens more effectively and equally in the governance of public services, the possibilities of civic engagement beyond traditional concepts of volunteering and the barriers to more extensive and representative involvement in the political sphere. Details on early findings were also requested by the EC which is involved in a view of local electoral cycles in England and attitudes towards the frequency of elections and of voter fatigue. IPPR is an independent think thank that draws on academic research as well as engaging in research itself with a strong policy focus. Its aim is to promote new ideas that influence the development of policy especially through its strong networks with government in particular. The EC is an independent body that was set up by parliament in 2000. The aim of the organizations is to increase public confidence in the democratic process within the UK and encourage people to take part by modernizing the electoral process, promoting public awareness of electoral matters and regulating political parties. In
disseminating our results to these two organizations, we hope that the results of our project will contribute to the debate on civic renewal and policy developments in this area in some way.

Most recently, we have also been asked for details of our research from the Institute for Political and Economic Research (IPEG), a research institute that aims to contribute to the development of effective governance. IPEG has been asked to submit details on research being undertaken at Manchester to the Civil Renewal Unit (CRU) at the Home Office. The Unit is proposing to establish a Centre for Active Citizenship and it is especially interested in facilitating citizen engagement and civic renewal. We are very, of course, pleased to be able to disseminate our research findings in these ways. They were not anticipated in the original research proposal. In the proposal, we expected to disseminate our findings at a more local level, to the local authorities, MPs etc in the constituencies in which we expected our interviewees to be clustered. As it turned out, our interviewees were not clustered into particular localities and nor, as we have emphasized, were they engaged in voluntary activities of an overtly political kind. Many of them had little or no contact with public bodies. Disseminating the findings to local public bodies, therefore, seems less appropriate than originally anticipated in our initial proposal. What we remain concerned to do, however, is to disseminate our findings - not to the ‘centre’ like the above - but back out to our interviewees so to speak. They contributed to the Citizen’s Audit and our more in-depth study. With advice from the programme director, we plan to write up our key findings in pamphlet form to disseminate to them over the next few months.

**Future Research Activities**

We have a lot of work to do ourselves with further analysis of the data and writing up to be done of issues that are central to the research and those which are more of a tangent to the its main objectives. We would like to think further about the issue of time and voluntary activity. More than a third of our interviewees were retired and, indeed, spoke off jumping for joy at the prospect of doing voluntary work in their retirement. The majority of our interviewees, however, were employed and juggling family responsibilities, job demands and voluntary activities in their daily lives. Given that Britain is known for its long hours work culture and the intensification of work more generally, and the demands of everyday life are frequently cited as a constraint on activism, we want to know more about how our interviewees fitted voluntary activities into their daily lives. Inevitably, we did not interview large numbers of activists who might be described as working class (although note our caveat about class definitions above). We suspect that a different methodology is required to capture working-class activity that is not overtly political in nature but activism none-the-less. It would be very interesting to do research at a locality level - a community study for example - to capture the range of associational activities on council estates and the like that go unnoticed.

One of the joys of doing empirical research derives from the surprises it throws up. It came as a surprise that so many of our activists were not engaged in political activities and they were engaged, for example, in various community associations and the like.
Many of these activities were undertaken under the auspices of different churches. They were very wide ranging. One interviewee spoke of how her church was involved in numerous welfare projects from prisoners to prostitutes in the big city in which she lived. Against the backdrop of declining formal attendance at church services and in the context of debates about a demoralization of society, we were surprised to strong a moral basis for voluntary activities as many of the interviewees spoke of a sense of duty to the community, a responsibility to help less fortunate people and so forth. Similarly, many of our interviewees supported extra-curricula activities at schools or children’s recreational clubs and groups. It would be interesting to analyze this data in the context of debates about the changing welfare state and the growth of the voluntary sector in providing welfare services. We are especially interested in people’s voluntary careers and how they might lead to formal employment opportunities in a variety or organizations in the voluntary sector. We know the ESRC is planning a big initiative on the voluntary sector and we welcome funding of research in this area.

Professor Fiona Devine
23 October 2003