

Using Local Statecraft to Explain the Attitudes and Behaviours of Local Political Elites Toward Public Participation Initiatives

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Whilst local political elites are happy in principle to support public participation initiatives, in practice they appear unwilling to incorporate outcomes into their own policy and decision making processes. This paper argues that Jim Bulpitt's 'statecraft interpretation' can be adapted to the arena of local politics and used to provide a plausible explanation for these local political elite attitudes and behaviours. This 'local statecraft' model suggests that, when faced by participatory initiatives local political elites make a calculation based on; their local governing code; the possibilities for local polity management; and the prevailing context. Ultimately this calculation is non-ideological and is structured by the twin objectives of winning elections and governing competently. The paper concludes by highlighting the implications for research and policy.

This is very much a work in progress – all suggestions and comments welcome.
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Introduction

The attitudes and behaviours of local political elites towards participatory initiatives¹ present a significant problem for those who advocate the use of such initiatives and who wish to see them impact upon local policy processes. For, whilst local politicians are willing to endorse such initiatives in principle, the impact on policy and decision making has been minimal and the status of local politicians has remained largely unchallenged. Within the European context it has been observed that, when bringing citizens and other groups into processes of interactive decision making, the 'sanctioning and implementing of results of the results in "normal" political decision-making procedures and arenas is apparently problematic' (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000, p. 367). Politicians 'seldom or never abdicate their pivotal role in general local governance (Steyvers *et al.* 2007, p. 123)', and, whilst local politicians are happy to work with participatory initiatives, they will only do so as long as initiatives are benign and as long as they retain the final say (Copus 2007; Pilet and Steyvers 2007). Furthermore, where councillors engage directly in participatory initiatives their influence can have negative effects (Newman 2001; Fung and Wright 2003). In short, whilst local political elites may embrace initiatives in principle, in practice they ensure that any impact on the local policy process is limited. The question that follows is; how exactly can these behaviours and attitudes be explained?

Many explanations for these attitudes and behaviours can be found in the UK local government literature². The party group, for example, has been identified as one prominent cause. It demands loyalty from councillors in a way that citizen engagement is unable to challenge (Gyford 1991; Leach and Wingfield 1999). Participatory initiatives are seen as potential sources of difficulty for councillors who may be forced to choose between the recommendations of initiatives and the policy of their party group. This situation, which has been described as a *crisis of representation* (Copus 2001; 2004), is one that councillors will seek to avoid and hence they will work against any initiatives with the potential to make life uncomfortable for them in this respect. A second explanation is 'the very deeply held view amongst many backbench councillors (Liberal Democrats apart) that local democracy means representative democracy—hence their desire to marginalise the participatory democracy agenda' (Wilson 1999, p. 257). Local councillors are deeply wedded to a representative version of local democracy and adhere to the 'monopoly of the representative principle' (Stewart and Stoker 1988). Councillors feel threatened by new forms of participatory democracy and will

¹ Participatory initiatives here refer to the diverse range of extra electoral innovations that can be used to enhance representative democracy. See Smith (2005) for a full guide.

² For a fuller discussion of local government and public participation see Mckenna (forthcoming).

tolerate initiatives as long as they do not threaten established representative forms. (Bickerstaff and Walker 2005, pp. 2136-2137; Copus 2007, p. 25). A third explanation is that councillor attitudes and behaviours towards initiatives are caused by entrenched institutional frameworks such as the norms associated with representative democracy and organisational necessity. New norms of public involvement, service user empowerment and local deliberation do not displace these 'old' institutions but rather are overlaid on top of them (Barnes *et al.* 2004, p. 217). In response these existing frameworks foster processes of 'institutional deflection, accommodation and incorporation' which is reflected in practice by a failure to provide adequate resources for initiatives, the questioning of the legitimacy of citizen groups and the strongly held concerns about the validity and legitimacy of participatory initiatives (Sullivan *et al.* 2003).

Another explanation is that councillors have moved away from a democratic role and become immersed in the detail of running public services. Hence councillors have come to act as 'elected managers' (Copus 2006) and this puts them in a defensive position with the electorate as they seek to demonstrate their competence and expertise without being seen to rely on advice from the public. Elite attitudes and behaviours can also be explained as the consequence of a more cynical managerialist agenda. Elites have no intention of sharing power or of transforming democracy. Instead they recognise initiatives as valuable means to gather intelligence, to shape public perceptions, to legitimise pre determined policies, to tokenise and co-opt people, to manage protest and to divert attention from unpopular policies (Boaden *et al.* 1982; Hampton 1991; Lowndes and Wilson 2001; Beresford 2002). Finally, the inability of local political elites to incorporate the outcomes from participatory initiatives can also be explained as something which happens despite their own good intentions. So, for example, political and organizational obstacles such as the attitudes of some councillors and officers need to be overcome whilst the competing and sometimes restrictive demands of other central policy imperatives serve to limit room for policy manoeuvre and the resources to support participation. The issue, therefore, may simply be one of unsolved institutional design, in other words as proper mechanisms have to be developed which 'can properly integrate the issues and concerns raised in participatory forums into the mainstream of local authority decision making' (Stewart and Stoker 1988, p. 24).

Whilst these many explanations together present an illuminating smorgasbord of micro theories, what is lacking is an explicit elite theory that allows underpinning assumptions to be made explicit, the relative weight of these different explanations to be judged and the relationships between them to be explored. Such a back theory, however, is not readily available. This is

in part because UK local political elites are a relatively unexplored sub field of elite theory (Woods 1998). This absence of theorising about local political elites³ is no doubt a consequence of weaknesses in elite theory more generally which has been contentious in recent years to the extent that it has been discarded by many. Whilst having a long history, elite theory has been less favoured in recent years, in part due to overstated claims linked to the approach and the indiscriminate use of the term (Scott 2008). The ambiguity of elite theory has resulted in a field where varied definitions have 'played havoc with the analysis of research problems' and where 'different labels are used to refer to the same concept and different concepts are covered by the same label' (Zuckerman 1977, p. 327). Nevertheless, if the term is used carefully and limited to groups who are 'holders of power' the concept may still have explanatory power (Scott 2008, p. 28).

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to present a full explanation of local political elite attitudes towards participatory initiatives by linking existing explanations to an original theory of local political elites. The foundations for this back theory are the work of Jim Bulpitt, specifically his 'statecraft interpretation'. Statecraft is a set of linked concepts which were used by Bulpitt to explain the behaviour of national elites, most notably the first Thatcher government of the early 80's (Bulpitt 1986). Statecraft has been an important and influential contribution to political analysis in the UK (Buller 1999). The distinctive contribution of statecraft is its rejection of ideology as a driver of elite behaviour and its focus instead on the importance of pragmatism in pursuit of the ultimate aims of winning elections and governing competently. Local statecraft therefore outlined below and then, following this, the full 'statecraft explanation' will be presented as a theoretic model. The implications for research and policy will be discussed.

Local Statecraft – A Theory of the Local Political Elite

This section sets out 'local statecraft' as a back theory that can be used to organise the many explanations of elite attitudes and behaviours towards participatory initiatives. In a nutshell, local statecraft can be understood as a theory of the local political elite that deploys the core concepts of Bulpitt's statecraft interpretation within a local political context. To the knowledge of the author this has not previously been done. The rest of this section, therefore, maps out the underpinning assumptions about the local political elite and these core concepts of local statecraft. It also outlines how the

³ The exception is the valuable, although little used, contribution offered by Woods (1998) who develops a poststructuralist framework for analysing local political elites.

assumptions of critical realism can be used to give local statecraft explanatory power. First, however, a little more will be said about statecraft itself.

Bulpitt's Statecraft Interpretation

Statecraft is a concept that was developed by Bulpitt in order to interpret the behaviour of national elites in the UK. Bulpitt put forward statecraft as an alternative to interpretations which suggested that the first UK Thatcher government was driven by ideology, acting on behalf of capitalist interests or concerned primarily with maintaining policy consistency (Bulpitt 1986). Instead Bulpitt argued that the behaviour of the Thatcher government, or any national power elite, needed to be understood as a product of the need of political parties to gain and maintain power. Bulpitt described statecraft in the following way:

What is statecraft? The crude answer is that it is the art of winning elections and achieving some necessary degree of governing competence in office. It is not synonymous with, though it may be related to, pragmatism or expediency. It is concerned primarily to resolve the electoral and governing problems facing a party at any particular time. As a result it is concerned as much with the 'how' as the 'what' of politics. (Bulpitt 1986, p. 21)

Statecraft is an institutional phenomenon. It refers to 'the dynamic character to governance and way in which a certain kind of institutional intelligence accumulates over time' (John 2008, p. 5). Buller summarises it like this:

In short, Statecraft is about the relationship between ideas and political practice; it is about short-term politicking or tactical manoeuvring. However, it is something more than these things. It is concerned with the possibilities for longer-term reflection, calculation and action within the structural constraints faced by any political leadership in office. (Buller 1999, p. 695)

Defining the Local Political Elite

Local statecraft, as a variant of national statecraft, carries a number of assumptions from Bulpitt's original conception. It assumes that the elite will behave in a rationally self interested and unified way (Buller 1999, p. 695) and that actors have relative autonomy to act and rationality is 'bounded' so that policy makers will 'satisfice'; choosing those options which are 'good enough' for their purposes and, at the same time, deviate as little as possible from existing routines and practices (Bulpitt 1988, pp. 185–6). However, whereas

Bulpitt defined the elite as a group consisting of the main political actors and civil servants, whom he called the 'court', here the *local political elite* is defined primarily as those elected councillors who are members of the ruling council group either from a single political party or members of a coalition. It is of course possible to identify a local government 'joint', or 'corporate', elite, comprising of senior politicians and managers, and this is a concept that has been widely used in local government research and theory (Wilson 1989). The preference here, however, is to follow Page (1984) who equates *political* with *elected*. Local political elites also differ to their national counterparts in other ways. A local council party group, for example, would typically comprise of between 25 to 35 members which is more manageable number than the three hundred plus members of parliament that that national elites will typically have to work with. Furthermore, despite the fact that a cabinet / non executive split has been introduced into local government, the party group meeting retains its status as the primary decision maker particularly over cabinet meetings which tend to be set piece meetings held in public. Finally, from an officer perspective, senior managers, unlike their counterparts in national government, will work for all councillors, not just for the ruling group.

If they are to be properly defined, elites must be clearly differentiated from other influential groups and their relationships with these other groups defined (Scott 2008). In this respect three groups are particularly important for the local political elite. The first are the senior echelons of local authority management who work closely alongside them and alongside the executive councillors in particular. This relationship with council's senior management is extremely important for the local political elite and n Context ie on a day to day basis. The second group is the wider membership of the political party including the members and officials who, whilst not able to participate in all of the work of the local political elite, may nevertheless have important influence not least in determining the selection and de-selection of candidates for elections. The third important relationship for the local political elite is with the national political elite although this relationship is perhaps the most difficult of the three. In contrast to many other European countries, local political elites in the UK have been historically insulated from national elites who may in turn regard their local counterparts as parochial and less competent (Cole and John 2001).

The holding and exercise of power has particular connotations for local political elites. This is crucial as the 'holding and exercise of power' and the role of collective agency in this regard is at the heart of the elite concept (Scott 2008). There are two main forms of power associated with elites; *coercive influence*, linked primarily with formal and administrative power 'depends on

the rational calculations made by agents and operates through punishments and rewards'; and *persuasive influence*, linked more with informal strategies, 'depends on the offering of arguments, appeals and reasons that lead subalterns to believe that it is appropriate to act in one way or another' (Scott 2008, p. 30). For local political elites the 'key aim of the party locally is to secure positions of power or a voice in any arena that presents itself' (Copus 2004, p. 59). Coercive influence is exercised through formal control of council decision making structures which includes council meetings, cabinet meetings and other committees such as planning. In settings outside of the council such as community groups, political party meetings and external organisations, however, power, will be exercised through persuasive influence. It is in these arenas that interpersonal relationships and extended networks become important. For local political elites the problem of power is different to that faced by national elites. Coercive influence is both restricted by the severe statutory limitations set by national government and limited as there are many fields of local politics over which local elites do not have direct control. These fields include health, policing and the local economy. So, whilst the exercise of power is a serious challenge for local and national elites, local political elites are much more dependent on persuasive influence than their national counterparts. In contrast to the national elite, who may seek to avoid engaging in difficult policy issues, the local political elite will often willingly engage in controversial local issues as they seek to enlarge their sphere of influence and demonstrate their value to the public.

Core Concepts of Local Statecraft

Statecraft draws together a number of core concepts. In his last iteration of statecraft Bulpitt described it as having three main dimensions:

These are: (a) the governing objectives; (b) the governing code – a set of relatively coherent principles or rules underlying policies and policy related behaviour and (c) polity management – a set of political support mechanisms designed to protect and promote the code and objectives. (Bulpitt 1996, p. 1097)

Governing objectives are the fixed aspect of statecraft. They are twofold; to win elections and to achieve governing competence. This need to achieve governing competence is regarded by Bulpitt as the most significant aspect of statecraft. It refers to a party's perceived ability, when in power, to make the right policy choices and in particular to avoid policies which are difficult to implement (Bulpitt 1986).

The governing code is 'something less than a philosophy of government and yet more than a collection of specific policies. It relates to the accepted rules of statecraft as employed over time by political elites' (Bulpitt 2008, p. 70 note). The governing code can be regarded as an institution able to adapt to new circumstances and to influence the behaviour of actors over significant periods of time (Bradbury 2006). Unlike the governing objectives, governing codes are not fixed. They can vary according to time and space and they can continue as long as they are viable. Significant shocks or structural changes can cause the end of one statecraft regime and herald in the start of another.

At the heart of the local statecraft model of local politics is the local governing code. Adapted from Bulpitt's governing code concept, it refers to the beliefs, norms and rules which guide the behaviour local members of the local political elite. Within a critical realist framework, the local governing code can be understood as an institutional mechanism. The institutional logics which structure the local governing code are the same governing objectives that apply for the national elite; winning elections and maintaining governing competence.

For Bulpitt, statecraft regimes were not fixed and could vary over time as a reflection of changed circumstances and in response to system shocks. To help frame these variations Bulpitt described a series of power models that might apply to governing codes. In *Territory and Power*, for example, he described a number of models that the centre might adopt in seeking to govern over the periphery of the state. These included the coercive power model, the central authority model and the central autonomy model (Bulpitt 83, 64-5). Similarly, for local statecraft, different power models are possible. So, for example, the *party representative model* reflects a strategic view of governing locally. Competence means being able to achieve objectives through council policy and decision making and by mobilising the council administration. It is underpinned by the belief that the public will vote for the party that has the best record of running the council and provide the best value for money. Group loyalty and party discipline are highly important as is the idea that the ruling political group are able to exercise their authority through council decision making structures. The *community representative model*, on the other hand is underpinned by the assumption that the council is not a good place to get things done as it is dominated by officers and restricted by laws and financial constraints. Instead the community arena is a much more fruitful arena for achieving objectives through dealing with individual complaints and local concerns. The assumption is that the electorate's concerns are highly local and that 'people don't care about anything; unless it's happening outside their front door' (Copus 2007, p. 8). The idea that councillors must be a 'good ward member', meaning someone

who deals effectively with day-to-day complaints, is a powerful norm within this model. In the local political arena where actively voting electorates may be as small as a few thousand, dealing with complaints, petitions and other street level problems can have a big impact on the likelihood of re-election. Whilst parties may be associated with one power model more than another (e.g. Liberal Democrats may be associated more with the community representative model), allegiance to one model cannot be assumed. Councillors within the same party group may often adhere to different power models and thus creating tensions within the local political elite.

Bulpitt's concept of Polity Management refers to 'the 'tricks' of the political trade designed to protect and promote the interests of the (elite) and disadvantage the interests of the opposition'. It includes management of the party, the state and public opinion; what Bulpitt called political argument hegemony, or the 'control of commonsense' (Bulpitt 1996, p. 1102). Similarly, *local polity management* includes; management of the party, management of the council; and management of public opinion. Local polity management operates to support the local governing code but is not entirely subservient to it. The experience and activity associated with local polity management may create feedback which causes changes to the code. As previously noted, party management may be less of a challenge at the local level but the local political elite nevertheless places a great importance on group loyalty. Similarly, management of a local council may be seen as less of a challenge than that of directing the institutions of central government. Given that they operate in the shadow of national politics, the battle to influence public opinion is more difficult than at the local level. Local political elites will make as much use as they can of the limited opportunities they have to manage public opinion. They will make full use of local media, either through press releases or by engaging with the websites of local papers. They will also ensure that the public are made aware of the good work being done by their council through council newspapers. Public meetings of council and cabinet are set piece events which can also be used to try and influence public opinion although these set piece events are more likely to be played out in front of local reported than in front of any meaningful numbers of the public. They are nevertheless should be understood as public *theatres of representation* that give councillors an opportunity to 'perform' in front of the electorate (Copus 2004).

For statecraft context is critical as:

'The art of Statecraft is to understand and work within the limitations placed on elite activity by the many changing structural constraints arising from within and without the polity' (Bulpitt 1986, p. 39).

Local statecraft operates in an environment which is both similar and different to the national version. From an electoral point of view the similarities include the electoral system being the same as at the national level, the same political parties dominating the political arena and the requirements for party discipline being broadly the same. As noted above, however, the formal power of local political elites is more restricted than that of their national counterparts and their power to influence the media is more limited.

Local Statecraft as a Theory

Bulpitt explicitly described statecraft as an interpretation and not as an explanatory theory. If local statecraft is to be offered as an explanatory theory, therefore, it requires an enhanced conceptual framework. This enhancement can be provided by applying the assumptions of critical realism⁴. As Buller has argued, this is not necessarily a difficult task as Bulpitt's approach was not that dissimilar to critical realism in the first place. Wedding statecraft to critical realism is, therefore, 'more a matter of 'bringing out' an implicit position, than calling for a radical reconstruction' (Buller 1999, p. 708).

Critical realism offers a stratified ontology that can be used to provide a credible account of how institutions work and, as statecraft can be understood as an institutional phenomenon (Bradbury 2006), a credible account of how statecraft works. An example of this institutional application of critical realism is provided by Leca and Naccache (2006) who have aligned the stratified ontology of critical realism with different aspects of institutional life. Specifically they posit the existence of institutional logics as unobservable social structures that shape institutional forms. So, whilst actors interact with institutions which both shape and are shaped by them, these institutions are at the same time structured by institutional logics which provide the basis of organization and legitimacy so that 'whilst institutions are the rules of the game, institutional logics are the underlying principles of the game' (Leca and Naccache 2006, p. 632).

The core concepts of local statecraft can be mapped against these aspects of institutional life as described in figure 1. Governing objectives are therefore institutional logics which structure the local governing code. The consequences of the local governing code play out empirically in the realm of

⁴ A fuller discussion of critical realism is beyond the scope of this paper. See Sayer (2000) or Pawson and Tilley (1997) for such a discussion.

local polity management which may also provide feedback to the local government code. Like statecraft, critical realism also places a high emphasis on context as a factor in any theory.

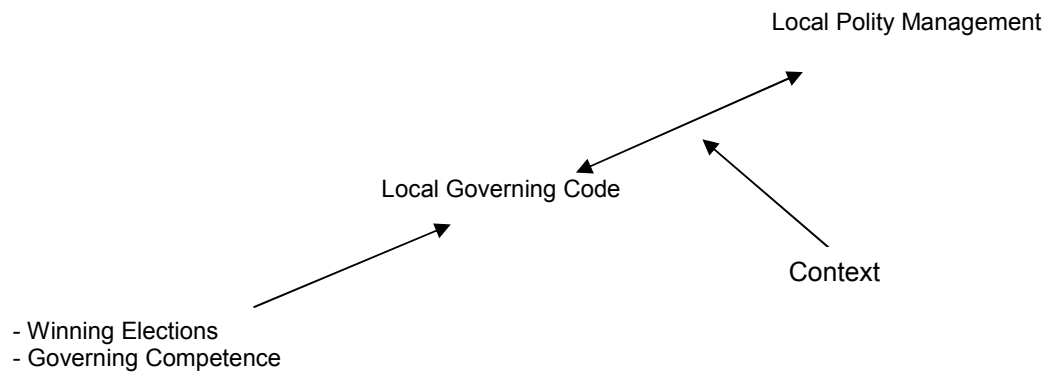


Figure 1: The core concepts of local statecraft (adapted from Sayer (2000))

Having mapped out local statecraft as a suitable elite back theory, the statecraft explanation of local political elite attitudes and behaviours towards participatory initiatives can now be attempted.

Participatory Initiatives: The Statecraft Calculation

When faced with the prospect of either establishing participative initiatives or responding to outcomes from initiatives, the local political elite make a collective calculation from which there are three likely results. The local political elite may decide to:

- a) Endorse the initiative and engage positively with any outcomes
- b) Reject the initiative
- c) Endorse the initiative but refuse to engage with outcomes

This calculation, summarised in figure 2, has three components. First, local politicians draw on the informal rules associated with their local governing code which provide the principles against which an assessment is made. Second, the specific qualities of the initiatives are considered in order to determine their value for local polity management. Third, the prevailing context is assessed to ensure that any difficulties will not be caused on account of particular local circumstances. Each of these components will be described in more detail below.

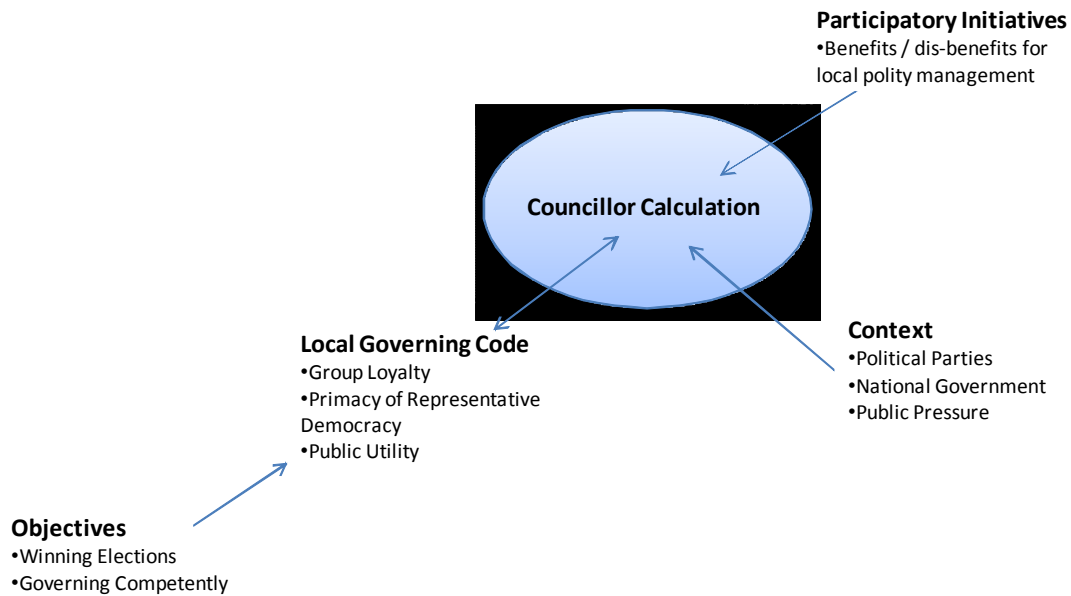


Figure 2. Participatory Initiatives – The Councillor Calculation

The Local Governing Code and Participatory Initiatives

The local governing code includes a number of informal institutional rules that influence how local politicians regard participatory initiatives. Ultimately these rules are linked, either consciously or unconsciously, to the objectives of winning elections and maintaining governing competence.

The first relevant rule of the local governing code is the one that states that councillors should always side with their party group when its decisions come into conflict with the outcomes from participatory initiatives. These types of conflict, if they were to happen in formal decision making forums, would cause particular discomfort for councillors who would find their loyalty torn between the wishes of their constituents, expressed through participatory initiatives, and the interests of their party group. This discomfort would be amplified if the cause of this ‘crisis of representation’ was an initiative supported by the party group in the first place! Group loyalty can be understood as an important aspect of the local governing code that is an integral aspect of party group custom and practice, which operates above and beyond formal rules. The strength of the belief in group loyalty is reflected in the fact that it retains its influence even when parties are in opposition or when large majorities make the prospect of losing votes unlikely (Copus 2004). Furthermore, councillors, like their national counterparts, have an ‘intense desire’ to avoid public displays of party dissent and disunity and ‘strongly subscribe to the notion that a divided group loses elections’ (Copus 2004, p. 115).

The second relevant rule is the one that states that the local political elite should always promote the current form of representative local democracy above all other forms including participatory initiatives. Underpinning this rule is a number of beliefs and norms about how local democracy should operate that can be linked back to the elite's need to govern competently. This belief system has been widely observed and has been described as 'the monopoly of the representative principle' (Stewart and Stoker 1988) and the 'primacy of politics' (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000). Copus (2004, pp. 273-275) identifies a series of assumptions which 'manifest themselves, in all parties wherever they are located' that, taken together, form this belief system. The first assumption is 'that parties represent the only legitimate source of political authority, an authority assumed from the local election' (which is itself assumed to be the only legitimising source for local politics) and that 'elections provide parties with a right to govern because they signal the acceptance by voters of a manifesto or policy platform or because they simply give a particular party a majority'. Conversely any form of local politics not organised around the idea of elected political parties should be treated with suspicion. At the local level further assumptions apply. Firstly, that 'parties have an equalising effect on local participation' – in other words they serve to neutralise or absorb non-party active citizens whose campaigns might otherwise bring 'bias' into local politics. Secondly, that 'the election of representatives and a representative based system is the only way to organise a local democracy'. In other words local democracy means that elected representatives make the final decisions even where some elements of consultation or participation are built into the system. Thirdly, public apathy and disinterest in local affairs leaves a vacuum into which elected councillor must fill: 'Simply put, parties must govern locally and dominate the local political realm because they do so from far more pure and honourable motives than ordinary citizens or sectional interest groups. Ultimately all councillors have a shared experience that leads them to believe that 'the party is the rightly dominating force within local democracy and politics' (Copus 2007). Governing competence for local political elites is largely a matter of their persuasive influence and this is in turn a question of legitimacy. Legitimacy can be understood as an 'empirical matter involving the attitudes of the populace toward the government' which should be based upon a widely shared acceptance of the current system (Waskan 1998, p. 32). It is in the interest of the political elite to promote and maintain the dominance of the current representative system as this is the foundation of their legitimacy and their exercise of persuasive power.

A third rule is that councillors must demonstrate their utility to the public and not allow mechanisms to be set up which diminish or undermine their

usefulness. Participatory initiatives which focus on service improvements, for example, would represent these types of mechanism. This rule is underpinned by the assumption that voters are more likely to support local politicians in elections if they can perceive direct practical benefits. The majority of the public has little to do with formal local politics outside of elections and is interested primarily in 'low council tax and efficient service provision' (Pratchett and Wilson 1996). In contrast to the desire of national elites to focus on high politics, councillor activity is very much focused on the 'low' matters of administration and management so that councillors spend much of their time 'immersed in the details of service quality, administration and delivery' (Copus 2006). Engaging the public on wider policy issues, whilst these may be important for the councillor, is seen as ultimately a fruitless activity in terms of maintaining and exercising the power of the local political elite. A ruling political group therefore seeks to demonstrate that it has 'got things done' at election time and will set its priorities accordingly at the beginning of its term. This 'service' orientation is a powerful idea for the elite and 'whilst councillors can, and do, bring a broadly political view to the work they undertake, the councillor as the elected manager, rather than active and powerful politician, is very much the norm (Copus 2004, p. 20).

Local Polity Management and Participatory Initiatives

When local political elites assess participatory initiatives they do not do so from an ideological perspective. Instead they consider them as possible aspects of local polity management. In this context they may consider initiatives to have value in a number of different ways; they are able to legitimise decisions and provide useful intelligence (Boaden *et al.* 1982), as mechanisms for communicating political messages; as a means of gathering intelligence; or as opportunities for positive public relations for example. Conversely initiatives will be seen to have negative value if they, for example, promote alternative political messages, provide a platform for political opponents, etc. First and foremost, elites will be keen to ensure that participatory initiatives do not interfere with their ability to govern and will be unable to support, except superficially, any initiatives which feed recommendations directly into the policy process.

Elites will therefore prefer participatory initiatives that have certain characteristics. They will prefer initiatives that have large numbers of participants as this suggests a greater potential electoral impact if the initiative provides a positive experience for those taking part. Elites will also prefer initiatives which have a formal role for ruling group councillors as this helps to reinforce their democratic status and, at the same time, direct contact ensures that information from initiatives can be picked up directly by

councillors and not filtered by officers. In this context participatory initiatives, like council and cabinet meetings, can be regarded as public *theatres of representation*, providing councillors with an additional opportunity to 'perform' in front of the electorate. Finally elites prefer initiatives to be advisory rather than able to make recommendations because they may generate outcomes that are at odds with decisions made by meetings of the ruling party group. They are anxious that 'their manoeuvring room to reject or amend policy proposals will be restricted' (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000, p. 369). They also worry that, given greater formal powers, 'troublemakers' will manipulate the participatory process in order to create political discomfort for them. Hence participatory initiatives can be regarded by elites as potential battlegrounds for competing parties.

Variations may exist according to the power model followed by the elite. The party representative model suggests that participatory initiatives can only have a symbolic and public relations role and should not interfere with policy and decision making, through having a direct impact on council agendas for example. Local political elites will be able to support initiatives as long as they are benign or as long as they are confident they can comfortably manage outcomes within the decision making process. Even in these cases elites will be keen to frame the work of initiatives within discourses of legitimacy and representativeness as this reinforces their own role. The community representative model, on the other hand, implies support for initiatives as long as they both involve, and are beneficial to the interests of, councillors in their wards. Because less importance is placed on decision making at council meetings, in fact it is a forum where the effectiveness of community politics can be demonstrated, those following the community representative model are less anxious about initiatives directly influencing policy and decision making.

Context and Participatory Initiatives

Statecraft is not fixed and will be responsive to the changes in the political environment. Attitudes towards participatory initiatives may likewise be affected by changes in the local political context. Aspects of context that may have a particular bearing upon elite behaviours and attitudes towards participatory initiatives include; *political parties; national government; and public pressure*. Both locally and nationally parties set both the formal and informal rules which provide the context for local political elites to operate through, for example, standing orders, conferences, communications and policy decisions. There are already differences in attitude between the parties such as the liberal democrats' greater 'community' orientation for example (Copus 2004). Changes in the national party through leadership changes or new coalitions,

however, create new imperatives for local political elites. More generally it is 'parties that 'define the concepts of politics, democracy and representation' (Copus 2004, p. 290). National government is also a source of constraint and change and whilst local elites are severely limited in their room for manoeuvre, they also have to deal with a regular supply of new national initiatives, including those which prescribe public participation. Bickerstaff and Walker (2005), for example, note the way in which government requirements for local authorities to develop Local Transport Plans leave little room for changes in response to public consultation. Tight control over funding provides a further structural constraint that elites need to manage. Public pressure is a further source of constraint and change. Organised community interests do from time to time, however, challenge the power of local political parties and 'community assertiveness' has been widely observed at both the national and local level – although it is against the local council rather than national government that the electorate has the 'greater propensity to protest (Copus 2004, p. 27). Perhaps the most striking example is when single issue campaigns successfully stand candidates against the mainstream parties in local elections.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to present a more comprehensive explanation for local political elite attitudes and behaviours towards participatory initiatives in the UK than has hitherto been available. In order to build on and develop existing explanations local statecraft has been developed as a theory of local political elites. This theory is an original construction that deploys the core concepts of Bulpitt's statecraft interpretation as an explanatory theory of local political elites. It is not claimed here that local statecraft is the only way to construct such a theory of the local political elite in the UK. Indeed it would be possible, for example, to build from the liberal pluralist tradition (Zuckerman, 1977), to take a poststructuralist approach along the lines of that suggested by Woods (1998) or to adopt a Marxist position such as the one offered by Coburn (1977). The hope is, however, that by offering local statecraft for scrutiny debate can be stimulated. The intention is to provide an opening salvo rather than a final conclusion.

From a research perspective the statecraft explanation presented here is, for the author, plausible in the first instance. It is consistent with available empirical evidence and is able to draw in many of the currently available explanations described earlier in this paper. However, as a theoretic model, the statecraft explanation needs to be tested through further empirical research before its credibility can be properly established. So, for example, it

should be possible to uncover evidence of governing codes despite the obvious difficulties of researching these unwritten rules and the fact that latent structures can only be inferred and not observed (Buller 1999). Indeed, the retroductive research strategies favoured by critical realists focus on the testing of hypotheses and the design of research instruments in order to be able to establish the validity of the theory models that they build. Unlike an inductive approach, the researcher 'has something to look for' (Blaikie 2000). Researching elites of course presents another set of challenges although these may be less at the local compared to the national level where the stakes are undoubtedly higher.

From a policy perspective this model, if accurate, has important implications for those wishing to see a greater impact from participatory initiatives in the policy process. It suggests that local political elites need to be convinced of the benefits of participatory initiatives in statecraft terms before they can be successful. As Askim and Hanssen suggest: 'Parties could recognise the potential of participative initiatives to enhance their own public legitimacy and increase the chance of re-election for their councillors (Askim and Hanssen 2008)'. It may also suggest that there needs to be a radical strengthening of the supporting environment for participatory initiatives in the UK, such as an introduction of the type of legal and constitutional measures that exist in many other countries (Gaventa 2006). One further possibility is that the local governing code may be changed although how this 'institutional engineering' might be achieved is unclear and consistency with the governing objectives would have to be maintained. More realistically perhaps, the statecraft calculation suggests a more pragmatic path for policy advocates of participatory initiatives; to design initiatives around the needs and concerns of local political elites. This would be to favour those initiatives which focus on service issues, do not report directly to council meetings and have a formal role for elected councillors from the ruling group. It is perhaps no surprise that the majority of current initiatives appear to be of this type.

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