PLEASE NOTE that this is based on a chapter from my doctoral thesis and I didn’t have the time to turn it into a proper paper. Apologies for its length.

Desired and unwanted: The struggles of deliberative practitioners in local participatory governance in Scotland

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The institutionalisation of participatory and deliberative policy making in the UK is proliferating through a range of partnership/governance arrangements and public engagement processes (Newman and Clarke, 2009; Barnes et al., 2007). Surprisingly, scarce attention has been paid to the role of practitioners tasked with turning deliberative ideals into everyday practices (Smith, 2009: 161). There has been some analysis of the role of facilitators (Moore, 2012) and external consultants (Hendriks and Carson, 2008; Cooper and Smith, 2012). Yet, we still know little about official deliberative practitioners employed by local authorities, working across policy domains, and negotiating an evolving constellation of actors. That is, constrained and enabled by a particular ecology of participation.

This paper presents findings from two years of ethnographic research shadowing deliberative practitioners in a Scottish Local Authority Area. They represent a new type of policy worker institutionalised by the Scottish Government’s Community Planning policy over the last decade. Unlike other participation practitioners –tasked with ‘consultation’ or ‘community development’– these officials’ job is to organise and facilitate new ongoing deliberative forums connected to local policy making. The paper, therefore, analyses their role in reshaping local democracy, and their struggles to negotiate the uneasy fit between new deliberative processes and established representative institutions. The conclusions are both optimistic and critical –these officials have considerable power to turn deliberative forums into spaces of possibility, yet are strongly constrained by entrenched policy making cultures. Accordingly, they are at the forefront of an unstated culture change project that makes them both desired and unwanted.
1. The relevance of official deliberative practitioners

Whereas attention to practitioners has been a staple of policy studies (e.g. Forester, 1981, 1993; Forester, 1999, 2009; Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody and Kelly, 1993; Williams, 2002; van Hulst et al., 2012), that has not been the case in the participatory and deliberative democracy literature on officially invited spaces. In most of it, forums are created, participants summoned, encounters facilitated, results taken forward—or not—and so on. But such accounts tell us little about who creates, enables, summons, facilitates and takes those processes forward. In other words, these narratives presume—by omission—an array of ghost agents, as if public engagement simply happens and it doesn’t have to be performed. This fosters the illusion of engagement as a somewhat disembodied practice, and ignore that it requires work, and therefore workers.

Although this may be overlooked in many scholarly accounts, it is clearly at the heart of activities on the ground. All sorts of institutions around the UK are building capacity for engaging ‘publics’, ‘communities’, ‘citizens’, ‘patients’, ‘users’, ‘consumers’, ‘stakeholders’, etc, in shaping policies and services (Newman, 2001, 2012; Barnes et al., 2007; Clarke et al., 2007; Newman and Clarke, 2009; Pieczka and Escobar, 2013). As a result, there are myriad official public engagement practitioners (henceforth, public engagers) whose job is to organise deliberative forums.

To be sure, researchers of participation and deliberation often recognise the important role of the “facilitator” (Gastil, 1993; Fung and Wright, 2003; Gastil and Levine, 2005; Baiocchi, 2005; Nabatchi et al., 2012) and call for research into their role (Smith, 2009: 169; Moore, 2012), but they rarely provide accounts of their work beyond momentous interventions (e.g. Krantz, 2003: 231-234; Fung, 2004: 187-195, 207; Ryfe, 2002; Mansbridge et al., 2006). If we think of participatory processes as spaces for performance—using a theatrical metaphor—most studies focus on the frontstage. In the USA, some public management literature considers “the role of agents in creating and facilitating opportunities for deliberative democracy” (see Feldman et al., 2006: 89). Similarly, some deliberative scholars are beginning to map the varied provenance and motivation of “civic engagement practitioners” (Leighninger, 2006, 2012; Lee, 2011). However, in many cases, these practitioners are not officials, and their work is often more to do with democratic experiments than with everyday processes in “ordinary democracy” (Tracy, 2010).

In the UK, there has been some attention to “community engagement professionals” (Mayo et al., 2007; Craig and Mayo, 1995; Taylor, 1995; e.g. Craig et al., 2011), organisational “boundary spanners” (Williams, 2002, 2012), and official “civic
entrepreneurs” (Durose, 2007, 2009, 2011). However, the engagers studied here are distinct, as their job is to organise official participatory processes and deliberative forums in a range of policy contexts. There has also been some research into practitioners in the science public engagement context (Chilvers, 2008; Pieczka and Escobar, 2013), postulating – following Rose (1999) – their “new political status” as “experts of community”, and “increasingly influential and powerful role in policy-making processes”, as well as “wider problems of instrumentalism and industrialization” brought about by the commercialisation of such practices by consultants spearheading the “emergent deliberative industry” (Amelung, 2012: 13-14). Some are thus beginning to document how some practitioners operate ad hoc as external consultants (Cooper and Smith, 2012; Hendriks and Carson, 2008), but we still know little about practitioners – like the official engagers in this paper – working permanently for a local authority, across policy domains, and navigating an evolving constellation of actors; i.e. constrained and enabled by a particular ecology of participation.

If, as hinted above, public engagers exercise considerable power, what does this entail? What do the engagers do and what are their motivations? Indeed, their political work is a key thread in this paper for, as Forester (1999: 168) argues, they are “public stewards, not just apolitical neutrals. They are organizers of public debate and deliberation, not just convenors who serve water and ask everyone to be polite”.

To sum up, looking at influential publications by think-tanks and civic organisations (e.g. NEF, 1998; Involve, 2005; Lowndes et al., 2006b; Warburton et al., 2008; Blake et al., 2008; Foot, 2009; Brodie et al., 2011; Andersson et al., 2013), research or policy statements by governmental departments (e.g. Warburton et al., 2006; Burall and Carr-West, 2009; Mahendran and Cook, 2007; Scottish Government, 2009), or widely cited academic works (e.g. Barber, 2003; Fung and Wright, 2003; Fung, 2004; Young, 2000; Dryzek, 1990, 2010), it is striking how little they have to say about engagement work and those tasked with performing it. I therefore follow Geertz’s (1973: 5) advice: to understand the practice of participatory democracy you “should look in the first instance not at its theories or… what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do”.

2. Wyndland as a case study

I adopt the notion of case study as a “method of selecting the source of data” (Blaikie, 2009: 186, 189). Following Flyvberg (1998, 2001, 2004), my case circumscribes multiple sites involving various individuals, groups and processes within the official contours
of a Scottish Local Authority Area (LAA) that I will call Wyndland. In “multi-sited ethnography”, following “the people” is a key option to generate rich data (Kubik, 2009: 48; Campbell and Gregor, 2002). This qualifies the deceptive appearance of single-n cases, as they actually often “entail multiple observational areas within their geographic, organizational, or political settings; multiple interviews and chats; multiple events observed” (Yanow, 2009: 294). I have come to see Wyndland as a microcosm of Scottish participatory governance, and these engagers as exemplars of a broader community of practice that shares many of their trials and tribulations. To be sure, the case is not intended to be representative or amenable to generalisation in a conventional way. The challenge in policy ethnography is to “select small sites that open windows onto larger processes of political transformation” (Shore and Wright, 2011: 12). In that sense, I do not present Wyndland as a local manifestation of a global phenomenon, but as one of many sites in which that phenomenon is generated.

There were two main criteria for choosing Wyndland¹, a medium sized LAA with urban and rural areas. Firstly, I wanted a case that was rich but comprehensible, that is, where the density of networks and activities would not overwhelm my capacity to focus on practices, as it may happen in a larger LAA. As it turned out, the density of participatory activity in Wyndland is staggering. It took me a year to grasp structures, organisations, modus operandi, jargon, networks, processes and so on. This reveals the idiosyncratic nature of the engagers’ “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998), and the process of socialisation that I had to undergo for ritual entrance into their policy world.

The second criterion was feasibility, especially given the usual difficulties of getting access for ethnographic immersion (Smith, 2007: 225-227). The considerable time and relational work needed to negotiate access meant that I only superficially considered other LAAs as potential sites. This can be seen as a weakness. However, in ethnography it is commonly accepted that obtaining substantial access may supersede other criteria (e.g. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2009: 64-5; Zirakzadeh, 2009: 104-106). Another potential critique is that I could have chosen sites at other LAAs and work comparatively. Then again, my study is not about LAAs, but practices, practitioners,

¹ Wyndland’s population is between 80,000-170,000. Exact figures are not provided to preserve anonymity. This bracket represents 21 out of 32 Scottish LAAs — see www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/02/21143624/1 [Accessed 23 December 2012]. Wyndland shares some quintessential traits of contemporary Scotland — i.e. it’s relatively wealthy, but with substantial areas of poverty and deprivation; it has an increasingly post-industrial economy oriented towards services and tourism, although some traditional industrial basis remains; it has a large public sector including thousands of employees; and, politically, it features traditional Labour strongholds increasingly challenged and reshaped by the rise of the Scottish National Party.
micropolitics and meanings in action. This warranted seeking depth rather than breadth (Wagenaar, 2011).

A fundamental research choice was to take the engagers’ perspective in order to understand their worlds through their accounts, our interactions and my interpretations of their practices. In this, I join a growing research cohort who, without dismissing ‘structure’, chooses to focus on ‘agency’ (Shore et al., 2011; Williams, 2012; Barnes and Prior, 2009b). Working closely with practitioners can heighten the risk of “going native” and losing critical distance (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 87). As Bourdieu (1977: 10; author’s emphasis) puts it, ethnography entails navigating the tension between being “carried along by the game” and being “carried away beyond the game”. However, the risk of “going native” makes most sense within a positivistic understanding of ethnography, where the researcher fashions herself as a detached observer. Interpretive ethnography does not share this aspiration, and its methods are not presented as “clear-cut, fixed and impersonal” (Law, 1994: 4). When Pachirat (2011) sought to study slaughterhouse work, he became a slaughterhouse worker. To study engagement work I could hardly think of a better way than going native.

I chose practitioners based on early field experiences. My snowball exposure\(^2\) began by following officers who seemed nodal actors in participatory processes across Wyndland, from the strategic partnership level to local community engagement. Soon four officials seemed ubiquitous, and I decided to focus on them. To be sure, there are other participation practitioners in Wyndland, and I have also worked with them. However, those four are the ones whose posts were created by new ‘participation policy’ both in local government and the NHS, and their remit is to engage citizens, representatives and partners in various policy forums.

In sum, I assembled my case study taking cues from research designs that had proven insightful elsewhere. For instance, Barnes et al. (2007) conducted multi-sited case studies of participation in two English cities, and Fung’s (2004) influential book on “empowered participatory governance” featured case studies of a few Chicago neighbourhoods. All in all, Wyndland offered me what Aalborg offered to Flyvbjerg (1998): a rich case study of local democracy. Then again, I will not go as far in my claims: Flyvbjerg expected Aalborg to be to him what Florence was to Machiavelli.

3. Methods

\(^2\) Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2009: 67, 78) argue that in interpretive ethnography ‘exposure’ is a more appropriate term than ‘sampling’.
My research design entails a multi-method approach because, following Nicolini, studying the complexity of practice sometimes requires a “toolkit logic” (2009: 1403). My ethnographic toolkit included six data sources. In this paper I draw on three, namely, participant observation, interviews and focus groups. I now outline them in turn. My core research method was participant observation spanning two years of fieldwork, including attendance to 117 meetings, shadowing engagers as they organised forums and processes, and working with them more intensely during 15 weeks of alternating work placements spread over the final 10 months. Table 1 sketches this progression from shallow to deeper ethnographic immersion. The first year was mostly about observing the engagers’ frontstage work, acquainting myself with the terrain and building relationships. On the second, I intensified fieldwork by negotiating work placements, gaining access to new forums and processes, and thus focussing both on backstage and frontstage work.

**Table 1. Immersion strategy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occasional participant observation of forums</td>
<td>Participant observation of forums and processes</td>
<td>Shadowing engagers during work placements, and participant observation of forums and processes (when not on placement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus: frontstage work</td>
<td>Focus: backstage and frontstage work</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

I spent 817 hours\(^3\) in Wyndland, distributed over 131 days, and generating 969 pages of fully transcribed fieldnotes. Figure 1 illustrates the intensification of fieldwork during the second year, as well as the alternation between blocks of placements and analytical time-outs.

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\(^3\) Without including time travelling between Edinburgh and Wyndland, or working on fieldnotes afterwards.
My method was the modality of participant observation known as “shadowing” (e.g. Wolcott, 1984; Fenno Jr., 1990), suitable to study agents working across diverse settings (Czarniawska, 2008a). The premise is to follow the agent, and through that experience make sense of unfolding relationships: “how things hang together in a web of mutual influence or support or interdependence” (Becker, 1996: 56). I generated 969 pages of fully transcribed fieldnotes. Figure 2 plots the pages onto hours of fieldwork, and illustrates how fieldnotes became prolific as the research focussed during the second year. This was due to increased hours of fieldwork, but also to fieldnotes becoming more analytical through theoretical sampling, whereas during the first year they were more descriptive.
I also carried out in-depth semi-structured interviews to elicit reflection, explore meanings and meaning-making processes (Weiss, 1994; Wagenaar, 2011) and collect stories of practice (Forester, 1999, 2009). I conducted 44 interviews with 40 individuals\(^5\), which generated 49 hours of audio-recordings and 907 pages of transcripts.

**Table 2. Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad categories of interviewees</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shadowed engagers (Community Planning Partnership; Council + NHS)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3 repeated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other participation practitioners</td>
<td>6(^6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillors (Government and opposition)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1 repeated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council officials (Managers, officers)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS officials (Managers, officers)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and third sector representatives and</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^5\) Most interviewees lived or worked in Wyndland, but I also interviewed officials working at regional level (i.e. NHS) or public engagers from neighbouring LAAs who collaborated with Wyndland’s engagers.

\(^6\) One was an intern engager, and I only partially transcribed the interview.
Finally, I also conducted 3 focus groups (Table 3) as a response to emerging fieldwork situations, which seemed best served by this form of group interview. The added value of this method is the shared exploration of a topic via group interaction and “joint construction of meaning” amongst participants selected because of their involvement in a particular process or situation (Bryman, 2008: 474). This additional data was useful to add insight, but also to reach groups that I couldn’t access otherwise (i.e. NHS participation practitioners).

**Table 3. Focus groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date and duration</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2011</td>
<td>7 citizens, Public Partnership Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106 minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2012</td>
<td>5 NHS Public Involvement Coordinators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2012</td>
<td>4 shadowed public engagers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4. The public engager in institutional context: Community Planning in Scotland

I met around 30 participation practitioners in Wyndland, but only 4 public engagers. I base this distinction on 2 axes of difference (see Table 4). The first relates to the types of spaces organised by participation practitioners. A typical division is between invited and invented spaces (Cornwall, 2002, 2004; Miraftab, 2004; cf. Taylor, 2007). In the former, authorities invite citizens to participate, whereas citizens or civic actors initiate the latter. The second difference is that some practitioners specialise on one policy area (issue specialists), while others work across many (process specialists).

**Table 4. Participation practitioners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Invited spaces (initiated by authorities)</th>
<th>Invented spaces (initiated by civic actors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single policy area</td>
<td>e.g. participation officers in Council departments such as Housing or Environment</td>
<td>e.g. participation practitioners working for Tenants and Residents Associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(issue specialists)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple policy areas</td>
<td>public engagers</td>
<td>e.g. participation practitioners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the world of Community Development, which spans invited and invented spaces, there have been participation practitioners at least since the 1960s (Craig et al., 2011). Although community workers have long been integral to the welfare state, recent developments in UK governance (Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 2004) have ushered in a new generation of official participation practitioners – the public engagers⁷. On the one hand, there has been a proliferation of “partnership” arrangements between public agencies and across sectors, which has extended “the range of institutional actors with responsibilities and powers for delivering public policy” (Barnes and Prior, 2009a: 5; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Osborne, 2010). On the other hand, this has been accompanied by increased opportunities for public participation through the development of new spaces within which citizens and officials meet together to deliberate, make and review policy” (Barnes, 2009: 33; Barnes et al., 2007). Despite the challenges of combining both partnership governance and public participation (Newman, 2001; Sullivan and Lowndes, 2004; Sterling, 2005), variations of these evolving arrangements remain central to the project of constructing “a new set of relationships between government, communities and citizens” in the UK (Barnes and Prior, 2009a: 5). Public engagers, working at the nodes of such relationships, are thus becoming more prominent as such invited spaces multiply.

In Scotland, the pursuit of that alchemic feat – governance through partnership + public participation – started with the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, and is called Community Planning (CP; see Appendix 2). Over the last 10 years, moulded through a series of policy statements and evaluations, CP has become integral to how successive Scottish Governments have envisioned the future of local governance (Audit Scotland, 2013; Carley, 2006). There are 32 Community Planning Partnerships (henceforth, Partnerships), one per Local Authority Area. Although they vary, each Partnership has a Board and various Theme Groups, which typically bring together representatives from the Council (statutorily tasked with leading), NHS, third sector, police, emergency services, business, education and community associations (Figure 3).

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⁷ I use this neologism to avoid reciting the official titles of the participation practitioners profiled here (e.g. Community Planning Officer, Local Community Planning Officer, Neighbourhood Partnership Officer, Public Involvement Coordinator). The ambivalence of the term ‘public engager’ encapsulates two key characteristics: they work in the public sector, and their job is to engage publics.
At the grassroots level, there is Local Community Planning, typically operationalised through Neighbourhood Partnerships or Local Area Forums. In essence, the Board and the Theme Groups are the strategic locus for collaborative governance involving organisational and political representatives, whereas Local Community Planning (LCP) provides invited spaces for citizen deliberation and community participation. This is the institutional architecture that the public engagers I shadowed traverse, and some research participants described them as ‘the life and blood of Community Planning’. Their jobs didn’t exist before CP, and CP did not exist before them –they brought each other into being.

5. The engagers and the ecology of participation

The remainder of the paper presents findings on the following dimensions: the contested meanings of partnership and participation, the cultural milieu that enfolds engagement practice, the relationship between engagers, officials, citizens and politicians, and the engagers’ motivations and emotion work. The purpose is to study
what Dewey might have called Wyndland’s “practical ecology” of participation (Wagenaar and Cook, 2003: 167), thus providing an account of participatory policymaking as a “continuous process of contestation across a political space” (Wright and Reinhold, 2011: 86). Firstly, I introduce the complex ecology of meanings that shapes their policy worlds. Secondly, I explore tensions elicited by the engagers’ work. Thirdly, I argue that those tensions are constitutive of a contested ‘culture change’ project front-lined by the engagers. Finally, I illustrate how they negotiate those tensions and how that endeavour affects them.

5.1. Wyndland’s ecology of meanings

Wyndland’s ecology of participation is fuelled by a dynamic ecology of meanings, where conflicting notions of public engagement collide into assemblages forming new political and cultural milieus. Here, culture is not merely “cults and customs, but the structures of meaning” through which people “give shape to their experience”; and “politics is not coups and constitutions, but one of the principal arenas in which such structures publicly unfold” (Geertz, 1973: 312; van Hulst, 2008). The engagers carve up spaces where that ecology of meanings is negotiated through practices that seek to recast the “interface between state and society” (Newman and Clarke, 2009: 139). As Cornwall and Coelho (2007: 2) argue, these are

... spaces of contestation as well as collaboration, into which heterogeneous participants bring diverse interpretations of participation and democracy and divergent agendas. As such, they are crucibles for a new politics of public policy.

The engagers work on very diverse processes, with distinct dynamics and scope. These include traditional consultations, local –temporary or ongoing– deliberative forums, and Partnership stakeholder forums. Although Community Planning is the overarching policy framework, I analyse participatory governance in Wyndland not as an official structure but as a complex ecology of meanings shaped by an evolving network of relationships. This comprises a changing cultural domain where participation and partnership are contingently defined, contested, negotiated and performed. On paper, most local and strategic forums started from similar premises. Despite their conceptual isomorphism, however, each new assemblage evolved uniquely. My contention here is that this greatly depended on the evolving ecology of meanings and relationships negotiated through practice.

I did not start this research from formal definitions of participation or partnership. Instead, during fieldwork, I explored the diverse meanings that they take in specific processes where different understandings materialised and evolved. Accordingly, I
encountered Council and NHS officials who thought about the Partnership in terms of ‘public sector efficiency’, ‘coordination’, ‘strategic direction’, ‘co-production’, ‘integrated services’, and ‘added value’ – while other Council and NHS officials thought of it as ‘an imposition’, ‘a waste of time’ or merely ‘sharing information’. Equally, I met third sector and community representatives who saw the Partnership as a ‘discursive forum… to be heard’ – a place for ‘working together’, ‘collaborating’ and ‘sharing resources’ – while some of their peers described it as ‘top-down governance’ and ‘rubberstamping decisions made elsewhere’. Yet again, some politicians understood it as ‘joined-up thinking’, ‘bringing together key agencies to solve problems’, and ‘pooling budgets’, whereas others saw it as a lesser arena for ‘Council leadership’.

Similarly, participation also functioned as an “empty signifier” (Laclau, 2007: 36-45) substantiated through meaning-making practices where different understandings collide. Accordingly, Council and NHS officials, third sector and community representatives, and politicians and citizens shared diverse and crosscutting understandings of participation. Some saw it as ‘research techniques’ for ‘collecting local intelligence’, ‘detect gaps and problems’ or ‘sound out public opinion to make better decisions’. For others, it meant ‘involving people in decision-making and service planning’, ‘giving people a voice’ and ‘co-producing policies’ through ‘deliberation’. Yet for others, it was about ‘empowering communities’ by ‘building capacity’ and ‘devolving budgets and services’. Somewhat more cynically, others saw it as a way of pre-empting and placating ‘objections’ to policies, ‘ticking boxes’ in a ‘tokenistic exercise’, or as an ‘abdication of responsibility by decision makers’. An NHS engager summed it up: ‘what I might say is participation and what a member of the public might say or… our Chief Executive says… may be slightly different things’.

This confluence of diverse, often-conflicting, meanings has been noted in case studies in England (Lowndes et al., 2006a; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2008; Sullivan, 2009; Durose and Richardson, 2009; Durose and Lowndes, 2010). My research adds further insight by emphasising the crosscutting nature of these different understandings. Indeed, when I tried to map the meanings above onto particular groups a clear pattern emerged: there was no clear pattern. They were spread across the spectrum in ways that wouldn’t warrant ascribing certain narratives to certain groups. Accordingly, some officials welcomed participatory processes as sources of ‘knowledge’ and ‘legitimacy’, while other officials considered it a ‘burden’. Some community activists embraced the ethos of the deliberative forum, while others saw it as a space for co-option. Amongst politicians, while one advocated devolving budgets to local forums, a party colleague resented them, and offered an alternative: ‘If people want to put their suggestions in a piece of paper in a box that’s fine’. Therefore, I couldn’t make sense
through traditional categories (e.g. officials vs. citizens), and began to see the engagers’ world as one of intimate antagonisms and unlikely alliances—a liminal space for shifting relationships (Escobar, 2014b: Chapter 4).

From the engagers’ perspective, the complexity of this ecology seemed both a blessing and a curse—it enabled them to carry out their work, but it also made it particularly challenging. That is, the ambiguity of the empty signifiers ‘partnership’ and ‘participation’ allowed them to summon people with different understandings, thus opening a space for renegotiating practices. On the other hand, that ambiguity could also hinder collaboration when conflicting meanings were exposed as incommensurable. Accordingly, the forums were not only the means of partnership and participation, but also the very spaces where their meanings and impact were often negotiated. That is not to say that the forums were open to anything, but that their dynamics were more complex than any dichotomist analysis of engagement as either “incorporation” or “empowerment” may suggest (see Newman and Clarke, 2009: 139; Barnes et al., 2007; Barnes, 2009). Accordingly, the engagers’ work is central in shaping what partnership and participation may mean in specific processes—and brokering that meaning-making space can be challenging.

5.2. Being wanted and unwanted

During early fieldwork an engager confided that she often felt ‘unwanted’. I used this as a heuristic (Abbott, 2004) and, inspired by Becker’s (1993; 1998) ethnographic way of unravelling a single word, I sought to learn about the engagers through their ‘unwanted-ness’. Initially this was puzzling, since rarely a day passed without the engagers being asked to organise yet another participatory process. Indeed, their expertise seemed in good currency.

Wanted

Some officials (i.e. Council, NHS) appreciate the engagers assisting them in complying with frameworks that mandate public engagement. This highlights the policy drive behind the current institutionalisation of local participatory governance in Scotland (Sinclair, 2008; Matthews, 2012). It also suggests that some officials valued the engagers’ expertise and networks. Several praised their ability to work across organisational boundaries—‘they are not siloed and they see the bigger picture’—and appreciated that they ‘are getting well known in the communities’. One explained: ‘they are actually doers and enablers… I am more of a policy person, I am not the kind of getting my hands dirty’. Others, like this Service manager, welcomed forum opportunities:
if I am visible... you can often just nip things in the bud, so attending these evening meetings, speaking to so and so out in the car park ... there is so much business that can get done instead of allowing things to fester and... become a problem...

A second group seeking engagers’ assistance includes councillors trying to make participation work for their electoral agendas. As a manager explained, the engagers ‘can get pulled in several directions... and because... they are good and are engaging lots and lots of people... many councillors want a slice of that’. Finally, there are citizens and community representatives who welcome the engagers as mediators. A third sector executive noted the increasing value of the engagers’ work since the financial crisis:

... we have been challenged by the global economic situation... prior to that... none of us had to really work together... so the change from 2008... has also meant that we have actually had to get around tables and have proper conversations that actually involve partnership...

Similarly, a Coastal Forum citizen (Chapter 5) was enthusiastic about this process, and stressed that the engagers made ‘a huge difference’ compared to her previous participation experiences:

...where there are Community Planning Officers things work much better. They move you forward... look after the group and make sure that egos don’t get in the way. They also have a direct link to councillors and the Council... that can be very advantageous... You can’t do away with the professionals, you need them, because they can galvanise the volunteers. And I am not a great believer in the Big Society... community groups can be problematic, there are factions... it can be very messy... And I am happy to give time ... but I still want the support. I don’t want volunteers to replace the officers... The high demand often made the engagers feel ‘overwhelmed’ and ‘stretched’, or ‘dragged into meaningless processes’ (i.e. ‘tokenistic consultations’) instead of focussing on those they believed in (i.e. deliberative forums). Arguably, the practical ecology of participation in Wyndland favours quantity over quality. Therefore, somewhat paradoxically, as the engagers become popular, their interventions can feel self-defeating.

Unwanted

Before becoming an engager, one worked for the Council’s Social Exclusion Division: ‘Everyone wanted you there, and here is so frustrating... because you’re being attacked and belittled’. Many research participants spoke of widespread ‘hostility’ against the engagers –Councillor Sullivan: ‘the really sad thing is... the amount of people that come up against [them] for just doing their job... so the abuse that they have had from certain quarters...’ The engagers often spoke about ‘resistance’ by officials who feel
overburdened by participatory processes. A third sector worker explained: ‘every other department within the Local Authority fights Community Planning, and does not believe in it... They do it because the government has told them ... [The engager] does it because she believes in it’. That commitment, however, elicits strong reactions –Council official: ‘There is no one person in the Council that’s not got a problem with her and it’s a shame because she totally believes in what she is doing but she sees it as more important than anybody else’s work’.

Many complained about the engagers ‘nagging’ them. For a sympathetic official, much was explained by ‘the nature of the job... it arrived overnight, another thing for Council officers to do on top of the workload and... people just haven’t bought into it’. A key dimension is that some officials feel uncomfortable with participatory processes that challenge their authority and expertise. Consequently, some deployed a repertoire of micro-resistances (De Certeau, 1988) –i.e. not reporting, ignoring emails, missing deadlines, abandoning meetings, or not addressing forum requests. These minutiae, aggregated, seemed to the engagers a conspiracy of little gestures that, in sum, meant more than the parts.

Regarding councillors, some saw the engagers’ processes as tampering with their influence. A Cabinet member explained that some colleagues ‘still find it difficult to accept that they are not the only show in town... an elected member may have a particular interest and... if they feel pushed aside or their role is being eroded...’ An extreme case was a Cabinet councillor who was ‘really abusive’ with the engagers. Once he tried to stop a forum and they received a distressing phone call: ‘I don’t want any of this in my turf!’ Opposition politicians were not necessarily supportive either, and sometimes accused the engagers of being political instruments of the current Administration.

The engagers also felt unwanted by some third sector and community representatives. Sometimes this related to the demands that myriad forums placed on them –third sector manager: ‘what pisses me off is... the amount of stuff she wants us to do... a total lack of realistic expectation’. Furthermore, some saw the engagers as interloping in their community engagement and leadership. Accordingly, Community Councils were often described as ‘defensive’, ‘unwilling to participate’ and ‘protectionist’. A community councillor argued against citizen forums: ‘you cannae give power when there is decision-making... to people who, no disrespect, who are ignorants... you have to know about it, you have to be visionary’.

Lorna explained that some community groups see them as ‘invaders rather than supporters’, and endured situations ‘where this people could come and rip up your professional practice and... you’d basically just had to sit and take it’ in order to ‘try and sort
of negotiate or allay some fears with these groups'. Seemingly, the engagers are wanted because of their expertise on participation, and unwanted because not everyone likes how deliberative forums invite new participants and redefine established roles. However, another engager added nuance to the wanted/unwanted distinction by exemplifying her relationship with a Cabinet councillor:

...[he was] disliking me, disliking everything I was doing... I was causing him problems apparently... he virtually threatened me... but now... he is lovely to me because he is trying to run in the area where we are doing Local Community Planning and I have a lot more connections than he does...

Accordingly, she concluded, it's not simply that 'nobody wants you. No, everyone wants you to be a little bit of a pawn, and if it will help them then they will like you'.

**Making converts**

Despite the challenges, the engagers seemed optimistic. 'We are making converts', said one, as we drove to the ACT forum –tasked with creating a strategy to revitalise a town centre using £2 million of capital expenditure. She gave the example of a Council official who is 'becoming completely fascinated with this... and because he is actually really quite senior this is feeding through his department and right into other departments'. In contrast, another official involved in ACT 'never wants to speak to the community... really sees them as an obstacle... But she is there!' The engager emphasised this. They can make more 'converts' insofar they keep them engaged. A senior NHS official added to this metaphor of 'conversion' talking about his peers: ‘you can see the light goes on in folks’ eyes when they do the community engagement stuff... and actually realise that... folk are really sensible'. Over time, the engagers’ work can turn critics into allies –e.g. Health Forum citizen: 'I wondered if it was just lip-servi... to democratic participation... but more recently I am persuaded that it is a genuine effort to involve the public in the work of the Health Service'. Conversions highlighted the possibilities of the forum as a “contact zone” (Newman and Clarke, 2009: 62) where liminality may generate unforeseen collaboration.

Consequently, new relationships sometimes emerged from the ashes of animosity. Like the evening when a community councillor asked: ‘ok, how can we work together?’ The engager was delighted: ‘I felt for the first time that he treated me as an individual who may know something, rather than as this official with a job title that he hates profoundly’. Similar things happened with politicians –an engager explained: ‘I begin to realise more and more that it's not really parties, it's the personalities, so it depends on... how you get on with them and how they value you and it's about that relationship.’ Indeed, most of my interviewees placed emphasis on ‘mindsets’, ‘personalities’ and ‘relationships’, which foregrounds the potential of a “relational political sociology” of participatory governance (Baiocchi,
For the engagers, few things seemed more important than the relational capital they channelled towards, and developed through, the forums.

Yet, despite the emphasis on ‘mindsets’, ‘relationships’ and ‘culture’, reform throughout Wyndland’s Partnership typically concerned ‘structures’. From the strategic to the local level, and from Council to NHS, participatory arrangements were constantly rearticulated. Governance reforms, locally and nationally, typically targeted ‘structures’ with the hope of reshaping ‘ways of working’ – e.g. the Scottish Government’s double agenda of public service reform following the Christie Commission\(^8\), and health and social care integration in each Local Authority Area\(^9\). Structures, unlike ‘personalities’ or ‘culture’, can be designed and reassembled. They offer a visible target when compared to the milieu of mindsets and interaction patterns that make up the cultural ecology of participation. Of course, structures do shape processes, but it is through processes that forum participants render structures meaningful. Therefore, participatory assemblages represent cultural crucibles – understanding culture as “a set of material practices that constitute the meanings, values, and identities of a social order” (Fischer, 2000: 120).

While making sense of the wanted/unwanted spectrum, I began to understand the engagers as culture change agents, and used this to learn about their institutional landscape.

5.3. The ‘culture change’ project

Often characterised as a “congested and confused policy space” (Durose and Lowndes, 2010: 342; Skelcher, 2000; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2008), the local crossroads of partnership and participation assembled through Community Planning has been nurtured by successive Scottish governments “adding to but not wholly displacing pre-existing governing arrangements – thus creating further complexity” (Cowell, 2004: 497). As Lowndes (2005: 297) observes:

> … local authorities have been encouraged and then required, to change their arrangements for political leadership and decision-making. But they have for the most part insisted on driving the new vehicle down the old path – whatever the discomfort involved!

The engagers work at the vortices where that discomfort unfolds. These difficulties have been recurrent since Community Planning started, when Abram and Cowell

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\(^8\) See [www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Review/publicservicescommission](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Review/publicservicescommission) [Accessed 20 September 2013].

\(^9\) See [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/Policy/Adult-Health-SocialCare-Integration](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/Policy/Adult-Health-SocialCare-Integration) [Accessed 20 September 2013].
(2004: 213) noted ongoing “fundamental disputes” about its purpose “and the beliefs and power relations that could hold it together”. The dominance by the largest partners (i.e. Council and NHS), the ambiguous possibilities for the third and community sectors, and the new roles for councillors, officials and citizens, made Community Planning a space where “different operational cultures are held in suspension” (Abram and Cowell, 2004: 216; Newman, 2001: 121-126). Although such liminal spaces can open roles and relationships to renegotiation, they also present considerable challenges:

...existing arrangements of local governance... are deeply embedded through informal norms and conventions. When reformers attempt to introduce new institutional frameworks... they are faced with the equally important, but rarely recognised, task of de-institutionalising old ways of working... Those who benefit from existing arrangements are likely to defend the status quo; when formal change becomes inevitable, they may seek to incorporate old ways of working into new partnership structures. (Sullivan and Lowndes, 2004: 67)

This cultural milieu is hardly exclusive to Wyndland, which seems to offer an archetype of broader trends in Community Planning across Scotland (see Barr and Christie, 2012; Audit Scotland, 2013). In June 2013, BBC Scotland published the headline “Scottish public bodies ‘resisting change’”, while the Herald Scotland read “Damning report condemns pace of public sector reform”10. Both were reporting on a Scottish Parliament’s cross-party Local Government Committee inquiry. MSPs reviewed, among other things, Community Planning and public sector reform following the Christie Commission –where partnership and participation were prominent (see Christie, 2011). The Committee’s verdict seemed unequivocal: "It is clear to us that Community Planning Partnerships are simply not delivering. There is a lack of leadership and poor communications and many are disconnected from the people they serve”. The spokesperson continued: “We uncovered some very deep seated attitudes and behaviours that will take time to change.” And criticised “those who are resistant to making change and resistant to working together to bring real change into the hearts of communities across Scotland”.

What culture? What change?

The engagers often talked about ‘*the political culture*’, and explained: ‘*our organisations work in particular ways and partnership work is not the natural thing for them*’. They also argued that ‘*a lot of people in public service are very cynical… they don’t really believe that Community Planning and engagement can work or is worth the effort, and so they will be resistant to it, specially when it affects their patch*.’ In contrast, others –like this senior NHS official– had a more optimistic outlook: ‘*you need to change your processes and procedures and the culture gradually spreads, gets inculcated*’.

In this context, ‘*culture*’ represents another empty signifier capable of encapsulating diverse concerns and aspirations across Wyndland’s ecology of participation. Understanding the wanted/unwanted quality of the engagers’ work thus offers insight into the institutional culture that enfolds, and evolves with, the forums. Here, institutions are not the same as organisations. They are “stable, valued and recurring patterns of behaviour” that constitute “the rules of the game” (Huntington, 1968; quoted in Lowndes, 2005). Informal rules can be as influential “as official codes of conduct and written constitutions in determining opportunities and constraints for participation” (Lowndes et al., 2006a: 546). Furthermore, Ostrom (1999: 37-38) has argued that the most powerful institutions are “invisible”, and coined the concept “rules-in-use” to understand them. Following Lowndes et al. (2006a: 542), rules-in-use here refer to the particular combination of “*formal and informal institutions that influences participation in a locality, through shaping the behaviour of politicians, public managers, community leaders and citizens themselves*”.

The engagers described their ‘*culture change*’ work as ‘*reshaping ways of working*’ –that is, reshaping the institutional ecology of rules-in-use. In this, they were supported by those, like Councillor Wilson, who criticised ‘*the old days when the politicians and the officers knew best*’, and insisted that ‘*you’ve got to throw old protocols out of the window*’. The next sections explore those two key domains in the policy world of invited participation –the officers and the politicians. This addresses an important gap. Most research focuses on “citizens, users, and publics who are to be engaged, coerced, empowered and made responsible through participatory initiatives” but often overlooks how “public officials negotiate their roles and identities” within them (Barnes, 2009: 34). In other words, whereas much research focuses on what participatory arrangements do to citizens, here I focus on what they do to the institutions that host them.

**Engagers and officials: Changing public sector governance**
For the past two decades the UK public sector has undergone various “modernisation” agendas often linked to improving managerial dimensions (Clarke and Newman, 1997). Along the way, particularly since the 1997 New Labour UK government and the first devolved Scottish government in 1999, partnership and participation have become prominent in that agenda (Newman, 2001; Sullivan, 2001; Orr and McAteer, 2004; Mayo et al., 2007). To be sure, the emphasis on efficiency and performance remains, but “overlaid on it” are “new demands that public services should empower citizens and communities, develop partnerships, collaborate with ‘civil society’ groups, and foster ‘co-production’ arrangements with service users” (Newman and Clarke, 2009: 6). In this context, engagers find themselves – as an NHS one explained – ‘trying to encourage and cajole staff to be able to engage well with the public’. Public sector officials face new roles and dilemmas (Goss, 2001) and sometimes “refuse to ‘know their place’” in these new assemblages (Newman and Clarke, 2009: 60), which means that the “joining-up” can be “strongly resisted” (Newman, 2012: Location 3215). The engagers interpreted that ‘resistance’ in terms of ‘control’, ‘expertise’, and ‘ways of working’.

Control

An engager suggested that some officials fear deliberative forums because they ‘worry that if we evidence too much need things will have to change, so there is that tension that they’d lose control’. Another engager lamented that ‘something that on paper is quite revolutionary’ is undermined by how different players act. She gave the example of the Partnership Board, often used by key actors for sharing decisions made offstage, rather than as a frontstage for inclusive policy-making. A third sector representative explained: ‘…it’s not in their interest to make it diverse because that dilutes their power and their ability to make decisions… certain decisions are always made… outside of the room… in secret… in the areas with largest budgets’. This referred to Council and NHS senior officials. When I interviewed them, it seemed apparent that these were accepted rules-in-use – e.g. NHS executive: ‘it’s the same for any decision-making process, consensus-building goes on outside the meeting and… it’s really important that it is aired at the meeting… but… you would obviously want to talk to people before’. In this way, the inner workings at the Partnership’s strategic level were often negotiated offstage, that is, beyond the backstages and frontstages where the engagers have room for manoeuvre.

Consequently, much of the engagers’ work entailed a politics of exposure: trying to ‘drag’ officers and issues into more visible spaces. An engager explained that it ‘depends on individual managers, whether they recognise that’s something that people should be doing’, or whether they think that ‘this is their area, there is no need for other people to get involved’. For another engager, this came down to ‘a lack of imagination’ and ‘partnership ethos’,
and unwillingness to share policy-making jurisdiction: ‘they are trapped in this box, they can’t see beyond the Council. Why don’t they enable the voluntary sector to work with them closely and with communities in basic problem-solving processes?’ A third sector representative referred to control and territoriality:

… politicians come and go, civil servants are forever… they will buy their time if they don’t agree with the politics of it until they can make change that suits them… and [the engager] is working with the power play of all these individual departments… and [if] the wider community contributes… that doesn’t always meet the need of an individual department, who wants to hold on to its workers…

Another engager sums it up: ‘there is a reluctance to give up control, which is understandable… professionals in a whole range of things do have expertise, that’s why they are there!’

Expertise

Fischer (2000: 259, 1990, 2009) has shown how certain governance discourses have given way to “an increasingly technocratic form of public decision making”. Renegotiating the existing politics of expertise constitutes a key dimension in engagement practice. Claiming expertise is a way of asserting professional jurisdiction over a social domain (Abbott, 1988). In Wyndland, politicians and officials have traditionally claimed jurisdiction over policy-making. Even engagers’ allies recognise that forum success often depends on officials ‘not feeling threatened’ by new configurations of knowledge/power (Foucault, 1980), and emphasise the difficulty of changing rules-in-use – e.g. NHS official: ‘I sit around some of my colleagues… and I find myself in that position as well going: it’s easier just to do it ourselves, we know best’.

Consequently, the allocation of roles implicit in how engagers script and facilitate participatory processes is sometimes unwelcomed by officials who see them as encroaching on their expertise and domain. This seems typical in transitions from technocratic to participatory policy-making (Innes and Booher, 2010). Officials are being asked to relinquish some of the power afforded by their authority and expertise, and develop new kinds of contact with citizens and various representatives. Engagement work pushes new forms of evidence and knowledge (local, experiential) into decision-making processes. As argued earlier, the engagers believe that, as long as these officials are around the table, they can make converts, expose them to various others (ideas, people) and somehow nudge them into collaboration. In this process, previously unquestioned technocratic expertise can be exposed to new deliberative scrutiny.
Ways of working

The engagers talked constantly about ‘reshaping ways of working’ in order to change ‘mindsets’. This materialised in myriad backstage negotiations with officials. For instance, persuading them to use forums as deliberative spaces rather than only to circulate information –e.g. ‘it’s Community Planning and we can’t just have bullets on a slide’–, or trying to stop ‘tokenistic’ consultations –e.g. ‘the decision had been made, although of course we didn’t say that in the announcement for the event’. A Council official argued: ‘it’s definitely a cultural thing… the problem is that things have been done in such a way for a long time and the mindset is we don’t like change’. Talking about ‘culture’ was also typical in the NHS context –which has it’s own difficult relationship with participatory practices (see Parkinson, 2004; Davies et al., 2006; Mockford et al., 2012). During a focus group, two NHS engagers explained:

... we try and enable our communities to... influence what is delivered, especially in Scotland because we have a very paternalistic health service that tends to tell you what’s good for you...

... in Scotland, generally we tend to be left of centre... I therefore think it was a genuine desire to involve people... coming from... the politicians, unfortunately my experience is the people... within the management side of the Health Service havenae really bought this...

When external consultants came to NHS headquarters to report on reviews, they often spoke about the need to open ‘honest conversations’: ‘we won’t be able to deal with the reforms and agendas that we are facing without dealing with the culture issue’. Most engagers shared a sense of the NHS as a complicated assemblage where ‘all sorts of decisions are taken all over the place in all sorts of ways and there is no dimension of democratic politics at all’. Nonetheless, despite the ‘huge culture shift’ needed, they often remarked that things ‘are better now than 20 years ago’. For others, however, these challenges had less to do with culture than with accountability structures –e.g. Council Policy manager:

... the biggest barrier is accountability... at the individual level is somebody being accountable to a manager... In terms of local councillors being accountable to an electorate, the NHS being accountable to the Board and... the Ministers, and in between there is... organisations... which are not accountable with anybody else, the voluntary sector, the business sector... Different accountabilities create problems in terms of sharing budgets, sharing staff and sharing working practices, changing working practices...

Most research participants acknowledged these difficulties –also reflected in the literature (e.g. Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Sullivan, 2003). However, some engagers argued that ‘that doesn’t stop the Council from deciding in partnership, even though it may be then submitted to review and due process, and they may even be able to reverse decisions if
‘needed’. Furthermore, they insisted that the problem was not only with formal rules, but also with rules-in-use – e.g. car conversation:

Engager 1: …the thing that holds us back and can make the biggest difference is our own thoughts and behaviours, but no one will say this. It’s about how we work, our mindsets.

Engager 2: I just wonder how the Chief Exec feels about all of this, you know, does he think that the Partnership is working and everything is just dandy?

Engager 1: …he thinks everything is about structures, and simplifying structures and avoiding duplication, but it’s not, it’s about mindsets and ways of working…

Perhaps the engagers’ struggles reflect the absence of incentives for collaborative governance. Innes and Booher (2010) argue that “interdependence” is crucial for partnerships to succeed. If certain players don’t feel that they need others in order to do what they do, why would they collaborate? If that’s the case, perhaps the current Scottish Government’s health and social care integration agenda will go some way towards fostering interdependence. Nonetheless, the engagers’ reflections also suggest that participatory assemblages not only reflect existing public sector cultures, but are performative of them – that is, actors “constantly construct an organization through their actions and their interpretations of what they themselves and the others are doing” (Czarniawska, 2008b: 7). In this sense, the forums can be spaces for implicitly reshaping rules-in-use. By insisting on ‘mindsets’ and ‘culture’, the engagers seem to foreground the power of agency to overcome problems of ‘accountability’ and ‘structure’ – as if trying to reclaim the notion that things could always be made otherwise.

Engagers and politicians: Participatory and representative democracy

Although related issues are recurrent in the literature (e.g. Sullivan, 2009; Hoppe, 2011), my point of departure here is engager Lisa’s reflections:

… councillors and community councillors see themselves as elected representatives… yet our approach to community engagement [is]… to involve the wider… communities who… are not mediated through [them]… and so it’s that tension between, you know, participatory democracy and representative democracy.

Engagers and councillors need each other, but their relationship embodies the very frictions between the distinct practices of democracy that they mediate. Although these

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11 See www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/Policy/Adult-Health-SocialCare-Integration [Accessed 20 September 2013].
frictions have been noted in Scotland (e.g. Orr and McAteer, 2004; Sinclair, 2008), we still know little about how they are negotiated. This section, therefore, addresses the role of politicians, their relationship with the engagers, and the impact of electoral dynamics on participatory processes.

The role of politicians

Partnership and participation—or “governance-driven democratization”—can be seen as “supplementary to electoral democracy, shoring up its functional weaknesses” to generate legitimacy locally, “issue by issue, policy by policy, and constituency by constituency” (Warren, 2009: 8). Participatory assemblages are often ambiguously appended to representative mechanisms, and many councillors struggle to “develop different, more interactive ways of governing with, rather than on behalf of, the public” (Sullivan, 2009: 52; Martin, 1997; Abram and Cowell, 2004).

Wyndland’s party-political landscape resembles Scotland’s at both local and national level: a fierce competition between Labour and SNP (Scottish National Party), who alternate in power either as majority parties or in coalition; a small Conservative presence; a diminishing Liberal Democrat party; and a few independent politicians. Labour introduced Community Planning (CP) nationally in 2003 and the SNP developed it further since 2007. Therefore, both parties partially own the framework and its evolution, which takes diverse forms in each LAA—including varying degrees of involvement by councillors in each Partnership (Audit Scotland, 2013; Barr and Christie, 2012). In Wyndland, when the 2007 elections came, the outgoing Administration had barely managed to outline Partnership plans and initiate some Local Forums. Arguably, CP had not been core to their agenda.

The new Administration brought new impetus, and by 2010 the Partnership was a full-blown assemblage including a Board, numerous Theme Groups and the Local Forums. Then, a new Administration took over in 2012, and once again reassembled the Partnership. Typically, successive Administrations have looked at previous forums with suspicion, and often started their own—sometimes shutting down others or reviewing previously committed budgets. Nonetheless, both SNP and Labour Administrations have kept similar discourses about CP, and their ranks include both enthusiasts and detractors. During interviews, members of both Administrations recognised that they ‘didn’t take it far enough’. Ten years have passed since initial CP legislation, and Wyndland resembles other LAAs—it’s still ‘early days’ for the ‘culture change’ project.
Few councillors engaged substantially at the strategic level of Wyndland’s Partnership – e.g. the Council Leader chaired the Board. Their most prominent role was in Local Forums. Cross-party enthusiasts of participation saw themselves as ‘a new breed of politician’ whose job is ‘to put into action what local communities want to achieve’. Whereas others had a more critical stand: ‘we’ll listen to what people say, but they don’t know anything about the budgets, they don’t know the issues in other parts… they’re not in a position to make a judgement’. Many politicians feared ‘ignorant’ and self-serving publics: ‘if you give the public purse out to the public… they will spend it their way! … then there would be no room for us’. Yet, other councillors saw forums as secondary and only made appearances when scripted by the engagers. This varied ecology of meanings, once again, cut across and within party-political divides. Accordingly, support for CP depended on individual ‘political champions’. Councillor Wilson, the proverbial “facilitative leader” celebrated in the literature (Bussu and Bartels, 2013), describes his Cabinet struggles:

> Some politicians find it difficult… to let go… some politicians don’t trust local people… and there was lots of debate about… how we could do it… how we could fund it… So a lot of my time was spent on persuading my colleagues.

The intensification of CP in Wyndland from 2007 coincided with the first results of the new multi-member ward STV system for local elections in Scotland. Now each ward featured elected representatives from diverse parties, and thus Local Forums often included both ruling and opposition councillors. Actually, the first forums became spaces for negotiating this new form of local representation. Indeed, they became crucibles where councillors had to learn not only new ways of deliberating with citizens, but also of sharing constituency representation. For the engagers, this became problematic as new forums were initially dominated by traditional party politics. Councillor Wilson illustrates this:

> …local councillors… were dominating and starting to argue amongst themselves… and local people are thinking… if they wanna argue they can do so at the Council Chamber… we are wasting our time… if that lot are just gonna be talking amongst themselves and deciding. And [the engagers] through me and through their own… persuaded other councillors that if they are gonna be involved it really has to be a step back… not just carrying on as if they are running the show.

The engagers were instrumental in negotiating the councillors’ role. Initially, it was a matter of preventing forums from becoming – in Lorna’s words – party-political

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‘stumping grounds’ or ‘shouting matches’. Once certain councillors relaxed the premise ‘I’ve got to stamp my authority on this place’, they focussed more on policy deliberation. Over the years, they undertook various forum roles, often negotiated ad hoc with engagers and participants.

Nonetheless, some councillors still regard CP –a Cabinet officer explained– as a way of ‘abdicating their responsibility to make decisions… instead of… manning up and taking them themselves’. This language was not unusual in a world of mostly male politicians –some of whom despised collaborative policy-making as ‘soft’, considered the Community Services portfolio as secondary, and referred to the engagers as ‘the girls’. Some opposition politicians and community councillors were particularly critical of current CP: ‘this Administration… has done more consultations with the public than I’ve ever seen in my life before… they can’t move unless they consult!’ However, as the engagers noted, the diffusion of responsibility also entails a diffusion of ‘credit’. When forums achieved outcomes (e.g. town centre investment, new services), ruling councillors had to share credit with other participants and politicians. Accordingly, some councillors kept distance from the forums –they did not understand their purpose or struggled to find ways of doing, and speaking about, participatory politics.

**Engagers and councillors**

Building relationships with councillors is critical for the engagers. Although they seek to strike crosscutting alliances, they work most closely with ruling councillors –who are instrumental for the forums’ influence on decision-making. For the engagers’ manager, theirs is ‘an unstructured relationship and they are blurring around the edges… and elected members should not be directing staff’s work’. However, as Alison explained:

> …in theory councillors cannot tell us what to do, but… they do it all the time…
> Now there are 12 of them wanting to be part of the ongoing processes and… there are some who want nothing to do with it and will use it… as an Administration-bashing football… it comes down to individual personality…

Engagers from other LAAs also spoke about the ‘double-edged sword of working with councillors’: ‘we’re pulled off in all sorts of directions, but on the flipside, we also have their ear’. Indeed, this was not a unidirectional relationship –‘we use them and they use us’, explained Lorna. In that trade, however, the engagers risk losing relational capital (‘trust’, ‘face’, ‘reputation’), as some councillors try to open deliberative forums for electoral reasons (e.g. being seeing to channel resources to their ward). Nonetheless, the engagers could hardly script many forums without them:
… we use them as well… there is the legitimacy stuff… We write all the briefing stuff that they stand up and say at the beginning, we frame everything to fit the way we want it to be, we use them to get access to information, to get things onto an agenda, we use them when other departments are not playing ball…

Often, after a forum meeting, engagers and ally councillors would find a quiet corridor to ‘plot’ moves – e.g. how to reframe forum issues to tap into existing budgets, how to mobilise departmental resources to service a forum, or how to bring in officials who weren’t ‘playing ball’. Accordingly, the engagers did considerable backstage work to get support – or at least acquiescence – from councillors. One engager found this ‘kind of entertaining… it’s what makes it interesting… and it’s about working up people and playing people, and working out who… I can work with and who I can ignore’. The engagers typically scripted three councillor roles: completely engaged, engaged at some stage, or kept ‘at arms-length’. The three entail risks and opportunities that the engagers must calibrate. For instance, having Cabinet councillors completely engaged can ‘give clout’ to a forum – a clear link to the Administration and departmental resources. The downside is that when those councillors lose elections, entire processes can be in jeopardy.

Elections and forums

Pre-electoral time creates ‘a lot of flurry’ in the engagers’ world – said their manager – and they must ‘watch’ that forums are not arenas for ‘grandstanding’. An engager explained: ‘election time is just exhausting… most councillors want to talk to you, the amount of councillors I’ve spoken to in the last 2 weeks is unbelievable… they just want to… see if some things can get done’. It was not unusual that ruling councillors would announce large budgets towards the aims of certain public forums just before an election. The opposition leader was furious: ‘things are being manufactured at this late stage and this budget… in February… to manipulate the electorate in May’. As a result, the ongoing ‘bad feelings’ between SNP and Labour councillors were accentuated during such periods. Their otherwise similar CP discourse was then performed as incommensurable. An engager illustrates:

…they all say ‘yes, of course we want to listen to our communities’, [and then] it gets into ridiculous in-fights and bullying tactics between councillors… and it’s much more divided… much more antagonistic, and… things get bumped… because it was supported by the previous Administration…

Elections 2007: War stories

Many recurrent stories across Wyndland’s participatory worlds concerned the impact of the 2007 elections on pre-existent forums. The new Administration shut them down
and opened new ones elsewhere. ‘They just abolished them… the community was shattered’, said the then opposition leader. In contrast, a Cabinet councillor argued that ‘what the opposition mean by that is that we took the ability for them to control a budget away’, and criticised them for seizing the forums ‘as an opportunity to gain some of the power’ that they had lost electorally. I heard multiple versions of this story, which acquired almost canonical status in the engagers’ imaginary, thus informing the scripting of subsequent forums. Here is an engager’s account:

…it got nasty… [ruling councillors] were getting viciously… personal attack, nastiness, unpleasantness… all the time… by [opposition] members… so other community people were getting fed up as well, [ruling councillors] were … pissed off, but also… just worn down… it finally blew up in a meeting which was deeply horrible… and… the Cabinet just went…. it doesn’t work in that area, it needs to be stopped. So it was all put on hold suddenly… just [when] we were starting to develop stuff …

Subsequently, the Administration changed Local Community Planning policy, and the ruling party even changed its manifesto for 2012, no longer talking about ‘devolving budgets’ to Local Forums. As Councillor Wilson explains: ‘it backfired on us’ because it gave the opposition an ‘incentive’ to take over those processes. As a result, they now pleaded to be ‘guided by local people’ but retain ‘control of expenditure’. Consequently, the opposition criticised them as ‘control freaks’ and pleaded budget devolution if they won in 2012. The engagers were sceptical: ‘why didn’t they do it when they were in power?’ Fascinated by the engagers’ 2007 post-electoral “war stories” (Orr, 1996), I extended my fieldwork to encompass the 2012 elections.

Elections 2012: Back to the future?

The change of Administration in May 2012 turned the engagers’ world upside down. It was particularly difficult for those who experienced the 2007 ‘fiascos’. Tears, uncertainty and frantic office days ensued –Alison: ‘everything is chaos at the moment… and I’ve got this hysterical laughter’. Suddenly, meticulously scripted processes, carefully facilitated forums, and painstakingly built relational capital were in jeopardy. Some officials no longer returned phone calls, and the engagers had no longer full access to the forums’ backstages that had been their turf. After a week, their managers got provisional answers from the new Administration: some forum meetings were suspended, others could continue but without commitments. This infuriated the engagers: ‘they are asking us to waste our time in a process that may go nowhere’; ‘this forum is now a complete farce’. Unable to script, without backstage leeway, frontstage performances risked becoming farces (Escobar, 2014a).
They kept anticipating scenarios and reflecting. Could they have scripted better forum protection? Alison: ‘we have… involved officials from the outset… the Leader of the Council, the councillors… we had the political support of both sides… everything to make sure that we were not putting ourselves in this position’. Amongst the officials I met during post-election weeks –CDOs, policy officers, managers– the engagers seemed the most visibly affected. Myriad conversations ensued:

Engager 1: … maybe they will actually respect the practice and the community engagement that went into it… maybe they will appreciate that these processes are quite robust… This shows you how vulnerable these things are…

Engager 2: … [The new Administration] will likely… pull out of the areas where we are working now, and take it back to… where it was initially… I was working there… it was all closed down so badly… so I don’t have credibility there… and I hate … having to go there and start it all again… I might as well just quit…

Trainee engager: … so many people have worked so hard for years … brought so many groups together… got people passionate… and now… that meeting is cancelled, this meeting is cancelled, no idea what’s going on here, we could be completely pulled out of that area…

Engager 2: …in this job, you work closer to policy and politicians that you would do in a traditional CDO [Community Development Officer] position.

CDO: Your job sucks [everyone laughs].

Indeed, processes supported by outgoing councillors became ‘under review’. As the outgoing Cabinet had stopped forums in 2007, the engagers expected a repeat of this retaliatory approach. Therefore, Wyndland seems caught in a vicious circle in which partisan and electoral dynamics trump participatory politics and deliberative processes (see Cooper and Smith, 2012).

To salvage some forums, the engagers tried to regain leeway in the (new) backstage. Firstly, they investigated who would lead their department –‘we used to have a champion in Cabinet… we need someone like that’. The problem was that now ‘some of the people who have been most vocal about our work… are part of the Administration’. Then, they scripted moves for forums that still had ‘momentum’ and facilitated meetings where participants could question ruling councillors about intentions and budgets. Indeed, citizens and new opposition councillors kept pressing on. The engager spoke tactically at the forums: ‘hearing [ruling councillors] saying that this is going ahead is heartening for everyone here. The timing may be different… but it’s reassuring to have this conversation…’ Limited in backstage room for manoeuvre, the engagers made the most of the frontstage –using it to influence inaccessible backstage domains. The ‘frustration’ of not being privy to spaces where things were being worked out eventually turned into a renewed sense of agency.
They began to mobilise relational capital and strike new alliances—sometimes unexpectedly. Like the evening when a new Cabinet councillor confided bitter disagreements within his party: ‘I’ve been taking drugs to cope with this shit since the election… I shouldn’t probably say this, but fuck it!’ The engager replied: ‘with time you’ll know me and you’ll find that I’m a very discreet person’. One forum was in his town, and he assured the engager that ‘this will fucking happen… or they will be in for a rough ride’. He insisted that ‘the town comes before the party’ and that he will become independent if necessary. This was unexpected insight for the engager: ‘I shouldn’t be hearing this, I’m a Council officer’. The Councillor laughed: ‘that’s what your manager always says’. Such sensitive information was extremely valuable, as the engagers worked the foundations of a new backstage. Potential new allies emerged; new windows of opportunity opened. The engagers’ political nose tracked new trails, carving up a new backstage from where to try and salvage some forums. For those at risk of becoming ‘farces’, they scripted senior managers giving public assurance, so that they would have a face-saving interest in negotiating backstage with the new Administration.

Eventually, the engagers acknowledged the positive side. They could now help to reformulate and improve CP—i.e. focussing on places where they are ‘wanted’. As for how to shield participatory processes from electoral politics, their experience suggests some options: keeping forums away from councillors—but risk losing influence and legitimacy; forging cross-party alliances—a considerable challenge; or keeping forum lifecycles within the legislature’s timeline—which requires impeccable scripting. In September 2013 most forums were still ongoing, albeit considerably delayed and pending Cabinet decisions. The engagers’ work has been to emphasise the participatory, rather than party-political, quality of the forums, in order to secure their survival. In Wyndland’s ecology of participation, participatory democracy remains subservient to representative institutions.

5.4. Administrative and activist engagers

Hired to implement CP, few engagers knew that meant negotiating, through practice, what CP might mean. They were tasked with engaging people in policy forums; but no one mentioned that would entail fostering ‘culture change’ in a contested ecology of participation. This explains the bewilderment some felt about the political nature of their job. In this section, I explore their agency and its emotional import.

I begin with a distinction that helped me to explore diverse approaches to engagement work—namely, the administrative and the activist engager. The former adopts a fairly bureaucratic role, working within parameters set by others. The latter develops
ongoing political work to reshape policy worlds and push in particular directions. The administrative engager accepts existing cultures, whereas the activist becomes a culture change agent. The former adapts to existing rules-in-use, whereas the latter seeks to create new ones. While the administrative engager closes the office for the day, the activist strikes a tactical conversation in the car park. To be sure, I am not describing specific engagers, but two basic ways of being an engager. Indeed, the ones I met fluctuated between these ideal types depending on various dimensions – including the nature of the participatory process at hand, their experiences and feelings about the job, and the unfolding ecology of participation. In some cases, time and challenges forged the activist engager, yet in others, they made way for more administrative approaches.

**Intrapreneurship**

In this paper, I have illustrated the engagers’ internal activism through their struggles to foster deliberative engagement. That activism doesn’t focus necessarily on substantial issues, but on the form that policy processes take to deal with them. Such activism seeks change by creating liminal spaces pregnant with possibility – a “dialogic” in-between where participants may reshape each others’ perspectives and actions (Escobar, 2011a: 20). Turner (1967, 1969) argued that liminal spaces – characterised by ambiguity, disorientation and emergence – can foster deviation and creativity. This makes the engagers’ job both challenging and possible, as they can exploit liminality to generate change.

Thinking about the engagers as internal activists challenges the “stereotypical distinctions between activist outsides and incorporated insides” (Newman, 2012: Loc 4551). It seems “too simplistic to associate subversion solely with action outside the official sphere of participation” (Barnes and Prior, 2009a: 10; Barnes et al., 2007; Taylor, 2003). As Goss (2001: 5) argues:

> ... working in the space between bureaucratic, market and network cultures, creates space for innovation. People working in these spaces learn extraordinary skills... The constant collision of different assumptions and traditions offers scope to challenge on all sides. The very messiness begins to break down old systems and procedures... New [entrepreneurial] skills and capabilities are needed.

The engager can be understood as an “institutional entrepreneur” (DiMaggio 1988; Lowndes, 2005), a “policy entrepreneur” (Roberts and King, 1991) or a “civic entrepreneur” (Durose, 2011). As activist insiders, engagers deploy relational capital and micro-political know-how seeking “to balance multiple competing constituencies”
and “induce co-operation” thus “forging new coalitions” (Freeman and Peck, 2007: 925; Fligstein 1997). To understand this work, Lowndes (2005: 306) calls for research into “the role of power relationships in driving and constraining processes of institutional entrepreneurship” and “the role of ideas in influencing the direction of entrepreneurship”. This section considers some of these issues by focussing on the engagers’ insider activism, or “intrapreneurship” (Newman, 2012: Loc 2420). A strategic engager reflected on this:

… we are all so caught up in the bureaucracy that we don’t get things done... I put my head above the parapet too often, but... I care and because I'm bolshie sometimes I get things done while others don’t and... I could get into trouble...

‘It’s amazing how much it depends on your personal politics’, she continued, ‘some are quite happy to let things take their own course’. However, she argued, ‘this is far too important’ to let it become an ‘administrative task’ with no scope for ‘reshaping governance’. Accordingly, the engagers spoke about ‘putting my bit in for the world’, ‘values of justice and equality’, and ‘people’s rights to participate in decision-making’. This materialised not only through forums, but also backstage work trying to redress imbalances –i.e. supporting ‘community action forcing the Council to come around’, or contesting the ‘anti-third-sector’ attitudes that hindered inclusion in the Partnership. Their motivation stemmed from previous experience in social movements or working in the community and third sectors, and understanding ‘their struggles’. However, this insider activism, ‘can feel very uncomfortable because... we are employees’ –which reflects how CP can form “contradictory points of alignment between emerging governing rationalities” and the engagers’ political work (Newman, 2012: Loc 1389). Navigating this depends, an engager argued, on ‘whether you feel you have some sort of ideology and principles around the way you practice to try and negotiate those difficulties’.

Their intrapreneurship does not depend on formal power –they actually work from the bottom of their organisational hierarchies. This can be challenging: ‘I can’t call a Head of Service into account’; ‘I don’t have power over any area, so the negotiation depends on interpersonal relations’. Nonetheless, one argued that ‘maybe this is an advantage... I am not a senior manager... so I can raise questions and do things that others can’t’, ‘I do have the power to bring things to the table’. Perhaps their lack of formal power has honed the micro-political know-how illustrated earlier. The capacity to work the backstage, build relational capital, and assemble processes thus becomes crucial for “spotting opportunities to pursue forum objectives that were unlikely to be achieved through official channels” (Barnes, 2009: 45). As one put it, ‘we must use whatever resources are available’. Another added: ‘this is not different from how wars are fought, it’s strategy’.
This takes exhausting subtlety: ‘acknowledging sensitivities and being very careful that you don’t upset certain people… takes a lot of energy in Community Planning’. It requires patience: ‘sometimes spend months thinking about… tactics… to get around certain person or group’. It needs perseverence: ‘I work and work and tweak my way until finally I get what I need’. It also entails political knowledge to ‘play on existing interests’, and find the right time for ‘rattling cages at the Council’ or ‘rocking the boat with our colleagues’. Finally, it also involves ‘twisting peoples’ arms’ when the engagers feel ‘forced to have to go around pushing people to work in certain ways’.

Despite mixed feelings about the thornier side of ‘culture change’ work, the engagers relished the “pleasures of agency” (Newman, 2012: Loc 231). One explained: ‘I like finding the way through the maze… I enjoy… the conflict bits, the bits that are frustrating… and how you’ve got to sort of manage through people’. References to the pleasures of agency were more common amongst Council engagers than NHS counterparts – perhaps because, as argued before, they have more room for manoeuvre. The NHS context seemed to encourage well-rehearsed caution – a more administrative approach to engagement work. In contrast, Council engagers seemed often more proactive – ‘making converts’, forging alliances and mobilising resources.

**Emotion work**

This paper illustrates the intensity of the engagers’ world – an undercurrent of passion and frustration that springs into myriad actions, trials and tribulations. In her study of women “working the spaces of power”, Newman (2012: Loc 3661) argues that:

> border work has [to] be understood as political rather than geographical: the ‘inside’, ‘outside’, ‘edges’, ‘middles’ and so on referred to by [research] participants were less concerned with defined places as with political possibilities. They were spaces of agency, of power: but also spaces of ambiguity, discomfort and emotion work.

It is regarding emotion work that the engagers’ backstage most closely resembles Goffman’s (1971) depiction of the generic backstages of social interaction. Put simply, the engagers’ backstage was the domain of unrestrained and shared emotionality, while the frontstage remained characterised by “emotional labour” – the work of developing context-appropriate emotional responses (Hochschild, 1983). To say that backstage and frontstage featured distinct emotional dynamics is not to reduce emotion work to emotional expressivity, nor to establish a separation between emotion and reason. Indeed, contemporary and classic debates problematise that separation, warranting instead an understanding of reason as inextricable from emotion (Escobar, 2011b: 110; Hume, 1739; Nussbaum, 2001). That is, emotion work makes engagement
practice possible by nurturing the engagers’ commitment, sagacity and intrapreneurship.

They accepted that, in their job, the track from elation to despair was a one-stop journey. They often savoured their relational milieu: ‘there is a lot of shit in this job, but there is a lot of good people’. Occasionally, they shared the ecstasy of the forum aftermath. For instance, after a large Partnership forum –following months of preparation– the atmosphere was so electrifying that the buzz carried on and they could barely sleep. Even deskwork time was often intense –while writing emails or policy documents, their body language revealed mounting tension punctuated by sudden outbursts of ‘frustration’ or laughter. In times of turmoil –e.g. post-elections– the texture of their emotional palette would thicken, turning frustration into despair and stories into tears. This unfolded in the backstage of their backstage –the toilet, the car. The frontstage remained the domain of emotional labour:

Alison: …you are always performing in this job.

Lorna: Yes, the other day… my face was hurting from smiling so much… keeping this level of enthusiasm and cheeriness is quite exhausting.

It was particularly difficult to witness the ‘burnout’ that the engagers felt as time passed in the job: ‘I don’t see myself doing this for too long’, ‘I just don’t know if I can carry on for much longer’. They often felt ‘overwhelmed and overstretched’, and talked about being ‘scarred’ by certain experiences. There were also moments of self-questioning: ‘I’m going through a period in which I think my work is shit and doesn’t mean anything’. This ‘burnout’ was not lost to their colleagues –some of whom answered quite dramatically when asked if they would take that job:

Council official: …if we didn’t have [the engager] driving Community Planning… it would just… be a shambles… I don’t envy her, I think she’s got possibly one of the worst jobs in the Council, and she’s made a lot of enemies…

Third sector representative: …she is between a rock and a hard place… she sees injustice… people who stop things from happening… and this is the deal about power play within a Local Authority.

NHS official: I could not physically do it…

Council service manager: … I would commit suicide within six months.

Such strong expressions underline the intensity of the engagers’ work. Perhaps there was some warning in the story of a predecessor who, after some forums collapsed, went on ‘stress leave’ and never returned. An engager said that ‘it gets easier as you get a bit of life under your belt’. But time kindled its own dilemmas: ‘I know where all the bodies
are buried’. The toll of intense political work – assembling processes, driving ‘culture change’ – was difficult to ignore, although they could be quite humorous about it. This was a conversation where Councillor Wilson explained difficulties recruiting political candidates:

Councillor: … why would they want a job in which they’ll have to work endless hours, for a modest salary and being attacked from all quarters?

Engager [laughing]: … just like Community Planning Officers…

Over time, the fire of some activist engagers would steadily dim. The prospect of ‘unfair’ forum closures would then become a more resigned affair: ‘do I want to fight to the bitter end? … to go down all guns blazing, I don’t know, because it’s not worth it’. In such cases, I got a sense of how the frustrations, dilemmas and struggles of the activist engager could become catalysts for more administrative approaches. Engagement work can wear you down; the ups and downs can be too convoluted even for those who enjoy ‘finding the way through the maze’. Moreover, the pressures of being wanted and unwanted can steadily add fuel to the ‘burnout’. Arguably, Wyndland’s ecology of participation provides a more hospitable environment for the administrative engager, and somewhat nudges the activist engager to weigh the pressures and pleasures of agency.

6. Conclusions: Unsettling and reassembling local democracy

As Davies (2011: 11-13) argues, participatory governance is often hailed as a fait accompli – a move from government to governance – that assumes that that’s how things work, thus rendering the work it takes invisible. Accordingly, “partnership” is often portrayed as a fact, a move willed by public administrations, rather than an ongoing political project that must be performed through myriad everyday practices. Here, I have shown participatory governance not as an accomplishment, but as a contested, fragile, and evolving assemblage that takes constant work. Consequently, I have tried to render that political work visible.

Analysing Wyndland’s ecology of participation suggests that there is more scope for manoeuvre – by officials, politicians and citizens – than is often assumed. As Lowndes et al. (2006a: 559) argue, institutions are malleable: there is “a degree of path dependence but actors can shape and bend institutional forces in new directions”. These authors also show that institutional rules-in-use can be more determinant of meaningful participation than the socioeconomic status or social capital of a locality. In other words, local authorities that open rules-in-use to renegotiation through engagement processes can foster substantial participation despite scoring low on those other factors
(Lowndes et al., 2006a, 2006b; Baiocchi, 2005). Of course, that entails painstaking struggle to reshape rules-in-use as illustrated here, and the potential burnout of engagers and others is not to be underestimated. Equally, this also highlights how much the engagers can influence the ecology of local participatory democracy.

Studying the wanted/unwanted tension illustrated how local actors react to Community Planning by developing a multifaceted politics of adopting, adapting, abiding, avoiding or evading. An overall picture emerges from this account of the engagers’ world, featuring a crosscutting tension between tradition and change. New participatory practices seem to clash with established ways of working amongst public sector officials, politicians, and community representatives. Some see their traditional roles challenged by the new participatory gospel, backed by national frameworks, and practiced locally by the engagers. In this account, the engagers appear as political workers advancing a culture change project ripe with tensions, ambiguities and power struggles: a project embraced and despised by people across the spectrum of official and public spheres. In that sense, the engagers’ agency forces negotiation amongst the diverse understandings of local democracy and public service that coalesce in new participatory processes.

As Sullivan (2009: 65) argues, participatory governance policies “are themselves subversive acts, designed with the express purpose of unsettling the established relationships of politicians, the public and professionals in the pursuit of new ones”. Consequently, Community Planning can be seen as a disruptive intervention that problematises local policy worlds. An intervention where the engagers’ practices shape, and are shaped by, an evolving ecology of participation –which in turn forges the activist engager, or fosters more administrative approaches through puzzlement, disappointment or exhaustion.

Accordingly, this case study clearly illustrates the risk of burnout faced by deliberative practitioners working for public authorities. By the same token, it also suggests how that burnout can be to the detriment of local ecologies of participation if the engagers become more administrative and less ‘intrapreneurial’. Arguably, studies of deliberative democracy should more often consider the relevance of such agents in fostering participatory politics and deliberative engagement. In places like Wyndland, the prospects for a deliberative system can depend greatly on the political know-how, the engagement skills and the personal commitment of people like the engagers.

The paper also highlighted how electoral and partisan politics can often jeopardise the existence and impact of ambitious deliberative forums (i.e. the £2 million ACT process). Wyndland offers numerous examples of how participatory democracy
remains subservient to representative and bureaucratic institutions. While Scottish national politicians – from both Labour and SNP – have for over a decade developed Community Planning policy, their local counterparts seem uneasy about its local implications. Facing puzzles around the ‘culture change’ project, I often felt that some important conversations between MSPs and councillors seem to have never taken place. As a result, the frictions between representative and participatory democracy are often left for the engagers to negotiate.

In case studies of partnership and participation in England, Barnes et al. (2007: 184) note that “institutional, policy and cultural” contexts are essential for understanding participatory assemblages and deliberative projects. This leads them to be “relatively pessimistic about the potential of new initiatives to overcome entrenched institutional or political forms of power”. While this reading might also suit Wyndland, my experience with the engagers has dissuaded me from “totalizing narratives that foreclose the possibilities of political agency” (Newman, 2012: Loc 485).
References


