Non-governmental actors and the political dimension: navigating the tensions in new governance spaces

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Part 1: Developing a comparative conceptual framework

Global trends

The complexity of governing in an era of globalisation along with the widespread privatisation or sub-contracting of services in modern states, has led to a shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ (Rhodes, 1996, Stoker, 1998). As a result, there is also a global turn towards the ‘non-governmental’ sector both as a vehicle for the delivery of services and as a source of civic activity to counter a growing democratic deficit. While some see major opportunities in this, others argue that it represents a withdrawal of the state from its traditional responsibilities, as part of a neo-liberal global project of modernisation and privatisation of public services. They see the turn to governance as shifting the risks associated with delivery to non-state ‘partners’ or as cost-shifting and ‘responsibilisation’ according to a logic of ‘neo-liberal governmentality’ (Lemke, 2001).

What is certainly taking place is a realignment of relationships between the state, the market and civil society. This could be described – using Evers’ concept of the ‘third’ sector as tension field between state, market and community (Evers, 1995) - as a repositioning of relative powers between different actors as they pull and push in different directions. It can also be described as the displacement from formal to informal techniques of government (Lemke, 2001).

Whether or not the state is relinquishing some of its power, it is clear that these new processes of governance generate ‘new governance spaces’ where non-governmental actors can participate and interact with the state. These spaces emerge – and are constituted - differently around the globe, reflecting different histories of state-civil society relations, and differing social and political drivers:

- In Latin America for example, there has been a proliferation of legal frameworks for citizen and community participation in municipal planning, budgeting and provision of local services;
- In both England and Wales, there is an emphasis on partnership and civil renewal, user and non-governmental involvement in service delivery;
- In Bulgaria /Central & Eastern Europe, the focus is on building civil society to strengthen the process of democratisation, largely through the creation of NGOs, with support from international foundations.

But these spaces also have common features across the different countries as institutional and often territorial arenas where governance is played out.

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Research in the UK and elsewhere has suggested that, while many NGOs welcome the new opportunities that are emerging, these new governance spaces also pose a number of dilemmas. It has also suggested that NGOs are marginalised in these new spaces, despite the rhetoric. It thus highlights inherent tensions for non-governmental actors: between autonomy and incorporation (Craig et al., 2004), between confrontation and co-operation (Fung and Wright, 2001), between service delivery and advocacy roles, and between conflicting accountabilities and sources of legitimacy (Taylor and Warburton, 2003).

This study, therefore, seeks to explore further the ways in which non-governmental organisations perceive these governance spaces, how far these tensions and dilemmas are reflected in different national and regional contexts and how different NGOs in these different contexts navigate these tensions. While our focus is on organisations, however, we are also interested in the role played by individual non-governmental actors from those organisations in mediating relationships with the state in these spaces.

The non-governmental sector

The choice of the term ‘non-governmental actors’ derives from the terminology used in the ESRC programme, ‘Non Governmental Public Action’. It is deliberately a broad and inclusive term, which has been focused down for this study. In defining the ‘non-governmental sector’ the research has made use of the categories developed by Salamon and Anheier in the Johns Hopkins University study; it focuses on NGOs from the following ‘groups’ (Salamon & Anheier, 1997): ‘education (especially pre-school and primary, and ‘other education’); health (‘other health services’ especially public health), and ‘economic, social and community development’ (especially community development). It chose initially to focus on grassroots and/or developmental non-governmental organisations that are directly involved in addressing social and economic inequalities.

From the outset, the research team – drawn as it was from different country settings – found it difficult to establish a common vocabulary to talk about the non-governmental sector, because members’ conceptualisations were necessarily relative and defined within socio-political and cultural contexts. As Tarrow said of (traditional) social movements, they were not ‘the automatic outcome of modernisation but emerged from the long, tormented but ultimately interactive process of state formation and citizenship and from the diffusion of these forms of interaction over time and across territory’ (Tarrow, 1998, p 200). While we are not equating the non-governmental sector with social movements, there are useful parallels in that each emerges through processes of contestation and interaction with the state.

Salamon and Anheier (1997) argue that the non-profit sector is a “middle way” between state and market – an idea that may resonate with North American and Western European political discourse, but dopes not necessarily have the same relevance to the more oppositional dynamics of Latin American social movement organisations or the emerging sector in Central and Eastern Europe. For these reasons, the first phase of the research investigated the history of state-civil society relations...
in each country, the political culture and the values and beliefs attached to concepts of ‘non-governmental’ organisations and actors, in order to understand how they influenced the way these actors behave and are perceived locally. It is this which is the main focus of this paper.

**Governance spaces**

Governance spaces are defined for this research as arenas in which state and non-state actors come together to collaborate on some aspect of the policy process. They are often designed by state actors and reflect – amongst other things – shifts in local, national and/or international policy. As such, they can be understood as ‘invited’ spaces, an expression of structural change and the opening up of opportunity for participation, whether in response to popular demand, donor pressure or shifts in policy (Cornwall, 2004). In England, for example, there is currently a reconfiguration of governance around territory, with an emphasis on shifting power and responsibility from central to local government, in order to “give local authorities more opportunity to lead” (CLG, 2006, p 2). A key vehicle for this is the Local Strategic Partnership, which brings together private, public and third sector actors at local authority-wide level. Policy also aims to give more power to citizens and communities to have a bigger say in the services they receive and the places they live” (ibid., p 2). There has also over the years been a proliferation of thematic forums such as Police Consultative Forums, or Public and Patient Involvement Forums.

Governance spaces can be conceptualised as ‘multiple parallel spaces in which power is encountered and negotiated’ (Newman, 2005, p 4), where configurations of actors and distribution of power are constantly shifting and changing. In an “invited” governance space, this process is directed – and the limits of what is discussable within this arena, are set - by state actors. While there may be a great emphasis in the discourse in the UK and elsewhere on partnership, collaboration, representation and community engagement in governance, it is important to recognise that these spaces are formed by processes which can create new patterns of inclusion and exclusion. As Cornwall observes, new governance spaces which we may regard as innovatory participatory arenas ‘are often fashioned out of existing forms through a process of institutional bricolage, using whatever is at hand and re-inscribing existing relationships, hierarchies and rules of the game’ (Cornwall 2004, p 2).

However, new governance spaces can also be “popular”, i.e. arenas in which people come together at their own instigation to protest against government policies, produce their own services or for solidarity and mutual aid (Cornwall 200, p 2). Popular spaces may become institutionalised or may be transient, and critically, the boundaries between invited and popular spaces are mutable – “popular spaces” can become institutionalised, with statutory backing, and “invited spaces” may become sites for the articulation of dissent, as well as for collaboration and compromise’ (ibid. p 2). However, the top-down “invited” structures for collaborative governance do not always tap into the bottom-up “popular” initiatives from the NGO sector to create space to interact with the local state. This study is concerned with both kinds of spaces insofar as they include both non-governmental and governmental actors and, if they co-exist, the extent to which they intersect as well as the tensions between such top-down and bottom-up participatory processes.
The theories and hypotheses to be tested

Our intention therefore is to explore the ways in which organisations in these different contexts strive to achieve agency, autonomy, voice and legitimacy vis-à-vis the state in the new governance spaces available to them.

There are a range of scholarly disciplines and bodies of literature which could inform our research, from political science to organisational theory and psychosocial work. We took three in the first stage to develop our conceptual framework and these have rooted us in a political science perspective; governance theory, social movement theory and governmentality theory.

Governance theory explains the de-centring of state power and the multiplication of governance spaces in modern politics (Rhodes, 1997, Newman et al, 2004). It is a predominantly Western European account of political change to explain the slimming down of the state and the increased involvement of non-state actors in policy processes and especially in service delivery. It therefore needs to be tested against the realities of non-Western countries, where this de-centring will be taking place to a greater or lesser degree. That said, governance theory offers us a way of understanding how and why traditional governmental power is now dispersed beyond and within the state. ‘This dispersal of state power opens up new ways in which citizens can engage in the politics of localities and regions and participate in ‘project politics’ on specific issues’ (Newman, 2005, p 4). Some accounts of governance describe it as ‘an interactive process which involves various forms of partnership, whereby government gives up some of its authority to control and decide’ (Stoker, 1997, p 22). Other governance commentators view the decentring and withdrawing of government as deceptive, and argue that a “metagovernance” endures which maintains state control at arms’ length (Jessop, 2003). Certainly, the motives that drive governmental actors to open up new spaces for participation in political processes are various: a need to work with complexity (especially in local government), to cut costs, to bring new forms of knowledge, resources and expertise to bear, a political commitment to widening participation – these or a combination of these all inform the widespread acceptance of the governance paradigm.

While the motives behind government decisions to make institutional changes are important, Newman has argued that governance is – and the study suggests this is not specific to Western Europe – ‘a contradictory and contested dynamic process which remakes the boundaries of the public sphere’ and so ‘produces new governable subjects and potentially opens up new sites of agency’ (Newman, 2005, p 2). This analysis points to governmentality theory which, in the Foucauldian tradition, argues that state power is produced through a range of sites and alliances at a distance from the state, and that these forms can sustain the state more effectively than its own institutions (Foucault, 1980, Rose and Miller, 1992). Swyngedouw (2005), for example, draws our attention to the ways in which governing beyond the state privileges certain actors, through entitlement and status, the mobilisation of discourse alliances which ignore or silence alternatives and new forms of governance established as a regulatory framework for managing a beyond-the-state policy.
Newman’s analysis of governance as changing power relations is also resonant of social movement theory, a third conceptual port of call. Social movement theory holds that political opportunities emerge as the state undergoes (governance) shifts: ‘when institutional access opens, rifts appear within elites, allies become available, and state capacity for repression declines, challengers find opportunities to advance their claims’ (Tarrow, 1998, p 71). The starting point for the study’s conceptual framework is to conceptualise the new governance spaces as political opportunities for non-governmental actors. Social movement theory also highlights the agency of collective actors. Jasper (2005), for example, sets out an approach that attempts to explain the strategic choices made by non-governmental actors. Further, there is a more recent field in social movement studies which has drawn on cultural and cognitive theories to understand the choices social movement actors make, how they construct meaning and how these meanings are negotiated (Caniglia and Carmin, 2005). As Della Porta and Diani observe, ‘looking at structural opportunities without considering the cognitive processes which intervene between structure and action can be very misleading’ (1999, p 223).

Our reading of these theories in the light of the research has led us to develop four hypotheses. The first is that new governance spaces represent political opportunities, since they open up institutional access and remake the boundaries of the public sphere. These new governance spaces will therefore offer NGOs opportunities to access, following Tarrow:

a. institutional provisions for participation
b. new external resources for people who lack internal ones
c. new alliances
d. realignments that can bring new groups to power

As mentioned above, the areas of work or sectors that the study focuses on are public health, education and community development. The governance spaces that correspond to these policy areas will vary as the processes and the involved actors will vary. The second hypothesis is thus that the tensions that NGOs identify and the ways in which they can be navigated will vary not only according to country but also according to policy area and type of governance space. Lavalle et al. (2005), for instance, find in Brazil that which non-governmental actors participate in local governance spaces does indeed depend on the policy area and the institutional design of the participatory space (p960).

The research is predicated on the assumption that non-governmental actors experience a number of tensions when they enter governance spaces, especially “invited spaces”. These could be understood as strategic dilemmas, upon which cultural, psychological and emotional as well as structural factors have influence (Jasper, 2005, p 11). This resonates with Newman’s analysis of governance as a process whereby the boundaries of the public sphere are renegotiated and new actors and new possibilities for agency emerge. In this process, non-governmental actors in governance spaces will need to navigate the tensions between conflicting incentives and aims, modes of action and between conflicting accountabilities and sources of legitimacy. Should an NGO’s priority be participation in the governance space even if its agenda is not consonant with the priorities of the organisation’s membership? If the organisation relies on state or international donor funding, does this lead to their cooption? There
are a number of factors which are likely to affect their ability to navigate these tensions. In Latin America, for example, Schönwälder argues that to avoid cooption in new spaces for participation in local governance, civil organisations need to make strategic alliances with each other (1997; see also, Craig et al, 2004). Similarly, Lavalle et al (2005) find in Brazil that the participation of non-governmental actors in local governance spaces is also determined by the organisation’s political alliances and networks. Other factors may be their structure, their funding dependencies and the history of relationships with the state.

The third hypothesis is thus that the capacity of NGOs to navigate these tensions will vary, in relation to:

- their structure (membership or public service oriented)
- their involvement in state-funded delivery and/or international agencies
- their connectedness with other wider social movements and local networks
- the history of state / NGO relationships

The potential for non-governmental organisations to have agency in new governance spaces depends not only in relationships with their peers, but also on the opportunity for alliances across sector boundaries and the interplay between formal mechanisms and informal networks. This suggests a fourth hypothesis which is that the capacity of NGOs to navigate tensions in new governance spaces will also depend on the extent to which formal spaces are embedded in informal relationships between state and non-state actors.

Finally, the processes that take place in these new governance spaces, and the outcomes of non-governmental participation within them, will not only depend on the convergence of environmental circumstances, but on the perceptions and actions – or non-actions – of individual non-governmental actors. Newman et al (2004) found in their study of public participation in collaborative governance in the UK, that ‘the meanings that actors ascribe to participation influence both the processes and outcomes of citizen engagement’ (p219). Although the focus in the study is on organisations, therefore, it also explores how their strategies and perceptions are mediated by the individuals who represent them in governance spaces. It looks, therefore, at the personal, political and professional experiences of individual non-governmental actors and how they have encountered and negotiated with state actors in other circumstances. This introduces a psychosocial dimension which is also concerned with values and networks, how leadership is enacted by individuals, and how individuals feel empowered or otherwise to act on perceived opportunities.

The diagram below maps the relationships and influences that connect the individual (non-governmental actor), the organisation, and the governance space.
Diagram 1: Relationships between the individual, organisation and governance space

- **INDIVIDUAL**
  - Networks
  - Experience
  - Values

- **ORGANISATION**
  - History
  - Accountability
  - Funding
  - Organisational structure & culture

- **GOVERNANCE SPACE**
  - Tensions, alliances
  - Experience and values of other actors
  - Political culture & history of state-CS relations
  - International trends
  - Institutional rules of the game
Part 2: Preliminary comparisons

This section considers the findings of the first stage of our empirical research which entailed a conceptual and context mapping exercise across the four countries. Many of the observations made in this section come from a workshop held towards the end of Phase 1 of the research process, which involved the research team members from the different countries. The mapping exercise aimed to explore how concepts of governance, autonomy, voice and legitimacy are understood in the different national contexts and establish what is known about the state of development of the third sector and its relationships with the state. It mapped governance spaces in our selected policy areas and began to map the actors in these spaces. The following paragraphs discuss the extent to which the conceptual framework explains the initial findings.

Governance spaces

In Wales and England there is a proliferation of partnership working and a very pronounced shift towards involving the non-governmental sector in some areas of service delivery, particularly health and community development. There are quite sophisticated national and local policies and structures for non-governmental participation in governance. In England, there is a National Community Forum in England, which is made up of grass-roots activists recruited from neighbourhood renewal areas across the country in areas that are subject to neighbourhood renewal. At municipal level, there are local strategic partnerships in England and Wales (where they are called community strategic partnerships). Collaborative working is a core value of the Welsh Assembly Government, and this value is expressed through the national partnership councils (governance spaces) with the voluntary sector, local government, and business – representatives of the non-governmental sector in Wales meet regularly with Ministers from the Welsh Assembly Government through the Voluntary Sector Partnership Scheme. Wales’ national governance structures are well regarded and considered to be effective by state and non-state actors (although to varying degrees in different policy areas).

In England, there is a range of decentralisation programmes to the sub-local level (including in Birmingham, our English case study area). In Birmingham, however, the district partnerships cover an area the size of a small town. At neighbourhood level, there are neighbourhood forums, which offer an opportunity for local organisations and individuals to come together with local councillors and service providers, but they are ad hoc and their powers are limited. Governance at the sub-local level in Wales is less well developed and spaces are not considered to be effective. There are a number of health and community development/regeneration governance spaces at local level in both England and Wales, but the health spaces are most likely to operate at city or district-wide level, while participation in education (through parent governors) is most likely to take place at individual school level. In both countries, there are community regeneration partnerships that have been set up with European or national government funding to target pockets of deprivation. In Wales, these partnerships have been created with the ‘three thirds’ principle of equal representation from government, business and the non-governmental sector.
In Bulgaria, if the state is giving up any of its powers, this is a slow process, and as yet the state is not actively promoting the development of the non-governmental sector as an alternative provider of public services. The mapping exercise in Bulgaria has identified a few areas in which governance spaces are opening up, mainly in response to external, e.g. EU pressure. There is a new municipal health care commission, which invites the participation of the NG sector, and there are a number of specific commissions at municipal level for dealing with drug addiction and HIV/Aids. A possible explanation for this may be that complex issues such as public health and specialised fields such as drug abuse and HIV cannot be dealt with by the state alone, which motivates them to open up to the NG sector. Alternatively, it might be argued that these are new issues for the post-Communist country, and the state has not yet accumulated expertise on how to deal with them. The NG sector can tap into international and specialised knowledge more readily than the state, and also access international funding.

In Nicaragua, there are two key invited spaces for participation in governance at the municipal level. These came about as a result of recent legislation around citizen participation, in response to a process which was set in motion through the coordinated lobbying of the NG sector. These spaces are; the Municipal Development Committee, which is a multi-sectoral committee for policy planning and development, and the Open Forum (‘cabildo’) held twice a year for public participation in the development of the municipal budget, and reporting on its spending. However we find that in Managua, our case study site and the capital, the Committee has not been set up, despite the legal requirement to do so. This has prompted NG actors to create an alternative space. An alliance of NGOs in the south of the city has established a semi-formal linkage with the local state whereby representatives from this alliance meet with LG officials on a 2-weekly basis.

There are few governance spaces that operate at neighbourhood level – i.e. below the level of the municipal government in Bulgaria or Nicaragua. In Bulgaria and Nicaragua, the only spaces that we have identified as operating at a smaller scale than that of the whole local authority, are the school boards. These however – at least in the Bulgarian case – are problematic as it is not clear if they operate as NGOs or as governance spaces, or both, as we discuss further below.

The following table summarises the governance spaces so far identified by the first phase of our research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Nicaragua</th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Wales</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General or cross-cutting Sectoral</td>
<td>Municipal Development Committee; Open Forum (Alliance of Civil Organisations)*</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Community Strategy Partnership;</td>
<td>Local Strategic Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Intersectoral Health Committee; reproductive health; HIV-Aids; Children and Healthcare Commission; Council for the Integration of Handicapped People;</td>
<td>Healthcare Commission; Council for the Integration of Handicapped People;</td>
<td>Community Health Council*†; Local Health Board; Local Health Alliance;</td>
<td>Primary Care Trust National Health Service Trust Patient &amp; Public Involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In practice, it seems that participation in these spaces is highly formalised and often limited to a selected handful of umbrella or specialised professional NGOs - the non-governmental ‘aristocracy’. In Wales, umbrella organisations dominate the strategic partnerships at national level and in our local case study. This is also the case in Birmingham – our case study area in England. Community-based organisations are very unlikely to be invited into these strategic governance spaces. We return to this point later in the paper. There is a much greater likelihood that community-based organisations will be represented in sub-local spaces, but also that individual members of the community attend.

The study’s third hypothesis argues that the differences in how NGO actors deal with the tensions they encounter in governance spaces could be explained by:

a) their structure (hierarchical, participatory, member-led etc.)

b) their involvement in state or donor-funded delivery

c) their connectedness with wider networks/movements

d) the history of state/NGO sector relationships

A preliminary examination of NGO involvement in governance spaces in the four countries and selected cities confirms the explanatory value of the four dimensions of this hypothesis, but with variation of emphasis. Connectedness with wider networks/movements (c) seems to be most significant in Nicaragua and accounts for the emergence of a popular governance space. It is significant in Bulgaria that there is a lack of connectedness between what the study team there call ‘aristocrat’ NGOs and the grassroots. In England, Bulgaria and Nicaragua, the scoping interviews at local level suggest that involvement in state or donor-funded delivery (b) has some inhibiting impact on NGO behaviour, leading to some degree of compliance. This
will be tested further in the locality case studies. In Nicaragua however, international funding provides resources for NGOs without them having to align themselves to a political party.

The most significant variable appears to be (d), the history of state/NG sector relations. In England and Wales there is a long tradition of state-NGO relationships in both case study areas. In Birmingham, the NGO ‘aristocracy’ appears to have a relatively non-critical relationship with local government – in interviews so far, they suggest that they experience no tensions in the governance spaces that they engage in. There is some evidence that this is particularly true of older and more established NGOs and it may be that this is part of a life cycle in which, as NGOs grow and have more influence, they become part of the ‘establishment’, with cross-over between the sectors and formal relationships embedded in informal networks. In Wales, the linkages between state and NG actors are also strong; people move between sectors and local level community partnerships – even those which have established themselves as independent entities - are still serviced by local authority staff, despite a discourse of independence from the state. In Nicaragua, the relationship is highly politicised; access to the governance space is influenced by party political alignment. In Bulgaria, there is cooption or ‘governmentalisation’ of the NGO sector, as government tries to attract the NGO sector and to control it through financial support it provides.

Refining (or complicating) concepts

How do the findings so far relate to the theoretical frameworks we suggested at the outset?

The study’s understanding of governance space is rooted in governance theory, which describes the phenomenon of the de-centring or dispersal of state power and the opening up of spaces for participation in policy processes. This is evidenced to a very varied degree across the four sites, as described above. Social movement theory provided the first hypothesis, that new governance spaces represent political opportunities, since they open up institutional access and remake the boundaries of the public sphere. The study finds that there are, albeit very unevenly, new governance spaces in all four sites, which offer NGOs opportunities to access institutional provisions for participation (for example in Nicaragua, the new Law of Citizen Participation, and in Wales, the Voluntary Sector Partnership); new external resources for people who lack internal ones (community regeneration partnerships in Wales and England); and new alliances (networks that are developing around specific policy areas in all four countries). There is, however, a more dynamic relationship between the space and the NGO that is not captured in this hypothesis. In Nicaragua, the research finds that failure to set up the statutory governance space has led to NGO actors creating their own, into which local government officers now have semi-formal linkages through their fortnightly meetings with representatives from the alliance. In Wales, there are find hybrid spaces, where state-led partnerships have constituted themselves as independent community development trusts, albeit with staff still employed by the state and with a mix of board members from across the public and NG sector and still serviced by LA staff. Members of these organisations tend to see themselves as independent non-governmental organisations rather than the ‘invited’
spaces which they had originally been. The school board in Bulgaria is another example of such a hybrid.

While it is too early in the research process to have empirical findings on the strategies used by non-governmental actors in these spaces [hypotheses 2, 3 and 4] or to reflect on the explanatory power of governmentality theory in this research, the initial findings suggest some emerging themes for analysis and new areas for conceptual work.

The study’s fourth hypothesis argued that the capacity of NGOs to navigate tensions in new governance spaces would partly depend on the extent to which formal spaces were embedded in informal relationships between state and non-state actors. Preliminary findings suggest emerging themes of trust, interpersonal relationships, and the value of less formal linkages where the state has a dialogue with the sector:

- In Bulgaria, levels of trust in government and in the NGO sector are low. Some governance spaces are only a few months old and there is fear and uncertainty about what is at stake in these spaces, and also fear of revealing insufficient knowledge.
- Formal linkages can bring the right people together, but often the dialogue happens outside the formal governance space where there is more flexibility, the option for bilateral discussions and informal relationships. Access to this dialogue, however, is often confined to community aristocrats.

Where a legal requirement to create a formal governance space is not followed through, NG actors may develop alternative linkages in order to approach state actors. This can happen when the NG and state actors know and trust each other enough to agree to regular meetings. This lobbying can turn into a popular governance space (as in the case of Managua). This suggests that the study needs to explore the dynamics of governance and the way in which spaces develop. However, initial findings suggest that, even where formal spaces are being created, access to informal spaces leads some community aristocrats to bypass the emerging systems which leads to their understanding of the community’s interests being predominant.

**Questions and emergent themes**

*Is governance really happening?*

The definitions of NGO and governance space - and the boundaries between them - are not as clear-cut as the study’s theoretical framework suggested. The study has been working with an ideal type of ‘governance space’ which in reality is rarely evident. This ideal type implies that decisions are devolved through the tiers of government and that there is deliberation and collaboration between participants, as well as a commonly held sense that by working together a better ‘product’ can be achieved. In all cases this is only partially true. In England and Wales, for example, despite a strong and pervasive political culture of collaborative working local - partnerships are often set up because of external pressure from central government or the European Union, which makes collaboration a condition for funding. This external pressure also applies in Bulgaria and Nicaragua, although there the pressure may also come from foreign donors. However, a collaborative approach in Nicaragua is made more difficult by a political context and culture which takes a zero-sum approach to
power. Further, enduring clientelist practices and the partisan nature of service delivery is a strong disincentive to local councils to invite NGOs that are allied with the opposition to participate in governance. Governance spaces are therefore more elusive in Nicaragua than our conceptual framework allowed for – these spaces may exist by law, but in practice they are often not accessible and so NGOs must take up a lobbying rather than collaborative role.

**Blurring of boundaries**

We have also found a number of cases where it is difficult to draw clear boundaries between the individual, the NGO and the governance space. In Wales, we have already mentioned the ‘hybrid’ community development trusts. Here, some 130 community development partnerships have been set up in deprived neighbourhoods with National Assembly for Wales funding. While most of these partnerships were initiated by the state between state, NG sector and sometimes the private sector, and serviced by local state officials, a number of these have now evolved into community development trusts, incorporating as independent non-profit community organisations. At the same time, they retain their initial partnership characteristics and have state and non-state actors on their boards. In these spaces/organisations, the chief executive (often still employed by the local state) can represent both the local state and the community, and is accountable both to the board of what is now a community organisation and also to the local authority, which pays his/her salary. In our discussions it has been suggested that ‘the space and the organisation are like two sides of the same coin’ (Research team workshop, June 2006). Are these hybrids a governance space that has been ‘captured’ by the NG sector, a stage in a cycle of governance development which will be observed more widely or a myth of independence?

Another space that is difficult to define, in all country contexts, is the school board, in the policy area of education. In Bulgaria, these can be NGOs, and in Nicaragua they are governance spaces. In England and Wales they are governance spaces but involve parents as individuals and not as NGOs. It is not yet clear, though, how far these different approaches affect the perspective taken by parents on the board. Do they enter the space as an individual or as an organisation? If they do enter as an individual, are they expected to ‘symbolise’ a position or perspective, for example, that of all parents? If they enter as an organisation, do the actors in the space still relate to each other as individuals with particular histories and capacities? What gives them legitimacy in either of these situations?

**Individuals or organisations**

A further issue which is more complex than tidy models of governance suggests is the ambiguity of the role of individuals in these spaces, and this has led us, while still focussing on the organisation, to pay more attention then in the original study design to the role of individual in Diagram One. Are individuals in these spaces there as individuals or as representatives of NGOs and how is that relationship mediated? We have chosen to focus on the organisation, but will this deliver the insights we are looking for? Organisations are represented by individuals who often wear several organisational hats. Do others in the organisation we are studying relate at all to the governance space? How are individuals mandated and how do they and others perceive this, especially when it comes to handling the tensions experienced in those spaces. And where do the state actors in the Welsh community development trusts
and other hybrid spaces fit in, juggling roles and accountabilities between the sectors? Whatever the answer, our findings so far suggest that the relationship between individual-organisation-space we represented earlier in Diagram 1 is more complex, dynamic, blurred and overlapping than we had anticipated.

**Collaboration and exclusion**

In all sites, it is difficult to find community organisations participating directly in governance spaces. This may reflect the particular nature of the case study sites we have chosen, especially in the UK where the rhetoric at least suggests that community based organisations are themselves engaged in governance spaces rather than being represented by more mainstream NGO actors. But while this may be the case, the likelihood is that, in many localities, the situation is still as described earlier in the paper, i.e. that the relationship between the state and the sector is mediated by the larger, professionalised NGO, or the ‘non-governmental aristocracy’. In the strategic governance spaces of Wales and England, where the allocation of funds and the direction of policy are debated, it is often only a handful of umbrella NGOs or the larger specialist NGOs that are invited (or elected) to participate. The reason for this is commonly given to be that the smaller community-based organisations lack the capacity to attend a lot of partnership meetings. Another frequently voiced explanation is the ‘competence gap’; that smaller less experienced organisations don’t have the skills or the vocabulary to act appropriately in these settings – that they are not ‘strategic’ enough (ODPM, 2005). At the same time a frequent complaint from statutory partners on LSPs and on other partnerships in England is that community representatives tend to be paid workers or the ‘usual suspects’. These explanations and criticisms may mask the danger that the NGO elite can be seduced into a co-optive relationship with the state, given to believe that they are in a privileged position to have influence but in fact tying their own hands in the process. This exclusion is more acute in Bulgaria, where the spaces are fewer. However, a less critical stance, in the UK at least, may also suggest a genuine blurring of boundaries and this is something the study will explore further.

Either way, initial findings suggest that the likelihood that excluded voices will be heard is remote. Thus in Bulgaria, initial impressions are that, although, in response to EU pressure Roma communities are being invited into dialogue with the state, this is mediated – again – by organisations FOR rather than OF Roma. In the UK, while the high profile given to diversity issues creates spaces for excluded communities to engage in dialogue with the state, previous research has found that many still feel marginalised. But reflecting this diversity without simply relating to community ‘aristocrats’ or some excluded communities at the expense of others is problematic, especially in a situation where many different communities are competing for funds and political attention.

**Conclusions - implications for the conceptual framework**

Governance theory tends to be normative. Governmentality theory is more nuanced and highlights the pressures and opportunities in these spaces but not how to address them. This study has gone to the social movement literature to help to develop understanding of the political opportunities and the strategies and tactics that can create ‘active subjects’. This literature provides insights into the dynamics of the relationship with the state: how the NGO sector emerges, organises and takes action
in opposition to, in collaboration with, in collusion with the state. However, these bodies of theory are still not sufficient to explain some of the issues that are emerging, and the study will also introduce organisational and psychosocial theory where relevant to look at the processes and dynamics within individual NGOs.

In order to understand how and why organisations behave in these spaces, it is necessary to understand the spaces themselves, both as (mainly) state-provided participatory structures (with what rules, norms, how are these shared and understood, etc.) and also as psychological terrains where NGO and governmental actors can dialogue. The first aspect may be best approached with a framework such as the institutional analysis and development framework of Elinor Ostrom (Ostrom et al, 1994). The second aspect can be investigated using psycho-social and organisational theories. Both are needed to better understand the processes – both individual and social – that actors experience when they move into the symbolic collaborative arena of a governance space. What are the factors that enable them to set aside their individual and organisational identities to a sufficient degree that they can actually deliberate - i.e. how can people hear and understand issues from other actors’ perspectives, and discuss these with a view to finding an outcome that is satisfactory to all? The ideal type of governance space that is implied in the policy rhetoric requires such a capacity and the study aims to identify factors that enable or inhibit this.
Bibliography


