'New Governance Spaces': what generates a participatory disposition in different contexts?

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Abstract: This paper examines developments in governance and non-governmental public action in three diverse contexts. It is based on comparative international research that examined the role of non-governmental actors involved in partnership working with state actors in the UK, Bulgaria and Nicaragua. The paper draws on Crossley's (2003) development of Bourdieu's (1977) 'theory of practice' to examine the contextual factors that influence the participation of non-governmental actors in 'new governance spaces'. It highlights three very different responses to the 'opportunities' governance offers, which illustrate how historical processes mould civil society relation's *vis-à-vi*s the state in highly significant ways. Although governance presents many obstacles to change, the paper concludes that the new forms of participation that are appearing in these spaces may be the foundations from which more significant change emerges. ***Key words***: civil society; capital; habitus; non-governmental; participation

Introduction

In the UK and parts of Western Europe the move from government to governance has been well documented (Stoker 1998; Rhodes 1996, 1998). This shift has seen governments open up to involve non-governmental actors in

different stages of the policy process, with government's role seen increasingly as one of coordination rather than provision. The interest in non-governmental action that has accompanied this move has now spread around the globe with different expressions in different contexts, often at the insistence of international financial institutions. In the global 'North' governance is understood as a response to the complexity of problems that cannot be solved by government alone, while in older and newer democracies across the North and South there is a concern to strengthen the democratic deficit. As a result of these developments, governments have been motivated to create 'new governance spaces' to which a range of non-governmental actors are invited. As Cornwall and Coelho (2007) state:

> Reforms in governance have generated a profusion of new spaces for citizen engagement. In some settings, older institutions with legacies in colonial rule have been remodelled to suit contemporary governance agendas; in others, constitutional and governance reforms have given rise to entirely new structures [...] at the interface between the state and society (Cornwall and Coelho 2007: 1).

While this shift represents new opportunities, the premise that these new spaces for participation offer a new vision of the public domain (Fung & Wright 2003) is contested (Craig et al 2004). The non-governmental response to these opportunities has also been varied. Why is this? Why is participation more evident in some places than others? And what are the contextual factors that compel individuals to participate in new governance spaces?

This paper draws on research into the experience of non-governmental actors (NGAs) engaged in new governance spaces in three countries – Bulgaria, Nicaragua and the UK (only England and Wales);[I] we use the term NGAs following the ESRCs Non-Governmental Public Action programme, to refer to non-state organisational actors whose activism is directly concerned with influencing and/or contributing to the public good rather than for motives of economic profit.[II] The three countries illustrate contrasting historical state-civil society relationships and patterns of welfare provision. At the time of the study, all were in transition and each had been undergoing a period of neo-liberal reform. In addition, Bulgaria was emerging from state socialism and centralized bureaucratic control, Nicaragua from a dictatorship and revolutionary upheaval.

The research set out to explore how governance had developed and how it was understood in different parts of the globe. The first hypothesis of the research, that under certain conditions new governance spaces provide political opportunities, is based on one of Sidney Tarrow's (1998) insights from social movement theory, which states that political opportunities emerge as the state undergoes (governance) shifts. The second hypothesis is that the capacity of organisations to participate effectively in these opportunities will vary according to the context, the nature of the organisation, and the linkages they have with other actors. Initially the research set out to investigate the potential for non-governmental actors to navigate the difficulties of governance and become 'active subjects' in Foucault's (1979) terms (Morison 2000). Governmentality theory appeared to offer valuable insights into the challenges of governance and the potential for resistance and influence (Taylor 2007), yet as we have argued elsewhere (Howard and Lever 2008; Taylor and Lever 2008; Taylor, Howard and Lever 2010), it does not significantly help to explain the factors that shape agency or the capacity to be 'active subjects' in different contexts.

In this article we turn to the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and his 'theory of practice' to address this concern, particularly as developed by Nick Crossley (2003). Like Foucault, Bourdieu discusses the way in which power and knowledge are conveyed through discourse, but his discussion of the interaction between habitus, field and various forms of capital provides additional insights into the ways in which discourse structures practice. Crossley (2003) develops these ideas in relation to social movement activism and what he describes as a radical habitus of contention, but our research suggests this kind of analysis can also help us to understand in what ways activists are responding to the opportunities governance offers. We believe Crossley's insights can be used to describe the participatory disposition or habitus that an individual develops, and the factors that motivate an individual to participate in the opportunities governance offers. In the following sections we briefly examine Bourdieu's theory of practice and Crossley's subsequent critique, before turning to our case studies of new governance spaces in Bulgaria, Nicaragua, and England and Wales in the UK.

Bourdieu and habitus

Following a long tradition of radical thinkers who have struggled with the theory and practice of agency, Bourdieu discusses how individual biographies are linked to broader collective histories. To highlight the expectations of action embodied in these biographies he uses the term *habitus* to define the constraints and opportunities imposed by particular social contexts. For Bourdieu, agents operate in a series of markets or *fields* (social, political, cultural) that function in a similar way to the economic market. Each field has its own dominant institutions, operating logics, means of production, and profit and loss accounts determined by the rules specific to it. Agents possess varying amounts of different kinds of capital – *economic, social* (relationships) and *cultural* – depending on their background (education, wealth and other attributes) and these will have greater or lesser value in the various fields in which they operate (Aiken and Holden 2008). Bourdieu also added a fourth type of capital – *symbolic* capital – which is consecrated by those agents and institutions which already have power within a given field and thus gives them a greater likelihood of being able to define the terms of participation in a given context.

Bourdieu illustrates these processes in *Distinction* (1984) where he shows how aesthetic, political and lifestyle differences allow some groups to *symbolically* define their own habitus as superior to that of others, and how this in turn facilitates different opportunities. In *The State Nobility* Bourdieu (1996) shows similarly how the possession of *symbolic* and *cultural* forms of capital (based on status and prestige) leads to education in an elite establishment and to a career in prominent public and private sector institutions. Participation in the public sphere is thus underpinned by *habitus* in a number of ways, and Bourdieu claims that the educated middle classes are more likely to engage in the public sphere than the working classes because they are better resourced. This is an obvious point, but what are its implications when we look at the participation of disadvantaged communities in partnerships for neighbourhood renewal in the UK, or the participation of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in governance in Nicaragua? There are strong traditions of working class contention on which participants can draw on in both contexts. We come back to this point below.

Crossley's critique: why do individuals participate?

Whilst agreeing with the general thrust of Bourdieu's argument, Crossley (2003) has concerns over Bourdieu's (1990) assumption that *habitus* is in some way suspended during periods of crisis (Bourdieu's primary example is the protest movement spawned from rebellion in May 1968). While protest is undeniably linked to moments of crisis, Crossley argues that crisis is also an amplification of features of protest that are permanent within a given society. He is critical of what he considers Bourdieu's 'overly consensual picture of the social order', arguing in particular that Bourdieu's work overlooked the durable impetus to critique in contemporary society (Crossley 2003: 45); he sees this as exemplified in social movements, but we believe his ideas can be applied to the way in which non-governmental actors operate more generally, drawing on available resources and networks to further their goals. Considering the work of prominent social movement theorists, Crossley (2003: 49) argues that 'Bourdieu generally fails to consider the wider preconditions of protest and movement formation' and that he thus falls 'foul of studies which have persuasively argued for the importance of such facts as political opportunities'. Discussing the ways in which 1960s radicals remained significantly more politically active throughout life than many of their contemporaries, he draws attention to the ways in which movement participation creates a disposition towards further political activity as and when opportunities arise; he refers to this as the 'radical habitus'.

In discussing the 'radical habitus' Crossley (2003) highlights a number of reasons for theorizing social movement activism in terms of Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Primarily he argues that involvement in protest creates a habitus that nurtures activism and movement activity, illustrating how this is reinforced by *symbolic* and *cultural* forms of capital (the badge, the T-shirt, the songs etc) and reflexive forms of practice in the wider social movement field – the field of contention as he calls it. This includes the support networks, social events and 'pedagogic agents' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1996) through which knowledge, commitment and reflexivity reproduce radical culture across historical time.

Crossley (2003) also discusses the interplay between the field of contention and other fields in which activists operate – where of course they are confronted by different sets of rules. This requires a multi-dimensional model of activism, moving from specific movement industries to the broader movement sector and the interpenetration of these fields with the economic, political and media fields,

and to specific fields of contention (e.g. the mental health field). He suggests further that it makes sense to theorize 'activism' in terms of 'durable dispositions' because many individuals engaged in movement activity will have an acquired 'disposition' towards practice through their *participation* in that practice over an extended period of time – which is perhaps sufficient, Crossley argues, to merit a reference to Bourdieu's concept of habitus. The central point of Crossley's argument is that activism – or in our case participation – emerges through practice, which engenders further practice through the acquisition of a reflexive disposition.

Crossley (2003) identifies four aspects of what we are henceforth calling a participatory *habitus* or disposition, to which, following Hoggett et al (2006), we add a fifth attribute:

1. A disposition to criticise elites
2. Political know how
3. An ethos that encourages participation
4. A feel for protest and organising
5. A strong emotional commitment to participation

We believe these attributes can be used to *describe* an activist, the participatory disposition that individual activists develop, and the factors that motivate individuals to participate in new governance spaces. Building on this, we examine the contexts in which the participants interviewed in our research operate. We examine the different political cultures in Bulgaria, Nicaragua and the UK and the differentiated responses to the political opportunities new governance spaces offer NGAs.

Methodology and methods

To identify comparative case studies, we began with the UK and looked for countries with different historical legacies of participatory processes. Initially two regions were selected – Latin America and Central Eastern Europe. Bulgaria and Nicaragua emerged as the final case study countries because they clearly illustrated contrasting state-civil society relationships and patterns of welfare provision to the UK. In Nicaragua and Bulgaria the capital cities were selected (Sofia and Managua), but in England and Wales the

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second cities (Swansea and Birmingham) were chosen, primarily because it was thought that London, as a global city, would reduce the comparative potential of the study overall.

The research was carried out between 2005-08; it was based on 20 national and local stakeholder interviews, one case study and 2-3 focus groups in each country. In each site, six organisations engaged in grass-roots work were selected from the fields of community development, primary health care and education. Within each organisation, at least two semi-structured interviews were conducted with up to six people. Some actors were community activists, while others held salaried professional posts, depending on the nature and scale of their organisation's activity. All participated in governance spaces at the neighbourhood or municipal level. Each national team of researches[III] developed country profiles and case study reports, which were analysed in comparative perspective during national inquiry groups, international team meetings, and at an international video-conference. Data was stored and coded using NVivo, and the coded data was used to develop country case studies and cross-national comparative analysis.

Before moving on we should point out that we are not claiming that any generalisable insights emerge from these case studies, more that they illustrate three very different historical contexts that condition participation in new governance in very particular ways. We would also like to emphasise that we base our analysis of the participatory disposition on evidence of participation in government-sponsored or *invited* governance spaces, our aim being to understand why there are differences in how such opportunities are perceived and responded to by NGAs in each context. We now turn to the first case study, to England and Wales, where we find an increasingly *institutionalised habitus* or *participatory disposition.*

Political culture in England and Wales

England is a country with a highly centralised state, although there is a current policy focus on devolution and decentralisation. There is a three party-system, focussed on the centre ground, with an increasingly mixed economy of welfare provision co-ordinated by the state, within which non-governmental organisations have played an increasingly central role. The relationship between

the state and a long-standing and well-developed 'third sector'[IV] assumed a higher profile during the New Labour period. Although it gained momentum under previous Conservative administrations during the 1980s, non-governmental activity was institutionalised by New Labour in a comprehensive policy covering constitutional forms, new investment streams, and a Compact of principles governing the state's relationship with the sector (Home Office 1998; HM Treasury 2002; 2007). Although the policy emphasis has changed with the arrival of the Coalition Government in 2010, the sector is still seen as an alternative channel for delivering welfare services in England through partnership working and community engagement.

Wales has been a devolved administration within the UK since 1998. This has also facilitated new political opportunities in line with the need to build up a distinctive set of policies appropriate for the size and culture of Wales. Because of the country's small size, relationships between national and local government, as between the state and the non-governmental sector, are often much closer than they are in England; this is partly because Wales is small enough to foster good working relationships, and partly because of a shared cultural history based on mining, chapel, choir and rugby club (Clark et al 2002). Nevertheless, in the wake of the Beecham Report (2006), there has been an increasing emphasis on service delivery which, much as in England, appears to signal the advent of a managerial approach to governance on the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) terms (Lever and Howard 2007).

The non-governmental sector

Both England and Wales have a flourishing non-governmental sector, based in long traditions of philanthropy and mutualism. Religion has also played a central role, particularly in education and the relief of poverty. The non-conformist ethic has also been strong both in the philanthropic tradition, with major charitable foundations set up by the Quakers, and in the mutual tradition, where Methodism exerted a strong influence on the mutuals, and eventually the Labour Party. Increasing dissatisfaction with the welfare state in the 1960s and 1970s led to the growth of advocacy organisations and community movements and a demand for a greater role in welfare. While the marketisation of welfare has since brought greater opportunities for non-governmental involvement in the

provision of public services, the comprehensive policies that now frame third sector relationships with the state have also raised concerns about the institutionalisation of the sector.

In Wales more than England, the non-governmental sector taps into a long tradition of collective action and a belief in the value of collective action to bring about change. In the 1800s, churches and chapels dominated but, as industrialisation advanced, the trade union movement and the working men's clubs also came to have a significant role, as did the co-operative movement and the Worker's Education Movement. Both the mining and steel industries, which characterised the Welsh industrial scene, were dangerous, high-risk forms of employment that produced high levels of class conflict and close-knit communities with strong solidarity bonds and high levels of *social*, *cultural* and *political* capital. Although these forms of capital were evident in the biographies of many of our respondents in Wales, it was also clear that the bonds that held these communities together have been eroded by decades of economic and social marginalisation, and that non-governmental actors – rather than participating through clearly defined political obligations – now work in individual policy areas where funding is available for participation in service delivery. Thinking about participation in these terms is absolutely necessary if the funds available for partnership working in new governance spaces are to be accessed and made use of.

Participation in governance, the only game in town

In the UK reforms in governance have generated a profusion of new spaces for participation. At the strategic level or local authority-wide, there are local strategic partnerships which bring state and non-state partners together around 'community strategies' and thematic boards and working groups, while at the grassroots level there are the generalist regeneration partnerships. Non-governmental action in these spaces revolves around this complexity and a range of problems that governance theorists argue cannot be solved by government alone. Birmingham, our English case study, has developed a system based on decentralization and devolution which divides the city into districts. Each district has a partnership and our case study focuses on community based organisations – a Healthy Living Centre and a neighbourhood forum – which

engage with a district partnership in the city. In Swansea, our Welsh case study, we focused on the city-wide strategic partnership and a number of governance spaces linked to it at the local authority and neighbourhood level, including a Mental Health Forum, a Domestic Violence Forum and a children's play forum.

The demands of past political affiliations are still clearly evident in Swansea. However, while many Welsh community based respondents talked of 'the Party' openly, in the spaces we visited there was no real sense of the *social*, *cultural* and *symbolic* forms of capital that characterised the 'Labourism' of their communities in the mid 20th century. This is not to say that these forms of capital no longer exist, more that they are not evident in the governance spaces where funding is available to participate around particular policy issues. The vast majority of respondents in our case study organisations at the neighbourhood level claimed that their participation in 'new governance spaces' emerged either from a personal or family crisis – a breakdown, prison, depression, bereavement – or from a habit that developed in childhood, often a 'family tradition', and many thus worked in more than once space.

In the larger organisations operating at the local authority level we encountered similar motivations to volunteer based on personal crisis or family traditions:

> [It] was just that sort of family tradition of volunteering […] I guess I probably can't remember a point in my life where I wasn't involved in voluntary organisations in one way or another.

A number of respondents in these better-resourced organisations also spoke in terms of career development rather than activism – although sometimes the two impulses merged into one. Several respondents also spoke of formative experiences of exclusion and struggle that led them to seek work where they could help others in similar situations.

> I always came back to the community […] It became a need […] for people like myself to do things […] for the rest of the community.

In most of these spaces there is an expectation that community participants should leave their grievances at the door and collaborate with what is ultimately a state-led agenda, a situation that often has the effect of undermining the

cultural and *social* forms of capital that once dominated local politics. However, despite the demands of governance, and the need to play the partnership game in the manner expected, it was also clear that individuals participate in governance spaces because they are immersed in a family, community or cultural tradition where there is a long history of participation.

Nevertheless, the pressures to 'get along' and work in partnerships are intense and the frustrations generated by decades of exclusion and deprivation are often left without an outlet, thus creating a great deal of community apathy and resentment. One community organisation left the neighbourhood partnership because of these tensions, only to come back some months later, convinced that they needed to be on the inside to have a chance of understanding what was going on in their locality.

In Birmingham governance was more accepted than it was in Swansea, with individuals playing the 'partnership game' in a more pragmatic way. In a much larger, multicultural city there was less talk of formal politics and our interviewees often discussed policy issues in a very matter-of-fact way. Motivations were again quite diverse, often similar to those in Swansea, with some respondents again describing their work in the sector in terms of career or personal aspirations:

> I started work in psychiatry, mental health work […] I've just found myself
> here through a natural career progression.

Others again described their involvement in local organisations as an expression of their long-term individual activism, and although it was perhaps not as evident as it was in Swansea, beneath the surface there was clearly a history of participatory intent.

In both Birmingham and Swansea there was a strong sense that non-governmental action should play an active role in shaping public policies and of the potential of working in this way. For many the state is still perceived as the principal partner in governance spaces, primarily because of the legacy of comprehensive welfare provision and the *symbolic* capital state players bring to the table. Many of the larger organisations saw their role as complementary to the state, as collaborators bringing additional knowledge to partnerships, rather

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than challenging the state to change its policy and meet local needs, although community-based organisations were more likely to challenge the state's agenda, particularly in Swansea. In both cases, participation in 'new governance spaces' was constrained by the requirements of specific funding streams, which coalesced around issues that many argue the state can no longer address without the help and cooperation of others. Governance, in this sense, perhaps more so in Birmingham than in Swansea, was often seen as the 'only game in town'.

While many non-governmental actors in the UK possess a disposition to criticise, political know how, and an ethos that encourages participation, the feel for protest – in Crossley's terms – appears to waning, at least in the new governance spaces that emerged under New Labour. Although there is still a strong emotional commitment to participate in the opportunities governance offers, it is clear that political opposition to the state is much less acceptable than it was 50 years ago. While participation emerges through practice, thus engendering further practice through the acquisition of a reflexive disposition, this practice has now become institutionalized through radical political reform. Political conflict, in this context, one could argue, has been outlawed by institutional means. Nevertheless, it appears that new and fragile forms of cultural capital are emerging in the spaces where there is a specific policy focus – the mental health field in Swansea, for example.

Since the end of our fieldwork there have been significant developments in the UK, with the financial crisis of 2009 and the election of a new Coalition Government in 2010 generating a new wave of protest movements. Although the paper focuses on participation in *invited* governance spaces, we observe in our study of Nicaragua below that inclusion in wider social movements is often linked to participation in such spaces. It remains to be seen if recent developments in the UK influence participatory processes in governance spaces to any significant extent. We now turn to Bulgaria and Nicaragua, where we find two very different pictures of non-governmental action and participatory processes.

Bulgarian political culture

In Bulgaria there is little sense of the participatory disposition needed to overcome the democratic deficit in the sense stated by governance theorists, and our research encountered an almost anti-participatory *disposition* and fatalistic *habitus.* Although there are organisations working to address the concerns of some vulnerable groups through links with specific policy areas at the international level, the notion of governance is not recognised by many people and there are no constitutional provisions which guarantee citizens' rights to participation.

Bulgaria emerged as an independent state in 1878 as a result of the break up of the Ottoman Empire; the current frontier between Bulgaria and Serbia/ Romania is the frontier between the former Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman empires. For over 1000 years Bulgaria has been either a province of an empire or a state under the direct rule of an empire, and its people thus have strong expectations of ruling elites, albeit a mistrustful expectation. Since the transition from communism to capitalism in 1989 political parties have been numerous, though most have been relatively short-lived. In 2001 the National Movement Simeon the Second (a party created around the heir of the last Bulgarian monarch) won the parliamentary elections, but disappeared after one term. Non-governmental participation in associations, organisations and movements with alternative ideas about how society should be organised has not materialised to any great extent, primarily, it appears, because there is little sense of a participatory *disposition* or *habitus* amongst large sections of the population. As on respondent commented:

> Surveys from recent years show that Bulgarian society is passive, that it is not
> interested in politics, that the people hate the politicians, the state, the court –
> they hate anyone with some power.

This general antipathy towards participation in the public sphere becomes clear if we consider the history of the non-governmental sector and the types of non-governmental action that exist in Bulgaria today. It is also worth noting that Bulgarian municipalities have little in the way of resources and there are few governance spaces where NGAs can engage the state. A decade ago Brinkerhoff (1999) argued that the Bulgarian state does not seek out partnership arrangements with civil society unless forced into such arrangements by external forces like the EU. As we observe in what follows, while sparks of civic activism are emerging, this is still very much the case today.

The non-governmental sector

Shortly after the transition to capitalism a law was introduced that allowed for the creation of non-governmental organisations, foundations and associations. This new labour market was quickly exploited and these new organisational forms were soon associated with unfair commercial activities, attitudes that were reinforced through a number of high profile scandals (Snaveley and Desai 1995).

Today the concept 'non-governmental' defines organisations with very different agendas. The most obvious difference is between state-funded ('old') NGOs and externally funded ('new') NGOs. State-funded NGOs are structures which emerged and flourished in the socialist era (national unions of the disabled, the blind, and the deaf), which survived the transition with many nominal members and a governing apparatus that followed a discriminative state paradigm regarding the place of these people in society. These organizations had a right to be funded by the state and today they participate actively in the system for distributing certain social aids, which is still the basic notion of social policy. After 1989 a new kind of NGO emerged around specific issues that were not being met by this existing policy framework. All five organisations in our Bulgarian case study emerged in response to gaps in government policy and they were able to function solely because they worked in areas supported by external donors. This type of NGO is directly associated with the current notion of the non-governmental sector and the protection of the rights of people of unequal social status – including HIV and disabilities – yet there is still no consensus on the status of these groups in society. The work carried out by these organisations is rarely a priority of the state and they tend to work at the margins, filling the gaps in state provision and confronting the indifference that still characterises state attitudes towards many marginalised groups. Each of the last four governments has created their own NGOs as a point through which they can reallocate funds for state led projects. There is a list of special NGOs who are entitled to state funding.

This situation is compounded by the general mistrust of civil action and by the fundamental lack of belief in non-governmental action as a force for change. As a respondent pointed out:

> Very few of the state organisations and […] people in the country are […] convinced that civil organizations are capable of solving their problems.

In this context the concepts of governance and non-governmental action are alien and difficult to apply, even unimaginable, and some of our respondents argued that there is no such thing as governance in Bulgaria. Insofar as it is possible to speak of a non-governmental sector at all, it is – like the wider concept of civil society – emergent and fragile.

In this context it is very difficult to identify a participatory *habitus* or individuals with a disposition to participate in the opportunities governance offers. Large sections of the population distrust political elites and have no history of collaborative working that allows them to come together around common issues. They lack the political know-how to transform their distrust and criticism of elites into action, demonstrate little interest in civil activism, and have a distinct emotional aversion to participation in general; there is little sense of sector around which activists can coalesce and people are generally organisation-averse. As a result of their historical experiences of ruling elites, many Bulgarians are cynical about the possibility of participation in the public sphere and turn instead to the market.

Participation in the economic field, but not the political

Salmenniemi (2007) argues that in Russia civic activity can be viewed as a social practice that has reproduced the old social hierarchies and inequalities in the manner described by Bourdieu (1996). In Bulgaria too it is clear that the main beneficiaries of the transition from communism to capitalism have been the former communist elite who have converted their former status into new forms of *economic* and *cultural* capital. Because of the relatively peaceful transition from communism to capitalism it was not difficult for members of the ruling communist elite to move forward into the new period relatively unscathed by wider processes of social and economic change. The dominant class – the former communist 'nomenklatura' – had the resources and networks to fall back on, and when it came to privatizing the economy there was a rush to participate in the market sphere which had previously been unavailable to them. Although they do not come directly from elite schools in the manner described by Bourdieu (1996),

the individuals trained by the party as technocrats have followed a similar pattern of transformation and there are now clear links between the state apparatus and the private sector – a situation evident in the biographies of many of our state respondents. While the fall of communism may well have presented political opportunities for non-governmental action, it is clear that the dominance of state and party has persisted.

Despite the severe lack of societal, cultural or material incentives to participate generated by these developments it is clear that very small numbers of people are making an effort to bring about change. Much as in the UK, they participate because of personal impulses and motivations and also because of funding opportunities in particular policy areas. Some of our respondents were lobbying to improve conditions in orphanages, while others were working in the field of HIV/Aids. One respondent explained her participation in the following ways:

> Because I am personally affected by the problem […] the man I am living with and I, we are both HIV positive.

While civil society in Bulgaria remains comparatively weak in this context, it is clear that sparks of activism and fragile forms of *cultural* capital are emerging. However, if the participatory impetus needed to sustain non-governmental action does not emerge, the institutional legitimacy needed to push forward reform and build on these developments will remain elusive (Petrova and Tarrow 2007).

We now turn to our third and final case study, Nicaragua, where we observe a participatory disposition based on a radical and contentious *habitus* and a longstanding confrontational state–civil society relationship.

Nicaraguan political culture

Latin America is characterised by weak states and fragile political parties and a persistent void between governments and the governed (Pearce 2004). Much like the transition to democracy in Eastern Europe, new forms of elite rule have made little difference to the lives of the poor majority (UNDP 2003). Over recent years the international donor discourse has responded by shifting its focus from civil society capacity building towards promoting 'new governance spaces' and the participatory institutions that can facilitate democratic development.

Commenting on this shift, Pearce (2004: 485) argues that the new approach tends to overlook the ways in which discrimination and exclusion impede the factors needed to increase participation, and that political parties in the region do not currently offer meaningful opportunities for the 'articulation and representation of interests in the state'.

This is very much the case in Nicaragua, a country with high levels of poverty and highly entrenched inequalities (NSI 2006). The country has a long history of political upheaval and instability from the Spanish conquest, through independence and, more recently, revolution (Sequeira 1995). From the dictatorship of Somoza onwards, in the Sandinista revolutionary government and the US-backed coalition that replaced it, *cultural* and *symbolic* forms of capital have been transformed time and again by groups putting forward diverse social and political agendas (Arnove and Dewees 1995; Whisnant 1997). This uncertainty and turbulence contribute to the political polarization that beleaguers Nicaraguan society today.

The non-governmental sector

At the time of our research (2006-7), some key governance spaces at the municipal level were being consolidated: the *comités de desarrollo municipal* (municipal development committees) were at this time recognised as the principal and mandatory institutional space for local government-civil society dialogue. During the Bolaños administration (2000-06) and in large part due to the lobbying and pressure of CSOs, the Law of Citizen Participation was approved (2003) as a guarantor of citizens' right to participate in local governance. However, our case study site was in Managua, one of the few local authorities (15%) that failed to set up a municipal development committee. In District III of Managua, community organisations thus came together to form 'The Alliance of Community Organisations of the South-West Periphery of Managua' in order to coordinate their plans more strategically with public sector agencies. Other spaces studied in District III were the Municipal Health Council, the Disaster Prevention Committee, and a Parent's School Council.

Many of the CSOs that participate in governance in Nicaragua today can trace their involvement back to the complex history of political contestation outlined

above, which has often included mobilisation against, and at times, collaboration with the state. Somoza's regime repressed autonomous civil organisations and promoted clientelist mechanisms to reward loyalty with access to resources,. However, the grassroots resistance that ousted the regime revisited and expanded this participatory tradition during the 1980s, imbuing it with a revolutionary ideology underpinned by Christian foundations. The shared experience of sacrifice and loss during the revolutionary and Contra conflicts facilitated the development of strong solidarity links within and between communities, with organisations like 'Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs' drawing on *emotion* to develop strong identities and new forms of collective action (Bayard de Volo 2006). Much like Bulgaria, mass organisations were created by the state during the socialist period, but in Nicaragua these organisations evolved out of networks of community groups that had formed as resistance to the Somoza dictatorship, and which were drawn into the revolutionary project of the new government with its high levels of *cultural*, *social* and *symbolic* capital.

After the Sandinista party lost power in 1989, the following decade was marked by a series of right wing governments, the intervention of international financial institutions, the rolling back of the state, civil conflict, and increasing political bipolarism. Macro-economic structural adjustment imposed by the IMF was accompanied by a rapid increase in NGOs to deal with growing poverty and unemployment, and to channel the surge in foreign aid through new and emergent forms of *cultural* capital. Much of the non-governmental action that emerged in this period was associated with ex-public sector employees from the Sandinista era. In the context of a weak state and failing economy, the NGOs that emerged during this period filled the gaps in service provision, provided sources of employment for the middle class, and maintained a strong critical and political voice. Many of these actors are still involved in civil society networks, where they are recognised, respected, and have influence in contemporary critiques of the state.

Current non-governmental action needs to be understood in the context of the pact between the socialist-leaning *Sandinista party* and the right-leaning *Liberal party,* which has brought about a redistribution of state institutions that has distorted party politics and relations between the state and the non-governmental sector. Power struggles do not only take place between the state

and non-state actors; there are also struggles for protagonism within civil society, where 'NGOs' are often viewed as competitors to political parties, and social movements sometimes struggle to gain or maintain autonomy from party politics. Many NGOs are still aligned with particular social movements, political parties and religious institutions (Mitlin et al 2007; Bebbington 2004), while many grassroots organisations still depend on a 'mother' organisation in the State, the Church, a political party, or an international NGO (Serra, 2007). Much like the UK, several of our respondents were members of two or more organisations in a district, and these organisations invariably had the same political affiliation.

Participation and the imperative of unmet needs

The failure of successive governments to respond effectively to the needs of the population means that in Nicaragua today we can identify a quite complex and durable disposition to participate amongst non-governmental actors, many of whom who operate along multiple alignments with diverse forms of *cultural*, *social* and *symbolic* capital. Many non-governmental actors possess a disposition to criticise, political know how, an ethos that encourages participation, a feel for protest and organising, and display a strong emotional commitment to participation.

In most cases these attributes have emerged through long-term community activism and membership of community organisations that challenge the state's inability to provide the poor with the services and resources they need. In some instances, these organisations have provided an alternative to the family, allowing individuals to participate and build their own critical capacity. A member of a health NGO explained:

> I saw the place as a space in which I could find support from people that would understand me, that wouldn't see me as a 'minor', but rather as a young man with feelings, with views, and with rights – that's what I was looking for.

A 'together we can' approach thus forms a central feature of the Nicaraguan participatory habitus. Nicaraguan NGOs see their role as co-participants in public policy and there is a well-established conviction amongst activists that

participation grants a strong sense of agency. This is evident in the proactive approach of the Alliance of Community Organisations, which has been meeting regularly with local government officials since 2004 in the absence of a Municipal Development Committee, which by law should have been provided by the local authority.

Although the Nicaraguan public sphere has developed and moved on, as Pearce (2004) suggests of Latin America more generally, its evolution continues to be inhibited by entrenched traditions of clientelism and political polarisation. The participatory *habitus* nurtured in the 1980s is still evident, with high levels of *cultural* capital in diverse fields, but it is vulnerable to clientelism and manipulation by political parties that transform the *symbolic* power of the state for their own purposes time and time again. Not surprisingly, there are enduring difficulties in collaborating and working across political party divides. The latest radical shift created by the new Sandinista government has appropriated citizen participation once again, with government-aligned activists recently taking to the streets to fight activists of the opposition party. There is a clear lack of interest in dialogue and the new Government is vociferous in its rejection of 'NGOs' – as opposed to 'popular' community based organisations. Their key policy towards the sector has been to set up Citizens' Power Committees, clientelist partisan mechanisms for grassroots organisation, which either bypass or co-opt the sector. Non-governmental actors continue to work alongside these new spaces, but recent research suggests that these committees are either substituting or working in parallel to pre-existing governance spaces (Prado, 2008). Many NGAs (community organisations, women's organisations, citizen's organisations and non-governmental groups) are aware of these problems, and are discussing how to move away from the traditional top-down approach towards a more inclusive and collaborative model. The new party-led structures for participation pose the question of how activists can move between collective action and institutional spaces in a more positive way.

Concluding discussion

We suggested at the start of this paper that Crossley's (2003) use and development of Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977) allows us to understand participation in new governance spaces by highlighting the contextual factors

that facilitate the development of a participatory habitus or disposition amongst individuals in different contexts. So what have we discovered?

It is clear that the complex relationship between habitus and the institutional frameworks that govern participation creates different challenges in each of the countries we studied. In the UK the key issue revolves around maintaining or restoring an independent sense of habitus as dissent becomes marginalised through a wider process of institutionalisation. Governance is 'the only game in town' and if individuals are to engage the state in any way whatsoever they must draw on fragile forms of cultural capital that are relevant in the forums where funding is available. The expectation that participants leave their grievances at the door and take part in what is ultimately a state led agenda often has the effect of undermining the *cultural* and *social* forms of capital that once dominated local politics, thus creating many frustrations. Yet it was also clear that many of our respondents were embedded in cultures with a long history of participation, which in turn motivated them to work in partnership with state agencies despite the problems they face. In the new culture of 'Big Society' in the UK, which seeks to promote civic activism at a time of massive funding cuts for the third sector, it will soon become clear what participatory capacity has endured, and what influence new protest movements have in governance spaces.

In Nicaragua we found a much stronger willingness to engage in the politics of governance, and a much stronger *habitus* or *participatory disposition*. In a highly politicized environment, in the context of a weak state with complex political alignments, participatory *habitus* is often entangled with partisan convictions and diverse forms of cultural capital that maintain a contentious and confrontational state–civil society relationship. The key challenge here is to enhance the institutionalisation of independent governance spaces and overcome the years of political polarization, although the partisan nature of the current Citizens Power Committees further entrenches this polarization. In Bulgaria, the key challenge is to overcome the belief that non-governmental actors *cannot* bring about change. Despite high levels of injustice and exclusion, our analysis highlights an *anti-participatory habitus,* at least as far as participation in governance is concerned, and it was hard to find anything that actually resembled a new governance space. Nevertheless*,* much as in the UK, new and emergent forms of *cultural*

capital were evident, with a small number of individuals demonstrating how new forms of participation can emerge at the margins of the dominant political culture.

In an analysis of affiliation to local organisations amongst ethic minority groups in different contexts, Trienekens (2002) claims that the forms of community-based capital that emerge through participation have little or no social value outside specific cultural practices where they are relevant. Much the same could be said of the emergent forms of cultural capital we have encountered in new governance spaces, which often have value solely because funding is available to help the state to deliver specific public services in a given area. However, our analysis suggests that participation in new governance spaces is motivated by the participatory disposition actors bring to the governance arena, which in turn motivates them towards further political activity. It is through their encounters in governance spaces, we argue, that activists forge new alliances and relationships that facilaite new forms of capital. And as Crossley (2003: 59) states, it is these new forms of capital that help to keep 'movement *illusio* alive outside periods of crisis', thus 'helping activists to stave off disillusionment'.

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[I] We developed two case studies in the UK because we felt that devolution in Wales had enabled the Welsh Assembly to develop some distinctively different policies from England, particularly towards the 'third sector.'

[II] These actors may include professional service-oriented organisations and community based organisations, and we make distinctions between these two groups where relevant. We use the term 'civil society' to describe the realm in which non-governmental actors and citizens operate.

[III] The UK research team also included Chris Miller and Vicky Harris. The Bulgarian team was led by Rumen Petrov and Antaoneeta Mateeva, the Nicaraguan team by Luis Serra.

[IV] We have used the term 'third sector' in the UK only, as the concept has no currency in Bulgaria or Nicaragua. We note that it is still a contested term in the UK (Alcock 2010) and Europe (Borragán and Smismans 2010).