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Sustainable Participation? Evaluating the Role of the City and County Development Boards in Promoting Public Participation in Local Sustainable Development

STRIVE
Environmental Protection Agency Programme
2007-2013

SSTI
Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation

Comhshaol, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Heritage and Local Government

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EPA STRIVE Programme 2007–2013

Sustainable Participation? Evaluating the Role of the City and County Development Boards in Promoting Public Participation in Local Sustainable Development

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Executive Summary

Sustainable development is essentially a political programme for change adopted by governments throughout the world. It has its primary basis in *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED] 1987), and is endorsed by international agreements sanctioned in Rio in 1992 (the Earth Summit) and Johannesburg in 2002 (World Summit on Sustainable Development). Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 ('Local Agenda 21'), the global programme for the implementation of sustainable development agreed at the Earth Summit, placed the responsibility for coordinating local sustainable development firmly at the door of local governments throughout the world.

The City and County Development Boards (CDBs), which were created in 2000, had a remit to design a city-/county-wide Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development and to undertake the relevant dimensions of its delivery. While the implementation of Local Agenda 21 is clearly the responsibility of *local government*, the fact that the CDBs are focused on a strategic approach to local development suggests that they create a context, mechanism and an agreed strategy conducive to the *governance* of local sustainable development.

The research contained in this report *Sustainable Participation? Evaluating the role of CDBs in Promoting Public Participation in Local Sustainable Development* (SUSPART), responds directly to a call for proposals under the Environmental Protection Agency Environmental Research Technological Development and Innovation (ERTDI) Sub-measure 2: Sustainable Development.

There are five main components to the SUSPART approach:

1 The Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review was to set the scene for the evaluation of the CDB process by establishing the recent evolution of the governance of sustainable development in Ireland; changes in the understanding of sustainable development internationally and the impact on the Irish approach; the state-of-the-art in the theory and practice of sustainability governance; and the growing emphasis on public participation in sustainable development.

The following key questions arose from the literature review: How is sustainable development *understood* and *integrated* within the CDB process? How does the CDB process contribute to *enhanced* steering, learning and capacity building for local sustainable development? How, and to what extent, does the CDB process contribute to *effective* participation for sustainable development?

2 Analysis of City and County Development Strategies

An analysis of the city and county development strategies was conducted to gain insight into the strategic integration of sustainable development and participation in the CDB process and also to establish the potential contribution of the CDB process to local sustainable development. The analysis showed that while in general the discourse and principles of sustainable development have been integrated into the strategies, there is considerably less *explicit* integration of Local Agenda 21. While there is some indication that environmental initiatives and actions increased in significance after a 2005–2006 review process, the overwhelming emphasis in most of the strategies is still on social inclusion. In the original design of the strategies, while there was some consultation with the wider community, the most widespread approach was to conduct consultation through the CDB and the Community Forums. This suggests that the CDB process, though initially allowing for wider consultation, can hardly be considered a vehicle for direct citizen participation. It does, however, mix community and stakeholder types of participation.

3 Local Authority Evaluations of the CDB Process

Directors of Community and Enterprise were appointed within each of the 34 local authorities in 2000 in order to service the CDBs. SUSPART conducted telephone interviews with the directors and their officials to incorporate a more subjective dimension to the overall evaluation in mid-2005. The outcome of the interviews

showed that (i) the integration of sustainable development at the Board level takes place through deliberative exchange and through the specific actions of the sub-groups; (ii) in actions that have a specific sustainable development or Local Agenda 21 focus, the integration of social and environmental issues tends to be more prominent than those that address all three dimensions of sustainable development; and (iii) the integration of participation for sustainable development is indicated by the fact that there is a tendency for Community Forum members to be involved in actions across the board and not just confined to social inclusion measures.

A number of particular challenges emerged as important to future progress, including retaining a focus on the strategic intent of the process; acknowledging that participation is a learning process in its own right; recognising that the voluntary nature of the process places significant demands on the community and voluntary sector; and ensuring that central government provides strategic coordination, policy direction and adequate resources for the process.

4 Stakeholder Evaluations of the CDB Process

In order to gain an insight into the perspectives of the key stakeholder groups participating in the CDB process, 20 detailed in-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholder representatives in four separate locations (Donegal, Galway, South Dublin and Wexford) in late 2005. The outcome of the stakeholders analysis highlights that (i) sustainable development is, for the most part, regarded as secondary to the functional requirement of inter-organisational/ inter-agency strategic coordination; (ii) the process has increased access to decision-makers through *networking*, but not necessarily to decision-making. While there is a sense that the CDB exerts a communicative influence on decision-making, there is very little sense that stakeholders are influential in terms of shaping outcomes; (iii) local level-governance still has little or no leverage over higher levels of decision-making.

Two main issues stand out as key weaknesses of the CDB process:

- If the CDB process is to address the procedural dimensions of sustainable development in terms of promoting public participation (the reason it was originally identified as a vehicle for Local Agenda 21), it needs to connect more directly with the wider community.
- The vertical dimension of governance needs to be strengthened. There is a very strong impression that poorly articulated vertical linkages lower the horizons of participants' expectations of what the process can achieve.

5 Synthesis, Comparison and Conclusions

Sustainable development has become imprinted on the CDB process: through the city and county development strategies; the deliberations of the Boards; and the actions already implemented and those identified for the future. There is a strong social emphasis in the strategies and the actions of CDBs, and the picture that emerges from the analysis here is that the strategic emphasis is on development that enhances quality of life. The quality of life emphasis is not unique to the CDB process; indeed, it reflects a wider shift in the sustainable development debate at global, European Union (EU), and increasingly at national level. While the analysis of the original strategies shows a medium level of identification with Local Agenda 21, the shift away from explicitly emphasising it as an integrative instrument appears to be a feature of the interim reviews of the CDBs. This is neither an isolated phenomenon nor is it particular to the Republic of Ireland.

Apart from structured representation via the Community Forums and through stakeholder participation in the CDBs, citizen participation is largely passive. Proposals in the Green Paper, *Stronger Local Democracy – Options for Change* (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government [DoEHLG] 2008), for the introduction of mechanisms for direct citizen participation may be compatible with enhancing local sustainable development, but they are quite distinct from the CDB process.

Within the CDB process the cyclical process of review and renewal activates different types of participation, including consultation of the wider community at different stages. In order to connect more effectively with decision-making processes that could have a material impact on local sustainable development (i.e. the development plan), these cycles need to be synchronised. The CDB

process has reasonably high levels of input legitimacy, but somewhat weaker output legitimacy.

The SUSPART research found a relatively poorly perceived sense of capacity to effect change for sustainable development at the local level, largely because much of the most significant decision-making is made at national level. Three main consequences can stem from this: stakeholders (i) exit the process; (ii) remain inside, but lack commitment; or (iii) the lack of decision-making capabilities becomes a source of discontent and mobilises protest.

5.1 Conclusions and Implications for Policy-Making

Governance alone is not a sufficient condition to steer a path to sustainable development. It requires central *government* to provide stimulus, support and direction to the process. There are three main implications for policy-making:

5.1.1 Integration at Local Level requires Integration at National Level

The reactivation of the High-level Interdepartmental Group reviewing the National Strategy for Sustainable Development, the creation of the Interdepartmental Committee for the CDBs, and the work programme of Comhar (the Irish Sustainable Development Council) provide a strong basis for developing an integrated approach at national level. In light of emerging environmental priorities at both EU and national level, particularly with regard to both renewable energy and climate change, agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Sustainable Energy Ireland also have a critical role to play in a coordinated approach. Crucially, this must place particular emphasis on strengthening the vertical dimensions of governance, and this can only come from the government. In light of these considerations it would be advisable to retain the High-level Interdepartmental Group to oversee the implementation of the new National Strategy for Sustainable Development.

5.1.2 Strengthening the Capacity of Local Government to Implement Local Sustainable Development

The Directorate of Community and Enterprise is a critical hub in relation to the implementation of the CDB strategies. Therefore, the Directorate requires adequate resources (financial, technical and human) not just to promote both awareness and participation in local sustainable development, but also to promote awareness of the role of the CDB in relation to sustainable development in the local community. A common approach to 'sustainability proofing' the strategies would help to clarify the importance of sustainable development internally within the CDBs and have the advantage of creating a common standard that could provide valuable local information as inputs into national approaches. Comhar, the EPA and the Institute of Public Administration could coordinate such an approach; however, the involvement of the Directorates of Community and Enterprise and the CDBs would generate results that would be more acceptable and appropriate. Comhar's Principles for Sustainable Development have been used by at least one local authority (Fingal County Council) in the review of their strategy and could act as a common departure point for the development of a common approach to sustainability proofing.

5.1.3 'Horses for Courses': The Diverse Purposes of Public Participation

Just as public participation is only one among a mixture of approaches that form part of a diversified approach to the governance of sustainable development, the CDB process is just one among a number of participatory mechanisms channelling public input into public policy. Capacity building, particularly the encouragement of a sense of agency amongst citizens regarding individual responsibilities, requires the provision of legal rights. SUSPART would, therefore, endorse the call by Comhar for the government to fully implement the Aarhus Convention[1] and for the full transposition of related EU Directives on public participation and access to justice.

1 The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters is more commonly known as the Aarhus Convention. As the title suggests, it gives the public rights in relation to information, public participation and access to justice, in decision-making processes on the local, national and trans-boundary environment.

1 Introduction

Sustainable development is essentially a political programme for change adopted by governments throughout the world. It has its primary basis in *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED] 1987), and is endorsed by international agreements sanctioned in Rio in 1992 (the Earth Summit) and Johannesburg in 2002 (World Summit on Sustainable Development [WSSD]). Agenda 21, the global programme for the implementation of sustainable development agreed at the Earth Summit, builds on the premise that the achievement of sustainable development requires new forms of social learning, 'whereby major collective actors seek to resolve potential conflicts on environment-and-development issues through new forms of involvement and co-operation' (Lafferty 1998: 1). Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 (henceforth referred to as 'Local Agenda 21') placed the responsibility for coordinating local sustainable development firmly at the door of local governments throughout the world. Throughout the 1990s, Local Agenda 21 was the main vehicle for the translation of the ideals of Rio into practical models of local governance. National strategies for sustainable development exist in most countries in the world, and a total of 113 countries had initiated at least 6,400 Local Agenda 21 processes by 2002 (Jänicke 2006: 3).

The *National Strategy for Sustainable Development for Ireland* (DoELG, 2002) published in 1997, places a particular responsibility on local authorities to implement and coordinate local sustainable development through Local Agenda 21. The objective of advancing the implementation of local sustainable development through Local Agenda 21 was reaffirmed in the Irish progress report on sustainable development presented to the Johannesburg conference in 2002.

In 1998, the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems (1998) highlighted the existing overlaps in the activities of local government, the state agencies and local development agencies and identified the need for integration. It proposed the creation of local development boards known as City and County Development Boards (CDBs) that would be linked to, but separate from, local government, though under the auspices of the Director of Community and Enterprise within local government. The membership of the CDBs is drawn from the local government sector, the local development sector (e.g. LEADER II, ADM-[2] supported partnerships and community groups etc.), state agencies and the social partners[3]. The remit of these CDBs is to design a city-/county-wide 'Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development' and to undertake the relevant dimensions of its delivery. In addition, the work of the CDBs is supported through the creation of a consultative Community Forum, the city- or county-wide structures created with national-level funding 'to facilitate participation, feedback and accountability among community and voluntary organisations' (Adshead and McInerney 2006: 14). While the implementation of Local Agenda 21 is clearly the responsibility of *local government*, the fact that the CDBs are focused on a strategic approach to local development suggests that they create a context, mechanism and an agreed strategy conducive to the *governance* of local sustainable development. Taken collectively, the CDB, the Community Forum and the *Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development* are referred to herein as 'the CDB process'.

The research contained in this report, *Sustainable Participation? Evaluating the role of CDBs in Promoting Public Participation in Local Sustainable Development* (SUSPART), responds directly to a call for proposals under the EPA Environmental Research Technological Development and Innovation (ERTDI) Sub-measure 2: Sustainable Development. As the title suggests, the primary purpose of the research was to evaluate if, and to what degree, the city and county development strategies have contributed to promoting public participation in

2 These are initiatives supported by EU funding mechanisms under the Structural Funds. LEADER is a community initiative which supports the establishment of groups throughout Ireland to promote an area-based approach to rural development. ADM (or Area Development Management) administers a global grant for area-based partnerships established to tackle long-term unemployment under the Community Support Framework for Ireland, 1989–1993.

3 The current model of social partnership in Ireland arose in 1987 amidst a period of fiscal rentrenchment. The social partners, including employers, trade unions and farmers work together to develop consensus on policy strategies and wage agreements. In 1996, the Community and Voluntary Sector was incorporated into Irish Social Partners.

local sustainable development. The research examined: (i) the integration of sustainable development into the CDB process; and (ii) the exact nature and modes of public participation that the process has promoted in the governance of local sustainable development. The overall objective of the evaluation was to consider the contribution of the CDB process to the governance of sustainable development in Ireland, and to provide some guidance as to how this might be enhanced in the future.

2 Study Methodology

2.1 Complexity and Evaluation

Sustainable development is a contested concept and as such introduces complexity into the policy-making context (Runhaar et al. 2006). Academic and policy literature frequently glosses over the complexity of sustainable development, presenting it as unproblematic in principle, though difficult to achieve in practice (Connelly 2007). There are three principle dimensions to the complexity of sustainable development that any adequate evaluation must consider at a minimum. They are: (i) changing 'conceptions of the concept' of sustainable development (Connelly 2007); (ii) the challenge of knowledge and learning which has led to a call for multi-stakeholder participation in sustainable development (Voß et al. 2007); and (iii) an acknowledgement that participation is only one part of a larger process of multi-sector integration of environmental objectives in non-environmental policy domains (Lafferty and Hovden 2003), and multi-level (local, regional, national, supranational, global) governance for sustainable development. As Lehtonen (2004: 207) points out:

> The nature of sustainable development as an open, multi-dimensional process implies that any analytical framework is likely to represent only temporary agreement, which evolves alongside our understanding of sustainability … any evaluation framework should be embedded in the prevailing context and institutions

Therefore, SUSPART considered it important to examine the emergence of current thinking in relation to the dominant meaning of sustainable development; approaches to participation; and the relationship of the CDB process to the evolving structure of multi-level governance for sustainable development in Ireland.

2.1.1 Criteria and Analysis for Evaluation

Conventional perspectives on evaluation 'require programme or policy objectives to be set and criteria defined and measured in order to determine the degree of success' (Barnes 1999: 65). This assumes that goals are, or can be, stated clearly, that there is only one view as to what those goals are, and that objective measurement of goal achievement is possible. Sustainable development can be evaluated objectively according to three types of standard: (i) external, (ii) internal and (iii) comparative criteria (Lafferty 2005).[4]

External criteria include the international agreements, strategies, plans, guidelines or models that emanate outside of the immediate context, e.g. from the United Nations (UN), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) or the EU. Internal criteria are derived from the strategies, programmes, plans and policies adopted by national governments to follow up on their commitment to, and implementation of, sustainable development. Comparative criteria include strategies, plans and activities initiated by other governments in pursuit of their obligations under Agenda 21. All of these criteria are intertwined and as such allow for an integrated evaluation of approaches to sustainable development. While Lafferty (2005) understands 'comparative' in the sense of cross-national comparison, it could arguably be adapted to take account of comparisons between local approaches to sustainable development.

While not concerned directly with sustainable development *per se*, previous evaluations (Fitzpatrick/ ERM [Environmental Resource Management] 2002; Indecon 2008) can provide an objective evaluation of the development and review of the CDB process in the light of *internal* criteria established by the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems. What is significant about these internal criteria is that they are actually an adaptation of the *external* criteria developed by the International Council of Local Environmental Initiatives for the Implementation of Local Agenda 21 (ICLEI). This is a very useful point of departure because it means that the CDB process comes complete with a set of inbuilt criteria for evaluation that combine internal and external standards that can be used to *compare* how national policies have been translated into strategic action across the local level of governance. Therefore, a comparison of sustainable development and participation in the city and county development strategies allows a preliminary

4 In discussion with Advisory Committee Meeting, SUSPART, January.

basis for understanding their role and contribution to local sustainable development. In the first instance, this involves a reconstructive analysis of the content of the city and county development strategies.

When it comes to participation in multi-stakeholder policy domains, however, evaluation must reflect the complexity that SUSPART identifies as being intrinsic to sustainable development. Adapting observations from Barnes (1999), evaluation questions need to incorporate the pragmatic concerns of those who want to improve the practice of participation, as well as the broader more theoretical purpose in understanding what such developments mean for the relationship between the government and participants in the local governance of sustainable development. Reconstructive analysis can therefore only go so far: while useful for characterising the logic or reasoning behind a policy programme, and for setting the context, there is always the potential for divergent logics between policy initiators at national level, those charged with implementation at the local level, and other stakeholders in the process. The term 'stakeholder' here refers to categories of actor who contribute to a policy domain, who are needed for problem-solving or who are affected by problem-solving activities (Runhaar et al. 2006). Stakeholder analysis then aims at eliciting the perceptions and evaluations of those that have a stake or an interest in a particular process.

The combination of reconstructive analysis and stakeholder analysis provides a strong basis for evaluating the role of the CDB process in promoting public participation in local sustainable development. However, the state-of-the-art in evaluation research in terms of participative approaches lacks 'clear and unambiguous criteria, there is no consensus in the research community of how to measure success or failure, and there is also no agreement about the choice of appropriate research methods' (Renn 2008: 321). Renn (2008: 322) also points out that, in the case of most evaluation schema, there is a lack of attention to the normative, substantive and procedural criteria that underpin different concepts of, and approaches to, participation. If SUSPART is to make a contribution to knowledge beyond simply providing policy-relevant *information*, or *describing* the state of play in participation in local sustainable development in Ireland, then one more step is necessary.

An overall analytic standard against which the empirical case can be measured is required in order to understand the precise contribution that the CDB process makes to (i) the strategic integration of sustainable development; (ii) promoting *effective* public participation in sustainable development; and (iii) enhancing the *capacity* for sustainability governance in Ireland. Therefore, recent theoretical frameworks developed in the scholarship on 'governance *for* sustainable development' (Bäckstrand 2006a, 2006b; Evans et al. 2006; Jordan 2008; Lafferty 2004; Meadowcroft 2004; Meadowcroft 2007a, 2007b; Snedden et al. 2006; Van Zeijl-Rozema et al. 2008; Voß and Kemp 2005; Voß et al. 2007) and models and modes of participation in complex governance (Fung 2006; Meadowcroft 2004; Renn 2008) are adapted for this purpose.

2.2 The SUSPART Approach

There are five components to the SUSPART approach:

1 Literature review;

2 Content analysis of the city and county development strategies;

3 Local authority evaluations of the CDB process;

4 Stakeholder evaluations of the CDB process;

5 Synthesis and comparison.

2.2.1 Literature Review

In light of the observations made in this report concerning the complex challenge of evaluating participation in sustainable development, the review of literature had a number of objectives. These included (i) describing the specific evolution of governance and participation in the context of sustainable development in Ireland; (ii) understanding the changing conceptions of sustainable development shaping its interpretation in Ireland; (iii) characterising the theoretical, normative and empirical sources of demand for the governance of sustainable development; and (iv) establishing the state-of-the-art in the literature on the theory and practice of public participation for sustainable development. The outcome of the literature review (v) is the further specification of the SUSPART model of evaluation.

2.2.2 Content Analysis of the City and County Development Strategies

The purpose of the content analysis is to gain an objective perspective on the strategic integration of sustainable development and participation in the CDB process. The city and county development strategies (the 'strategies') were therefore analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively for the specific inclusion or reference to sustainable development, Local Agenda 21, environmental integration and participation in their text. The strategies were also analysed for information purposes, i.e. do the strategies contain specific information, or detail on the strategic integration of sustainable development and participation, that would contribute to the overall evaluation of the evaluation process? In order to capture any substantial changes since the empirical research was conducted in 2005, the results were compared with recent research on the CDB process, specifically Indecon (2008) and O'Riordan (2008).

2.2.3 Local Authority Evaluations of the CDB Process

In order to gain an insight into the perspectives of key personnel in Irish local government, specifically within the Directorates of Community and Enterprise that are responsible for steering the actual implementation of the CDB process, a telephone survey was conducted with 32 of the 34 local authorities. The high rate of response is due in no small part to the support of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) in the completion of the survey. The semi-structured interviews were designed to: (i) fill in gaps in information identified in the analysis of the strategies; (ii) elicit the situated evaluations of the respondents regarding the contribution of the process of promoting participation in local sustainable development.

2.2.4 Stakeholder Evaluations of the CDB Process

In order to gain an insight into the perspectives of the key stakeholder groups participating in the CDB process, 20 detailed in-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholder representatives in four separate locations (Donegal, Galway, South Dublin and Wexford). This included interviews with representatives from the local government, local development, state agency and social partner pillars of the CDB, and a representative of the Community Forum in each case. In addition to establishing the overall perspectives of the stakeholders on the role of the CDB process in promoting public participation, these interviews were used to elicit evaluations of the precise forms, quality and outcomes of participation.

2.2.5 Synthesis and Comparison

Based on the models derived from the literature review, the objective evaluation of the strategies, and the outcomes of the interviews with local authorities and the stakeholders, the SUSPART project provided a synthesised evaluation of the CDB process. Furthermore, the conclusions from the SUSPART research were compared with other recent evaluations of the CDB process to establish the consistency of findings and to provide the basis for outlining the policy implications of the project findings.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of the literature review was to set the scene for the evaluation of the CDB process by establishing:

- The recent evolution of the governance of sustainable development in Ireland;
- Changes in the understanding of sustainable development internationally and the impact on the Irish approach;
- The state-of-the-art in the theory and practice of sustainability governance;
- The growing emphasis on public participation in sustainable development.

The outcome of the literature review is the further specification of the project approach to evaluation.

3.2 Setting the Scene: Governance and Sustainable Development in Ireland

3.2.1 The Shift from Government to Governance

Traditionally, the concept of governance denoted the process of governing, with the latter primarily associated with governmental steering by regulation and sanctions (Lafferty 2004: 5). In structural terms, this is referred to as 'governance as hierarchy', whereby governance 'conducted in and through vertically integrated state structures is an idealised model of democratic government and the public bureaucracy' (Pierre and Peters 2000: 15). Modern theories of governance, however, have expanded this connotation to include many other forms of social steering (Lafferty 2004: 5).

Governance is not completely new in the sense that it describes historical patterns of corporatist decision-making, as well as traditions of cooperation with voluntary associations and groups in civil society (Torfing 2006). What *is* new is that governments in many countries increasingly perceive governance as 'an effective and legitimate form of governing society' (Torfing 2006: 113).

In this context, the role of the state changes since governance in the sense used here refers to the totality of steering mechanisms employed, regardless of the seat of responsibility:

> ... since several of the mechanisms of governance depend on aspects of learning, cooperation and feedback and other forms of non governmental input, it becomes clear that the instrumentality employed in any specific steering initiative will vary considerably from a traditional understanding of governing as command and control compliance ... (Lafferty 2004: 7)

Governments must now adapt to and contend with 'open-ended, often unusual ad hoc arrangements that demonstrate remarkable problem-solving capacity and open opportunities for learning and change in exactly those circumstances where classical modernist institutions have failed to produce solutions' (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003: 7–8).

This has a particular resonance in the field of environmental politics and more specifically the debate on sustainability development. The recurrent emphasis on governance in environmental discourse 'represents an effort to answer the decline in the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy making, [since] the peculiar connection between these two aspects makes uncertainty, which characterises many environmental issues, particularly relevant' (Pellizzoni 2004: 542). In the contemporary world, solutions for many environmental problems cannot be found within the boundaries of the nation state, 'forcing established institutions to take part in trans-national networks of governance in which power is dispersed', for example the EU or the UN (Hajer and Versteeg 2005: 182). As governments go increasingly trans-national to make decisions in relation to issues like sustainable development, there is a sense that they move away from the democratic traditions of national communities: as they go more local to implement decisions in a democratically effective manner, they are judged on their capacity to deliver (Bang 2003).

3.2.2 The Governance of Sustainable Development in Ireland

3.2.2.1 Government and Governance at National Level

Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland was published in April 1997 (DoE 1997). As such, it was

one of the earlier national sustainable development strategies in the EU (Davies 2008). The impetus for developing the strategy was to respond to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) process and obligations under Agenda 21. The primary focus of the strategy was on the integration of the environment into various policy sectors (agriculture, forestry, marine resources, energy, transport, tourism and trade), providing a rebalancing of the previous situation where environment was generally not well integrated into national policy (Mullally 2004). An acknowledged weakness of the strategy was that it did not have many quantified objectives and lacked clear indicators to measure progress (Comhar 2007: 25). Furthermore, the strategy had very little emphasis on the social dimensions of sustainable development (Mullally 2004). A recent comparative evaluation of the institutional design of national sustainable development strategies in the EU member and accession states revealed that Ireland is among a group of countries where the environmental ministry has taken the lead in the development of the strategy (coordination structures are composed of a mix of government representatives and key stakeholders). In other countries strategies were submitted to the parliament for approval, consultation or guidance, whereas in Ireland a special sub-committee of parliament was established to monitor and examine sustainable development issues (Commission of the European Communities [CEC] 2004).

Niestroy (2005: 183) notes that the lead role of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) in relation to sustainable development policy is as of yet uncontested in the Irish context. The vertical integration of sustainable development policy in government involves the DoEHLG, local authorities, and the EPA. The Department of Local Government was transformed into the Department of the Environment in 1978 (now Environment, Heritage and Local Government) and was assigned a leading policy role in promoting the protection and improvement of the physical environment. The responsibility for the implementation of environmental legislation was, however, placed on local authorities. The modernisation of Irish environmental governance began in 1990, with the publication of the *First Environmental Action Programme* (DoE [Department of the Environment] 1990), committing the Irish government to the integration of environmental considerations into all policy areas and the acknowledgement of the principle of sustainable development. The Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992 provided the legal basis for the establishment of an independent statutory authority for the protection of the environment.

The Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government has overall responsibility for planning at a national level in Ireland. According to Grist (2003: 222), the introduction of the Planning and Development Act 2000 added new principles to the planning system in addition to introducing a 'hierarchy of plans' into the mix. Grist points out that the Planning and Development Act 2000 was 'to have an ethos of sustainable development, be strategic in nature and deliver the highest quality of performance'. The Act stops short of actually defining sustainable development, but it was to find expression through the instruments of the Regional Planning Guidelines, County Development Plans and Local Area Plans (see below) (Dodd 2003: 119). Nevertheless, its value has been to bring focus to the reflections of policy-makers and it has 'provided a revised rationale for planning, because it involves the interaction between economy, environment and society' (Clinch 2004: 43).

The Irish social partnership model has provided the framework for formal relations between the government, business and civil society at both national and local levels (Daly 2007). This represents a growing shift from *governance as hierarchy* to new more flexible forms of governance in Ireland (Adshead 2003: 126). It has been suggested that the Irish model of social partnership differs from its European counterparts because it conjoins negotiation, problem-solving, and consensus-seeking governance in deliberative democratic forms (Adshead 2006). Partnership, according to Sommers and Bradfield (2006: 69), is particularly attractive as a mode of governance because it 'spreads risk in times of policy shift, changing priorities and the uncertainties of aims, purposes and practices'. The success of the social partnership model at the national level has, therefore, resulted in a 'coordination reflex' in Irish governance (O'Mahony 2007: 281), which in turn has been replicated at the local level (Larkin 2004a, 2004b). Many government departments now engage in public consultation on policy matters, but participation in environmental decision-making is often adversarial at the implementation level (O'Mahony 2007).

Comhar – the National Sustainable Development Partnership (now Comhar – Sustainable Development Council) – was created in 1999 as the forum for national consultation and dialogue on all issues related to sustainable development (DoEHLG 2007: 49). Specifically, it was established 'to advance the national agenda for sustainable development, to evaluate progress in this regard, to assist in devising suitable mechanisms and advising on their implementation, and contribute to the formation of a national consensus in these regards' (Comhar 2009). Comhar has 25 members drawn from the state sector, economic sectors, environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social/community NGOs, and the professional academic sector. Working in three-year cycles, it completed its third term in December 2008. A key focus of its work programme (2006–2008) was its input into the renewal of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development Strategy (NSSD) (due in 2009). The Comhar *Recommendations on the Review of the National Sustainable Development Strategy* stressed that 'good environmental governance requires a combination of political leadership, effective mechanisms and public participation'. Comhar has specifically recommended that the revised NSSD should 'commit Ireland to the ratification of the Arhus Convention … and the full transposition of related EU Directives, particularly on public participation and access to justice' (Comhar 2007: 24, 23).

3.2.2.2 Government and Governance at Local Level

Local government in Ireland principally consists of 34 major local authorities – the City and County Councils – which typically tend to serve a larger population than many of their European counterparts. Local authorities in Ireland derive their power and function from central government, and are regarded as executive agencies of government departments charged with implementing central policy. Most government institutions and agencies work at the national level and have regional offices operating quite independently of the Irish local government system. However, by international standards, the powers of Irish local government are not strong and elected officials have little direct power. Their functions are divided into executive and reserved functions. The reserved functions are matters of policy and principle and are the responsibility of the elected representatives. Any function that is not a reserved function is the responsibility of the executive (Meldon et al. 2004: 41). The development plan is the basic policy document of the local authority in terms of planning and it is the instrument through which the planning objectives of the local authority are set out, and the planned regulation and control of development is outlined. The making or altering of a development plan has always been a reserved function of the elected representatives of local authorities. According to Dodd (2003: 119), the Planning and Development Act 2000 requires explicitly that 'a development plan must seek the integration of the planning and sustainable development of the area with social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population'.

Traditionally, public participation in local government has been effected by representative democracy through the electoral system. In addition to representative democracy, local authorities have statutory obligations through their planning and environmental functions to involve the public in decision-making, for example, through the planning appeals process (Callanan 2005: 917). In the specific case of the development plan, there has historically been a provision for public participation but much of the public feedback has only taken place after the draft development plans are published (Prendergast and Rybaczuk, 2005; Grist 2003). The proceduralisation of the timing, and formal requirements for consultation, under the Planning and Development Act 2000, potentially improves the statutory provision for public participation in the planning system since 'people now have an opportunity to be proactive by making positive contributions to the preparation of the plan instead of being confined to reactive submission of objections to the draft plan when published' (Grist 2003: 229). Prendergast and Rybaczuk (2005: 238) point out that there is still a tendency for citizens to pursue participation through planning and legal systems in opposition to specific local developments or proposals, and that many consultative processes remain under-subscribed or have difficulty exciting public interest and involvement. In both academic and everyday discourse this is seen as an irrational approach to public participation and is pejoratively referred to as the 'NIMBY[5] syndrome' (Flynn 2007). Recent Irish analyses of waste-management planning (Davies 2003; Fahy 2005) and urban development (Scott et al. 2007), root the preference for objection over consultation in a rational calculation, i.e. a greater expectation of efficacy in terms of influencing democratic decision-making.

5 'Not in my back yard.'

The language of the legislation or regulations dealing with the planning and development system emphasises consultation, which is used to satisfy a statutory duty, rather than participation in the sense of engaging with the public in a spirit of partnership (Prendergast and Rybaczuk 2005: 239). Although the expectation is that sustainable development requires a *different* approach to participation than established avenues for citizen participation, the observations detailed here raise an important consideration for decision-makers designing participatory processes. Participatory exercises are not created in a vacuum, but depend on both the historical development of institutional arrangements and on the historical experiences of participants. However, many experimental or innovative processes do not acknowledge the relevance of the prior experience of participants (Muir 2005; Murray 2006).

In the Republic of Ireland, the first official local-level institutional response to the sustainable development project was, as in most states, inspired by Local Agenda 21. Local Agenda 21 is simultaneously committed to two goals, namely: (i) the procedural goal of enhancing public participation in local decision-making, and (ii) the substantive goal of sustainable development as it is promulgated in the UNCED process (Feichtinger and Pregernig 2005: 212). Although presaged by earlier signals from central government (e.g. the Local Agenda 21 guidelines in 1995), it was the NSSD that placed responsibility on local authorities for the implementation and coordination of local sustainable development through Local Agenda 21. Each local authority was expected to enter into dialogue with its citizens, local organisations, and private enterprises and adopt a Local Agenda 21. The objective of advancing the implementation of local sustainable development through Local Agenda 21 was confirmed in the Irish progress report on sustainable development presented to the WSSD in 2002. The role of Local Agenda 21 as the key mechanism for delivering Agenda 21 and sustainable development was also restated at the WSSD (Lucas et al. 2003: 4–5). In 2006, the EU also reaffirmed support for Local Agenda 21, noting the importance of the sub-national level in 'delivering sustainable development and building up social capital … to build sustainable communities … and jointly create a high quality of life' (Council of the European Union 2006).

Several studies have attested to the role of Local Agenda 21 in stimulating democratic experimentalism, through projects and initiatives (Comhar 2007; Mullally 1998, 2001, 2004; Ellis et al. 2004). Nevertheless, the mixed response of local authorities throughout the country, and the variable means and modes of institutionalisation employed, are significant impediments to the implementation of Local Agenda 21. The most recent evaluation of progress on Local Agenda 21 on the island of Ireland was funded by the Centre for Cross Border Studies, and published in 2004. This study found that on the island of Ireland 54 per cent of local authorities have 'begun a process of Local Agenda 21' (about 58 per cent in the North and 50 per cent in the Republic). The authors noted, however, that even among the local authorities stating they have a Local Agenda 21 process in place, only 32 per cent engaged in participation with the community, and only 14 per cent stated that they went on to implement an action plan (Ellis et al. 2004).

There are many variables that can be used to explain the Irish experience (not least the situation of local government in the evolving terrain of multi-level governance in Ireland), but two concrete factors stand out. The first is the lack of a firm statutory footing – Local Agenda 21, though seen as desirable by central government, was effectively left as a discretionary action rather than being imposed as an obligation on local authorities. The second key factor was the lack of a clear institutional location wherein the type of strategic multi-actor coordination required for Local Agenda 21 could be embedded. However, 'new structures established under local government reform offered the potential for a mutually reinforcing overall framework for local government and Local Agenda 21 through the operation of the City and County Development Boards and other structures' (Comhar 2007: 25).

3.2.2.3 Institutionalising Local Governance (for Sustainable Development?)

Ireland in the 1990s was characterised by experimentation with a new localism in an otherwise centralist system of public policy (Adshead and Quinn, cited in Mullally 2004). The introduction of Community Initiatives designed to complement the European Structural Funds, and to ensure that local and regional government would have direct access to funding created a new impetus for local development. Reviews of the contribution of local partnerships funded under these Community Initiatives (e.g. LEADER) from the perspective of promoting sustainable development have been mixed (Moseley et al. 2001; Meldon et al. 2004).

However, there was a growing perception in the 1990s that the local systems of government and development were being progressively divorced, and that local development agencies were gaining considerable autonomy. The Devolution Commission set up by central government in 1995 established the principles behind a reform programme for *Better Local Government*, i.e. to ensure that:

> ... new forms of participation by local communities in the decision-making processes of local government are facilitated; [and], the role of local councillors in setting policy and giving leadership to socio-economic development together with the social partners is enhanced. .. (Meldon et al. 2004: 49)

Local authorities were required to create Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs), which mirrored the different service functions of the council (e.g. housing, environment, planning and economic development, etc.). The SPCs' role is to provide policy-making inputs and recommendations to the full council (Callanan 2005: 917). Two-thirds of SPC membership is comprised of elected representatives, the remaining third is made up of sectoral interests, e.g. community and voluntary groups, environmental groups, social partners, etc. Whereas the SPCs are focused on the functions and responsibilities of the local authority, the CDBs are mandated to provide a ten-year strategy as a template for all public bodies operating within a city or a county, not just the local authority (although it is clearly the central actor).

The introduction of the CDBs in 2000 represented an attempt to build consensual problem-solving institutions with strategic intentions at the local level of governance in Ireland. While the CDBs are networking and strategic planning organisations charged with the responsibility of formulating and keeping under review a long-term strategy for local development, they have no executive authority (Acheson and Williamson 2007: 32). CDBs were consciously designed to be both deliberative and participative (Larkin 2004b). Acheson and Williamson (2007) point out that their legitimacy derives primarily from the presence of elected representatives from city or county councils on the boards. Local economic development and public service delivery agencies have a much more extensive role on these bodies than the social partners. Moreover, only 2 of the 24 places on the CDBs are allocated to the community and voluntary sector, which is contingent on the sector being organised in a Community Forum (Acheson and Williamson 2007: 39). The CDBs and their strategies are of particular interest because they are the localisation of the Irish model of social partnership; and the strategies are explicitly considered as vehicles for promoting Local Agenda 21 (Mullally and Motherway, forthcoming). The strategies emerged from structured consultation processes and encompass agreed visions, goals, objectives and actions and, have built-in mechanisms for monitoring, review and revision.

Furthermore, in early 2005, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government required that the CDBs should carry out a review of their strategies (focusing in particular on their coordination role) and produce an implementation strategy for the period 2005–2008. All of these factors suggest that the CDB process provides a context, mechanism and an agreed strategy conducive to the *governance* of local sustainable development, but what does that mean?

3.3 Developments in the Concept of Sustainable Development

Much time and energy has been expended on the 'true meaning' of the concept of sustainable development, often generating more heat than light. Yet, rooted firmly in the Brundtland Commission's report *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987), sustainable development, defined as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs', has mobilised collective actors in different sectors and at different levels of society and has shifted the ground of environmental debate considerably over just two decades.

The process initiated by *Our Common Future* brought a focus to questions of equity and environment and raised important ethical questions regarding human–environment relations that remain highly relevant today (Snedden et al. 2006: 254). It established the aims of sustainable development as 'the improvement of human well-being; more equitable distribution of resource use benefits across and within societies; and development that ensures ecological integrity over intergenerational timescales' (Sneddon et al. 2006: 255–6). Although there is considerable disagreement as to how this could be implemented effectively, there can be little doubt

that 'the ambitions enunciated in Rio – prefigured by the Brundtland report (WCED 1987) in 1987 – involve significant changes in economic, social and cultural institutions' (Lafferty 2004: 19). Arguments about the definition of sustainable development are not simply 'semantic disputations, but the substantive political arguments with which the term is concerned' (Connelly 2007: 262). Jordan (2008: 20) notes that 'the constant processes of redefinition and interpretation that has taken place since 1987 has been mostly concerned not with fixing a precise definition of sustainable development in one or two lines of text'; rather, the focus has been on 'exploring the interplay between different sub-principles of sustainable development', including improving inter-generational and intra-generational equity; alleviating chronic poverty; encouraging public participation in decision-making, observing important limits to growth; and integrating an environmental dimension into all sectoral policy areas.

The goals of sustainable development are not defined unequivocally: 'rather, the single pillars of sustainability are subject to ongoing controversies based on heterogeneous perceptions, values and interests of individuals' (Newig et al. 2007: 187). The point is not to find a definitive meaning but to recognise plurality and the ways in which these 'are shaped and mobilised in political discourse', how the ideals of sustainable development are put into practice, and thus how the term is given concrete meaning (Connelly 2007: 262).

3.3.1 Shifting Interpretations

Whereas the Rio conference interpreted sustainable development as a single process with economic, social and environmental dimensions, Johannesburg defined it as three distinct processes, of 'economic development, social development and environmental protection – as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars' (George 2007: 103). The consequent ambiguity has heightened the perception that the practical translation of sustainable development is vague, contradictory, or confused.

3.3.1.1 Shifts at Global Level: The World Summit on Sustainable Development

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg 2002, 'participating governments reaffirmed the commitments made in Rio and offered reassurance on what was already agreed upon 10 years earlier' in Agenda 21 (Von Frantzius 2004: 472). The Johannesburg Summit was, however, markedly different from the UNCED conference in Rio with a particular focus on the implementation of sustainable development, rather than on policy creation as such (Steiner 2003). Assessments regarding the success or failure of the summit (La Viña et al. 2003; Wapner 2003), and subsequent progress on the implementation of sustainable development vary (Death 2008). Nevertheless, some of the outcomes of the WSSD are important to consider, particularly the Political Declaration and the Plan of Implementation (Von Frantzius 2004: 469).

The Political Declaration (Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development) outlines the challenges facing sustainable development, and specifies a number of general commitments such as the promotion of women's empowerment and greater democratic *participation* in sustainable development policies (Wapner 2003: 3). According to Von Frantzius (2004: 467), 'it does not set international principles that could be invoked in legal or political contexts, but is a more general philosophical contextualisation for the more detailed Plan of Implementation'. Jabareen (2008: 188) notes that it is 'significant that [the] political declaration of the WSSD, while dealing with sustainable development, focused on poverty eradication, changing consumption and production patterns, and managing the natural base for economic and social development rather than purely ecological matters'.

The Plan of Implementation as a plan of action was negotiated and agreed between governments (Von Frantzius 2004: 467). As such, the Plan of Implementation is a *political* document and is not legally binding, therefore, like Agenda 21 before it, it is designed to guide decisions (La Viña et al. 2003). The plan identifies a number of overarching goals such as eradicating poverty, changing consumption and production patterns, and protecting the natural resource base of the earth (Wapner 2003). Key priorities for action were identified in the areas of water and sanitation, energy, health, agriculture, biodiversity protection and ecosystem management, otherwise referred to as the 'WEHAB initiative'.

3.3.1.2 Shifts at Supranational Level: The EU Strategy for Sustainable Development

The current discourse of sustainable development has taken shape in the EU through a series of legislative

proposals, European treaties and developments in soft law. Vogler (2005: 837) points out that the beginnings of EU environmental action and the creation of environmental ministries in many member states are related to the developments in the international arena, particularly the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. According to Baker (2007: 304–5), the *Fifth Environmental Action Programme* (1992–2000) remains the major policy document structuring the EU's commitment to sustainable development, intertwining the twin imperatives of economic growth and environmental protection as mutually reinforcing aims of EU policy. It borrowed heavily from the Brundtland report's (WCED 18987) definition of sustainable development and was subsequently given legal status in the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997, which gave particular weight to the importance of environmental integration (Bomberg 2004: 64).

Responding to the recognition that progress on the integration of sustainable development into all policy areas had hitherto been relatively poor, leadership of the process was transferred from the Commission to the European Council at Cardiff in 1997. The process of Environmental Policy Integration or 'Cardiff Process', was initiated where the Council of Ministers in all of its formations was required to integrate sustainable development into its respective areas, and to constantly monitor improvements and address shortcomings (Jacob and Volkery 2004: 300). Heads of state reinforced their commitment to sustainable development by asking the Commission to propose a European Sustainable Development Strategy (EUSDS) at the Helsinki Summit in 1999 (Bomberg 2004: 64). The Gothenberg Summit in June 2001 adopted the Commission's Sustainable Development Strategy: 'symbolically and strategically Gothenberg was significant in that it signalled a shift – at least in discourse – from the language of economic governance (market and economic growth) to sustainable development' (Bomberg 2004: 66). Politically, it committed European leaders to a strategy and mechanisms to monitor implementation. The impetus for the EUSDS (and its renewal) therefore came not from the Commission, but from the European Council (Pallemaerts et al. 2007: 11). Although the EUSDS represents a high-level attempt at political steering, it is salutary to note that sustainable development has gone through cycles of prioritisation depending on which member state holds the presidency of the Council (Bomberg 2004: 71). Equally, the attempt at policy coordination at EU and member state level relies heavily on voluntarism (Pallemaerts et al. 2007: 27). The process both anticipates and reflects the growing emphasis on economic and social development in the WSSD interpretation of sustainable development, and the governance of the EUSDS reflects the diversification and hybridisation of governance practices at the global and EU levels.

In one interpretation, the EUSDS forms part of environmental mainstreaming in the EU (Usui 2007: 620). In another, 'by changing its emphasis, the EU tried to stress that sustainable development is more than a purely environmental concept, which poses a fundamental challenge to the organisation of the economy and society' (Pallemaerts et al. 2007: 9). The EUSDS covered 'a wide range of policy areas and puts environmental actions into a wider context subsuming issues such as poverty, social exclusion, the ageing society, land use, transportation and world poverty' (Usui 2007: 621). The EUSDS identified priority areas for sustainable development: climate change, transport, public health and natural resources and also included the elements of poverty and social exclusion, and the ageing of the European population which had already been agreed under the Lisbon Agenda in 2000 (Pallemaerts et al. 2007: 10, 23). Indeed, this is regarded as a key problem of the EUSDS in that, prior to considering the strategy, the European Council had previously agreed an overall strategy for economic and social renewal through a series of structural reforms, effectively isolating economic and social elements from the broader sustainable development agenda.

The Renewed EUSDS published in 2006 elaborates on the 2001 strategy, adding two additional priorities related to social cohesion and the EU's role in promoting sustainable development (Pallemaerts et al. 2007: 11). One of the most notable features of the Renewed EUSDS is that it is couched in the language of well-being and quality of life. Pallemaerts et al. (2007: 26) note that Renewed EUSDS is seen by the Council as forming the overall framework within which the Lisbon Strategy provides the motor of a more dynamic economy; however, when the Council gives a policy orientation on sustainable development it must take account of the priorities of Lisbon (2007: 26). The Renewed Lisbon Strategy 2005 simply reiterates the important contribution of environmental policy to growth and employment (Usui

2007: 627). The lack of a reciprocal acknowledgement prioritising environmental objectives suggests that the Lisbon process is very much to the fore.

3.3.1.3 Shifts at the National Level: Review and Revision of the Strategy for Sustainable Development

An interim review of the strategy formed the basis of the Irish government's submission to the WSSD in 2002. The review outlines the guiding principles, objectives and policy priorities. The guiding principles were developed by Comhar in 2002 and are discussed below. The broad policy objectives are outlined under the headings of eco-efficiency (more efficient production with less environmental impact and a progressive decoupling of economic activity and environmental degradation); quality of life (increased environmental quality for present and future generations coupled with greater opportunities for participation in decision-making and in community life more generally); and social policy (reducing consistent poverty, building an inclusive society, developing social capital and eliminating long-term unemployment) (DoELG 2002: 92–4). The key policy priorities of the review include: climate change; nature, biodiversity and heritage; environment and health; and waste management. These in turn are supported by cross-sectoral priorities and approaches heralding a mix of policy instruments, with voluntary and participative instruments operating in conjunction with instruments to improve existing regulatory measures (DoELG 2002: 97–8).

Rather than revising the strategy as such, the document is a review of the experience of implementing sustainable development during a period of rapid economic development, since the 1997 strategy remains the pre-eminent statement of sustainable development policies in Ireland (Niestroy 2005: 184). Nevertheless, there are a number of visible shifts to be discerned in the review that may prove significant. The first shift is that the review provided a new definition of sustainable development, 'reflecting an evolution in thinking moving towards an emphasis on quality of life and integrative approach' (Haughton et al. 2008). The second shift is that the social dimension of sustainable development is far more prominent than in the 1997 strategy. Given the timing of the review in 2002, this both reflects a similar trend in the EU and anticipates the shift in sustainable development that arises at the WSSD. The emphasis, however, is still more redolent of ecological modernisation than sustainable development (Davies 2008). The social dimension is also accentuated in the Irish government's *First Implementation Report* on the EUSDS 2007 (DoEHLG 2007: 1), where the language of social inclusion, social cohesion, quality of life and well-being is far more pronounced. The *First Implementation Report* is careful to point out that it 'is not a comprehensive analysis of sustainable development in Ireland or Ireland's sustainable development strategy'. However, it notes that 'the process of further reviewing Ireland's NSDS [National Strategy for Sustainable Development] was commenced in 2006 in light of the revised EU SDS and bearing in mind Ireland's specific circumstances including the publication of the Lisbon Agenda National Reform Programme 2005; …and the National Development Plan 2007–2013' (DoEHLG 2007: 50). In negotiating coherence and consistency between multi-level strategies for sustainable development, the hierarchy of priorities and asymmetries of influence between the Lisbon Process and the EUSDS are reproduced in the Irish context. The Lisbon Agenda and the National Development Plan (NDP) are exerting a structuring influence over the renewed NSSD, rather than the other way around. The NDP 2007–2016 gives a good indication of the lexical shift in relation to development in Ireland given its title, *Transforming Ireland: Towards a Better Quality of Life for All*. Davies points out that the NDP seemed to represent a departure from the economic–environment preoccupation witnessed in the NSSD, but on closer examination the rhetorical shift towards integration left the parallel paths of environmental protection and social development intact (Davies 2008). This appears to be confirmed by the emphasis in *Building Ireland's Smart Economy* published by the Irish government in December 2008. This document commits Ireland to the development of a 'green economy and places particular emphasis on the economic costs of climate change' (Department of an Taoiseach 2008).

3.4 The Theory and Practice of Sustainability Governance

3.4.1 Steering Sustainable Development: Normative and Descriptive Approaches

In the period between the major summits in Stockholm, Rio and Johannesburg, political discourse at multiple

levels (e.g. UN, OECD, EU, national and local levels) has turned to the question of appropriate ways of steering the transition to sustainable development; moreover, the emphasis on governance has grown in social and political science (Lafferty 2004, Voß and Kemp 2005). The juxtaposition of sustainable development and governance is far from uniform, with calls variously for 'sustainable governance', 'governance for sustainable development', 'reflexive governance for sustainable development', 'earth system governance' and 'global environmental governance' (Jordan 2008: 17). Nevertheless, we can gainfully make an *analytic* distinction between governance *for* sustainable development and governance *of* sustainable development.

Governance *for* sustainable development seeks to identify and prescribe what governance systems should be employed; the argument here is 'that systems of government can and should be configured in ways that not only encourage societal dialogue, but also transform attitudes and beliefs in ways that actively facilitate sustainable development' (Jordan 2008: 20, 163–4). This is the challenge of developing an institutional capacity to steer societal development within the parameters for ecological sustainability. A broad-ranging programme for social change, like sustainable development, needs intentional institutional transformation, which in turn requires institutional design: 'at all levels of social deliberation and action, including policymaking, planning and programme design and implementation' (Alexander 2006: 2). Sociology understands 'institutions as emergent configurations which structure the context of action for all actors' (Göll, and Thio 2008: 71). Göll and Thio (2008: 86, 25) suggest that 'it might be that innovative sustainable development institutions could become prototypes of a new "sustainable governance structure" or even cornerstones of new political systems which support sustainable development'. The emphasis here is on 'deliberate adjustment of practices of governance to ensure that society eventually proceeds along a sustainable trajectory'; hence, governance *for* sustainable development. Governance *for* sustainable development as it is employed here is, therefore, a normative horizon that allows us to introduce an *evaluative* standard to specific empirical contexts.

In order to understand the actual ways in which normative aspirations might become established institutionalised practice, we require a stronger appreciation of the contexts in which these types of governance are embedded, and the struggles involved in reconfiguring institutional arrangements (Hendriks and Grin 2007: 337, 24). Therefore, the governance *of* sustainable development is concerned with how sustainable development has been interpreted and pursued in different governance contexts and systems. Pre-existing institutional orders are fundamentally important to the creation of paths towards sustainable development. The focus on the governance *of* sustainable development is, therefore, oriented to the description of specific contexts, innovations and initiatives. Van Zeijl-Rozema et al. (2008) suggest that the different modes of governance available for sustainable development exist on a continuum between hierarchical governance (traditional governing), and deliberative governance in which societal actors shape societal goals through dialogue and social learning. The question is to what degree these modes of governance have become conjoined, connected, or coalesced at the local level in Ireland? How have existing patterns of governance accommodated institutional innovations for sustainable development? In a system of multi-level governance, attempts to coordinate political steering for sustainable development has been effected through a series of summits and political agreements (global and EU), the creation of new institutions and, more importantly, through the development of strategies for sustainable development at global, EU, national and local levels of governance. The specific model for sustainable development considered here is the 'Rio model of governance' that emerged from the Earth Summit in 1992. Jänicke points out that the 'Rio model of governance' is a knowledge-based model of steering rather than one based on power and legal obligation, essentially a voluntary process of policy innovation, lesson drawing and policy diffusion (Jänicke 2006: 1, 4). In essence, it is a multi-actor, multi-sector, multi-level system of governance (Jänicke 2006). Yet, governments are still key actors in these processes, and planning towards a sustainable society thus takes place in the interaction between government and governance (Evans et al. 2007).

3.4.2 Governance as an Integrative Process

Lafferty (2004) conceives of governance for sustainable development as referring to vertical environmental policy integration (across levels of governance), and

horizontal environmental policy integration (across sectors). In a similar vein, we might distinguish between *horizontal* and *vertical governance* where the horizontal level includes 'the relevant actors in decision-making processes within a defined geographical or functional segment' (e.g. community, region, nation), and the vertical level describes the links between the segments (e.g. the institutional relationships between the local, regional and state levels) (Renn 2008: 9). As such, the governance of *local* sustainable development does not exist in a vacuum and must take account of the influence of multiple levels of governance.

3.4.3 Governance as a Strategic Learning Process

Sustainable development problems often involve the complex interaction between very different elements from the domains of society, technology and nature (Voß et al. 2007: 197). The structuring of these interactions is important because feed-back loops and the emergent dynamics of systems can itself make interventions risky (Voß et al. 2007: 197). Sustainability as an orientation for development delivers ambiguous goals (Voß and Kemp 2005: 15), and consequently governance has to contend with *ambivalence* and conflict (Voß et al. 2007: 194).

The growing complexity and intensified uncertainty of contemporary society increases the demand for knowledge in decision-making. In this context, there is also a growing demand from society for the inclusion of non-official and competing voices in decision-making. The consequence is a shift from the relatively closed networks of experts and decision-makers to more open, multi-lateral knowledge networks as inputs to policy-making and deliberation (Crozier 2007: 4). Governance for sustainable development is concerned not *only* with the design and implementation of government policy, but also with collective processes of monitoring, reflection, debate and decision that establish the orientation for policy (Meadowcroft et al. 2005: 5).

3.4.3.1 Sustainable Development Strategies as Mechanisms for Coordination and Learning

Sustainable development strategies in general are interesting in terms of 'their meta-governance role as integrative devices both in their own right and in terms of how other governmental strategies are expected to incorporate the resulting understanding of sustainable development into their own work' (Haughton et al. 2008: 1226). Meadowcroft (2007a: 161) points out that sustainable development strategies 'with their institutionalised cycles of goal definition/policy designation/implementation/review and revision can also provide an iterative mechanism for publicly taking stock and orienting efforts for social transformation'. As well as providing for inputs from advisory bodies, strategies for sustainable development 'can also create mechanisms for integrating stakeholders into a structured review of social practices related to sustainable development'. In this sense, the process dimensions of sustainable development strategies are actually example of 'reflexive governance for sustainable development' (Voß and Kemp 2005).

The *Renewed EU Strategy for Sustainable Development* (Council of the European Union 2006) contains detailed arrangements for implementation, monitoring and follow-up and specifies what is required of other institutions and member states. For example, member states are expected to adopt national sustainable development strategies and submit them for 'voluntary peer review' by other member states, and the Commission is required to submit progress reports on EU and member state levels every two years to the European Council (Pallemaerts et al. 2007: 29–30). The introduction of the requirement on the Commission to submit progress reports to the Council every two years beginning in 2007 strengthens the transparency dimension of the EUSDS; it also provides for an iterative and cumulative assessment of the implementation process over time. The Irish NSSD is currently in the process of being renewed and, given past experience, the *Renewed EU Strategy for Sustainable Development* is potentially exerting an important structuring influence on the process. Recent indications are that the renewed NSSD is likely to follow 'a thematic rather than a sectoral approach', and that 'the governance of sustainable development is also an issue being carefully reviewed in this process' (DoEHLG 2007: 51).

3.4.4 Governance as a Capacity-Building Process

Jänicke, referring to strategies for sustainable development, argues that 'ambitious strategies need adequate capacities', where capacity can be defined by the limits of possible action within a given context (Jänicke 2006: 7). In an extensive study of Local Agenda 21 in Europe, Evans et al. (2006) highlights the importance of capacity-building measures at the local level. In

particular, they stress the importance of the relationship between the institutional capacity of local governments and the broader social capacity of their communities. Institutional capital defines the 'internal patterns of behaviour, ways of working, as well as the collective values, knowledge and relationships that exist within any organised group in society'. Furthermore, 'different forms of institutional structures and relationships lead to different levels of institutional capacities for sustainable development' (Evans et al. 2006: 853). Therefore, the potential for local sustainable development is likely to be conditioned by the structures and relationships of different groups in society. An exogenous concept like sustainable development has to be 'integrated into the values and meanings of local communities' (Mannberg and Wihlborg 2008: 40).

Politics and policy-making is not just about finding solutions to problems: 'it is as much about finding formats that generate trust among mutually interdependent actors' (Hajer and Wagernaar 2003: 17). Trust is necessarily an outcome of social relations rather than a precondition (Lehtonen 2004: 204). Governance understood as interaction between stakeholders and local governmental structures can build trust between the actors, conferring *informal legitimacy* on the process (Mannberg and Wihlborg 2008: 40). The problem for sustainable development is that multi-stakeholder processes often rely on the slow accumulation of social trust. This tends to reduce the ability of groups to undertake action in the short term, and when decisions are made, they tend to be incremental (Lawrence 2004: 14).

Dale and Onyx (2005: 7) argue that 'social capital is essential to sustainable development because the reconciliation of the three imperatives can only occur through collective action, and collective action will not occur unless there is an adequate stock of social capital'. The OECD defines social capital as 'shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within and between groups' (Bullock et al. 2008: 11). The linkage between sustainable development and social capital, however, remains largely unexamined: 'it is simply assumed that building social capital will enhance efforts to create sustainable communities' (Bridger and Lulloff 2001: 458). It must be stressed that concepts like social capital or capacity do not constitute rigorous theoretical frameworks for measuring the social dimensions of sustainable development. Rather, they need to be seen as 'useful metaphors that help with structuring thoughts, allowing the exploration of a system approach with three fundamentally different, but nevertheless interrelated, clusters of variables – ecological, social and economic' (Lehtonen 2004: 206).

Evans et al. (2006: 854, 855–6) argue that key elements of institutional design within local governance are crucial for the creation and mobilisation of social capital. These elements are: the relationship between local government and the voluntary sector; the presence of opportunities for citizen participation; responsiveness of decision-making to policy inputs and preferences; and the capacity to listen to and channel demands. Attention to these elements can provide a bridge between local governments and local communities or for bridging social capital (Newman and Dale 2007: 82). However, the need to deliver on policy goals means that 'the process of bridging has to be more selective, focused and instrumental … the benefits of social capital are rooted in the diversity of information and opportunities for brokerage between people, not strong social cohesion' (Rydin and Holman 2004: 124).

Sustainable development therefore requires a great deal of cross-sector, multi-agency work to effect change (Rydin and Holman 2004: 126). Local authorities vary considerably in their capacity 'to play a catalytic role in the formation of multi-agency partnerships' (Wallis and Dollery 2002: 77), and to steer local governance and development because many decisions affecting sustainable development lie outside of their control. The concept of 'bracing social capital' is required to address 'the reality of cross sectoral, cross scale horizontal and vertical linkages that are involved in many partnerships of governance' (Rydin and Holman 2004: 122, 853). Bracing social capital is primarily concerned with strengthening links across and between scales and sectors, but only operates within a limited set of actors provides a kind of social scaffolding' for strengthening local capacities for sustainable development. This type of social capital is concerned with developing the capacity 'to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions' beyond the local level (Lehtonen 2004: 205).

For actual participants in governance processes, 'the legitimacy of a decision-making procedure may be linked to the outcomes achieved', rather than simply being based on the initial commitments that people brought

into the process (Zwart 2003: 40). In terms of local sustainable development, the link between social capital and *policy adoption* has been shown to be stronger than the link between social capital and *environmental outcomes* in a recent study on Local Agenda 21, because environmental quality is the result of complex interactions between policies and technological and structural factors' (Owen and Videras 2008: 260). The ability to turn social capital into action for sustainable development (agency) denotes 'the capacity of persons to transform existing states of affairs, the capacity to plan and initiate action, and the ability to respond to events outside of one's immediate sphere of influence to produce a desired effect' (Newman and Dale 2007: 81–2). *Effective* public participation can, in theory, strengthen civil society and 'build adaptive, self-organising polities capable of addressing complex problems and stimulate wider civic engagement as a means of restoring trust in institutions of local government' (Scott et al. 2007: 166).

3.5 Participation and Sustainable Development: Theories and Practices

3.5.1 Participation in Principle

Bäckstrand (2006a: 470) associates the UNCED process in Rio in 1992 with the participative turn in the governance of sustainable development and points out that the emphasis on the participation and involvement of major groups from civil society emerged as a cornerstone of Agenda 21. The emphasis on participation was reiterated at the WSSD. The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development stresses that 'sustainable development requires a long term perspective and broad based participation in decision-making and implementation at all levels' (McCauley 2008: 154). The principle of participation is therefore now well established in the debate on sustainable development, and is codified in Chapter 23 of Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, as well as in the Stockholm Declaration, the Brundtland report and the Rio Accords (Green 2005: 70).

3.5.2 Participation in Theory and Practice

An understanding of the concept of participation is often assumed; however, in practice, actions are often based on differing perceptions of participation, and different perceptions of the level and quality of participation being sought, partially because of the lack of experience of effective participation practice (Meldon et al. 2004: 39). The language of participation can sometimes be confusing, with many terms used differently by commentators and many versions of categories and taxonomies in existence. A first important distinction is between the general term 'participation', and the more specific term 'consultation'. The OECD (2001: 2) sees the distinction as:

- Consultation: a two-way relation in which citizens provide feedback to government. It is based on the prior definition by government of the issue on which citizens' views are being sought and requires the provision of information.
- Active participation: a relation based on partnership with government, in which citizens actively engage in the policy-making process. It acknowledges a role for citizens in proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation rests with government.

Following a mapping exercise that he carried out on varieties of participation in complex governance, Archon Fung (2006: 67) argued that three questions of institutional design are crucial for understanding the potentials and limitations of participatory forms: (i) Who participates? (ii) How do they communicate and make decisions? and (iii) What is the connection between their conclusions and opinions on the one hand and public policy and action on the other? By exploring the answers to these questions in empirical cases, he identifies a three-dimensional institutional design space or 'democracy cube' that maps arenas of decision-making.

In terms of participants, on a continuum ranging from more exclusive to more inclusive, Fung (2006: 68, 69, 70) includes the state (expert administrators, elected representatives), mini-publics (professional stakeholders, lay stakeholders, random selection, open targeted recruitment, open self-selection) and public (diffuse public spheres). In terms of the modes of communication and decision, ranging from less to more intense, he includes communication (listening as spectator, express preferences, develop preferences), decision (aggregate and bargain, deliberate and negotiate, deploy technique and expertise). Finally, he

addresses questions of authority and power ranging from least to most authority, and including no influence (individual education/civic obligation), exerting influence (communicative influence, advice and consultation), and exercising direct power (co-governing partnership, direct authority). Different regions of this institutional design space are more or less suited to addressing the key values of democratic governance, namely legitimacy and effectiveness; however, no single design can simultaneously satisfy both. Used as an analytic model, he argues that we can begin to uncover the 'actual forms and contributions of participation' (Fung 2006: 74).

Renn (2008: 324–5), however, cautions that different mechanisms for public participation have different normative, substantive and procedural bases.[6] For example, public enquires, in theory, are primarily underpinned by a functionalist approach focused on the quality of decision-making outputs, the integration of different knowledge claims and representation by a diversity of different social groups. Referenda, focus groups and environmental mediation are underpinned by a liberal (neo-liberal) approach that emphasises informed consent and judgements – results are ideally based on informed choices and on an adequate representation of values and preferences in proportion to the affected population. Mechanisms like citizen juries and planning cells stem from what Renn classifies as an 'anthropological' approach, i.e. employing 'common sense' as the arbiter of disputes. Based on the jury system, the results are based on informed choices; however, representation is based on the inclusion of 'disinterested laypersons representing basic social categories such as gender, income and locality'. Renn (2008: 303, 302) points out that 'conflicts about the best structure of a participatory process arise from overt or latent adherence to one or another concept of participation'. In spite of a wide range of theoretical models and empirical modes of participation that are available, there has been a tendency to converge, albeit for different reasons, around *deliberative* approaches to participation.

6 Renn identifies six ideal typical structuring processes that channel public input into public policy-making. These include: functionalist, neo-liberal, deliberative, anthropological, emancipatory and post modern. Only three are included here for illustrative purposes. An extensive account of the theories of participation is available in Renn (2008), Chapter 8.

3.5.3 Sustainable Development and Deliberation

The growing emphasis on deliberative approaches to participation has a number of diverse roots, for example: concerns about the loss of public faith in decision-making on environmental and risk issues; an interest in more pluralist decision-making processes to reflect the diversities and differentiations of contemporary societies; the imperatives of inclusivity, reflexivity and social learning, and the growth of theories of democracy promoting participation and deliberation as a means of power redistribution (Petts 2005: 404). In reality, there has been an observable shift from the normative to the empirical where 'expansive democracy has moved from an alluring ideal to a budding reality in many regions, countries and policy domains' (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003: 8).

Participatory processes, if they are to contribute effectively to sustainable development, must encourage 'adequate representation of implicated interests and openness to public scrutiny; deliberative engagement among the implicated parties; the application and integration of different types of knowledge to decision-making; and the promotion of societal learning' (Meadowcroft 2004: 165). Meadowcroft is talking here about mechanisms for *enhanced* participation in public decision-making and implementation – above and beyond well-established modes of electoral representation, public debate, political organisation, pluralist bargaining or corporatist interaction, he is talking about deliberation.

Typically, we can identify three main types of participation: (i) citizen participation, (ii) community-centred participation and (iii) participation by stakeholder organisations. *Citizens* as individuals can participate in public life through a variety of mechanisms (e.g. joining a political party, becoming active in a social movement or associational life in civil society, or by contributing to public debate). Citizenship is 'a mediating practice which connects the individual and the institutional levels of society, as well as a common identity which links otherwise disparate individuals together as a collectivity with common interests' (Barry 1996). Public consultation and structured public enquires allow for the expression of public views, but not decisions on an outcome or even the possibility for recommending a course of action (Meadowcroft 2004). Referenda, whether they are legally binding or merely consultative, do allow for the shaping of outcomes – nevertheless, they are confined

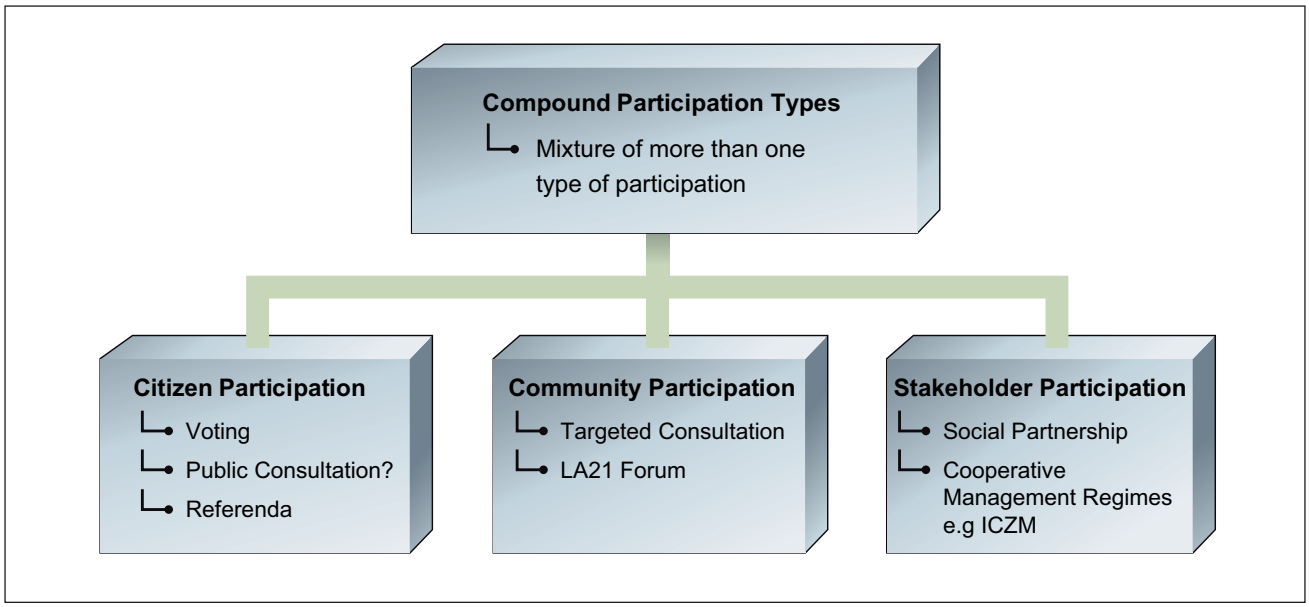

Figure 3.1. Typology of participation for sustainable development.

to fixed predefined alternatives on specific issues. One example of a mechanism that does allow for more detailed consideration of policy options and alternatives is the citizen jury model where 'a stratified random sample of citizens represent as a whole' (Meadowcroft 2004: 172–3).

Community-centred approaches emphasise the locus of participation as local communities where groups are brought more actively into problem-solving processes. While it can be effected through mechanisms like consultation and enquiries, it is generally more targeted towards consultation with organisations and groups in the community and voluntary sector that make up local civil society. In the context of sustainable development this often means directly targeting typically excluded groups, e.g. women, youth and non-nationals. Examples of community-centred approaches include discourse-oriented models, e.g. a Local Agenda 21 Forum (Renn 2008: 303). Meadowcroft (2004: 178) observes that the major challenge for these types of approach is how to: 'frame meaningful local participation in a context where many of the most important decisions affecting communities will inevitably be made by more extensive political units'.

Stakeholder approaches allow for established groups, organised interests and peak organisations to engage in focused interactions in a particular policy domain, through the participation of their representatives. These approaches are typically focused on the interaction of a limited set of actors through partnership. Partnerships are 'institutional designs for collaboration [that] offer flexibility and stakeholder engagement, but are loosely coupled to representative democratic systems' (Skelcher et al. 2005: 573, 574). Examples include social partnership at local level; and cooperative management approaches, such as integrated coastal zone management and river-basin management. Skelcher et al. point out that their design is driven by imperatives to do with the horizontal and vertical integration in policy implementation rather than democratic needs. In reality, many processes can contain compound types involving the combination of some or all of the types of participation identified here (Meadowcroft 2004: 180) (Fig. 3.1).

Deliberation in theoretical terms refers to an account of democratic politics, 'in which reasoning and exchange of viewpoints provide a way of understanding the values of democracy and the sources of political legitimacy' (Weale 2007: 79). While the concept of sustainable development indicates the kinds of issues that should be of concern, it is subject to democratic *legitimacy*, since 'its practical bearing cannot be established independent of the concrete life circumstances of a particular society and the needs, interests and values and aspirations of its members' (Meadowcroft 2007b: 161). A key challenge for sustainable development is that the sites of governance are multiple and power is diffused among many actors (Bäckstrand 2006b: 295). In order to be effective, 'various social sectors, strata and

organizations must be involved because the knowledge required to establish pathways to sustainability is dispersed throughout society' (Meadowcroft 2007a: 161, 166). Enhanced participation 'can promote the integration of knowledge and the adaptation of governance to diverse cross cutting contexts relevant to its achievement'. Furthermore, it can help 'to promote adaptive management and knowledge acquisition by societal partners'.

In theory, deliberation also evokes a sense of 'agency, intention and change' where actors reflect not only on environment and development problems, but also upon 'the approaches, structures and systems that reproduce them' (Hendriks and Grin 2007: 335). This suggests that participation is not simply a question of legitimacy, there is also some expectation of *effectiveness*, i.e. 'the need for a certain degree of confidence that human activities and actions will actually result in the consequences that actors intend when performing these actions (Renn 2008: 286). Bäckstrand (2006a: 470) has noted a qualitative shift in the understanding of the relationship between participation and sustainable development in the Johannesburg debate, since: 'more participation was not enough; it had to be structured to encourage deliberation and collaboration of disparate actors with a stake in the implementation of Agenda 21'.

3.5.4.1 Evaluating Participation

Dryzek (2002: 29) characterises the process of democratisation as the expansion of democracy through the increase in franchise, scope and authenticity. An increase in franchise indicates the expansion of the number of people capable of participating in a collectively binding decision. Scope indicates bringing more areas of life under potentially democratic control. Authenticity refers to the effective participation of autonomous and competent actors, participation that is real rather than symbolic. Dryzek points out that deliberation can potentially contribute most to increasing democratic authenticity. The question now is how to evaluate emergent institutional governance designs in the light of sustainable development. Bäckstrand distinguishes between input and output legitimacy as standards for evaluation of deliberative institutional forms (2006a, 2006b): 'legitimacy stems from a procedural logic (that rules are predictable and determined by legitimate actors) and a consequential logic (that rules and institutions lead to collective problem solving)' (Bäckstrand 2006b: 294). Input legitimacy concerns procedural demands such as representation from different stakeholder groups; forums for deliberation, issues around transparency, access and accountability (Bäckstrand 2006a: 477). Output legitimacy concerns the effectiveness of new modes of governance in relation to their problem-solving and implementation capacity. She makes a very important distinction between 'outcome effectiveness' or the ability to solve problems; and 'institutional effectiveness': the extent to which adequate institutional frameworks for measuring monitoring and review are in place as a precondition of achieving desired sustainable development outcomes (Bäckstrand 2006: 478–9). The former may be difficult to evaluate given that 'the implementation of sustainable development goals is an extensive, conflict-ridden and long-term process'.

For the purposes here, 'institutional effectiveness' is a more useful measure of the output legitimacy of sustainability governance, since it is tied to the procedural values of representation, participation, accountability and transparency (Bäckstrand 2006). Bäckstrand points out that evaluation of this type is not about absolutes or tight classification – rather, it generates insights into degrees and continuums of legitimacy very much in keeping with the types of model elucidated by Van Zeijl-Rozema et al. (2008), Renn (2008), and Fung (2006). By positing input and output legitimacy in relation to one another, Bäckstrand is able to construct an evaluative model that is arguably transferable to other contexts and situations (Fig. 3.2). If the result shows high levels of input legitimacy and high levels of effectiveness then this is a strong version of stakeholder democracy. High levels of democratic representation with low levels of effectiveness represent a symbolic participative politics (Bäckstrand 2006a: 479). If there are low levels of input legitimacy and high levels of effectiveness, this indicates effective stakeholder influence but not necessarily on a democratic basis. Finally, low levels of input legitimacy coupled with low levels of effectiveness indicate co-optive politics. The issue of deliberative quality is important here since it is not simply an issue of *gaining access to decision-making*, but also of the ability to *influence* norms and values, and to shape discourse (Petschow et al. 2005: 11).

Criteria for the evaluation of the CDB process must include both objective yardsticks from a theoretical perspective, e.g. Bäckstrand's model, and reflect the

figure 3.2

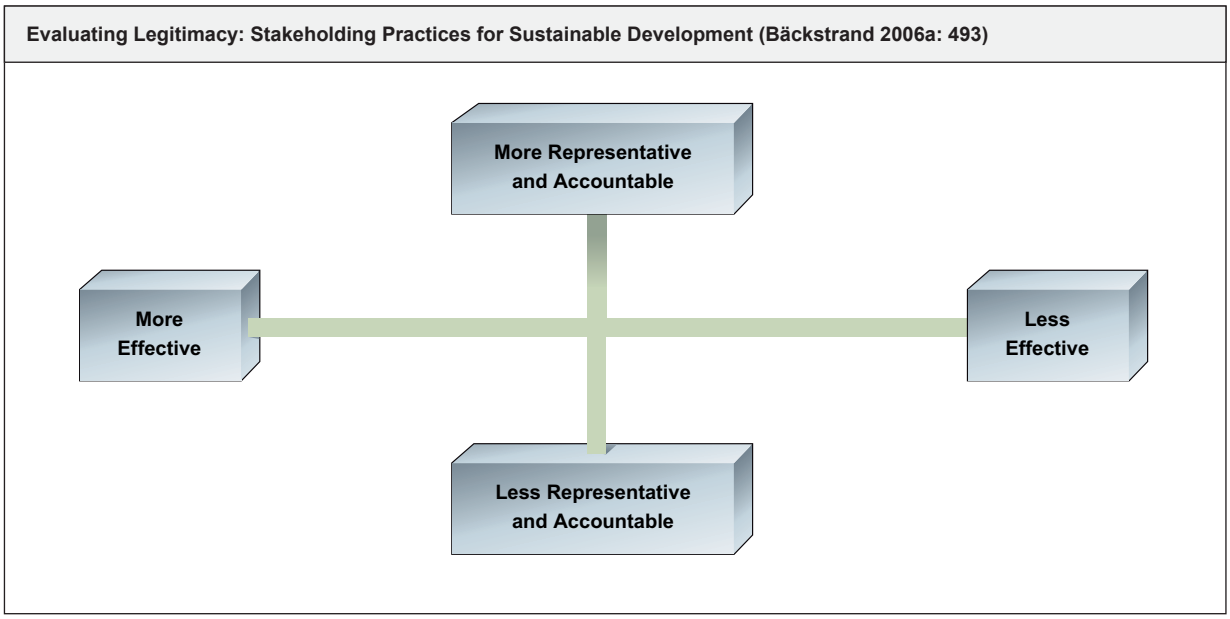

Figure 3.2. Evaluating stakeholder practice.

subjective evaluations of participants (Renn 2008: 321). Gathering together insights from the literature, the specific model of evaluation will now be outlined.

3.6 The SUSPART Model of Evaluation: Questions, Dimensions and Parameters

The report has established that the CDB process is seen as a key vehicle for promoting public participation in local sustainable development. Gathering together the key insights of the literature review, the following key questions come to the fore:

1 How is sustainable development understood and integrated within the CDB process? The question here is not simply one of definition, but also prominence, prioritisation and action.

2 How, and in what way, does the CDB process contribute to enhanced steering, learning and capacity building for local sustainable development?

3 How, and to what extent, does the CDB process contribute to *effective* participation for sustainable development?

These three questions structure our inquiry across a multi-method approach, namely a content analysis of the strategies, interviews with Directors of Community and Enterprise and stakeholder interviews.

In order to understand the integration of sustainable development within the CDB process, (i) the content of the strategies was first analysed to understand the degree to which the strategies prioritised sustainable development; contained agreed vision statements that emphasised sustainable development; and the degree to which the discourse of sustainable development was evident. Although local sustainable development and Local Agenda 21 are not synonymous, the fact that the latter was the major initiative conjoining the substantive and procedural dimensions of sustainable development through the 1990s means that it is a useful proxy. Therefore, the content of the strategies were examined for specific mentions of Local Agenda 21 and related environmental initiatives (i.e. environmental initiatives that have a partnership/participative dimension). This was followed up in the interviews. The interviews with the Directors of Community and Enterprise were used to clarify the integration of sustainable development in the development of the strategies through 'sustainability proofing'; the cross-cutting nature of sustainable development in the actions; and to establish the types of Local Agenda 21 actions undertaken. The stakeholder interviews were then used to elicit subjective evaluations of the integration of sustainable development in the CDB process.

The specific contributions of the CDB process to: (ii) enhanced steering, learning and capacity building for

sustainable development and (iii) effective participation for sustainable development were analysed along a number of dimensions.

The first dimension is the actual purpose of participation. Is the primary purpose of participation in the CDB process democratisation for its own sake? Is the purpose normative democracy for sustainable development or is the purpose more functional, i.e. enhanced local service delivery? The vision statements of the strategies provided an initial orientation towards the defined purpose of the process. However, the subjective perceptions of the stakeholders were also an important indicator of purpose of the process.

The second dimension for evaluation, following Meadowcroft (2004), was to specify exactly what type of participation was under discussion. Who participates? Individual citizens, communities, specific stakeholders or a combination of two or more? While the strategies describe the composition of participants in the CDB process in terms of representation, further clarification is sought from the Directors of Community and Enterprise. In addition to establishing the specific type of participation, information on this dimension provides an important insight into the input legitimacy of the process.

The third dimension relates to the mode of communication – i.e, whether the process is simply about consultation or whether it extends to active participation and deliberation. While there is some descriptive information in the strategies, the interviews were carried out to obtain subjective assessments of the communicative dimension of the process.

The fourth dimension simply looked at the stage of input into the decision-making cycle. Does this entail once-off participation or a more institutionalised recursive process?

The fifth dimension of the evaluation focused on power and authority and was an adaptation of Bäckstrand's model (see Fig. 3.2 above). Building on the previous dimensions the focus here is very much on the deliberative quality of the process based on the subjective evaluations of the stakeholders. The focus centres on questions of both access and influence, but also takes into account the issues of representation, accountability and transparency.

The sixth dimension evaluated institutional capacity building for sustainable development. The primary focus here was on the evaluations of the Directors of Community and Enterprise of the CDB process to enhanced steering, learning processes and enhanced capacity for the implementation of the strategies. The emphasis was on the degree of, and barriers to, the institutionalisation of participation for sustainable development within the wider institutional context. It also focused on the subjective evaluations of the stakeholders of the quality of key relationships i.e. with elected representatives, the local authority, social trust, wider decision-making processes (e.g. central government) and the wider community (see Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. Dimensions and parameters of participation for evaluation.

PROCESS DIMENSION	PARAMETERS OF PARTICIPATION FOR EVALUATION
Purpose (The why of participation?)	What is the purpose of participation? Is it a normative (democracy for democracy sake; democracy *for* sustainable development) or functional value (efficiency for local service delivery: effective outputs)?
Type (Who participates?)	Does the process allow individual citizen participation? Does it allow for *community* participation (defined geographically, by interest, or by topic)? Or is it *stakeholder* participation (representatives of specific interests, agencies or constituency)? Does it *compound* different types of participation?
Mode of Communication (The how of participation?)	Is it consultation (bounded information exchange), active participation (proposing options and inputs) or deliberative (opportunities for discussion to generate collectively agreed solutions)?
Stage of Input to Decision-Making Cycle (The when of participation? i.e. before or after)	At what point of the cycle does participation come in e.g. setting the vision, implementation, review and evaluation?
Power and Authority (What can be achieved?)	How do process inputs and output impact on decision-making e.g. increased access, increased influence
Institutional Capacity Building (Where does the process fit or integrate into wider institutional contexts?)	What aspects of the process are institutionalised? What level of institutionalisation is achieved? Institutional capacity can be conditioned by expectations, quality of relationships (e.g. local government, local community, national government) and trust.

4 Analysis of the City and County Development Strategies

4.1 Introduction

In order to establish the potential contribution of the CDB process to local sustainable development, SUSPART undertook an analysis of all 34 city and county development strategies. Prior to the SUSPART project, there had been was only one evaluation of the city and county development strategies – the focus of the Fitzpatrick/ERM synthesis report (2002) was on gaining an insight into and an overview of all strategies, rather than on sustainable development as such. Nevertheless, the report makes a number of valuable observations which are consistent with the findings of the SUSPART project: the most prominent theme set out in the vision statements of the strategies is 'quality of life'; social inclusion accounts for the majority of actions identified; and, the majority of actions are led by the local authority (Fitzpatrick/ERM 2002).

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

A total of 34 city and county development strategies (i.e. 29 county council and 5 city council) were collected in 2005. The strategies were subjected to a detailed quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The content analysis proceeded in two stages: (i) collation and coding; and (ii) interpretation. The first-stage analysis consisted of the collation and coding of data into Excel worksheets using a research protocol developed by the project team.[7] The second-stage analysis subsequently built on the collation of both quantitative and qualitative data, and provided the generation and interpretation of results.

Two main points emerged from the first-stage analysis concerning: the consistency of structure, categorisation and language in the strategies: (i) The structure of the strategies varied greatly with regard to the amount and detail of information provided. In instances where either an absence of relevant information existed, or it was felt that the validity of the project teams' interpretations required further testing, specific clarifying questions were put to the Directorates of Community and Enterprise and representatives of stakeholder groups. Many CDBs followed the structure originally outlined in the guidelines (Vision→Theme→Goal→Objective→Action): however, some strategies did not have themes but 'strategic objectives'; others had goals as opposed to actions. These differences in terminology and categorisation led to some problems in comparing strategies and analysing them. This observation is consistent with the analysis outlined in the CDB synthesis report (*Review of the County/City Development Board Strategies*) conducted in 2002 (Fitzpatrick/ERM 2002). (ii) There is considerable variability in the use of terms 'sustainable development', 'sustainable' and 'sustainability' in the strategies. This is not unusual, and as the report demonstrates, there has been considerable expansion in how sustainable development has been interpreted at national, EU and international levels since the 1990s. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this analysis, the Brundtland report's emphasis on the integration of environmental, social and economic dimensions of development has been used as the basis for interpretation (WCED 1987). In some cases (e.g. sustainable economic development), the word *sustainable* is employed without reference to its connotations in relation to environmental or social sustainability. At worst, this can indicate a dilution of emphasis; at best, it indicates some considerable confusion regarding purpose.

7 Available in the End of Project Report.

4.3 Results

The results of the analysis are presented according to the focus on: (i) sustainable development in the strategies; and (ii) the information provided on the institutional and procedural dimensions of participation in the CDB process.

4.3.1 Sustainable Development in the Strategies

How prominent was sustainable development in the strategies? What types of vision of local sustainable development are in evidence? Is the language of sustainable development or Local Agenda 21 integrated into the strategies? If so, how is the discourse translated into action? The answers to these questions should provide an orientation on the level of integration of sustainable development into strategic local development.

Box 4.1. Visions of sustainable development.

Excerpts from the City and County Development Strategies
'... by observing the spirit of partnership and the principles of sustainability we will endeavour to enhance the lives of all sections of our community through the promotion of balanced and sustainable economic, social and cultural development...' (Limerick City Development Board)
'To promote the sustainable development of County Meath through an integrated and socially inclusive approach that recognises the economic, social and cultural potential of the population, and the limits and opportunities provided by the county's environmental and other resources.' (Meath County Development Board)
'Monaghan is an inclusive, outward-looking, progressive county, providing a diverse, vibrant economy, a sustainable environment and a high quality of life for all.' (Monaghan County Development Board)
'South Tipperary will have an inclusive economy and an excellent quality of life. It will be a place where all families and individuals can prosper. South Tipperary will balance the demands of a vibrant economy with the demands of a healthy and sustainable environment.' (South Tipperary County Development Board)

4.3.1.1 The Prominence of Sustainable Development

The primary focus here is an analysis of the layout and structure of the strategies based on the guidelines as set out in the *Shared Vision* document.[8] It also gives some guidance on the use of terms such as 'vision', 'goal', 'objective', 'target', 'key result area'. As already indicated, an 'ideal' structure of the strategy development process is a specific adaptation of the Aalborg Charter, i.e. Local Agenda 21. The purpose of this part of the analysis was not prescriptive (i.e., identifying best practice); rather it provided an initial orientation and description of the extent to which the CDBs foreground 'sustainable development', 'Local Agenda 21' and 'environment' in the strategies. As most strategies took a thematic approach, the focus here was on instancing how many of them had any of these terms as a chapter heading or as a thematic heading. Of the 34 strategies, 6 had a separate chapter or theme related to sustainable development, and there was some variation in interpretation and framing – for instance, sustainable communities, environmental sustainability, etc. A further 12 had a separate chapter or a theme related to environment. In order to be as encompassing as possible, some interpretative flexibility was required for the analysis. In some cases, synonyms were used – for example, Dublin City had a 'Greener City' theme, which is clearly identifiable as an environmental theme. Meanwhile, only one strategy (South Tipperary) identified Local Agenda 21 as a separate theme in its own right. The remainder of the strategies dealt with sustainable development, Local Agenda 21 and environment in other thematic areas with specific actions or initiatives discussed below under the heading of integration.

4.3.1.2 Visions of Sustainable Development?

All of the strategies with the exception of Longford and Tipperary North contained an agreed vision statement for the city or county. These statements were examined to gauge the extent to which sustainable development, Local Agenda 21 or environment enjoyed any degree of prominence in the visions for the future agreed by the stakeholders in the CDB process (Box 4.1).

Half of the 32 strategies that did contain an agreed vision made specific reference to quality of life in the vision statement, 11 mentioned environment, 8 mentioned sustainable development or sustainability and none mentioned Local Agenda 21 specifically.

4.3.1.3 Integration of Sustainable Development and Local Agenda 21 into the Strategy

In order to gain an initial perspective on the level of integration of sustainable development, the content of the strategies were analysed for:

- Reference to the concept of sustainable development;

8 *A Shared Vision for County/City Development Boards: Guidelines on the CDB Strategies for Economic Social and Cultural Development*, Interdepartmental Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems, DELG, May 2000.

fig 4.1

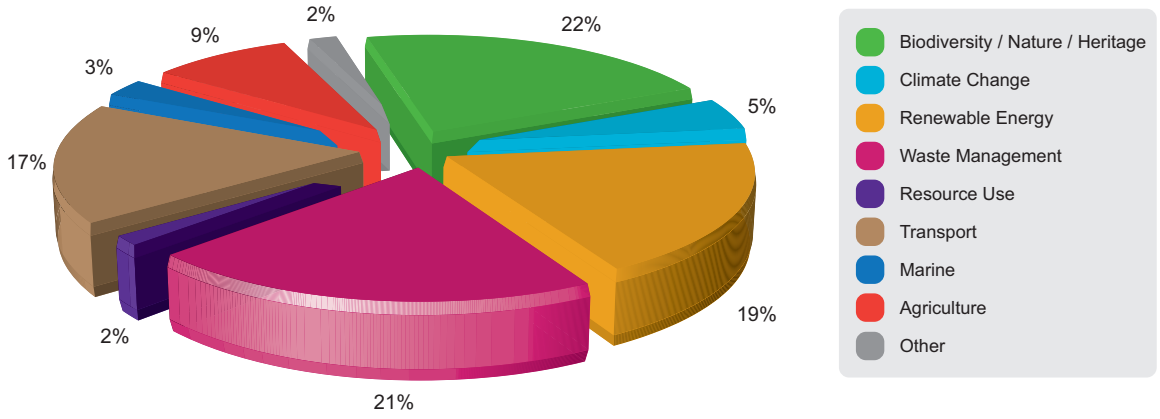

Figure 4.1. Types of environmental initiatives.

- Specific mention of the NSSD;
- Whether sustainable development was identified as a cross-cutting principle;
- The inclusion of a specific definition of sustainable development in order to gauge the specific interpretation of the concept; and
- Whether the strategies were proofed for sustainable development.

Sustainable development was mentioned in 97 per cent (33) of the strategies, 41 per cent both identified sustainable development as a principle and gave a definition, and 21 per cent made specific reference to the NSSD. The definition of sustainable development given by most CDBs was normally a variation on the Brundtland report (WCED 1987). For example:

> Sustainable Development is about a more inclusive society, which provides for better protection of the environment and use of natural resources, and shares the benefits of economic growth as widely as possible. It is about achieving a better quality of life … (Limerick City Development Board).

'Sustainability proofing' was mentioned in 22 of the strategies, 4 of which specifically referred to the NSSD. Detail of exactly how the proofing process took place was quite sparse in the documents.

Clearly, the discourse and language of sustainable development has been imprinted on the strategies, but is there evidence that this is being translated into action? The strategies were analysed for the presence of environmental and sustainable development actions or initiatives. A broad view of environmental or sustainable development initiatives was taken to include actions referring to: environmental protection; environmental sustainability; sustainable development; biodiversity/nature/heritage; climate change; renewable energy; waste (management); water protection; transport; marine; and agriculture. In total, there were 144 environmental initiatives across the strategies. A number of clusters of initiatives were common to most strategies. These were biodiversity/nature/heritage, renewable energy and waste management (Fig. 4.1). To some extent, with the obvious exception of climate change, the environmental actions prioritised in the strategies reflect the policy concerns indicated in the Irish report to the WSSD in 2002 (DoELG 2002). Climate change initiatives are relatively low compared to biodiversity/nature/heritage and waste management. There is no distinctive geographical pattern to the spread of these initiatives with the exception of marine-related initiatives. The only discernible pattern here is that strategies that contain a relatively large number of initiatives (five or more) tend to correlate with local authorities with a previous history of engagement with Local Agenda 21 (Mullally 1998; 2001).

As indicated previously, the strategies are specifically identified as a vehicle for Local Agenda 21 in Ireland. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that this would be reflected *explicitly* to some extent in the text of the strategies. Local Agenda 21 was mentioned and examples of specific initiatives were given in 62 per cent

fig 4.2

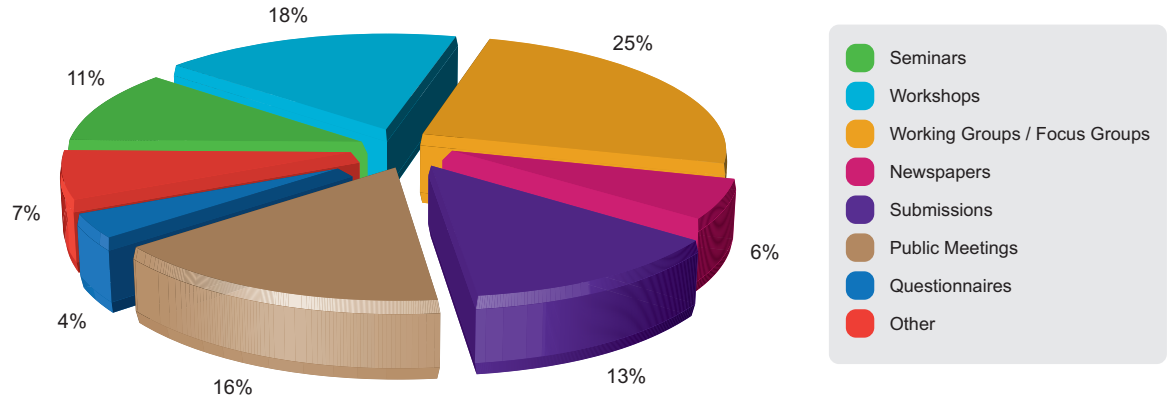

Figure 4.2. Public consultation on the development of the strategies.

(21) of the strategies, but only 26 per cent (9) defined what this meant. Where Local Agenda 21 was defined, it clearly highlighted the process and participative dimensions of sustainable development. For example:

> Local Agenda 21 is defined as a process, which facilitates sustainable development within a community. It is an approach based upon collaboration and participation, which respects the social, cultural, economic and environmental needs of the present and future citizens of a community in all its diversity and which relates that community and its future to the regional, national and international community of which it is part. (Meath County Development Board 2002)

The presence of Local Agenda 21 initiatives was interpreted in two ways: firstly, if an objective or action was referred to as Local Agenda 21 and, secondly, if the objective or action involved community participation in developing a plan or theme. Of the 34 strategies, 62 per cent had Local Agenda 21 initiatives. Examples included initiatives to:

- Facilitate the involvement of local citizens in the planning process of local areas (Limerick City Development Board);
- Participate in the social, cultural and economic life of the county as active citizens furthering the goals of participative democracy (Fingal County Development Board);
- Support community participation in all stages of the planning and implementation of environmental development and protection initiatives at county and sub-county level, and encourage the development of local community initiatives which support community involvement in environmental sustainability projects (South Dublin County Development Board).

4.3.2 Integration of Participation in the Strategies

The CBD process has previously been characterised as a mixed or compound type of participation combining stakeholder and community modes of participation. The question is to what extent participation can be evaluated by analysing the strategies – the content varied greatly in terms of the amount and detail of information provided on consultation and participation in the creation of the strategies (two did not give any information at all), but it could not be assumed that no consultation had taken place. In instances where either limited or no relevant information was contained in the strategies, or it was felt that the validity of the project team's interpretations required further testing, specific clarifying questions were put to representatives of the Directorates of Community and Enterprise and representatives of stakeholder groups.

4.3.2.1 Consultation: The Development of the Strategies

Information on consultation was given in 28 of the 34 strategies. Workshops, working groups, public meetings and seminars were the most widespread mechanisms for consultation (Fig. 4.2). Detail on how the communication

with the general public was structured (e.g., provision of information in newspapers), tended to be minimal. Only six strategies provided detailed information on submissions where either individuals or community development organisations had provided written inputs into the process. Most of the community consultation that took place was structured communication between the CDB and the Community Forum.

4.3.2.2 The Structure of Stakeholder Participation in the CDB

Most of the strategies provide information on the composition of the CDB. A national overview shows that the state agencies have the greatest representation of all of the types of stakeholder integrated into the process. Nearly one-third of representation on the CDB is comprised of state agencies. The social partner stakeholders account for 19 per cent of the total representation on the CDBs. The average CDB has five representatives from the social partners, two of which come from the community and voluntary sector. The main axis for interaction between the CDB and the community and voluntary sector is the relationship to the Community Forum.

4.3.2.2 The Structural Relationship between the CDB and the Community Forum

The Community Forum provides the platform for providing representation from the community and voluntary sector to the CDBs. Interaction between the CDB and the Community Forum is structured in two ways, either through membership of the Board or participation in working groups. The working groups were usually formed by the CDB to facilitate discussion and development of objectives and actions on sector-specific issues. Social inclusion and economic development were the two most popular working groups in which community representatives participated. Again, due to the lack of concise information, it was difficult to ascertain the exact extent of the interaction between the CDB and the Community Forum from the strategies. Some strategies listed the working groups but did not provide information on the breakdown of participants. Often, there was a lack of information on how the wider community was consulted and what feedback mechanisms were in place. While detailed information on community involvement in working groups was present in 13 strategies, many simply stated that members of the Community Forum were involved in the development of the strategy.

4.4 Outcomes and Conclusions from the Analysis

Although there is some variation in the labelling of elements of the strategies, by and large, the discourse and principles of sustainable development have been integrated into their texts. Therefore, SUSPART concurs with observations made by O'Riordan (2008: 4) that 'it would be appropriate to acknowledge that in the approach taken to date by all the Boards ... all had applied the principles of sustainable development in line with the Aalborg Charter'. O'Riordan also notes that this was also true of the review of the strategies in 2005/6. In other words, the strategies at some level represent the *implicit* institutionalisation of Local Agenda 21. Nevertheless, there is considerably less *explicit* integration of Local Agenda 21. This may be interpreted as mere semantics. However, the integration of Local Agenda 21 is relevant because of the specific injunction that it contains regarding the importance of public participation in local sustainable development. There is some evidence, arising from subsequent investigation by SUSPART, that following the review of the City and County Development Board strategies in 2005/6, the specific explicit emphasis on Local Agenda 21 has declined somewhat. In terms of specific initiatives for environmental sustainability, there is an emphasis on biodiversity/nature/heritage actions and renewable energy in the original strategies. There is, however, some evidence of growth in the prioritisation of climate change in the revised city and county development strategies (O'Riordan 2008).

There is also some indication that environmental initiatives and actions increased in significance after the review process in 2005–2006 (Indecon 2008). Nevertheless, the overwhelming emphasis in most of the strategies is still on social inclusion. For example, in the period 2002–2005, 18.5 per cent of all actions progressed by the CDBs related to social inclusion measures, 16.8 per cent culture/tourism related actions, whereas approximately 10 per cent of all actions took place in each of the areas of community development, economic development and environment (Indecon 2008: 6). Following an interim review of the strategies in 2005, a reorientation in priorities can be observed. In the implementation plans for 2006–2008, social inclusion measures still dominate, accounting for 17.3 per cent, culture/tourism measures 15.9 per cent, environment-related measures 15.8 per cent, economic development

12.2 per cent and community development 8 per cent (Indecon 2008: 16).

In the original design of the strategies, while there was some consultation with the wider community, the most widespread approach was to conduct consultation through the CDB and the Community Forum. This suggests that the CDB process, though initially allowing for wider consultation, can hardly be considered a vehicle for direct citizen participation. It does, however, mix community and stakeholder types of participation. The marginal representation of the community and voluntary sector in the overall composition of the Boards raises the issue of the asymmetry of representation, but there are mechanisms for the inclusion of representatives of the Community Forum through working groups. It is not entirely clear from the strategies which working groups the Forum is represented on: i.e., Are they simply confined to the social inclusion dimensions of the strategy? In terms of the wider democratic implications of the CDB process, and it is clear that although the Boards involve stakeholder representation and community participation, there is very little evidence of structured feedback to citizens and the wider community. There is a need for more detailed information on both the precise nature of participation in the CDBs and exactly how information on the implementation and outcomes of the process are communicated outwards.

5 Local Authority Evaluations of the CDB Process

5.1 Introduction

Directors of Community and Enterprise were appointed within each of the 34 local authorities in 2000 in order to service the CDBs. The Directorates, comprised of the directors and their officials, both lead and provide administrative support for the strategies and are therefore uniquely positioned to offer a perspective and informed evaluation of the process. SUSPART conducted telephone interviews with key respondents in order to incorporate a more subjective dimension to the overall evaluation.

5.2 Methodology

In May 2005, SUSPART conducted a pilot semi-structured questionnaire with three local authorities based on a number of questions raised through the analysis of the city and county development strategies. An amended questionnaire was then developed and a telephone survey with key respondents in the Directorates of Community and Enterprise in the local authorities over a three-week period in May and June 2005 was administered.[9] All 34 local authorities were contacted and informed of the purpose of the research and 28 local authorities participated in the survey. The respondents included 20 directors of community and enterprise, and 8 community and enterprise development officers. For the purpose of confidentially the respondents are not identified here. The data was analysed using Excel sheets. Closed questions with pre-empted fixed alternative responses were coded and given a numerical value and transposed into charts and graphs, open questions were recorded and summarised in tables.

5.3 Results

The results of the analysis are presented according to the focus on: (i) public participation, specifically in relation to the integration of the Community Forum into the CDB process and the challenge of promoting effective participation in general; (ii) clarifying the mechanisms for and the degree to which sustainable development is integrated in the process (iii) subjective evaluations of the contribution of the CDB process to the creation of local capacities for sustainable development.

5.3.1 Public Participation

Public participation in the CDB process has taken two main forms. The first concerns the one-off public consultation process which led to the creation of the city and county development strategies, information on which is contained within the strategies and detailed in the previous section of this report. The second concerns the permanent institutionalisation of public participation in the CDBs through the creation of Community Forums. While there is some information in the strategies on the Community Forums there is no real indication of how they function in practice.

5.3.1.1 Integration of the Community Forum into the CDB

At the time when most of the city and county development strategies where being created, only a handful of Community Forums were operational (most of them were only in the process of formation). Therefore, the mechanisms by which the Community Forum representatives were chosen vary between being nominated and voted on to the Board in equal measure. In some cases, the networks and organisations representing excluded groups that could channel participation into the Community Forum were not in existence. For example, in a number of counties migrants and multi-cultural groups were absent in the original formation of the Community Forums. However, the Directorates of Community and Enterprise have since attempted to remedy the situation. In the vast majority of cases, the Community Forum was organised according to electoral area (61 per cent) or by geographical area (25 per cent). In a small minority of cases (14 per cent) the Community Forum was organised on a thematic basis.

Interaction with the Community Forum is structured in a number of ways – for example, through local community meetings, direct contact between Community and Enterprise Staff and the Community Forum or their representative, and formal presentations and briefing papers from the Directorate of Community and Enterprise

9 Available in the End of Project Report.

fig 5.1

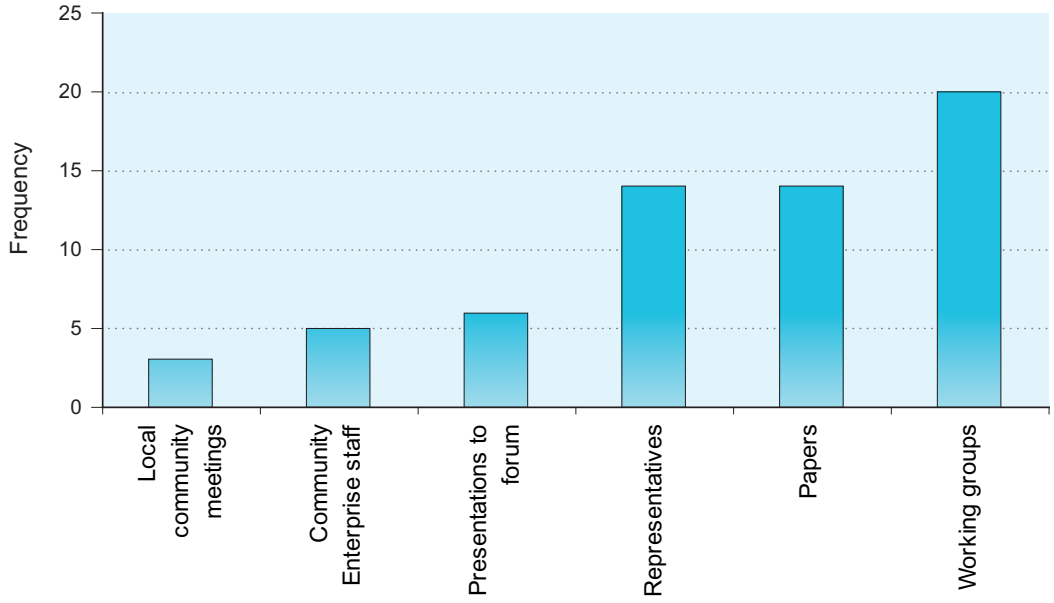

Figure 5.1. Interaction with the community forum.

to the Community Forum (Fig. 5.1). However, much of the interaction is structured through participation in the CDB working groups.

5.3.1.2 Evaluation of Public Participation through the Community Forum

In the course of the interviews, the respondents made a number of observations on the challenges of integrating public participation into the CDB process. These can be summarised under three headings: (i) bridging strategy and action; (ii) participation as a learning process; and (iii) participation for the community and voluntary sector.

Given the initial ambition and scope of the city and county development strategies and the diversity of stakeholders represented in the Boards, it is often difficult to sustain interest in issues that are outside of the remit of community groups. This was addressed in the review process through the reduction of the number of actions in the strategies. One of the major challenges identified by the respondents is that it can sometimes be difficult to retain a focus on a strategic level when the demand on the ground is for action on specific issues. Many of the respondents also remarked on the relative novelty of the CDB and the Community Forum in the Irish context and specifically referred to the fact that, unlike other European countries, a culture of participation was not embedded at community level. As such, the process of participation is also a process of learning how to participate. The final challenge is the burden that participation places on the community and voluntary sector. Despite the availability of funding for the Community Forum, participation can be costly and difficult to sustain in terms of time and energy, and this can lead a high turnover in participation.

5.3.2 Integration of Sustainable Development

The analysis of the city and county development strategies gives us some insight into the integration of sustainable development and Local Agenda 21. One aim of pursuing the theme of integration in this part of the research was to fill the gaps in information previously identified in this report. In addition to the inclusion of sustainable development and Local Agenda 21 as either a principle or theme of the city and county development strategy, SUSPART wanted to establish how the NSSD, and particularly the Local Agenda 21 guidelines, were incorporated into the strategies.

In the analysis of the strategies, 22 CDBs claimed to have 'sustainability proofed' the strategies but provided very little detail as to what this entailed. The interviews show that a number of different approaches were taken. In total, 16 respondents indicated that the strategy had been proofed for sustainable development internally within the CDB at either Board level or in dedicated workshops; within the Council by the Directorates of

fig 5.2

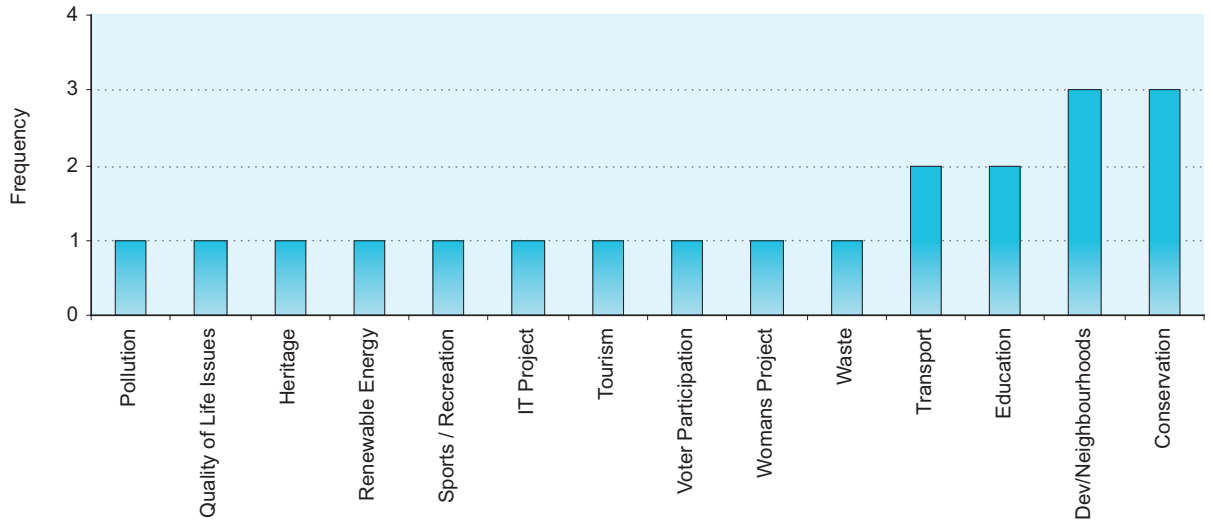

Figure 5.2. Specific Local Agenda 21 initiatives (n=20).

Community and Enterprise, or, in a small minority of cases, through the engagement of external consultancies. Those that had not proofed the original strategy at the time of publication indicated that it had either taken place subsequently and was integral to the work of the CDB, or that it was being addressed through the revision of the strategy. In the case of Fingal County Council, the revised strategy was proofed using Comhar's Principles for Sustainable Development. A common standard for 'sustainability proofing' the strategies would be a useful yardstick for any future evaluation.

Social inclusion is without a doubt the most significant element of the CDB process and has the highest proportion of actions and working groups. The question is whether is it linked to local sustainable development or treated separately. One of the principle means of integrating social inclusion and sustainable development is through the participation of members of the Community Forum on working groups. Almost half of the respondents stated that members of the Community Forum were represented on all working groups. Community Forum representatives were typically involved in socially related working groups (e.g., education, equality, youth, crime and policing, health and well-being), but they were also integrated into economic working groups (e.g., agriculture, tourism, production and commercial), and environment-related working groups (e.g., energy, waste). In addition, a number of cross-cutting working groups were also identified as having Community Forum representatives (e.g. 'sustainable communities', 'rural development' and community development).

The low prevalence with which the strategies mention Local Agenda 21 and the number of strategies claiming to have specific Local Agenda 21 initiatives, suggests a moderate level of *explicit* integration. In order to establish exactly what this entailed, the respondents were asked to give an example of a specific Local Agenda 21 action, i.e., actions labelled as such, or examples of initiatives that integrated environmental, social and economic themes. Transport, education, development of neighbourhood and conservation were the most commonly cited initiatives that included all three elements (Fig. 5.2).

Few economic initiatives were seen as having a balance of economic, social and environmental goals with the possible exception of renewable energy. One of the more interesting examples given was a project on education for active citizenship participation in Wexford. There was an overall sense, however, that the explicit significance of Local Agenda 21 was not being sustained through the review process. Many of the specific environmental initiatives were funded through the Environmental Partnership Fund. In many cases, the CDB process *per se* was equated directly with Local Agenda 21 and integrated sustainable development.

5.3.3 Subjective Evaluations of Capacity Building for Local Sustainable Development

Nearly all of the respondents characterised the CDB process as an innovative, and perhaps unique, approach to integrated local development. However, all were very conscious that it represented only one component of a

coordinated approach to local sustainable development embedded in a much larger system of multi-level governance. While progress was seen to be made on the strategy, the respondents pointed out that the rationalisation of the strategy and the prioritisation of action is a vital component in facilitating effective implementation. Three key points emerged as being pivotal to building capacity for local sustainable development, namely the need for (i) increased resources; (ii) enhanced coordination and cooperation with state agencies; and (iii) increased coordination and integration with the national level.

Several of the respondents reiterated the observation that the CDB process was essentially a learning process that relied heavily on good will and a substantial commitment to voluntarism at the local level. Nevertheless, the actual implementation of the city and county development strategy had become the responsibility of the local authority, and as such placed considerable demands on resources. Stakeholder participation, while valuable, is costly in terms of time and human resources and the cost of implementation was never factored into the strategies

Although many state agencies are identified as leading key actions in the strategies, their primary focus is at the national level. There was a clear consensus that central government needs to take a more directive role in encouraging the participation of state agencies in the implementation process.

Finally, there was a general sense that an integrated approach to sustainable development at local level required a corresponding process at the national level. The Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems had initially provided the mechanism for cross-departmental coordination in the process leading up to the creation of the strategies. Both the SUSPART research and more recent research by Indecon (2008) identified a widespread demand for a high-level mechanism to inform the Cabinet on key issues related to the strategies. This issue has subsequently been addressed through the creation of a coordination group at national level (O'Riordan 2008).

5.4 Outcomes and Conclusions

In terms of institutional design, public participation is channelled through the Community Forum. Interaction between the Directorate of Community and Enterprise and the Community Forum involves mixed modes of communication, including information exchange and formal briefing. However, deliberation takes place at the level of the CDB and through the sub-groups (working groups). The integration of sustainable development at the Board level takes place through deliberative exchange and through the specific actions of the sub-groups. In actions that have a specific sustainable development or Local Agenda 21 focus, the integration of social and environmental issues tends to be more prominent than those that address all three dimensions of sustainable development. The integration of participation for sustainable development is indicated by the fact that there is a tendency for Community Forum members to be involved in actions across the spectrum, and not just confined to social inclusion measures.

Evaluations of the process dimensions of participation tended to highlight issues of horizontal integration. A number of particular challenges emerge as important to future progress including: retaining a focus on the strategic intent of the process; multi-stakeholder participation is recent and insufficiently embedded in the political culture and is therefore a learning process in its own right; and the voluntary nature of the process places significant demands on civil society – 'participation fatigue' can undermine inclusion, particularly if there are clear outcomes.

Evaluations of capacity building for local sustainable development tended to focus primarily on issues of vertical integration (i.e., ensuring the connection between steering at national and local levels). Here, the main emphasis was on the role of central government in providing strategic coordination, policy direction and adequate resources.

6 Stakeholder Evaluations of the CDB Process

6.1 Introduction

In order to gain a perspective on the subjective experiences and evaluations of the different sectors represented in the CDBs, SUSPART decided to conduct a detailed analysis in four separate locations: Donegal, Galway, South County Dublin and Wexford. The purpose of the research here was not to develop in-depth case studies of the selected locations but to evaluate the CDBs and their strategies from the standpoint of the constituent stakeholder groups. The selected locations were examples where the CDBs appeared to have integrated sustainable development more than others. Therefore, they are indicative, rather than representative, of the wider experience.

6.2 Methodology: Case Selection and Data Analysis

SUSPART selected four case studies of good practice that would represent: (i) the urban/rural divide across the two Irish NUTS II regions[10], i.e., Border, Midlands, and Western Region and the Southern and Eastern Region; and (ii) cases where there was detailed information on both participation and sustainable development (including Local Agenda 21) in the city and county development strategies. Drawing on the analysis of the strategies and the telephone interviews, the CDBs were ranked: according to region; whether they were urban or rural; contained clear examples of participation; and the presence of Local Agenda 21/ public participation initiatives. The results were filtered in an Excel database and the four locations were chosen on the basis of matching the selection criteria. An interview schedule was then developed on the basis of questions arising from the theoretical discussion in the literature review and, questions evolving from the analysis of the strategies and the issues arising from the local authority interviews.

A total of 20 in-depth, qualitative interviews were conducted in the four locations in November and December 2005. During this period the CDBs were in the process of reviewing the city and county development strategies. Representatives of each pillar of the CDB (i.e., local government, local development, state agencies and social partners) were interviewed in all four locations. Additional interviews were also conducted with Community Forum representatives on each CDB. In the local government pillar elected representatives who were also the Chairs of the Environment SPC in their respective local authorities were targeted because they provided a channel for shaping environmental policies. In the local development pillar, representatives from local development partnerships were targeted specifically because many of these partnerships had previously engaged in initiatives for local sustainable development. In the case of the state agencies, representatives of the Department of Family and Social Affairs on the CDBs were interviewed to gain a perspective on the social inclusion dimensions of the strategies. Enterprise and economic development agency representatives from this pillar were also interviewed because of their particular relevance to local socio-economic development. In the social partnership pillar, business representative organisations were targeted because of their focus on local economic development, i.e., Chambers of Commerce. Finally, representatives of the Community Forum, included under the social partnership pillar, were interviewed because they provide a conduit for communication between the CDB and the local voluntary and community sector. The interviews, which lasted on average between 40 and 90 minutes, were recorded electronically and subsequently transcribed into a pre-coded template for qualitative analysis.

6.3 Results

The results are presented under the following headings: the role and purpose of the CDBs; the integration of sustainable development through the CDBs and the strategies, the mode, impact and value of participation in the stakeholder model; and the development of institutional capacity for local governance through the CDBs. Each section provides a synthesis of the results and illustrative examples categorised according to the type of stakeholder interviewed.

10 The Nomenclature for Territorial Strategic Units (NUTS) is an EU designation for Structural Funds purposes. The NUTS II regions in Ireland were created in 1999. They are referred to as regional assemblies but are not comparable to assemblies in the UK. Representatives are nominated rather than being directly elected.

Table 6.1. Integration of sustainable development.[a]

Stakeholder	Integration of environmental, economic and social issues
Local Government	Integration is limited, environment is one of six vertical streams, but maybe it should be a cross-cutting issue. (SD1)
Local Development	Whether we looked at the overall actions of the strategy in light of all three, probably no. (G2)
State Agency	If you quantify successful as a joined up approach at the networking level and knowing what is going on at agency level then yes. When it physically comes to getting an action on the ground that has implications it always falls to local authorities or established bodies that have the resources to do it. (D3)
Social Partner	There is integrated discussion, but it is usually unrealistic. 'We talk about everything except who's going to pay.' (SD4).
Community Forum	The CDBs do integrate different areas, they make the connection between them. For example, tourism development would be economic development, to be able to have tourism development there must be environment development, they raise common ground between areas. (D5).

a Please see Appendix for keys to interviews.

6.3.1 The Role and Purpose of the CDBs

The intention of national government in establishing the CDBs is outlined in the literature review of this report. The question is how the actual participants understood and interpreted the role and purpose of the CDBs. In general, there tended to be a fairly uniform understanding among the stakeholders. By and large, it tended to be viewed in functional terms, i.e. in relation to coordination and the creation of synergy between different agencies on a county-wide basis for the purpose of creating and delivering the development strategy. A secondary interpretation was that it allowed for learning to take place among the participants. The only substantial deviation from the dominant interpretation came from participants in the social partnership pillar, particularly the Community Forum representatives, who characterised the role and purpose of the CDB as improving local democracy.

6.3.2 Integration of Sustainable Development

There was general consensus amongst the stakeholders that the social dimension of sustainable development, specifically social inclusion, is perhaps the most integrated into the CDBs. This is no surprise given the prevalence of socially related actions in the strategies and the impetus for an integrated focus on social inclusion from central government. A subtle distinction was made, however, between the integration of sustainable development in deliberations of the CDBs and integration into the activities. There was agreement that when discussing the strategy at the level of the Board, a number of aspects of development are discussed, including social, economic and environmental dimensions. However, at the level of activity through the working groups there is a tendency to treat issues separately. When pressed, very few were able to identify actions that simultaneously addressed all three dimensions of sustainable development. However, tourism development actions were identified as also having cross-cutting significance (Table 6.1).

The composition of the CDBs *per se* was regarded as contributing to the integration of sustainable development into the deliberative process. However, there was also substantial recognition that the power, responsibility and resources for both decision-making and implementation lay outside the control of the CDBs. Ultimately, there was little sense of agency or the capacity to influence or effect change towards sustainable development.

6.3.3 Participation

In this section the question of participation in the CDBs was examined in terms of: the mode of communication and participation within the CDB process; whether the process gives wider access to decision-making processes outside the CDB; whether the stakeholders considered that the CDBs exerted influence on these processes; and finally, subjective evaluations of the value of participation in the CDBs.

6.3.3.1 Mode of Communication and Participation within the CDBs

All of the stakeholders interviewed were careful to stress that the CDBs were not decision-making bodies *per se*, but provided a context for the transmission of information by various authorities and agencies in relation to plans, policies and projects of relevance to the strategies. In this context, the CDBs allowed for discussion and debate, and the questioning and endorsement of activities of local bodies involved in the delivery of the strategy. Within the CDBs, the work of thematic sub-committees feed into the plenary sessions of Board. In nearly all cases, the respondents characterised the mode of communication as consensual. There was a very clear sense amongst all of the stakeholders that participation consists of providing inputs into decision-making and that the point of decision is located outside of the CDBs.

6.3.3.2 Wider Access to Decision-Making

If decision-making rests outside of the CDBs, the question then is whether participation has increased access to these wider processes. In general, there was a qualified sense that participation in the CDBs had made an impact on providing access to agencies and organisations where no previous working relationship had existed. The most common view was that the CDB was an extremely valuable context and medium for inter-agency and inter-organisational networking at the local level. While there are many other examples of local cooperation and partnership, none could equal the CDB in terms of the scope of membership. To some extent, the CDB process is regarded as providing a conduit for horizontal communication with decision-makers; however, it was not seen as enhancing citizen participation at the local level. This was clearly expressed by a representative of the local development pillar of a CDB:

> It gives access to decision makers, but no more influence. It doesn't constitute greater access to decision-making by citizens.
> (Interview W2)

The networking dimension of the CDBs is also seen as central to facilitating learning between different stakeholders in the process. However, there was a strong sense across all of the stakeholders that participation in the CDBs had no impact on national policy or on central government.

6.3.3.3 Influence over Wider Decision-Making

Although there have been some tangible increases in access to decision-making from participation in the CDBs, the stakeholders have a much more circumspect view of their impact. There was a general consensus that the CDBs exerted only a very limited influence on wider decision-making processes at local level, and to a large extent that this was tied to its remit in relation to the city and county development strategies (see Section 7). There is clear recognition of 'distributed power' amongst the stakeholders, i.e., that the decision, implementation and enforcement resided outside of the CDB process. The clearest indication of this came from a business representative in the social pillar of one CDB:

> If I was looking to influence something I wouldn't be looking to change the view of the County Development Board. Why wouldn't you just go to the county manager?
> (Interview SD4)

As such, influencing change requires other avenues of participation. Nevertheless, there were some perceived gains in terms of improving the transparency of decision-making at the local level and in channelling inputs into public policy by virtue of the composition of the Boards.

6.3.3.4 Stakeholder Evaluations of Participation in the CDBs

In addition to discerning the perspective of the stakeholders in relation to access to, and influence on, decision-making, it was also important to gain an insight into their overall evaluation of the process of participation in the CDBs (Table 6.2). The most common evaluation amongst the stakeholders was that it provides an opportunity for open communication, increased information and the airing of opinions about decision-making on local development. In terms of learning, the CDBs are seen as contributing to: increasing knowledge about plans and projects taking place; defining gaps in the general application of resources; and in reducing the duplication of effort between authorities, agencies and organisations with a county-wide remit. It was also seen as adding value in terms of monitoring decisions on local development.

The opportunity to participate in deliberations about local development is widely valued by the stakeholders; however, there is some frustration that this is not necessarily translated into action. In some cases, this is regarded as a problem of resources, but it is also

Table 6.2. The value of participation.[b]

Stakeholder	What is the value of participation?
Local Government	Agencies are now conscious that we are proofing decisions, and there is a better understanding of what the constraints are and how they arrive at their decisions. (D1)
Local Development	It's in its infancy, it wouldn't be having a major impact at this point in time. It does not have the finance to be anything other than a talking shop. (D2)
State Agency	The chance to share information, to share challenges. The stumbling block is the opportunity for a joined up approach at a practical level. That is not going to happen unless it comes from the top (national level). The perception remains that we are a talking shop. (D3)
Social Partner	It has brought contact with the social partners where it has not existed before, but there is no budget to combat issues. (G4)
Community Forum	Is talking participation? There is a value to it, knowing what is going on and knowing who the people are in various sectors. It may be participation in helping to shape views that someone else goes on to make decisions. (SD5)

b Please see Appendix for keys to interviews.

ascribed to the lack of leadership and direction from central government.

6.3.4 Developing Institutional and Social Capacity

As a structure for local governance the CDBs' principal axis for interaction lies with local government in both its representative and administrative branches. Therefore the quality of these relationships impacts upon the capacity of the CDBs to contribute to 'initiative and responsibility' (Evans et al. 2006: 853). Trust is a quality often regarded as an elemental component of collective action. Trust is certainly an essential outcome, if not always a prerequisite, for multi-stakeholder participation. Nevertheless, much of the decision-making that has consequences for sustainable development takes place beyond the local level. Consequently, there needs to be some sense that participation at the local level can impact at higher levels, even if (as in the Irish context) local autonomy is constrained by structural, legal or constitutional provisions restricting the actual extent of influence possible.

6.3.4.1 Relationship with Elected Representatives

One of the most frequently cited concerns surrounding the shift towards local governance in the 1990s was that politicians would perceive their democratic mandate as being devalued or marginalised (Callanan 2005). Callanan (2005: 923) points out that 'contrary to expectations … most elected members appear to have embraced the concept of partnership and participation at local level'. In addition to their representative function, the reform of local government enhanced the role of elected members in policy shaping and formation. The interviews indicate that the stakeholders generally value the connection between representative and stakeholder democracy quite positively. The elected representatives are seen as being quite influential in the CDBs and proving a linkage to the SPCs (the other key institutional form of local stakeholder governance in Ireland). There was also considerable agreement that the CDBs provide politicians with a valuable source of input to opinion formation and learning from organised interests on the level of the county. Some of the social partners, however, felt that it was an under-utilised resource. There was some divergence between the evaluations of elected representatives and the state agencies with regard to the nature of political engagement with the CDBs. The elected representatives stressed the strategic nature of their participation in terms of the general interest of benefiting the entire community (city/county). Against this, in some cases, state agencies viewed the engagement of elected representatives as tactical in the sense of focusing mainly on the specific interests of their constituents or electoral areas.

6.3.4.2 Relationship with Local Authority (Administrative)

The Directorates of Community and Enterprise were identified by all of the stakeholders as having a pivotal role in terms of the functioning of the CDBs, steering the

Table 6.3. Relationship to wider decision-making.[c]

Stakeholder	The relationship to wider decision-making
Local Government	It's very much at the periphery at the moment, there isn't a common understanding of its goals and objectives. (SD1)
Local Development	CDBs are not really linked to decision-making processes very clearly, because decisions are normally taken at the level of individual government departments. (W2)
State Agency	To some extent it is a debating society, and sometimes I wonder what the debate is about, as all the things are being dealt with elsewhere. (W3).
Social Partner	Its main benefit in terms of decision-making is to feed into different groups and for different groups to understand the different perspectives in terms of setting priorities. (D4)
Community Forum	It has a lot more scope than the community sector, it has the Council and the Partnerships. (W5)

c Please see Appendix for keys to interviews.

implementation of the strategies and acting as a critical hub for communication with the local authority. Many of the stakeholders point out that the Directorate acts as a key repository for the collective learning that takes place and are strategically placed to provide a comprehensive overview of all activity in the area. In part, this has to do with the turnover of participants in different stakeholder groups. As a result of their relative continuity, the Directorates can act to institutionalise knowledge generated within the CDB process. On the other hand, the steering role of the Directors of Community and Enterprise means that they are uniquely positioned to connect or synthesise the fragmented or partial understandings of constituent groups in an integrated way. Several of the stakeholders pointed out that while the outcomes of the CDBs activities are generated in a consensual and deliberative way, in reality much of the responsibility for action currently depends on the Directorate. While the social partners and Community Forum representatives particularly acknowledge the fact that the support from the Directorates of Community and Enterprise is invaluable, there is a sense that the ownership of the strategy is sometimes perceived as residing within the local authority. In a minority of cases this gives rise to issues of power and control. Nevertheless, even when such concerns are expressed, there is also recognition that without the local authority both the CDB and the strategy would not progress.

6.3.4.3 Relationships of Trust

Relationships of trust are often regarded as a critical element in enhancing the capacity to act collectively on an issue and constitute an important dimension of institutional and social capital. Whereas the opportunity for networking is one of the major benefits of participation, one of the main outcomes of participation is the development of trust. This is seen by all of the stakeholders as a prerequisite for a more integrated approach to sustainable development.

6.3.4.4 Relationship to Wider Decision-Making

Although the relationship between the CDB as a stakeholder institution and wider decision making processes is clearly related to the question of access to decision-making (Section 6.3.2.2), the key focus here is the deeper issue of actual quality. The concern here is the extent to which the CDB processes contribute to institutional integration and thereby enhance the wider social capacity for local sustainable development. Social capacity refers here to the collective capacity that has been built or exists within a community at the local level (Evans et al. 2006). In considering this issue many stakeholders tended to conflate the relationship to decision-making with the relationship to local government. This in part reflects the dual role of local government as both participant and facilitator of the process. Nevertheless, the involvement of local politicians, officials and the county manager in the CDBs was seen as enhancing the quality of relationships with the local decision-making. Again, the notion that the CDB exerted a communicative influence on decision-making rather than making decisions per se, comes very much to the fore (Table 6.3).

Table 6.4. Relationship with the wider community.[d]

Actor type	Relationship with wider community
Local Government	In terms of local democracy there is a low level of awareness among the general public. I do feel that in terms of Local Agenda 21, the County Development Board could probably do more. (SD 1)
Local Development	Citizen participation has to start at ground level and be facilitated all the way through and I don't think the CDBs have made a huge impact on citizens and governance. (W2)
State Agency	Low levels of public awareness [of the CDB], but through local area meetings of the Community Forum. (SD3)
Social Partner	Through the interaction of constituent agencies. (D3)
Community Forum	The Community Forum channels information back to community groups. (D4)

d Please see Appendix for keys to interviews.

Perhaps the most significant evaluation of this question comes from the social partners representing the Community Forum, where a common analysis is that by being part of a broader entity than the community sector enhances the capacity to get things done. The most universal theme amongst all stakeholders is the relationship between the local and national levels. Not only are significant decisions affecting sustainable development outside of the remit of the CDB, they are made at national level. The local development and state agency actors in particular remarked on the need for more coordination and integration between the local and national levels.

6.3.4.5 Relationship with Wider Community

The final component in developing local capacities for sustainable development is the issue of the connection to the wider community in the sense of communication and interaction with local citizens (Table 6.4). All of the stakeholders saw this dimension of the CDB as one of the major shortcomings of the process. In general, there was consensus that the CDBs had little or no visibility amongst the wider community and that there was limited awareness of their role or activities. Communication with the citizenry was largely indirectly – either filtered back through the different stakeholder groups or through the Community Forum.

6.4 Outcomes and Conclusions

Sustainable development is, for the most part, secondary to the functional requirement of inter-organisational/inter-agency strategic coordination, although social learning and democratisation are also acknowledged by different stakeholder groups. Although sustainable development is institutionalised at the level of discourse and deliberation, its actual translation into action often results in fragmentation and specialisation through the working groups. As far as priorities are concerned, socially sustainable development is more prevalent than the environmental dimension. A clear outcome of the stakeholder analysis, however, is the distinct absence of a sense of agency within the CDBs included in the SUSPART research in terms of moving towards sustainable development. While participants are well disposed to the process, they have little confidence in thier abilities to influence change. The mode of communication is consensual and deliberative, but decision-making powers are not internal to the CDB per se. The question of the impact of the CDBs with regard to both access and influence has yielded variable results. The process has increased access to decision-makers through networking, but access to decision-making is still mediated through gatekeepers, i.e. local authority officials or councillors. While there is a sense that the CDB exerts a communicative influence on decision-making, there is very little sense that it is influential in terms of shaping outcomes. The CDB process is valued as a context for communication and learning, but the fact that it lacks the power to translate this into action is a source of frustration.

In terms of developing local capacity for sustainable development, the institutional composition of the CDBs has created formal channels of communication between the stakeholders outside of conventional avenues of

lobbying and clientellism. There is clear evidence that the CDB process has contributed to building social capital, particularly trust, amongst the participants. Applying the distinctions introduced in the theory discussions, an important outcome of the social relationships developed is the creation of 'bridging social capital'. However, the extent to which the process has enhanced 'bracing social capital' is less clear. Certainly, the institutional structure which includes state agencies suggests the *potential* for strengthening links across and between scales and sectors. In *practice*, there is a very strong sense emerging from the SUSPART research, but also from other studies, for example, Indecon (2008) or O'Riordan (2008), that local level governance still has little or no leverage over supra-ordinate levels of decision-making. Two main issues stand out as key weaknesses of the CDB process:

1 If the CDB process is to address the procedural dimensions of sustainable development in terms of promoting public participation (which is why it was originally identified as a vehicle for Local Agenda 21), it needs to connect more directly with the wider community. While the process has certainly improved horizontal communication and has achieved the integration of multiple stakeholders, communication with the wider community is mediated through the Community Forum.

2 Successive analyses have highlighted the underdeveloped nature of the vertical dimension of governance in the context of sustainable development in Ireland (Berger and Steurer 2005, CEC 2005, Comhar 2007, Niestroy 2005). There is a very strong impression that poorly articulated vertical linkages lower the horizons of participants' expectations of what the process can achieve. Whereas realism is a fundamental ingredient in a strategic approach to sustainable development, fatalism and low expectations are a recipe for failure.

7 Synthesis, Comparison and Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this final section of the report is to synthesise the outcomes of the research in order to evaluate the role and contribution of the CDB process in promoting public participation in local sustainable development. This involves an assessment of the CDB process in light of the dimensions and parameters outlined in Section 3.6. Where useful, this is supplemented with analyses from: theoretical and empirical studies in the international academic literature; Irish studies of public participation in environmental governance (French and Laver 2005, Murray 2006); other evaluations of the CDB process (Acheson and Williamson 2007; Adshead and McInerney 2006; Fitzpatricks/ERM 2002; Indecon 2008; O'Riordan 2008). Finally, the conclusions of the SUSPART research are presented primarily with respect to the implications for policy-making.

7.2 Synthesis

7.2.1 Purpose

Sustainable development has become imprinted on the CDB process: through the city and county development strategies; the deliberations of the Boards; and the actions already implemented and those identified for the future. Sustainable development, however, is not regarded as the primary purpose of the process. There is a strong social emphasis in the strategies and the actions of the CDBs, and the picture that emerges from the analysis here is that the strategic emphasis is on development that enhances quality of life. The quality of life emphasis is not unique to the CDB process, but reflects a wider shift in the sustainable development debate at global, EU and, increasingly at national level.

Comhar (2007: 26) has recently pointed out that 'more needs to be done to improve uptake and implementation of Local Agenda 21'. Despite the emphasis on Local Agenda 21 contained in the reforms leading to the creation of the CDBs, it is conspicuous by its absence in the Green Paper on local government, *Stronger Local Democracy – Options for Change*, where it appears to have been replaced by an emphasis on climate change and participative democracy on the local level underpinned by a concern with quality of life (DoEHLG 2007). While the analysis of the original strategies shows a medium level of identification with Local Agenda 21, the shift away from explicitly emphasising it as an integrative instrument appears to be a feature of the interim reviews of the CDBs. This is neither an isolated phenomenon nor is it unique to the Republic of Ireland. By 2003 in the UK, Lucas et al. (2003: 63) were able to identify a shift away from Local Agenda 21 towards the language of quality of life and well-being, driven largely by a prioritisation of the social inclusion agenda.

7.2.2 Type of Participation

The CDB process represents a compound type of participation which includes a mixture of stakeholder and community-centred participation. The original development of the strategies did provide for public consultation; however, the feedback mechanisms are largely indirect. Both the strategies and the reviews are publicly available and therefore open to scrutiny. Apart from structured representation via the Community Forums and through stakeholder participation in the CDBs, citizen participation is passive (Fig. 7.1). While the compatibility between the transfer of the social partnership model to the local level and sustainable development is recognised, Comhar has stressed that 'local empowerment has not been fully realised with some groups still excluded from the decision making process' (2007: 25–6). This point has also been made in *Stronger Local Democracy – Options for Change* (DoEHLG 2007). The Green Paper acknowledges that the CDBs and Community Forums have brought a step change in dialogue with local communities, but since 'such structures do not have a universal reach … it may be necessary for local government to creatively and proactively seek new avenues of direct participation' (DoEHLG 2007: 79, 80). It goes on to instance a number of mechanisms that could be used to empower local communities, e.g. participatory budgets, petition-based right, binding plebiscites and regular town/area meetings, albeit on the basis of pilot programmes and experimentation. In essence, the mechanisms identified may well be compatible with local sustainable development, but are quite distinct from the CDB process.

fig 7.1

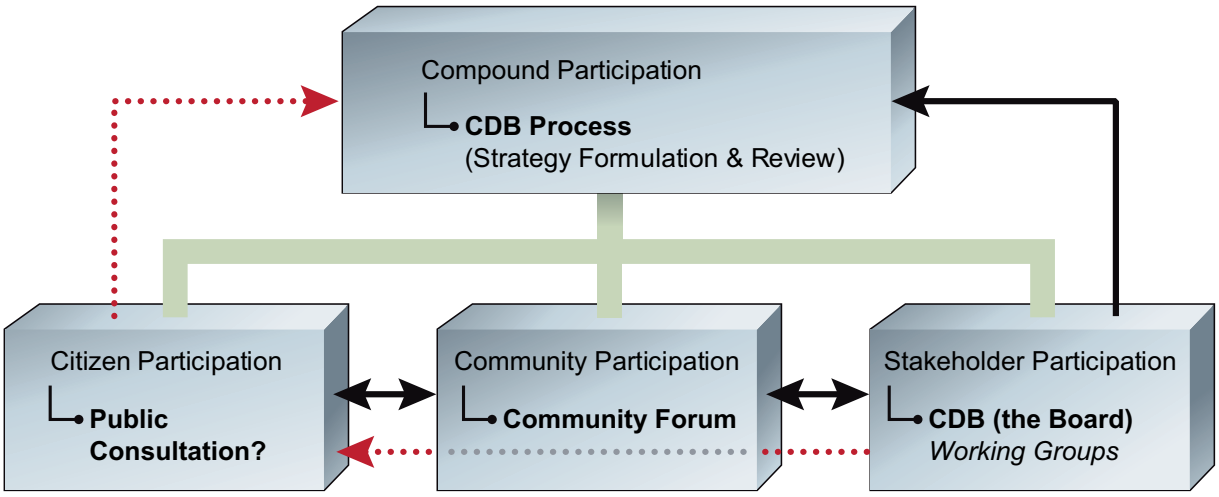

Figure 7.1. Types of participation in the CDB process.

7.2.3 Mode of Communication

The mode of communication and participation mixes several approaches: consultation in the initial stages; active participation in the case of the working groups and the review process; and deliberative at the level of the CDB. At the outset, the Task Force guidelines stressed that decision-making should be based on consensus, and this is the case in all of the CDBs. At the local level, reaching a consensus within the process can contribute to the goal of sustainable development, but there are at least two issues that require attention. The first issue concerns what Mannberg and Wihlborg (2008: 41) have termed the 'ambiguity of consensus'. When processes of communication aim to generate consensus they can mask fundamental disagreements. In order to sustain the process itself, the aim of achieving consensus within the collaborative context can often be prioritised at the expense of actually addressing the problem at hand. In other words, the goal of sustainable development can risk becoming subordinate to the process. This is where the connection to wider processes, particularly other statutory processes becomes important. The second issue is that the legitimacy of sustainable development policies cannot be forced upon local communities in a democratic context (Evans et al. 2006: 25).

7.2.4 Stage of Input to Decision-Making Cycle

Within the CDB process the cyclical process of review and renewal activates different types of participation, including consultation of the wider community at different stages. In order to connect more effectively with decision-making processes that could have a material impact on local sustainable development (i.e. the development plan), these cycles need to be synchronised. There is considerable research and data on local conditions, including environmental indicators, underpinning the strategies (O'Riordan 2008: 14). This information could provide valuable input to decision-making at both local and national levels if channelled properly.

7.2.5 Power and Authority

The Fitzpatrick/ERM (2002: 76–9) synthesis report proffered the view that by coming together, formulating and implementing a shared vision for their areas through the strategies that the organisations are involved in, the CDBs would move up the 'integration ladder', from network/information exchange, through coordination (altering activities), through cooperation (shared resources) and collaboration (joint activities). The Indecon report (2008) is a review of the revised city and county development strategies conducted in 2005–2006. The report makes no specific comment on sustainable development: it does, however, shed some light on the question of governance, specifically the issue of connecting the input and output legitimacy of these entities from the perspective of the local authorities. The Indecon report (2008: 54) shows that to a large extent, with the exception of social inclusion, the perception of effectiveness and the degree of involvement of the CDBs in achieving integrated development is still relatively modest. The perception that the CDBs are less effective in relation to economic development 'can

fig 7.2

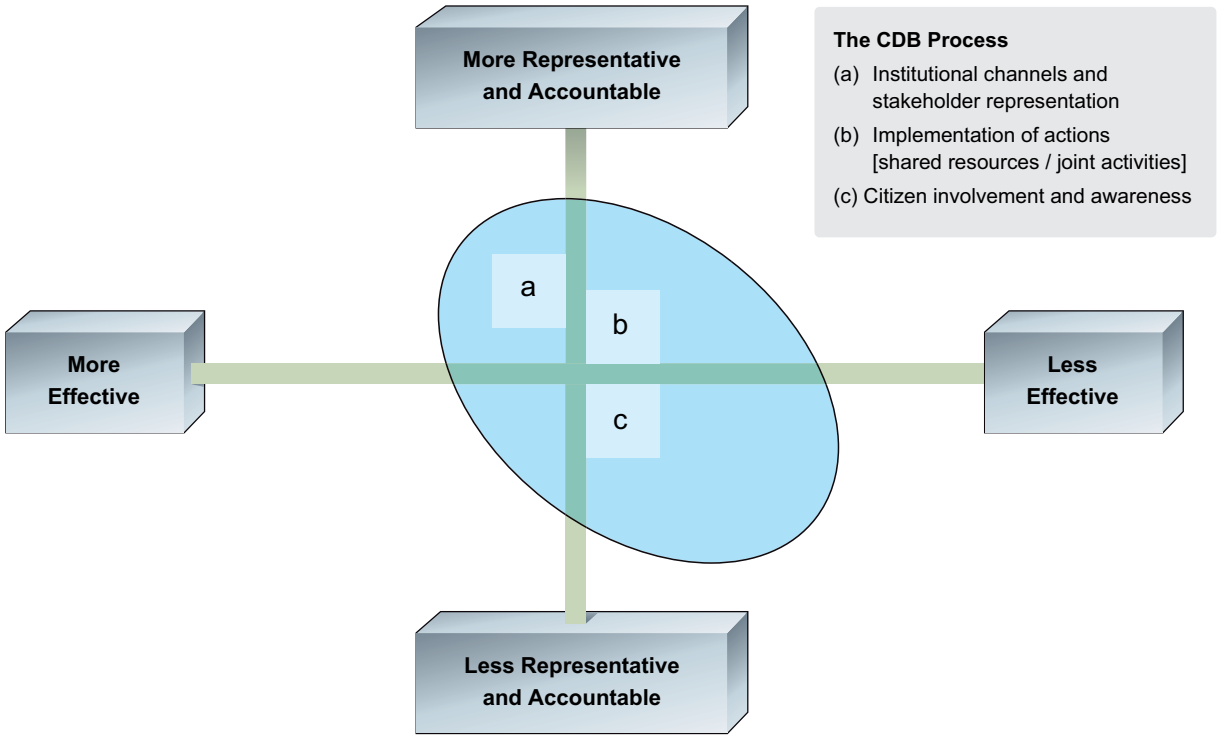

Figure 7.2. Legitimacy of the CDB process.

be related to the perception of the centralised nature of statutory bodies and government departments and their lack of regional autonomy'.

O'Riordan (2008: 12) makes two observations in relation to local sustainable development that echo the general findings of the SUSPART project. The first relates to the issue of effectiveness and engagement on environmental issues:

> ... the environment is the area that already has the greatest amount of statutory responsibility imposed on specific organisations, particularly local authorities … the extent to which CDB input would add significantly to such processes is not clear.

In other words, there is very little sense that the CDBs could be influential in this regard. The second observation concerns substantive environmental issues: 'given the significance of climate change to the future socio-economic context the Boards should consider this area as a focus for future consideration' (O'Riordan 2008: 12). What this highlights is the importance of the vertical integration of governance at the local level with national level strategy, processes and action. The SUSPART stakeholder analysis shows that while the CDB process has increased access to decision-makers, there is a strong sense that it is not really influential in terms of shaping outcomes. Adapting Bäckstrand (2006a) to evaluate the CDB process is illuminating (Fig. 7.2).

It should be stressed, however, that Bäckstrand's model only evaluates 'institutional effectiveness': it offers no perspective or evaluation of outcomes as such. The institutional link to the local authority (a), through the Directorate of Community and Enterprise; the participation, of elected representatives and the manager does provide direct access and inputs to policy framing by stakeholders, particularly since the elected representatives are also the chairpersons of the SPCs. The responsibility for the implementation of the strategy is distributed amongst different stakeholders (b), but as SUSPART and the Indecon report reveal much of the interaction remains at information exchange, the first rung of the 'integration ladder' (Fitzpatrick/ERM 2002). While the monitoring and review process does allow for a learning process to take place, the lack of a direct link back to local citizens (c) is a clear weakness. If the CDBs want to influence local citizens on sustainable development, or any other issue, they must first be visible and recognisable. Nevertheless, the monitoring and review process is central to ensuring the overall legitimacy of the process.

Based on Bäckstrand's model, the CDB process has reasonably high levels of input legitimacy, but somewhat weaker output legitimacy. This is neither uniquely Irish, nor is it particular to the CDB process. Evaluations of multi-stakeholder approaches to sustainable development at global (Bäckstrand 2006a; 2006b) and at EU level (Usai 2006: Pallemaerts et al. 2007) have also highlighted this problem.

7.2.6 Institutional Capacity Building

The building of institutional capital is clearly linked to the evaluative judgements by participants as to whether the process is an effective avenue for promoting change relevant for sustainable development. Therefore, there may well be an increase in social capital in terms of building trust through the CDB process, without a corresponding growth in capacity or agency. The Indecon report (2008: 59) points out that 'the whole exercise could be at worst, worthless or at best, of minor value, unless key decision makers take account of the views outlined … some weighting must be given to the CDB views, if the exercise is to be of value'. There are a number of well-established consequences that can flow from a poorly perceived sense of capacity or agency in participative processes. The first consequence is *exit*, where participants withdraw from the process (Mannberg and Wihlborg 2008). The second consequence is that participants remain in the process: 'despite their doubts about its effectiveness, either for fear of having policies imposed on them without having an opportunity to influence them, or because they lack alternative means of action' (Papadakis 2006: 22). The main danger in this context is that civil society will be confined to the role of 'legitimacy provider' (Papadakis 2006: 22). This can often result in the third consequence, the creation of frustration and the mobilisation of discontent (Rui 2004). This is evident in analyses of other types of participative processes in Ireland e.g. citizens juries (French and Laver 2005; Murray 2006) where frustration stemming from a lack of impact has actually mobilised opposition in civil society.

By far the most evident element constraining the development of institutional capacity for sustainable development at the local level is the creation of what Rydin and Holman (2004) call 'bracing social capital', the creation of effective linkages and networks across scales. This appears to be a constraint identified by all of the participants interviewed by SUSPART and other research on the CDB process. This type of social capital is essential to enhancing the vertical dimensions of governance for sustainable development, and is recognised as being underdeveloped in the Irish context (Berger and Steurer 2005, CEC 2005, Comhar 2007, Niestroy 2005).

7.3 Conclusions and Implications for Policy-Making

The CDB process is illustrative of a larger trend towards the governance of sustainable development as a multi-stakeholder, multi-sector, multi-level approach. Nevertheless, governance alone is not a sufficient condition to steer a path to sustainable development, it requires central *government* to provide stimulus, support and direction to the process. Furthermore, governance is only one dimension of a mutli-faceted approach that also requires a combination of legal, regulatory and market-based instruments. In order for the CDB process to contribute more effectively to the governance of sustainable development in Ireland, a number of considerations need to be taken into account.

7.3.1 Integration at Local Level requires Integration at National Level

Since many of the decisions and policies that impact at the local level are either made or channelled through the national level, the strategic integration of sustainable development needs to be steered at national level. The Renewed Strategy for Sustainable Development in Ireland will mark adjustments to the Irish approach, not simply because of a need to be responsive to evolving economic, social and environmental conditions, but also to become more aligned with both the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (United Nations 2002) and the *Renewed European Strategy for Sustainable Development* (Council of the European Union 2006). The reactivation of the High-level Interdepartmental Group reviewing the National Strategy, the creation of the Interdepartmental Committee for the CDBs, and the work programme of Comhar provide a strong basis for developing an integrated approach at national level. In light of emerging environmental priorities at both EU and national level, particularly with regard to both renewable energy and climate change, agencies such as the EPA and Sustainable Energy Ireland also have a

critical role to play in a coordinated approach. Crucially, this must place particular emphasis on strengthening the vertical dimensions of governance. In light of these considerations it would be advisable to retain the High-level Interdepartmental Group to oversee the implementation of the new NSSD.

7.3.2 Strengthening the Capacity of Local Government to Implement Local Sustainable Development

Despite the extension of stakeholder approaches to sustainable development at local level through both the SPCs and the CDBs the primary responsibility for implementation resides with local government. Although local authorities in their entirety are responsible for the implementation of policy, the Directorate of Community and Enterprise is a critical hub in relation to the implementation of the city and county development strategies. As such, the Directorate requires adequate resources (financial, technical and human), not just to promote both awareness and participation in local sustainable development, but also to promote awareness of the role of the CDB in relation to sustainable development in the local community. One of the most uneven aspects of the CDB process in relation to sustainable development is the approach to sustainability proofing. A common approach would help to clarify the importance of sustainable development internally within the CDBs and have the advantage of creating a common standard that could provide valuable local information as inputs into national approaches. Comhar, the EPA and the Institute of Public Administration could coordinate such an approach; however, the experience of the creation of the Local Agenda 21 guidelines suggests strongly that the involvement of local authorities and the CDBs would generate results that would be more acceptable and appropriate.

7.3.3 'Horses for Courses': The Diverse Purposes of Public Participation

Just as public participation is only one among a mixture of approaches that form part of a diversified approach to the governance of sustainable development, the CDB process is just one among a number of participatory mechanisms channelling public input into public policy. Newman and Dale (2008: 88) point out that 'just as functional diversity is critical to the resiliency of ecosystems, it appears equally critical to the development of agency'. Each avenue for participation has its own particular purpose and function in relation to policy. Capacity building, particularly the encouragement of a sense of agency amongst citizens regarding individual responsibilities, requires a conducive context in order to flourish. Somers (2005: 13) argues that voluntary action in civil society requires a legal underpinning in the form of rights, since 'without legal rights associational life is not possible'. A key element in responsible citizenship for sustainable development is the provision of legal rights and resources. Resources in this sense are not just financial, but also reside in opportunities to participate. The types of mechanism suggested by *Stronger Local Democracy – Options for Change* (DoEHLG 2007) would appear to go some way to increasing the available opportunities for participation. They are relevant here insofar as they must be clearly linked to the principles of sustainable development. SUSPART would, however, endorse the call by Comhar for the government to fully implement the Aarhus Convention and for the full transposition of related EU directives on public participation and access to justice.

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Acronyms and Annotations

ADM	Area Development Management
CDB	City and County Development Board
CEC	Commission of the European Communities
DoE	Department of the Environment
DoEHLG	Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government
EU	European Union
EUSDS	European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development
NDP	National Development Plan
NSSD	National Strategy for Sustainable Development
NUTS	Nomenclature for Territorial Strategic Units
SPC	Strategic Policy Committee
SUSPART	Sustainable Participation: Evaluating the role of CDBs in Promoting Public Participation in Local Sustainable Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UN	United Nations
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

Appendix

Keys to Interviews

	Local government	Local development	State agency	Social partner	Community forum
Donegal	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5
Galway	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5
South County Dublin	SD1	SD2	SD3	SD4	SD5
Wexford	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5

An Ghníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil

Is í an Gníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil (EPA) comhlachta reachtúil a chosnaíonn an comhshaol do mhuintir na tíre go léir. Rialaímid agus déanaimid maoirsiú ar ghníomhaíochtaí a d'fhéadfadh truailliú a chruthú murach sin. Cinntímid go bhfuil eolas cruinn ann ar threochtaí comhshaoil ionas go nglactar aon chéim is gá. Is iad na príomh-nithe a bhfuilimid gníomhach leo ná comhshaol na hÉireann a chosaint agus cinntiú go bhfuil forbairt inbhuanaithe.

Is comhlacht poiblí neamhspleách í an Ghníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil (EPA) a bunaíodh i mí Iúil 1993 faoin Acht fán nGníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil 1992. Ó thaobh an Rialtais, is í an Roinn Comhshaoil agus Rialtais Áitiúil a dhéanann urraíocht uirthi.

ÁR bhFREAGRACHTAÍ

CEADÚNÚ

Bíonn ceadúnais á n-eisiúint againn i gcomhair na nithe seo a leanas chun a chinntiú nach mbíonn astuithe uathu ag cur sláinte an phobail ná an comhshaol i mbaol:

- áiseanna dramhaíola (m.sh., líonadh talún, loisceoirí, stáisiúin aistrithe dramhaíola);
- gníomhaíochtaí tionsclaíocha ar scála mór (m.sh., déantúsaíocht cógaisíochta, déantúsaíocht stroighne, stáisiúin chumhachta);
- diantalmhaíocht;
- úsáid faoi shrian agus scaoileadh smachtaithe Orgánach Géinathraithe (GMO);
- mór-áiseanna stórais peitreail.
- Scardadh dramhuisce

FEIDHMIÚ COMHSHAOIL NÁISIÚNTA

- Stiúradh os cionn 2,000 iniúchadh agus cigireacht de áiseanna a fuair ceadúnas ón nGníomhaireacht gach bliain.
- Maoirsiú freagrachtaí cosanta comhshaoil údarás áitiúla thar sé earnáil - aer, fuaim, dramhaíl, dramhuisce agus caighdeán uisce.
- Obair le húdaráis áitiúla agus leis na Gardaí chun stop a chur le gníomhaíocht mhídhleathach dramhaíola trí comhordú a dhéanamh ar líonra forfheidhmithe náisiúnta, díriú isteach ar chiontóirí, stiúradh fiosrúcháin agus maoirsiú leigheas na bhfadhbanna.
- An dlí a chur orthu siúd a bhriseann dlí comhshaoil agus a dhéanann dochar don chomhshaol mar thoradh ar a ngníomhaíochtaí.

MONATÓIREACHT, ANAILÍS AGUS TUAIRISCIÚ AR AN GCOMHSHAOL

- Monatóireacht ar chaighdeán aeir agus caighdeáin aibhneacha, locha, uiscí taoide agus uiscí talaimh; leibhéil agus sruth aibhneacha a thomhas.
- Tuairisciú neamhspleách chun cabhrú le rialtais náisiúnta agus áitiúla cinntí a dhéanamh.

RIALÚ ASTUITHE GÁIS CEAPTHA TEASA NA HÉIREANN

- Cainníochtú astuithe gáis ceaptha teasa na hÉireann i gcomhthéacs ár dtiomantas Kyoto.
- Cur i bhfeidhm na Treorach um Thrádáil Astuithe, a bhfuil baint aige le hos cionn 100 cuideachta atá ina mór-ghineadóirí dé-ocsaíd charbóin in Éirinn.

TAIGHDE AGUS FORBAIRT COMHSHAOIL

- Taighde ar shaincheisteanna comhshaoil a chomhordú (cosúil le caighdéan aeir agus uisce, athrú aeráide, bithéagsúlacht, teicneolaíochtaí comhshaoil).

MEASÚNÚ STRAITÉISEACH COMHSHAOIL

- Ag déanamh measúnú ar thionchar phleananna agus chláracha ar chomhshaol na hÉireann (cosúil le pleananna bainistíochta dramhaíola agus forbartha).

PLEANÁIL, OIDEACHAS AGUS TREOIR CHOMHSHAOIL

- Treoir a thabhairt don phobal agus do thionscal ar cheisteanna comhshaoil éagsúla (m.sh., iarratais ar cheadúnais, seachaint dramhaíola agus rialacháin chomhshaoil).
- Eolas níos fearr ar an gcomhshaol a scaipeadh (trí cláracha teilifíse comhshaoil agus pacáistí acmhainne do bhunscoileanna agus do mheánscoileanna).

BAINISTÍOCHT DRAMHAÍOLA FHORGHNÍOMHACH

- Cur chun cinn seachaint agus laghdú dramhaíola trí chomhordú An Chláir Náisiúnta um Chosc Dramhaíola, lena n-áirítear cur i bhfeidhm na dTionscnamh Freagrachta Táirgeoirí.
- Cur i bhfeidhm Rialachán ar nós na treoracha maidir le Trealamh Leictreach agus Leictreonach Caite agus le Srianadh Substaintí Guaiseacha agus substaintí a dhéanann ídiú ar an gcrios ózóin.
- Plean Náisiúnta Bainistíochta um Dramhaíl Ghuaiseach a fhorbairt chun dramhaíl ghuaiseach a sheachaint agus a bhainistiú.

STRUCHTÚR NA GNÍOMHAIREACHTA

Bunaíodh an Ghníomhaireacht i 1993 chun comhshaol na hÉireann a chosaint. Tá an eagraíocht á bhainistiú ag Bord lánaimseartha, ar a bhfuil Príomhstiúrthóir agus ceithre Stiúrthóir.

Tá obair na Gníomhaireachta ar siúl trí ceithre Oifig:

- An Oifig Aeráide, Ceadúnaithe agus Úsáide Acmhainní
- An Oifig um Fhorfheidhmiúchán Comhshaoil
- An Oifig um Measúnacht Comhshaoil
- An Oifig Cumarsáide agus Seirbhísí Corparáide

Tá Coiste Comhairleach ag an nGníomhaireacht le cabhrú léi. Tá dáréag ball air agus tagann siad le chéile cúpla uair in aghaidh na bliana le plé a dhéanamh ar cheisteanna ar ábhar imní iad agus le comhairle a thabhairt don Bhord.

NDP
National Development Plan 2007 - 2013

Science, Technology, Research and Innovation for the Environment (STRIVE) 2007-2013

The Science, Technology, Research and Innovation for the Environment (STRIVE) programme covers the period 2007 to 2013.

The programme comprises three key measures: Sustainable Development, Cleaner Production and Environmental Technologies, and A Healthy Environment; together with two supporting measures: EPA Environmental Research Centre (ERC) and Capacity & Capability Building. The seven principal thematic areas for the programme are Climate Change; Waste, Resource Management and Chemicals; Water Quality and the Aquatic Environment; Air Quality, Atmospheric Deposition and Noise; Impacts on Biodiversity; Soils and Land-use; and Socio-economic Considerations. In addition, other emerging issues will be addressed as the need arises.

The funding for the programme (approximately €100 million) comes from the Environmental Research Sub-Programme of the National Development Plan (NDP), the Inter-Departmental Committee for the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (IDC-SSTI); and EPA core funding and co-funding by economic sectors.

The EPA has a statutory role to co-ordinate environmental research in Ireland and is organising and administering the STRIVE programme on behalf of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

epa
Environmental Protection Agency
An Ghníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil

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SSTI
Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation

Comhshaol, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Heritage and Local Government