Participation, Practitioners and Power:

Community Participation in North East Community Forests

By

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Preface

The material for this working paper was produced as part of a Masters of Environment and Planning Research at the University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne in the Department of Architecture, Planning and Landscape. The research was produced and written up from the 1st April 2003 -10th August 2003.

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Abstract

This research focuses on the nature and extent of community participation occurring in the North East Community Forests (NECF). The aims of the research were to firstly; review the current academic debate on community participation in landscape planning and management, secondly; reveal the current state of community participation within the NECF at both a strategic and local level and thirdly; consider the range of possible factors which determine the nature and extent of this community participation. This was achieved through a literature review, policy document analysis and in-depth interviews with individual NECF practitioners. Particular consideration was given to how individual practitioners might affect participatory processes. Research findings reveal participation practices within the NECF tend to focus on *'creating and enjoying'* not *'planning and managing'*. This local, rather than strategic approach to participation was found to be more compatible with the 90 % private land ownership that the NECF has to work with. The study concludes, that research which focuses on practitioners as forming *the* major barrier to enhancing community participation is unjustified in the case of the NECF. To enhance participation practice the multiple social, economic and material factors which converge to determine participatory processes within the NECF must be addressed.

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I: Introduction

Community Forests in the UK are multi-purpose forests existing almost exclusively at the urban fringe, with the ambitious aim to *"deliver a comprehensive package of urban, economic and social regeneration" (Community Forests, 2003a)*. Within Community Forest boundaries are existing woodland areas, agricultural land, recreation facilities, rights of way, housing and derelict land. Owners of this land are rarely the Community Forests themselves and rather include; private landowners, Local Authorities, other public agencies and charities. North East Community Forests[1] policy rhetoric states their commitment to community participation in the planning and management of these areas for example within the section devoted to 'People and Place' The Great North Forest Plans states its main aim is;

"To encourage and enable all sections of the community to be involved in planning, creating, managing and enjoying their local environment and to enhance the contribution of that environment to their health, well-being and quality of life."

(Great North Forest Plan, 2003, 25)

How practitioners try to achieve this participation and balance the interests of landowners with those of the community is of central concern for research. Referred to as 'community participation practitioners', these are people involved in the planning and delivery of participation within the NECF, where participation means anything from tree planting to agenda setting.

Thus, community participation and empowerment are key concepts within community forests policy rhetoric and it is suggested that *"one of the most striking features of recent UK forestry policy has been the emphasis on community involvement"* (Selman, 2002, 43). Across Europe the UK Community Forests have been seen as a leading example in their commitment to community participation and involvement (Konijnendijk, 2000). This emphasis on community involvement reflects, firstly; the changing nature of forestry, with its move toward multi-purpose, amenity, lowland forests and secondly; wider changes in the social and political climate, resulting in a greater demand for community participation in landscape planning and management.

Demand from within society for increased involvement with government decision making has grown over the past three decades due to an increasing suspicion of

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[1] NECF includes both the Tees and the Great North Forest which at the time of the research were in the process of merging.

expertise and authority and a disenfranchisement with public institutions (Giddens, 1993). There has been particular demand for involvement in environmental decisions as a result of growing environmental awareness, and the rise in "Green" issues. Researchers and professionals from within landscape planning and forestry have also come to recognise that participation can achieve landscape management which is more appropriate and more sustainable (Roe, 2000; Forestry Commission, 2002). A range of innovative participatory approaches which involve communities in landscape decision-making, but avoid the traditional adversarial nature of the public meeting have been developed to meet this demand.

The Forestry Commission have recently identified community involvement in the decision-making and management of community forests as a key area for social forestry research (Forestry Commission, 2002, 8). Recent research has suggested that it is practitioner's understanding and awareness which inhibit the uptake of participatory approaches (Hislop and Twery, 2002; Jackson, 2001) . However other research has been critical of such a narrow view of participation processes (Rydin and Pennington, 2000). The current research on community participation explores this tension, through investigating the practitioners' role in constructing participation processes.

The overarching question which has guided this research is:

What is the current state and level of community participation within the NECF, how is it determined and what role does the individual practitioner have in this?

II: Community Forests: Background and Context

What is Community Forestry?

"Community forestry is multi- purpose forestry which pursues rich ecosystems, access and recreation opportunities for all and are economically, socially and ecologically sustainable. Ideally these objectives are mutually reinforcing" (Selman, 2000, 106.)

Community Forestry in the UK embraces a wide agenda of environmental, economic and social regeneration in peri-urban areas and is about a lot more than just planting trees. It is important to clarify what is meant by community forestry in order to understand the issues of participation within the NECF which will subsequently be addressed. The term 'forest' is often associated with dense the planting of trees, however Community Forests are producing a multipurpose,

mosaic of landscape types with varying densities of woodland planting. Of the 41,500ha within the NECF boundaries less than 30% is to be planted with trees[2] . *"Community Forests are there to provide a wooded framework rather than a blanket coverage of trees"* (Davies, 2003)

In the context of community forestry the term 'community' distinguishes this multi-purpose forestry from the narrow, economic, single species view of forestry which dominated 20th Century upland Britain until the 1980s (Gilg,1993). What community forestry involves is a shift towards "multi-benefit forestry" which goes beyond economics to integrate social, ecological and aesthetic benefits of forestry (Selman, 2002). The section below outlines how forestry has reached this stage.

Why are Community Forests being planted now?

Community forests in the UK are a product of a partnership between the Countryside Agency, the Forestry Commission, relevant Local Authorities and other organisations. The Tees and the Great North Community Forests Programmes were initiated in 1994 and 1993. These two forests will merge by 2005 to become North East Community Forests (NECF).

The Community Forests have occurred as a result of the following social, political, economic and environmental forces:

♦ Surplus agricultural land and farm diversification
♦ Realization that formal planning process have often failed to deliver accessible attractive environments in the urban fringe and Pressure on green belt land
♦ Greater awareness of the environmental, social and economic benefits of trees.
♦ The changing policy context for forestry which places a significant emphasis on multi-purpose forestry
♦ The emergence of degraded post-industrial landscapes in regions undergoing severe economic decline
♦ The accelerating rate of involvement in outdoor leisure and recreation and accompanying policy measures to provide for this.
♦ The recognition of the need to focus this recreation near to towns and cities and away from more fragile landscapes and pressured rural areas. (Adapted from Mcfarlane, 2000)

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[2] The density and nature of planting will be similar to medieval woodlands with open areas, lakes and coppices

Why plant trees?

There are some strong ecological arguments for the re-forestation of Britain. The UK only currently has only 10% tree cover, despite its ideal tree growing environment. Re-forestation will be returning the landscape to a more natural forested state[3]. Planting trees also aids in carbon sequestration (Bishop, 1992) provides air pollutant uptake (Scott, 1998) enhances soil development and produces maximum biomass (Gilg, 1993). The arguments for multi-purpose, community forestry extend beyond ecology to advocate health (Ulrich, 1983; Scott, 1998) educational, recreational and economic benefits (Bishop, 1992). This includes making areas more attractive to economic investment (Templeton and Goldman, 1996) and increasing opportunities for leisure and tourism enterprises (GNF Forest Plan, 2003). There are also non-use values of forestry for future generations which are hard to calculate.

Despite strong arguments for forestry and the popularity of tree planting activities amongst the public (Macpherson, 2000) the planting of trees through the community forests programme is not an unquestionable good. Firstly; planting trees results in the loss of other types of habitat and landscapes (Green, 1996), Secondly; the planting is to be carried out predominantly on private farming land, where there is a historical legacy of farm woodland neglect and negative attitudes towards allowing public access (Bishop, 1992), Thirdly; planting may not be welcomed by communities, and may not always be used for the recreation it was intended for. Woodlands are often associated with criminal uses (drug-taking, attackers, vandalism etc.) and many women fear being in woodlands alone (Burgess, 1995). Forestry needs to be sensitive to the social and environmental context in which it is planted and the different cultural values of forests (Koijendijk, 2000)

The scale of change to the landscape of the North East as a result of community forest planting is to be considerable. Over 3 million trees have been planted and the forests eventually aim to contain over 40 million trees. While the density of planting may be relatively low at 30% the cumulative impact of this change on the communities which neighbour the NECF may be high, two million people in the North East live within 20kms of the NECF. The Community Forests state their aim is to *"create the most dramatic change to our urban landscapes since the Industrial Revolution" (Community Forests, 2003[a])*.

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[3] Since the last glaciation the predominant vegetation has been forest of various forms (Rackham, 1990).

Community Forests and Community Involvement

If community forestry is to proceed in a democratic, inclusive and sustainable manner communities require the opportunity to influence the design and management of these forests. A workshop on public participation in forestry made up of academics and practitioners identified that there were important differences between the UK Regions, meaning that certain kinds of initiative could prosper or fail depending on where they are launched. (Forestry Commission Workshop 3, 2002). This research will contribute to a regional perspective on community forestry by focusing on the NECF.

Community Forests state the aims of involving the public in changing the landscape of Britain and themes of 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'engagement' are central to their promotional material. It is important to determine if the NECF is embracing these concepts or whether they are empty rhetoric. On reading the term "community forestry" one may assume the devolution of some significant degree of power to the community however Selman notes that:

"What is more widely practised and may masquerade as devolution, being more acceptable to governments and the forestry industries is decentralization. This can be defined as the relocation of administrative functions away from a central location, providing the community with a capacity or authority to contribute to decision making." (2002, 43)

Community forests in the UK are not owned or controlled by the community, rather power is decentralized and; *"responsibility for plan-making, advisory services and grant aid is given to dedicated teams, who in turn use a variety of methods to involve local stakeholders and the public in the creation and upkeep of a diverse constellation of woodlands."* (Selman, 2002, 44). It is these "dedicated teams" and the methods they use to involve local stakeholders and the public upon this research focuses.

The National Community Forests website has a section entitled *"Empowering Communities"* here it states; *"It is important that local people are given the opportunity to make decisions regarding improvements in their local environment........Community Forests are successful because they forge strong partnerships with the public, private and voluntary sectors and individuals that take ownership of the Forest"* (Community Forests, 2003ᵇ) *"Community Empowerment"* is common rhetoric in participatory forestry projects but that what is meant is less clear (Buchy and Hoverman, 2000). While it may mean power is devolved, in the case of community forestry, research finds empowerment may simply translate to the level of the individual through personal development, education and projects to increase self esteem, creating an 'enabling' power rather than power over a project (Buchy and Hoverman, 2000).

How are the NECF setting out to engage communities?

Currently there is no document within the NECF devoted to Community Participation, so overarching aims emanate, in theory from the wider Forest Plans. These plans determine the overarching forest strategy for the following five years through setting out guiding principles, aims and objectives.

Within the section devoted to *'People and Place'* The Great North Forest Plan states its main aim is:

"To encourage and enable all sections of the community to be involved in planning, creating, managing and enjoying their local environment and to enhance the contribution of that environment to their health, well-being and quality of life."

(Great North Forest Plan, 2003, 25)

This is to be achieved:

"Through an integrated programme of information, consultation, participation and long-term stewardship."

(Great North Forest Plan, 2003, 26*)*

The plan identifies a range of ways in which communities have already participated in the GNF including through practical volunteer tasks, arts, recreation activities, educational events and at the planning stage through consultation and 'Planning for Real' exercises. Similarly in the Tees Forest Plan, under the heading *"A Forest for the Community"* states:

"It is the close involvement of people that distinguish community forests from other woodland initiatives" (Tees Forest Plan, 2000, 30)

The Tees plan states very similarly that it is committed to a programme of public involvement in the planning, creation and management of the forest and gives the example of a Planning for Real exercise it has carried out. One of its aims is to:

"Consult widely, monitor opinion and act on it" (Tees Forest Plan, 2000, 32).

Community Forests: Emerging Issues in the Literature

A limited amount of research specifically addresses issues of participation within the Community Forests and the National Forest and it will be interesting to see what parallels or distinctions I can draw from this and my own research. Community participation within the national forest was found to be limited. A comparison of approaches to participation within LA21 and the National Forest, Bell and Evans (1998) found that while LA21 takes a populist grass roots approach, the National Forest Strategy sought to "harness" participation and partnership through more formal links between a range of organizations agencies and volunteers. They suggest that despite rhetoric to the contrary the National Forest was developed due to changes over land use policy, rather than a genuine commitment to the integration of economic, environmental and social gaols that are enshrined in LA21. Bell and Evans (1998) recommended that further commitment is required to the promotion of National Forest ideals and the co-ordination of local participation to realize the balanced multi-purpose objectives in the forest strategy.

Development of community forests has been found to encounter tensions between private property rights and public environmental interests (Bishop, 1992). Inglis and Beck found that forestry commission approaches confined community forestry to a limited remit of recreation, conservation and 'walking the dog' suggesting that; *"for most rural scots community forestry is an insulting irrelevance"* community forest is *"maintained by a few unrepresentative people to be 'a playground for the urban rich"* (1996, 23). This links to wider issues of property rights where landowners (including farmers) act as "Gatekeepers" able to influence rights to access, leisure and development in the countryside. This results in private landowners having privileged claims upon the rest of society (Cloke et al., 1996).

Thus, we should continue to question the practices going on behind the term 'Community Forestry' and contribute to a regional perspective on community forestry through a focus on the NECF.

III: Community Participation, Power and Local Knowledge

The nature and levels of participation in policy or development processes are often measured in terms of power and the roles that different stakeholders have in the decision-making process. Power is regarded as central to 'participatory forestry' and it is suggested that *"to engage in participatory process will ultimately change relationship patterns and affect power relationships"* (Buchy and Hoverman, 2000). This theme of 'power' is reflected in a number of typologies of participation the most famous of which is Arnstein's Ladder (see Figure 1).
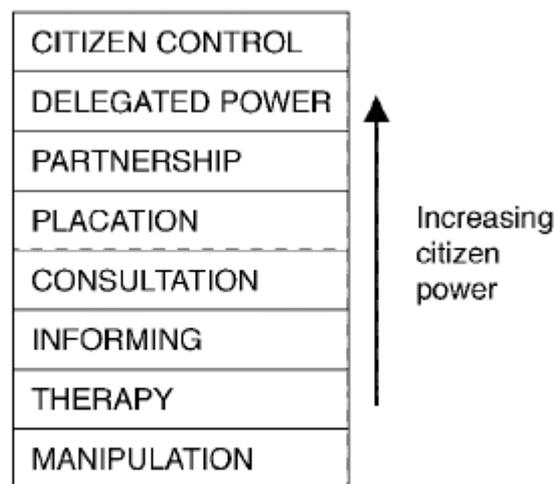

FIGURE 1. Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder of citizen participation'.

Arnstein's Ladder (1969) conceptualises participation as occurring at a number of different levels from 'tokenism' to 'citizen control'. Despite heavy criticism Arnstein's conceptualisation of participation and power has had remarkable endurance and the ladder is still widely referred to by both academics and practitioners. The ladder is used in the Forestry Commission's practice guide: *Involving Communities in Forestry through Community Participation* to describe the various levels of involvement possible from agency to community control, suggesting that; *"Usually it is not possible to progress up the ladder unless the previous level has been achieved"* (Forestry Commision,1996, 2). However a workshop group on social forestry made up of academics and forestry practitioners felt the hierarchical levels of participation were unhelpful (Forestry Commission 2001, 18). It appears that the simplicity of Arnstein's Ladder is its strength, but also its downfall (Sharp and Connoly, 2002).

Arnstein's ladder masks the more complex nature of participation, power and planning decisions. In theorising participation it must be recognised that power is not exercised along a single axis, chain or ladder, but is better conceptualised as a

net. Foucault's conception of power is useful to the analyses of participation for he recognises the everyday nature of power and social control and that all individuals are vehicles of power (Foucault, 1980). Such analyses of power disrupts the simple central/ local, powerful/ powerless dichotomies found within some attempts to theorise participation.

Recent research offers the opportunity to theorise participation in more sophisticated and socially relevant ways than is afforded by Arnstein's ladder. This includes Davidson's (1998) conceptualisation of participation as a Wheel, while Sharp and Connolly (2002) suggest that rather than conceptualising participation along a "single axis of power", we should focus on the power relations within a participatory process, asking 'How is power distributed?' and 'Who should have power, over what, where and whom?' This, they suggest, will involve the identification of actors and interests and the competing discourses through which they operate.

Participation can occur through a variety of techniques and informal mechanisms at a range of stages and levels in landscape planning and management. Here the full scope of participation within community forests will be considered from practical tasks such as tree planting, to participation in wider decision-making through meetings with parish councils and interest groups and through more innovative communicative methods. Communicative methods try to overcome the adversarial situations that tend to dominate traditional forms of public consultation such as public meetings. They include Planning for Real, round tables and focus groups which share common principles; including involving widest possible range of interests; focussing on the future and on common ground; working in small self managed groups and urging full attendance and participation; (Tewdwr-Jones and Thomas, 1998).

A range of levels of participation which can occur in community forests is conceived by the Forestry Commission in an adaptation of Arnstein's ladder as shown in Figure 2 overleaf.

Research suggests *"all levels of involvement may be appropriate under certain circumstances and for specific stakeholders"* (Jackson 2001,139). Jackson (ibid.) suggests that what is required is information to help practitioners in the 'selection of participation techniques', including in the form of a stakeholder analysis. The full scope of potential participants must also be considered from marginalized groups to powerful landowners and interest groups. These people fall within concepts of 'community' however it is important to clarify meanings here, for community is a contested concept with spatial, cultural and ideological elements. Three types of community have some analytical value to this research:

Levels of community participation

Community Control
The community is in full control of a scheme and makes the decisions regarding resource allocation, use and management. Agency involvement is available, but at the direction of the group.

Full Community Involvement
The community is undertaking substantial aspects of the community woodland programme without significant input from the agency. The agency is increasingly taking a back seat and a local group may be established to formalise community involvement.

Partial Community Involvement
Members of the community who have become interested through consultation are encouraged by the agency to become involved with 'appropriate' aspects of the planning, implementation and management of the community woodland scheme.

Consultation
Members of the community are actively encouraged to offer ideas and options that can be incorporated into the scheme if appropriate.

Information
Telling people what is going to happen without recruiting support or offering the opportunity to comment.

Persuasion
Securing a commitment to an objective of community participation and a structure to achieve it within the agency.

Agency Control
A scheme is provided by the agency or land owner with no actual or intended reference to the community.

Adapted from Arnstein (1969)

Figure 2. Forestry Commission adaptation of Arnstein's Ladder

Local place based communities: While we cannot assume a deterministic link between place and community (Cater and Jones,1989) local communities are still a common basis for social organization and action (Healey, 1997)

Wider potential catchment communities: Spatially more distant groups to the NECF or individuals who may have a potential interest in the NECF and its activities, but do not necessarily belong to a community of interest.

Communities of Interest: Formed more out of choice around an area of common interest. For example bridle-way groups, mountain biking clubs or wildlife groups.

All three types of community have the potential to be involved productively within the NECF through a range of participatory approaches.

When considering how practitioners decide upon community participation techniques, it is important to think through issues of power and recognise that participation is a social process, in which all individuals are vehicles of power. Communicative methods such as Planning for Real, developed by the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, try to overcome some of the power imbalances inherent in traditional public meetings, through mediated approaches (Tewdwr-Jones and Thomas, 1998), however there is an assumption in these approaches that we are inclined towards consensus (Parker and Selman, 1999) and that it is possible to reach as Renn et al suggest "equality among participants" (1995, 3). Perhaps what is more important though is recognition of diversity and of our differing frames of meaning (Sayer and Storper, 1997). This links to a post-modernist concern with difference rather than equality.

The effectiveness of a participation process may depend as much on personalities, institutional culture and how the process is timed and facilitated as where it is supposedly situated on Arnstein's ladder (Buchy and Hoverman, 2000; Healey and Gilroy, 1990). Institutions and people involved in participatory approaches to landscape planning are inseparable from the exercise of power for participatory approaches to landscape planning are about the identification, collection, interpretation and representation of local knowledge and at each point there are opportunities for various actors in the process to exercise power both implicit and explicit.

 "knowledge is culturally, socially and politically produced and is continually reformulated as a powerful normative construct" (Kothari,2001,141).

'Peoples knowledge' or 'Local knowledge' is not a fixed commodity that people intrinsically have and own. In recognition of this research has called for participation practitioners to be continually self-reflective in the process of interpreting community desires (Healey, 1997). However Cooke and Kothari(20001) suggest that it is not just individual practices but overarching, participatory discourse which "Embodies the potential for unjustified exercise of power" (Cooke and Kothari, 4, 2001). They suggest that "local knowledge" may be structured by planning processes and outcomes, rather than have a role in determining them. Thus, it is important to consider:

1. How community desires are being interpreted through participatory practice

2. Whether practitioners are reflective in this process

3. Whether being a reflective practitioner is adequate compensation for the other social structures which shape community participation practice and outputs.

In order to do this it is important to understand the underlying rationales for community participation in landscape planning and management which practitioners may draw upon.

IV: Rationales for Participation in Landscape Planning and Management

Participation in landscape planning and management is important for both people and the maintenance of the landscape they exist in. This means that participation can be justified on different grounds. Buchy and Hoverman (2000) distinguish between writing which addresses 'participation as an ethos', a right, as an end in itself or an ideology and 'participation as a management tool'; a means to an end, a method, and crucial to effective policy delivery. I have used this distinction to divide some of the rationales for participation found in the literature and these are summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3   The Rationales for Participation

Participation as an Ethos (Transformative)	Participation as a Management Tool (Instrumental)
➢ A democratic right	➢ Crucial to effective policy delivery
➢ An Education	➢ Increasing trust in decision making systems in both long and short term
➢ Helps participants engage in public and environmental good thinking	➢ Avoiding public controversy or confrontation
➢ Teaches skills necessary to become an "active citizen"	➢ A useful source of local knowledge helping local needs to be met
➢ Provides opportunities for social capital generation	➢ Results in better information and greater support
➢ Helps to build local identity	➢ Achieves landscape management which is more likely to be sustainable
➢ Helps to reconnect people with their environment	

(after, Rydin, et al 2000; Renn, et al., 1995; Roe, 2000; Hayward, 1995, Bucek and Smith, 2000)

The table provides a useful point of reference although it must be recognised that the distinction between the two rationales are not always clearly maintained in the literature. Research may address the benefits of participation from overlapping perspectives either implicitly or explicitly (Rydin and Pennington, 2000).

A Right

Participation is regarded as important as an ethos, a democratic right and an end in itself. In the UK there has been a tendency toward extending participation in local democracy and including citizens in decision- making at the local levels. Participation is important because it can be *a means of bringing the pattern of values and preferences within the policy process closer to that existing in society as a whole" (Rydin and Pennington, 2000, 154)* and achieve a more "Democratic Landscape" (Roe, 2000). Participation is particularly important to the work of Community Forests because, their design and management should reflect the needs and desires of local communities and other potential site users and these will vary and may depend on social class age, ethnicity and background (Burgess, 1996). Approaches

to community forestry which reduce humans to rational consumers should be avoided and the less tangible spiritual and cultural values of woodlands should also be recognised (Mackenzie, 2002).

Education

One of the major benefits of a participatory approach is its educational value and this is central to theories of participatory democracy. It exposes a participant to a wide range of points of view and helps them engage in "public good thinking" (Jacobs, 1997). If individuals participate and see the results of their participation either on the ground or at a strategic level they may develop the skills and confidence necessary to participate regularly and effectively become an "active citizen" (Bucek and Smith, 2000). It may help participants engage with 'environmental good thinking' and aid the transformation of people from 'self regarding' to 'other regarding citizens' with an appreciation of common human interests and compassion for non-human nature, from an eco-centric position participation has a particular appeal because of its 'transformative potential'(Hayward,1995). However a persons capacity to participate effectively may be enhanced by-being well informed, this means that while education can be a benefit of participation in most cases it is also a pre-requisite (Taylor, 1994). Institutional support is necessary to enhance the capacity of communities to engage in community forestry (Slee, 1996).

Social Capital Generation

Advocates of participation from an ethos perspective may think participation stops being meaningful when there is no transfer or share of power in decision-making (Buchy and Hoverman, 2000). However participation in landscape planning and management such as tree planting and consultation exercises have their place in a range of activities which help to "get on-board" the community and build stocks of social capital. Creating networks of individuals and processes of mutual learning and exchange (Wilson, 1997). These contribute to the incentive structure necessary to encourage the community to continue to get engaged (Rydin and Pennington, 2000). It could also be argued that the denser the social networks in the community, the higher the possibility of collective participation (Parker and Selman, 1999).

Involving locals actively in site management can also help re-establish the relationship between communities and their environment (Inglis and Beck, 1996). Participation in on the ground landscape management, art and design activities can also help reduce fears and perception of risk and increase confidence to use

woods (Burgess, 1995). This may enable stewardship and a sense of ownership of local woods.

Health

Active participation in practical landscape management can produce a variety of mental and physical health related benefits (Macpherson, 2000). This links a considerable body of work on the wider health benefits of the countryside. For example Ulrich (1983) finds that the view through a window may influence recovery from surgery and Ottoson (2001) accounts of his recovery from a traumatic injury and of the importance of nature in coping with a crisis.

Community forest's promotional material emphasises the health related benefits of trees and woods. However it is important to critically analyze how such physical health benefits are translated into policy rhetoric. There is a need to distinguish between:

"Empowerment" at the level of the individual to get out and enjoy the forest and participate through practical volunteer tasks which literally increase their physical power; and

"Empowerment" that results in communities having the power to determine the shape and nature of the landscape.

While there is obviously a degree of overlap between these two, as Roe (2000) notes empowerment and "active citizenship" doesn't necessarily increase the ability of communities to take direct decisions about their environment. Institutions and practitioners need to be receptive to participation that goes beyond empowerment of the individual. The use of collaborative planning techniques such as Planning for Real exercises which can help to fulfil the potential of participation as a democratic right.

Sustainable Landscape Management

An alternative perspective on participation is that it may be justified entirely on the grounds that it is a useful landscape management tool. Participation enhances the effectiveness of policy delivery, is a useful source of local knowledge, helps avoid conflicts and delivers more appropriate, sustainable landscapes (Forestry Commission 1996, Roe 2000). Some forestry research emphasises the role of participation as an educational tool with terms such as to 'raise awareness' and 'increase understanding' of forestry practice (see for example Konijnendijk, 2000).

However successful participation for landscape management is a two-way process, not simply a way of legitimating current practice. If sustainable landscape management is to be achieved the ideals of participation as an ethos must be recognised. Participation that feeds directly into decision-making and aids communities in defining their own landscapes can help communities to have a sense of ownership and responsibility towards a forest, helping to ensure its long-term stewardship and also resulting in a reduction in overall project costs (Parker and Selman, 1999) .

While there is room for expertise the community should have some power to define and design the landscape for as the European Landscape Convention (2000) recognises landscapes are socio-spatial categories as much to do with culture as with ecosystems. How a balance is struck between expert and community knowledge relates to wider debates surrounding how we *"splice together"* representative and participatory democracy (Parker and Selman, 1999).

Selman (2002) identifies that a key role for community forests is to instil an attachment between communities and woodland estate so that promotion and endorsement of community forestry becomes second nature to them, if this objective is fulfilled it could achieve both the benefits identified by those who promote community participation as an ethos and be a useful sustainable landscape management strategy.

V: The Disadvantages and Downfalls of Participation

By considering the central nature of power in the participation process it is possible to appreciate the difficulties in achieving effective participation. Participation will always be a scene of negotiation and collaboration but not amongst equals (Ploger, 2001). How can community desires be adequately interpreted? How can we splice those desires together into a framework of wider principles? Anyway, how can we assume the community have desires to participate in landscape planning and management, when they maybe face more pressing difficulties of low income and unemployment (NUFU, 2001).

Participation has often been embraced by planning research as of unquestionable good (Rydin and Pennington, 2000). However it can:

♦ Result in "selective stakeholder involvement" (Carman, 2003);
♦ Be used to "mask a hidden agenda of power in the landscape" (Mcinroy, 2000);

♦ Create "socially and racially exclusive constructs of place" (Crouch and Matless, 1996);

♦ Raise the expectations of the public unjustifiably (Selman and Parker, 1997).

♦ Increase time and administrative costs, and allow opposition to a proposal to develop (Petts,1999). Often antagonistic groups come to a process bearing grudges from earlier unsatisfactory encounters (Buchy and Hoverman, 2000).

The difficulties in achieving the many potential benefits of participation are divided into the following themes:

- Achieving adequate representation
- Stakeholder Identification
- Achieving Sustainability
- "Expert" V "Local" Knowledge

Achieving Adequate Representation

One of the main problems of achieving representative community participation is getting a wide cross section of participants and views, particularly at a decision-making level. While Athens in 5th B.C is frequently cited as the quintessential example of a participatory democracy, Athenian citizens were carefully vetted and immigrants and men under 20 were not awarded such privileges of citizenship(Hayward, 1995). Parallels can be drawn to current situations. Academics and practitioners have identified that participation in forest management and planning tended to concentrate on interest groups such as friends of forests, Parish Councils and organisations with specific interests such as wildlife trusts (Forestry Commission, 2001). These are vocal groups who often don't represent the interests of the young, ethnic minorities, the unemployed and disadvantaged.

"Traditionally local participatory exercises have been the preserve of articulate and influential groups, neglecting youth and disadvantaged sectors, and accepting the partial viewpoints of spokespersons who may only be 'nominally' representative. "(Forestry Commission, 2001)

More innovative methods of involving the public make claims to overcome some of these problems, however there is still a danger of agendas being monopolised by articulate professionals, consultants or activists (Selman and Parker,1997) all ways of structuring participation will affect its outcomes (Sharp, 2002) . Research on participation within Local Agenda 21 which takes a grass roots approach to participation found; it can create tensions between the central funding authority and local population who have different priorities, result in over representation of

more affluent and retired people due to difficulties in recruiting volunteers, produce overworked volunteers upholding the appearance of participation and result in difficulties in implementation due to time spent on building coalitions (Selman and Parker, 1997).

"There are significant risks that these approaches can give a platform for unrepresentative, even dangerous views that they fail to deliver when real conflict situations arise and that they may raise expectations unjustifiably."(Selman and Parker, 1997, 178)

In a rural context in the UK communities have expressed extreme reservations about community ownership or management of forests, and that such local power may result in the exposure of social divisions along the lines of class and ethnicity (Slee, 1996). We must therefore heed the warning that *"expanding opportunities for public participation in environmental planning is not always the best option"* (Rydin and Pennington, 2000, 153)

Stakeholder Identification

Whatever the downfalls, the many benefits of participation mean it is still worth pursuing. Participatory techniques still have the potential to reach marginalized groups (Bucek and Smith, 2000). If this is to occur there is a need for more open routes to get people involved in decision making. Forestry Commission research suggests *"Consideration needs to be given to a wide range of stakeholders and potential stakeholders who may or may not currently use woodlands"* (2001, 18). Jackson (2001) concluded from her study of public involvement processes in British Columbia that stakeholders should be left to self select in an open participatory process, suggesting that *"stakeholders are those who* believe themselves *to have an interest or stake, not those which the agency deems to have a stake, or would like to include" (140)*. However this results in a danger of spatially distant but powerful groups getting involved yet not carrying the full burden of the policies they propose (Rydin and Pennington,2000).

People may not participate for a number of reasons, at a decision making level these include; they may feel powerless to influence the decision making process, they don't have time, their interests are not compromised, they feel their interests are adequately represented or they are unaware of a proposal(Petts,1999). The reasons for this non-participation must be determined and participation should be tailored and targeted to include people in decision making. However it is important to determine who still chooses not to participate to ensure the views/needs these groups can still be taken into account.

Achieving Sustainability

Selman (2002) suggests there is a prevalent assumption that encouraging widespread participation will "axiomatically" deliver sustainability objectives. However while deliberative communicative, procedures may be the most likely to guarantee sustainability there is no guarantee that sustainable landscape characteristics will be ensured by such participatory strategies (Thayer, 1994) . This is what Jacobs (1997) labels "*the paradox of democratic sustainability*". This paradox does not mean that we must choose between representative <u>or</u> participatory democracy as Buchy and Hoverman (2000) suggest. Rather it raises issues about how we might situate participatory democracy within a wider framework of principles determined by representative democracy (Wainright, 2003).

We must distinguish what landscape planning issues are appropriate for a more participatory approach and which must be dealt with largely through environmental management (Rydin and Pennington, 2000*).* A framework of principles could be determined to ensure that local communities do not create exclusionary or unsustainable agreements. These principles could be based on what might be regarded as our generalizable human interest for a healthy sustainable environment Dryzek and other environmentalists suggest that despite our differences we still share a generalizable common human interest in terms of environmental decisions (e.g. Planting more trees). Such a framework of principals may already exist amongst NECF in the form of policy documents and informally through individuals and the organizational culture. However the assumption of such a common human interest is controversial. We must heed the warning that the assumption of unity can undermine the democratic potential of participation (Hayward, 1995).

Expert v Local Knowledge

Involving communities in landscape planning encounters issues of how we splice together community knowledge and desires with other forms of expertise. There has been a shift from away from 'expert' evaluation of landscape using quantitative, statistical methods towards more subject centred conceptions of landscape planning (Scott and Benson, 2002). However if we go as far as to accept Lothians (1999) proposal that landscape quality is not an objective, inherent quality but rather a subjective quality, in the 'eye of the beholder', Does this mean that participatory approaches are the only way in which we can define and design landscape? And if so where does that leave ecological and other forms of landscape expertise?

In contrast to this subject centred paradigm of Landscape Research other research conceptualise participants as simply; *"obstacles to implementation"* (Luz, 2000) or as 'unenlightened' (Konijindejk, 2000). Gobster (1999) in looking at conflict between scenic and sustainability values, is critical of the popularisation of a landscape aesthetic based on a preference for idealized, naturalistic scenery and advocates the development of an 'ecological aesthetic' which demands engagement of all our senses as well as our intellect to perceive and make sense of the landscape, based on an understanding of ecological sustainability. However they are based on the assumption that environmental preferences are easy to manipulate, which may not to be the case (Parsons and Daniel, 2002).

It is suggested that the move toward community based initiatives has been premature for there are indications of a tension between innovative and community based initiatives by the local community and statutory local plans prepared by the local planning authority (Owen, 2002). For landscape planning, the integration of sustainability, ecological (expert) and human perception perspectives of landscape are crucial to national and international policy issues (Fry, 2001). Conflicts between cognitive, aesthetic and ecological judgements can pose sever problems for planning publicly acceptable forest landscapes (Mcfarlane, 2000,146) Enhancing landscapes maybe about getting people to behave in a different way (Roe 2000, 58).

In some cases it may be preferable if design does not necessarily reflecting current community desires but rather projected community needs. For example considerable attention and funding is being focused on the health benefits of recreation in forests. How are any tensions between public landscape preferences and wider, social and environmental objectives of the North East Community Forests reconciled ? And what is the role of education on these issues?

VI: Enhancing Participation: Principles of Good Practice

There are a numerous ways that research has suggested for overcoming some of the notorious difficulties of involving communities in landscape planning and management. What I wish to emphasise here is a trend in the literature which seems to reduce many of the problems of participation to the level of the individual practitioner. However first I shall briefly outline some principles of good practice, with which to evaluate NECF approaches.

Rydin and Pennington (2000) suggest that in order to achieve more equal access to participation there needs to be a focus on the incentive structures available to

participants for example through; "Reducing the costs of participation" (e.g. paying for childcare, keeping meetings short), "Making the impact of part on policy decisions more explicit" e.g. using local media to highlight successes, "Altering the perception of policy outcomes"- careful marketing of policy and the potential of social capital for enhancing these, focusing on the enabling role of education (Rydin and Pennington, 2000). Furthermore, the particular needs of disadvantaged groups need to be addressed to ensure their involvement in practical forest activities (Burgess,1996) and to secure their involvement at higher decision making levels (Roe, 2000). Lastly, a common understanding of what participation means from the outset of the process is necessary to avoid conflict, disappointment or 'burn out' (Buchy and Hoverman, 2000). Buchy and Hoveman have developed four principles of good practice in participation, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4   Buchy and Hoveman's principles of good practice

Principle 1. Commitment and Clarity. This includes being clear about what an agency is seeking to achieve to avoid raising expectations *Is it informing people, seeking opinion or proposing to share control?* Delivering a transparent process and providing staff with adequate resources, status and training for implementation of that process.

Principle 2. Time and Group Dynamics. There must be enough time allocated, timing must be appropriate and this is dependant on the nature of the issues and the people involved . If participation is seen as an educative process then it must be given time to develop. Considerable facilitation skills are required to manage often competing and conflictual groups. There must be Continuity and follow up to the process

Principle 3. Representivity. Issues regarding which individuals and groups are approached to participate and the nature and timing of participation must be given careful consideration. While everyone who expresses an interest may be granted some opportunity to participate their voices should not necessarily be attributed equal weight. Issues of equity should be agreed upon and the outcome of participation should not be predetermined.

Principle 4. Transfer of Skills*.* Participation should be regarded as a two –way process of skills and knowledge share. If we recognise that knowledge is power those communities well equipped to assess and assert their needs improve their negotiating position. Information available should be comprehensive balanced and accurate. More strategic targeting and tailoring of participation maybe required in order to include people in decision making from underrepresented groups.

(Adapted from Buchy and Hoverman, 2000)

The focus on the practitioner for achieving good practice

The complexity of the issues encountered in involving communities in urban forestry means that each situation will require its own solution. Mechanistic approaches to involvement are inappropriate (Hislop and Twery, 2002).This means practitioners themselves are often seen as central to solving some of the disadvantages and downfalls of participation practice. Within planning research it is suggested that it is the individual who can cause the breakdown between 'intention' and 'implementation' and that therefore *"it is time to focus on and understand the individuals decision processes"* (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002, 91). Other planning research argues it is the view of the public as a threat to professional

practice which needs to change (Healey and Gilroy, 1990). What is implied in such research, is that with "communicative", "self- reflective", knowledgeable, well trained practitioners, enhancing community participation in landscape planning can be achieved.

Webler et al.'s research on participation in environmental decision making suggests that the process must be transparent and the practitioners approachable, open and reflexive *" people who believe the process is good are more likely to accept and endorse its outcomes" (2001, 448)* they suggest it is important to *" take time to listen to what people want and explore their expectations"*. Research within community forestry similarly suggests that it is "uncertainty" and "fear" which inhibits greater uptake of public involvement approaches to forestry management and that "what is required is greater guidance regarding whom to include, when to include them and the tools available to do so" (Hislop and Twery, 2002, 83). Jackson (2001) from her study of public involvement processes in environmental planning in British Columbia provides such guidance for practitioners who "lack awareness" of the choices available. She suggests that participatory techniques can be 'selected' through stakeholders analysis by asking *What is their level of knowledge of the issue? What is their degree of commitment?* Based on this analysis she sets objectives for each 'type of stakeholder' (see figure 5 overleaf). However is such a conceptualization of the decisions faced by participation practitioners a realistic one?

Objective	Stakeholder analysis	When to use	Not appropriate for
To inform	• 'general public' or • Specific stakeholder group which is unaware of the issue or project	• Introducing a new idea, initiative or project • As a first stage in further public involvement • Keeping the wider public informed of progress of higher-level stakeholder processes	• An already informed group which believes their input is desired, or necessary for success
Public education	• General public or stakeholder group is aware of the issue or initiative, but requires background information in order to create an informed opinion or make an informed choice	• To raise level of awareness of an issue • To provide background information • To prepare a stakeholder group for a higher level of involvement	(Nearly always appropriate, on an ongoing basis, and when combined with higher-level processes)
Test reactions	• Must already be aware of the issue • Must have some background knowledge • Should be representative of some wider group	• When the organisation has options to evaluate • When input is sought on existing ideas • 'Trial balloon' to test public reaction to an idea	• Stakeholders lacking knowledge or misinformed about the initiative or issue—return to public education stage
Seek ideas or alternative solutions	• An 'expert panel' • Stakeholders should be well informed and have expertise or special knowledge • Should have the commitment for this level of involvement	• When the organisation desires creative solutions • When local or specialised knowledge can supplement in-house expert's options	• Stakeholders lacking knowledge or misinformed about the initiative or issue—return to public education stage
Shared decision making	• Well informed and knowledgeable • High level of commitment • Belief in the process • Willingness to share information • Trust in the organisation and other stakeholders (or willing to build)	• When the organisation desires or needs consensus of stakeholders • Where ongoing conflict prevents implementation of organisation-driven solutions	• Stakeholders who are unwilling to take responsibility for decisions • Those who lack commitment to work within such a process • Organisations which are unwilling to implement decisions of the group • Organisations which lack commitment to supplying necessary time and resources

Figure 5 Stages of public involvement (Jackson 2001)

It is questionable to what extent work which emphasises the role of the practitioner in deciding the nature, scale and level of participation, accurately reflects the situation faced by community participation practitioners. It is argued that such research *"over emphasises the issue of supply of participation and under-emphasises demand for such opportunities"* and in so doing it *" neglects some of the fundamental obstacles to effective participation, which stem from its very nature as a social process"* (Rydin and Pennington, 2000, 156*).* Through researching community participation and its practitioners within the NECF I hope to clarify to what extent practitioners

themselves can overcome any barriers which exist to increasing and enhancing community participation in landscape management.

VII: Researching Participation in the NECF

Research Aims & Objectives

The main aim of this research was to investigate the current state and level of community participation within the NECF; see how is it determined; and ask 'what role does the individual practitioner have in this'?

The research had the following more specific objectives:

♦ To outline the context of Community Forestry in the UK and identify the aims of the NECF approach to community participation.

♦ To critically review the academic literature on community participation in landscape planning with a particular focus on community forestry.

♦ To explore decision-makers' and practitioners' understandings and perspectives of community participation, particularly in relation to the NECF area.

♦ To evaluate the current approach to community participation within the NECF and relate this approach back to the ideals expressed by participants, the policy documents and the literature.

♦ To discuss the opportunities and barriers to enhancing participation .

♦ To make recommendations for relevant policy changes and on how further research on this subject could best proceed.

Research Methods

The following research methods were used in this research;
- Review of relevant policy documents
- Initial survey style questionnaire of interviewees
- In-depth, semi-structured interviews
- Use of a research diary

The review of policy documents, initial survey of interviewees and the research diary were used in order to legitimate research data and improve interpretation of the research. This 'triangulation' between different data sources *"can help to enhance validity or 'believability' of the research"* (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1991, 199). An initial survey style questionnaire of interviewees was carried out by email prior to the interview or in person on the day of the interview (See Appendix). This helped me clarify basic information regarding; areas of responsibility, training and level of awareness and adoption of participatory techniques

The interviews were informed and supported by key literature which was identified through keyword and author Literature Searches using databases such as BIDs and Athens. The research also involved identification and review of policy documents and websites from North East Community Forests, Community Forestry, the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Agency.

The primary research method used was in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a range of key individuals involved with community participation within the NECF. An interview schedule with topic headings and key questions was loosely followed. Participants were selected through a 'snowball' approach from the following organisations: Great North Forest, Tees Forest, Durham County Council, Gateshead City Council and The Forestry Commission. Thus, key individuals made recommendations about whom else I should speak to. This had the advantage of being able to follow up leads as appropriate. However it also had some influence on the direction of the research. I also had to be wary of being directed away from more senior members of staff or toward less appropriate informants. The research was carried out under a limited time scale; this meant that although many of the key informants were accessed some potential interview candidates were not possible to reach.

Eleven people in total were interviewed. All the interviewees are listed in an Appendix by job title and responsibility with some notes on their experiences of community participation. These people are referred to throughout the research as 'interviewees' or 'practitioners'; yet, while some of them do not currently carry out community participation at a grass roots level, all have a role in shaping form or interpreting outputs.

Recording and Analysis

For the purposes of this research it was important not only to record what participants said but also how it was said and in what context. Location, timing, how I am perceived and perceive all can have some affect on the data obtained.

This is important when trying to subsequently understand the 'cultural logics' and interpret the meanings of the interviewees (Baker, 1997). Therefore interviews were tape recorded and the physical and social context of the interview and initial impressions were also noted in my research diary.

Location of interviews was mainly at participants own offices arranged at their convenience. Location may have had some affect on the interview data as participants may feel they can speak with more authority on a topic in their own office or maybe more reserved in some cases than if they were interviewed within a less formal environment. However office interviews suited the purposes of privacy, convenience and tape recording interviewing in an office environment. Unlike group interviews one to one interviews run the risk unchecked exaggeration or mis-information, therefore data was cross validated with other research participants and policy documents.

A strategy of reflexivity was adopted in an attempt to acknowledge sources of inevitable bias. This included reflecting on the influence of myself as a researcher in the research process. To aid me in the reflexive process I kept a research diary, which included recording details of research contexts, research participants, decisions, made within the research process and reasons for them. The interview process was a learning experience and each interview also built on the next in terms of its conduct and the questions. Each interview also built on a network of trust that occurred, as I became increasingly known amongst the research participants. I think that this establishment of trust and familiarity was useful in encouraging participants to mention significant issues.

Participants were used to help to validate data, in cases where I was unclear about the meaning of a statement then I tried to clarify this in the interview. With more time I may have been able to ask respondents to reflect on the context of the account and add additional feedback to final research findings; this could help aid interpretation. However it doesn't guarantee 'truth' for ; "Participants may not be consciously aware of the decision rules they use" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1991, 196).

Analysis of in-depth interview data considered both *what* is said and *how* it is said in order to try to look beyond the face value of accounts. Data was coded and sorted into themes in order to make it more manageable. Such thematic sorting of interview data has been criticized because it may obscure the activities and context of the talk and text (Potter, 1997) and present limited dichotomous choices (Fontana and Frey, 2000). However the themes remained flexible and when quoting people in this paper, I have tried to remain sensitive and true to context.

VIII: Current Approaches and Understandings of Participation in the NECF

Current Approaches to Participation

Local Scale Promotion, Consultation and Activities

The majority of participation in landscape planning and management within the NECF is occurring at a local scale at the level of consultation in small site design issues and involvement in practical activities. These participation activities are carried out by Tees forest staff [4]and through 'Outreach Workers' who are funded by the NECF, the Countryside Agency, Council Core fund, Neighbourhood Renewal and Landfill Tax. There include posts in areas of high deprivation such as Gateshead, West Durham and South Tyneside. Staff engage the community in forest related activities through talks and information provision, nature clubs, food co-ops and young peoples groups.

"Probably one of the best methods of reaching the community is feedback through talks, getting engagement through events. I talk to community groups, elderly groups, disabled groups, business groups, we all do our fair share, and we get known and recognised through those and people are willing to participate out of that….It's not planned, it's not strategic, but it happens possibly more by default than design I guess"

Recreation Officer

Such methods of community engagement are traditionally attributed the lowest levels of community power on Arnstein's ladder. However the extent to which such events informally influence the wider agenda of the NECF is hard to gauge. Practitioners contact with the community can help them to have an appreciation of community agendas, but how they are subsequently interpreted and followed up may depend on the personalities and issues involved.

Local Planning and Management

Participation exercises that attribute the community with greater formal decision making power are not regular occurrences within the NECF. Where Planning for Real and other more substantive participation exercises have occurred they have tended to be 'one-offs'. A high level of community involvement at the planning stage of projects is dependant on land which is in public ownership, a long timescale, considerable funding, staff resources, accessible/receptive communities and an ability to accommodate community demands that such exercises result in.

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[4] The Tees forest operates a different style of management than the GNF. At Tees more external funding for staff that work 'on the ground' is secured. GNF have taken on more of a facilitative/ enabling role towards participation through outreach workers only.

The photos of 'Planning for Real' exercises and references to community participation in planning and management of the NECF found within the Forest Plans are not therefore representative of the majority of community participation practice. At the planning stages of projects community involvement has tended to occur only through Interest Groups, Parish Councils and Residents Associations, which do not necessarily represent the interests of the community.

Participation in Wider Landscape Scale Decisions

When the Tees and the GNF were first initiated in the early 1990s Landscape assessments were carried out which addressed the wider landscape issues of whether the region could cope with 30% forest cover, its location and what would be the implications of this. However this was an expert driven document that was *"open for comment at the time"* (Regional Director), but the public were not actively involved in its development. Based upon this document planting continues 10years later while the wider landscape issues which surround this are not open to ongoing live debate.

 "First plans settled that issue, of where the forest should be and what it should look like ……participation matters have moved to site specific issues"
Regional Director

The NECF is producing a dramatic change in the landscape, but over timescales of decades. The progressive nature of this change means that it is important to remain sensitive to opinions regarding this wider landscape change. For as the Regional Director acknowledged himself earlier in the interview;

"Any organization who claims to be sensitive should always be reviewing what it does because public attitudes and people who are charged with our governance from local councils to MPs are always changing ideas and one hopes to reflect public view"
Regional Director

However this sensitivity to public attitudes and opinion only extends so far due to the agenda of the NECF to achieve 30% forest cover. The Community Programmes Officer recognised the fact that the NECF were coming at participation with a particular environmental agenda, of assuming that tree planting was a *"good thing"* which people will want. Referring to the projects that he'd been involved with in the NECF he explained that participation did not allow a questioning of the wider agenda of the organization and thus was perhaps not what he would refer to as *"true participation"*.

Participation at an Agenda Setting Level

While there is an awareness of the need to be open to changes in attitudes and opinion, the mechanisms for hearing and responding to those changes have strict limitations. NECF operate under a particular 'forestry agenda', with the assumption that planting trees are a 'good thing'. There are few opportunities for that agenda to be questioned. The NECF is in regular dialogue with the Local Councils and other stakeholder groups such as Wildlife Trusts and the Woodland Trust. However *"the Community Forest is not an organization at the strategic level who are community driven"* (Regional Director) Rather at a strategic level the community is represented indirectly by Local Authority Funding Partners who are nominated to sit on the NECF Regional Advisory Board which meets 3-4 times a year to give strategic guidance. As Director of the Tees forest explained ;

"We are effectively an implementation mechanism for the Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission …sitting outside Local Authorities yet responsible to them through member steering groups….. Central Government is trying to bypass local authorities so that everything doesn't have to be justified to the 'nth' degree, giving money to other organizations and building the third sector"

Tees Forest Director

This lack of justification to the 'nth' degree raises issues of representivity and local democracy. Is the NECF a truly publicly accountable body? Does the NECF as part of the 'third sector' result in less democratic but more efficient delivery of services? The Regional Director suggests that **"community participation has always been a central ethos of the organization",** however the motivations for this community participation appear largely to draw from a landscape management perspective.

"There are two key areas to what we do and that's; 'A' – Get the Community to accept what we are doing in the first place and 'B'- Get them to look at taking ownership of what we do, because I don't see the point in doing anything unless people are specifically prepared to help keep it. If we get to a stage where we do things and we move on and it gets vandalised then there's no point" GNF Director

The Directors are well aware that the ideals of participation extend beyond a landscape management approach. However they take a very pragmatic stance regarding what can be achieved within the community forests through participation, given time, staff and funding limitations. Participation is focused on communities in urban areas who neighbour community woodland to ensure its safeguarding and maintenance. The idea of "Ownership" refers to this safeguarding and maintenance not control over wider planning and management issues. While not ideal from an ethos perspective, this strategy allows for the continuation of the community forestry programme.

Practitioner's Construction of Approaches to Participation

Practitioners and Participation

Research suggests that there is a need to focus on practitioner's understanding, training and awareness of participation, for this may affect the participatory approach which is taken . Through in-depth interviews and a preliminary survey of participatory techniques used I tried to determine practitioners' understandings of and training in, community participation and how that might affect subsequent selection of techniques.

Findings suggest however that while practitioners had low levels of training, they had a high level of understanding of what constitutes good participation practice. Practitioners were able to shape at the local level, small scale participation practice. However what inhibited their uptake of more inclusive and ongoing participation approaches was wider controlling factors such as land ownership and funding, which are to be discussed in the next section.

What is Good Participation?

I asked participants to define what good participation might mean to them by referring to an example from their work. Participants indirectly sited many of principles that are identified by Buchy and Hoverman (2000) such as transparency, inclusiveness, continuity, representivity and skill transfer. The concept of community participation was translated slightly differently by different individuals depending on their past experience, role and responsibilities. For some the emphasis was on practical outdoor community action.

"its quantity and quality, you're getting numbers out from a variety of backgrounds and ages and perhaps people who wouldn't normally experience the outdoors"
<div align="right">Community Liaison Officer</div>

For others such as the GNF Director and the Community Project officer, *"true community participation"* was only when there was a degree of *"power sharing"* or **"initiation".** Here they referred to examples of Doorstep Greens programmes (a Countryside Agency programme) and Planning for Real exercises carried out by the NECF. Good Participation was described by most practitioners using phrases such as *"all inclusive", "constructive" and "promoting a sense of ownership"*. These are all key phrases used within the Forest Plans. The importance of *"involving people from the out set"* through to the delivery and after use was widely recognised, particularly by the Directors;

"to work well you must have involvement right the way through"
<div align="right">Regional Director</div>

"The trick is to keep people interested, I think sometimes people lose sight of that"
<div align="right">GNF Director</div>

The benefit of a range of linked activities, in a range of locations which could reach different sections of the community was also highlighted. The GNF Director gave the example of a Planning for Real exercise within the NECF, where events such as a story telling festival were used to raise interest and build up to the consultation and the model went to local pubs, town halls and schools.

The Regional Director had contributed to the "Involving Communities in Forestry" (Forestry Commission, 1996) Handbook referred to in Ch.3 . However he suggested that; *"People could certainly pick holes in my academic understanding and perhaps there is a role for the university there in bringing people like me up to speed"*

Practitioners Role in NECF Approaches to Participation

"Although we have agreed an approximate formula for how we engage communities in community forestry the personalities of the individuals who hold the posts very often affect the way we do things and the kind of groups which we engage"

<div align="right">Tees Forest Director</div>

Individual practitioners who were carrying out small scale, local participation projects on the ground were granted a degree of autonomy to determine the precise nature of that participation. The Tees Forest Director gave the example of previous individuals in the same Community Liaison post specialising in equestrian development or in education depending on their particular interests. This means practitioners were getting job satisfaction and could implement what they perceived as locally appropriate projects. However what may result is a focus on areas of personal interest not areas of greatest need. As Green (1996) notes it is hard to both strategically target and retain this grass roots spontaneity of action.

At a local level it is hard to determine how effective informal participation such as community walks, talks and chats are, in taking on wider community needs and views. Many of the principles of good practice at this level have a lot to do with attitudes and behaviour (Buchy and Hoverman, 2000). The influence of community participation on the wider NECF agenda through these informal mechanisms, appears to be up to the individuals in post, how receptive they are to community views and how they subsequently filter that information into site plans and policy documents. This informal agenda setting influence is hard to monitor and evaluate. However overall, approaches to participation and the power the community has to influence the planning and management of the NECF tends to be constructed by wider factors.

Participation's Importance

Interviewees were found to justify the importance of community participation, as both a landscape management tool, and as an ethos. Where Participation was justified in terms of being part of the ethos of the organization it tended to be in human centred rather than eco-centric terms. This echoes Selman's (2002) observation that the community forests have largely anthro-pocentric objectives. Those responsible for management of sites had a particular appreciation of the importance of community participation to a sites success, maintenance and management;

" People have to be prepared to help maintain a site, for if we get to a stage where we do things and then we move on and it gets vandalised then there is no point"

<div align="right">GNF Director</div>

The NECF Staff have a strong sense of themselves as working for the "community";

"We are a community forest and there is not much point in being one unless we get the community involved in what we do"

<div align="right">GNF Director</div>

"Community participation is part of the 'Raison d'être' of our organization….the community has been central right from day one and remains so"

<div align="right">Regional Director</div>

NECF practitioners had a high level of awareness of the social importance of the NECF[5]. One exception was the Forest Manager, who felt participation was something outside his field of expertise. In over 30 years of employment with the forestry commission he had seen forestry *"move down hill"* to urban areas, with a much greater demand for participation in their planning and management. For him participation was more a way of legitimating getting trees in the ground.

Practitioners emphasised to me the importance of not romanticising public participation. I don't think this was out of a strong anti-sentiment to the concept of participation, but rather that past experiences had shaped their perceptions of what was and wasn't achievable, and of the difficulties of achieving adequate representation. Some of these expressions may also be due to the perception of me as perhaps; 'Naïve, young, female researcher who needs educating about how things really are'.

Training in and Awareness of Different Participation techniques

Interviewees had only limited or no formal training in community participation techniques. Understandings and approaches to participation tended to be more reliant on personalities and past experiences than previous training. The few specific Community Participation Training courses, attended in the past 3 years, included; Landscape Character Assessment, run by the Countryside Character Network (Land Links Project Officer) and Stakeholder Dialogue run by the Environment Council. The Community Programmes Officer suggested that through past experience he has learnt different techniques for participation and knows what a group will feel comfortable with stating that; *"I kind of mix them up when I am working with community groups"*.

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[5] This is contrary to findings from a study of urban forest landscapes in Redditch, in the west Midlands where professionals were found to severely undervalue the social importance of woods in favour of conservation guidelines (Coles and Busseys (2001).

Participation practice tended to be learnt 'on the job' (or in previous jobs) and courses were attended on an as-need-must basis. The Planning and Projects Officer felt that due to limited staff resources, enabling substantive participation such as Planning for Real would currently require getting consultants in because there simply wasn't the staff time or resources to do it themselves.

The Regional Director identified; "*there are good networks for sharing information in the European Arena*"*.* The European Forum on Community Forestry of which he is a member includes a "Neighbour woods" Research programme which is currently in its formative stages. However amongst the rest of the team the sharing of best practice and ideas with other organizations outside of the NECF was very limited. For example there was little sharing of best practice and outputs from Local Agenda 21 (LA21). The GNF Director recognised that this was an area of weakness but felt that LA21 made no effort to 'x- fertilise' with organizations outside of Local Authorities. He suggested that the wider networking with other groups and organizations which share similar agendas was an issue that needed to be addressed in the next action plan.

IX: Structural Constraints

A number of factors have a role in shaping community participation approaches, it is not, as some research has implied, only individual practitioner's awareness, understanding, perception or fear that shapes participation practice. Factors include: 'Ownership of Land', 'The Nature of Grants', 'Funding of Organisation', 'Community Characteristics and Characters' and 'Site Characteristics and Expertise'. Practitioner's have a role in filtering and shaping the weight of each factor but practitioner's express high ideals for participation which they cannot achieve, because of the limits of the other factors. Therefore factors are not ordered in a strict hierarchy because the power to determine approaches to participation will depend on the specific personalities, sites and issues involved.

In order to understand how approaches to community participation within the NECF are determined, it is helpful to conceptualise power as operating within a variable net where are all individuals are potential vehicles of power. However currently, the greatest amount of power to control the nature and extent of community participation within the NECF resides with private landowners and with government who have the final control over the core funding and agendas of the NECF.

Ownership of the Land

"a lot of the land we are dealing with is land that will remain in the ownership of a farmer or landowner and their interests are clearly very significant, in some cases the landowner is relatively happy with a high degree of public involvement because they see it as a way of avoiding problems of vandalism or loss of trees but in other cases….. whoever the landowner is, public or private, they might be pretty concerned about the attitude of the public, what they might come up with and whether it will become an unstoppable public campaign that will force them into a position they would rather not go….it is part of our role to give them some comfort that we can manage these situations in a way that isn't detrimental to their personal interests"

Regional Director

Within the NECF Ninety percent is in private ownership[6] with the rest owned by Local Authorities, the Woodland trust and the Tees forest. The example of Stockwell Farm is used here to demonstrate some of the approaches of the NECF to community participation and to illustrate how private landownership may affect what participation can occur. Stockwell Farm is a 133 hectare scheme in the South of the Great North Forest. It is a domed hillside of farmland overlooking Murton to the South and Seaham to the East. The farmer is in the process of receiving woodland grants to plant the farmland with mostly broadleaf trees. He retains ownership of the land but must permit public access. Proposals for the site include a wetland area, footpaths which follow 'desire lines', wide rides so people don't feel too enclosed and vistas looking out to sea.

Attempts to engage the community with this proposal include announcements in local press, a staffed display at the new leisure centre and schools and a mail shot to local communities with information about the proposal, inviting people to attend the displays. Substantive community participation did not occur at the planning stages for this proposal, although initial plans were distributed to Local Authorities, the Environment Agency, Wildlife Trusts and Parish Councils for feedback. I asked how the consultation days were decided upon for Stockwell Farm; *"Well we just sat down at the GNF and said we've got to let the people know what is going on, before they get this as a 'fait accompli'"* (Forest Manager)

The participation processes for Stockwell Farm were summed up by one practitioner as:

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[6] This is unlike some other European Community Forestry Programmes who are experiencing a major shift of land from public to private ownership (European Community Forestry Forum, 2003).

"a PR exercise, asking for some guidance on design and also seeing if people are interested in doing practical volunteering and training on site………I'm keen that people take away skills from their involvement"

<div align="right">Community Programmes Manager</div>

At Stockwell Farm it appears that participation is not being embraced as a democratic right but as a management tool for promoting predetermined plans and minimizing conflict:

"Its not even consultation, its an information dissemination exercise, at the end of the day people aren't going to be able to make a huge difference"

<div align="right">Community Programmes Manager</div>

The participation programme for Stockwell Farm attributes the community with little decision making power .This is largely due to the situation of land ownership and the timescale of grants. Woodland grants and forest agreements are often entered into by farmers out of necessity due to the poor returns of agriculture, rather than a desire to contribute to community forestry.

"the farmer is trying to make money out of this, not for the good of the community, he's doing it because he can't make farming pay any more and he's wanting to see a return on his land, so it's a balance getting him to put footpaths in, he's wanting to see money back from it, it costs a lot to maintain foot paths."

<div align="right">Forest Manager</div>

In the case of Stockwell Farm it was suggested that the farmer would have probably preferred to sell the land but it had been on the market for over 3 years and not sold so community forestry was the farmers best option. This may put practitioners in the difficult situation of balancing the needs of the community with the priorities of the landowner. Despite perhaps believing in participation as an ethos practitioners must convince the landowner of the limited power of any participation over their land.

The Regional Director describes what it is like working for a community forest which is largely in private ownership; *"It is a little bit like walking a tightrope without a safety net but it is the 'Re-al' Politic of the situation"*. This is a revealing metaphor, he sees that there is a balancing act to be performed. The NECF practitioners are perhaps the insecure performers with limited resources, having to balance the agendas and expectations of the community with those of the land owner. The idea of 'balance' implies that there will be losses[7].

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[7] Balance has been replaced by notions of 'net gain' in recent countryside planning policy documents (Countryside Agency, 2000, 3).

Despite the NECF being funded by public money it is the priorities and demands of the landowner which often shape community participation practice. It is clear that the policy rhetoric and the ideals expressed by practitioners cannot always be met in these circumstances of public dependence on private interest (Bishop, 1992). For example there is a get out clause in the contracts to make the prospect of growing trees more attractive to farmers. The clause means that if house builders for example were prepared to repay the grant money, plus interest then community forest agreements may be able to be retracted. It has not happened yet but it does mean that there are significant risks of a community who have been encouraged to *"take ownership of the forest"*(GNF, Plan 2003, 25) being disappointed in years to come when they discover they have little power over that forest.

Private landowners within the NECF were described to me as being **"***often very conservative"* (Land links project officer) and it is may be the community who stands to gain the least out of community forestry. Private landownership limits the participation which can occur, in order to satisfy the landowner's priorities. This results in the promotion of activities which do not involve substantive engagement with or control over the land. For example;

"A lot of the initiatives are about, activity, fitness, feeling good about yourself and just getting out into the great outdoors…which I think is more compatible with private land uses, for they tend to be transient activities"

Regional Director

Private Landownership means there are few opportunities for the community to get involved in the NECF in more truly sustainable, engaging ways which could as Hayward (1995) advocates *"re-connect"* people with their local environment. For example if a group wished to plant and harvest an area of willow this would be subject to the private landowners permission and probably payment.

Participation and engagement in land which is in public ownership will also depend on the precise owners and interests in the land. If land is in Local Authority ownership the priorities for that land are dependant on which department has responsibility for that land. The Regional Director described Local Authorities as like *"multi-headed hydras"* for while the organization is constituted as one body, there are many departments with responsibility for NECF land with differing priorities for land use. *"All of them will be wary of raising expectations that cannot be delivered"* (Regional Director).

The Nature of Grants

"you've got a willing farmer, some funding and it's a relatively short timescale and you think ok we'll just go for it ......when going for grants and planting land you have to be opportunistic, if going down the true community involvement side it's a long drawn out process."

<div align="right">Community Programmes Officer</div>

This comment illustrates some of the limitations which result from a Community Forest programme which depends on private landowners and centrally administered grants for its planting. The timescales and nature of woodland grants, and the criteria for them being awarded affects opportunities for community participation. For example;

"at Stockwell Farm all the grant is paying for is the trees, not signboards or picnic benches if you did something like a Planning for Real exercise you'd be looking at other facilities being brought into it"
GNF Director

Involving the community may result in demands that funding mechanisms cannot accommodate. There are constraints on what can be planted through the funding and grants criteria. As the Planning and Projects Officer pointed out; *"You can't create a mown grass area when you only have 3 yrs funding what would happen after that?"* At Stockwell Farm there maybe a community preference for open rolling landscape with just a few trees, however grants specify certain densities of woodland planting so this is simply not an option.

The Community Programmes Officer pointed out that at another site, Harrington Park, some community members had expressed a preference for open landscape, bringing up issues of safety and fear of child abduction. However due to the nature of the grants and the agenda of the NECF he suggested that such positions couldn't be given serious consideration.

Substantial community involvement in decision-making and planning processes was not considered by practitioners to be a possibility when land is in private ownership because of the timescales, grants criteria and the fear of raising expectations before the project goes ahead. In the case of Stockwell farm for example; *"if someone said I want to buy this land, he (the farmer) could still at this stage pull out of it. The contract is only binding once we give him the grant money"* (Forest Manager). For the NECF teams there is little point in investing precious resources in community participation at the planning stages when the farmer still may pull out and when the participation may result in demands that *encourage* the farmer to pull out.

The opportunities to involve the public within the NECF in substantive participation exercises such as 'Planning for Real' are only likely to decrease. This is because as the NECF programme progresses, the opportunities for planting become less, as all the 'easy sites' with willing farmers or land in Local Authority ownership are planted.

Funding of Community Forests

"You follow the funding streams in this business because funding for the environment is in such short supply"

<div align="right">Director Tees Forest</div>

There are limitations to what can be achieved within the NECF due to the ownership of the land and the nature of the woodland grants. This means that ideally from the point of view of securing the NECF for the community, funding would be available to buy up land and transfer it from private to public ownership. However Community Forestry operates within a market. While the NECF have facilitated the buying of land by Local Authorities the cost of land and the limited budget the NECF operate under means that usually purchase by the NECF is not possible. This means that; *"Clearly resources do impinge a little bit on the levels of activity and the priority we are able to give participation"* (Regional Director)

The involvement of the community in a project is often dependant on securing the funding for that involvement. The Community Programmes Officer and the Director of the Tees Forest felt that community participation was increasingly widespread due to increased external funding that had been secured particularly for the outreach workers. However while the number of staff involved with the community within the NECF has increased, their effect is piecemeal.

Another consequence of limited funding is that the NECF ends up competing for funding with other organizations such as Groundwork. This can result in unproductive, antagonistic relations with organizations which share similar agendas and ideally should work together on areas of common interest. As one of the Directors put it to me; *"I am keen to work more closely with Groundwork, but they are very suspicious of us"*.

The competition for funding is likely to intensify as the Countryside Agency who currently contribute 50% of the Community Forests core funding plan to pull out by 2005. From the interviews it was evident that this has caused considerable anxiety amongst the NECF team. Securing funding for the continuation of the NECF was a dominant concern, for the Directors this tended to override issues of

Community Participation. Substitute funding from DEFRA and the Forestry Commission is not certain at this stage. This uncertainty results in a difficult situation with staff where as one of the Directors put it; *"within community forests nationwide people are getting itchy feet because they see projects being wound up in 2005".*

If staff leave, whatever their motivations this creates further difficulties for the NECF in terms of involving the community. Relationships with and knowledge of communities take time to build up and some of that is lost with each changeover of staff. The Planning and Projects officer emphasised the knowledge, time and commitment required to involve the community effectively. She is involved in the production of Local Management Zone Strategies (LMZS) for GNF sites. This involves the identification of areas of cultural and social significance that require protection. With reference to community participation she suggested *"given the resources and timescales this simply wasn't a realistic option".* She has used local Community Appraisals to feed into LMZS where appropriate or consulted outreach workers if they operate in the area, but confirmed that *"if I don't have easy access to that information I don't try and find it, its just too much".* She was aware that this resulted in more of her own value judgements and assumptions being fed into the LMZS.

Limited funding and pressured staff resources have resulted in 'piecemeal participation'. When I put this to the Regional Director he suggested that; *"I think we could add up to 4 posts in community participation to good effect".*

X: Locally Contingent Factors

Site Characteristics and Expertise

"You cannot take on board everything they want…it just might not work"

<div style="text-align: right">Community Programmes Officer</div>

Practitioners recognised that there was a role for their own and other landscape, ecological and archaeological expertise in determining the most appropriate development of a site. While reclamation of derelict public land may be able to have a relatively high degree of community input, more sensitive sites will require greater limitations on the power of the community to determine the design and management of those sites.

"communities think they know what they want…but you shouldn't believe automatically that that's the best approach…..you have to take their views into account, but develop a strategy that has some professional experience of dealing what has and hasn't worked in the past…… what they want isn't always necessarily right"

<div style="text-align: right">Tees Forest Director</div>

Community participation within the NECF has inevitably been constructed to allow continued space for expertise that ensure appropriate, sustainable development of sites. However this means that communities maybe attributed with low levels of decision-making power. While there are very strong arguments for a continuing role for expertise, what this raises is questions surrounding the assessment of others interests; Does the community have any genuine input into the planning of the community forest or are their ideas simply 'cherry-picked' to endorse a pre-determined agenda?

"Sometimes people want things on a site and it just is not feasible, and I think it's a case of education and understanding really"

<div style="text-align: right">Community Liaison Officer</div>

This statement echoes findings from a study of Communicative Planning in Brecon Beacons National Park where planners saw the value in meeting people as an opportunity to 'educate them' rather than engage in the two-way exchange of information. (Tewdwr-Jones and Thomas, 1998,141). However on the whole there was an awareness amongst the NECF team of the need to meet community desires and where necessary "make trade- offs" between the ecological and community needs for a site.

"The nature of the Stockfield programme, the size of it and the population on the doorstep means you need to go a step perhaps several steps further than normal"

Forest Manager

Scale had a role in determining what the participation was appropriate. Small, remoter planting programmes often had no community input, larger programmes having some, but landscape issues having little input due to perceived and actual difficulties in involving communities at a landscape scale. For the Forest Manager even the low level of consultation at Stockfield farm was still more than would *"normally occur"* in smaller less populated sites within the GNF. Practitioners felt it was particularly hard to achieve meaningful community input into issues at the landscape scale. This was another reason for participation which focused locally on sites close to major centres of population.

"When addressing issues which have large geographical implications its very difficult to engage people at a grass roots level …..they tend not to be interested, unless its their home area and they can get their teeth into it"

Senior Planner

"It is difficult to involve people in landscape work …Who do you go to? The nearest communities may rarely use a site, while some commuters may use it all the time"

Planning and Projects Officer

These comments raise issues of how to involve people in wider landscape planning issues within the NECF which go beyond the remit of this research. For now it is simply important to note that, the nature, scale and sensitivity of a site will affect how community participation is likely to proceeds in relation to it.

Community Characteristics

Some of the communities that the NECF work within are very deprived, the ONS Statistics from the 2001 Census (see Appendix 2) show that wards such as Hartlepool, South Tyneside and Middlesbrough rank among some of the most deprived wards in the UK. Communities are found to be, not unsurprisingly, very suspicious of projects that involve 'sprucing up' the face of areas, when, they have suffered substantial job losses and had as one practitioner put it "the heart ripped out of them" with the decline of the Durham coalfields and other heavy industry. The NECF aims of environmental enhancement, economic regeneration and improvements to the morale of areas are similar to those of the National Forest. Research has linked these aims with the very visual component of urban

regeneration schemes of the 80s and early 90s; the concept of the 'Garden Festival' (Cloke, 1996, 164).

It has been emphasised by interviewees that one of the most pressing challenges for the NECF in terms of involving the community is to promote the whole idea of Community Forestry and defend it in the face of demands for jobs and better services.

"When you go into a community there is an attitude that well, why should you be spending money on trees or landscape improvements? When what we really need is jobs… you can't duck an issue like that, you have to explain why you are doing it and that the money has been given for that purpose"

Regional Director

Such challenges tend to mean that limited staff resources must focus initially on the promotion and acceptance of community forestry rather than on issues of planning and design. Communities of the North East were hailed as *having "the capacity to really get behind a project"* (Regional Director). However perspectives diverged amongst interviewees regarding the involvement of ex-mining communities in landscape planning;

"the former mining communities come across as very close knit, confident, vociferous communities…they have a clear sense of their own identity, want to secure a future for their community and have clear views on how that should be achieved and will bring those views to us (the planning department0…… (knocks table twice) and you'd better listen"

Senior Planner

The Senior Planner saw these communities as bringing a largely positive contribution to community participation, for in some cases it was found to be the local community who engage the council in dialogue rather than visa versa, which he felt was a good thing. He contrasted this to some urban areas where communities were hard to identify and engage. However from within the NECF team the involvement of ex-mining communities in landscape planning was described in a less positive light;

" I think it's the nature of some of the people who get involved, a lot of them are old labour ex-mining, deeply misogynistic men over 65 and I do believe it is an issue, being a younger woman as well as having an environmental agenda, that is an issue, and they come from political dynasties in the Durham coalfields and there is a lot of petty stuff that goes on and they think they can railroad over people and quite often they do… they wield a ridiculous amount of power for who they are and their authority on things you know"

Planning and Projects Officer

This quote touches upon some of the key issues associated with community participation regarding power, representation and perceptions. Here it is important to note that community characteristics are not fixed or determined and prior knowledge of those communities may affect how practitioners shape the participation process. The Community Programmes Officer emphasised the mediation role that some of his work with communities demanded joking; *"it's like working for the UN"* and explaining that; *"the danger is you ignite an argument which happened centuries ago and its amazing how much bad feeling can be drummed up by one person"*. He continued to describe how it is important to "tailor the process" to ensure that conflict is minimized. Prior knowledge of community characteristics enables practitioners to act strategically. This confirms the findings of Sharp;

"Participation may be the site of conflict between different agendas. Awareness of those conflicts enables practitioners to act strategically to support rather than undermine progressive agendas" (2002, 64).

However while knowledge of the community may be classed as a positive benefit enabling the establishment of "progressive agendas", it may also result in misconceptions and stereotypes which limit the field of possible action.

Community Characters

Communities themselves also have a role in determining the shape and nature of participation within the NECF. Strong, grass roots community organizations can secure funding for projects and produce real on the ground change through the NECF particularly where public land is involved. Individuals and groups have the opportunity within the NECF to initiate participation projects themselves. However the Regional Director couldn't define the proportion which did this and how much participation was more strategically led by the NECF explaining; *"You cannot talk in absolute terms about proportions because the proportion is really determined by external factors"*. These 'external factors' appear to be the level of community demand for participation and projects:

"Where the steering comes from is a very good question …..I think, well its fair to say its been very much by response really and you get led off in all different directions, and not necessarily where we should be targeting key areas…..but where we are putting in new woodland then yeah we do work and target those neighbouring communities, but there are key groups ….they'll bring us in and you end up getting involved with very small projects in consultation with parishes and everybody else, you get drawn in very quickly, so it tends to be by that method not by strategic approach"

<div align="right">Recreation Officer (my emphasis)</div>

The above quote reveals that participation practice is not necessarily decided upon by practitioners or shaped strategically by the NECF, but may be initiated by local communities. This bottom up initiation of participation has many benefits, and may aid the aspirations of the NECF to involve the community, however the danger is that funding is directed away from areas of greatest need towards areas of easiest implementation. As Green notes:

"The great strength of these grassroots schemes is their freedom from bureaucratic structures and their consequent flexibility, versatility and accessibility which enables them to make things happen very quickly on the ground. But this freedom of action can risk their activities being opportunist and unfocussed, perhaps not always being directed where there is greatest need." (1996,194 My emphasis)

The 'bottom-up' initiation of Community participation is what advocates of social capital, community empowerment and participatory democracy have been calling for; however, a participation strategy which is led by response may not reach areas of greatest need.

XI: Representative Community Participation

"Shouting Loudest"

The discussion of community characteristics and characters and the role of expertise in constructing participation outcomes has raised issues of representation. One of the main aims of the Community Forests is:

"To encourage and enable all sections of the community to be involved in planning, creating, managing and enjoying their local environment and to enhance the contribution of that environment to their health, well-being and quality of life."

(Great North Forest Plan, 2003, 25).

This recognition in both Forest Plans of the importance of approaches which 'involve all sections of the community' and involve them in planning and managing sites appears encouraging. However the current emphasis is on 'creating and enjoying' rather than the 'planning and managing'. Representation of the community at a decision-making and planning level is piecemeal and selective largely occurring through Residents Associations, Parish Councils and Interest Groups who are not necessarily representative of the wider community.

Practitioners are well aware of some of the difficulties this causes, but lack the time and resources to tackle the issues.

"From my experience you are fairly lucky to get anyone involved at all and you usually find someone and think 'great' I'm contacting the community I'll pump them for everything I can get"

<div align="right">Planning and Projects officer</div>

Involving all sections of the community in the planning and management of sites on a limited budget and limited timescales is difficult if not impossible to achieve. The resulting problems are illustrated through an example the Tees Forest had plans for a "Western Greenway" recreation corridor which they consulted 'the community' on. The Local Council were keen to implement the idea but a Residents Association formed strong opposition to the proposal voicing concerns over pollution, fly tipping, joy-riding and horse mess which the recreation officer felt were largely unfounded. With reference to this 'Greenway' the Regional Director explained it has been *"dogged by problems of public perception and I think in retrospect that is because we did not do enough consultation at an early enough stage"* (Regional Director).

" those (the Residents Association) are the people that were consulted and expressed desires that they didn't want it to go through, the wider interests of the residents of Hartlepool, another 90,000 weren't taken into consideration….it's an example of how they got their wishes and the interests of the greater good didn't happen"

<div align="right">Recreation Officer</div>

Practitioners were well aware of the limitations of involving Parish Councils and Residents Associations but also of the potential benefits of involving these very helpful yet often unrepresentative groups.

"Whoever is interested is a god send, because a lot of the time, they couldn't give a toss……..it is usually people who are active in the community like the Parish Council people, who are already politically active and want something done for one reason or another, but not always in the interests of all the people there ….it is trying to get to the others that is the problem"

<div align="right">Planning and Projects officer</div>

Some efforts are being targeted towards *"trying to get at the others"* and involving them in the planning and decision making stage. An example of this is found at the Forestry Commission owned site of Coatham wood, the Community Liaison Officer explained how they formed a 'Friends of Group' with local residents not necessarily involved in other areas of parish/resident community life. Then taking

people on a 'walk and talk' to discuss the site and address local needs and use local knowledge to ensure that planting coincided with their wishes.

However the widening of direct involvement with site design and management to other potential catchment communities and beyond consultation with local interest groups and Parish Councils has been limited. What is occurring in most circumstances within the NECF is what others have labelled "Selective Stakeholder Participation" (Carman, 2003). This situation was usefully summarised by the Community Liaison Officer; *"Unfortunately it's the people who shout loudest who get heard in these circumstances"* .Only certain sections of the community tend to have the skills, time, resources and knowledge to "shout the loudest".

Inclusion of Disadvantaged and Marginalised Groups

Community Participation at the level of planning and management within the NECF involves selective groups not representative of the wider community[8]. It tends to be only at the level of creating, enjoying and learning that all sections of the community are being targeted. My questions which addressed issues of inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized groups in landscape planning and management tended to be translated by practitioners into issues of education, such as schools events and life long learning strategies and issues of access, such as disabled access and access to transport.

Few efforts are being made to include under –represented groups at higher decision-making levels. There is however an awareness of this:

"We try to reach excluded communities but when I look at it from a distance, impartially, I realise that what we do is just a drop in the ocean of possibilities, certainly where we have tried to get engaged is within the concept of access for all"

Regional Director

"Its part of our remit, our strategy, its certainly in the forest plan as a steering document, we work in the urban fringe and we try to address those needs of those people, I have talked to disabled groups about particular projects and how we can get them onboard and engage them in terms of access schemes"

Recreation Officer

Certainly "access for all" is a significant issue in terms of disability and for a region who has very low levels of car ownership. Up to 45% of households in some wards have no car or van. However with a focus on access and education, efforts made to

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[8] The few Planning for Real exercises carried out and the example at Coatham wood were the only exceptions to this trend.

include excluded and marginalized groups are tending to be at the level of activities, talks and consultation rather than through incorporation into wider decision-making and planning. It is the 'usual suspects' such as parish councils and interest groups who speak for the community. Young people, women, ethnic minorities and other socially and economically disadvantaged groups are excluded from decision making processes, yet research finds they can offer varied perspectives on community forestry (Burgess, 1996). The Regional Director asserted that this is a problem that has infiltrated all areas of planning and is not confined to the NECF understandably, implying that it was a problem which extended beyond the remit of the NECF.

When the inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalised groups was discussed initially with interviewees, the inclusion of ethnic minorities in community participation at any level was hardly touched upon. When prompted further they had few examples of practice, were unsure of their language and were sensitive to what might be regarded as acceptable terminology. This may be because the percentages of ethnic minorities in the region are very low and dispersed, with the majority of wards that the NECF covers being at least 95% White British.

"Ethnic minorities, yes that's on my list of who we should be involving….but it's a tiny percentage and whether we do get any representation, well we will have to see."

Community Programmes Manager

The inclusion of ethnic minorities within NECF landscape planning and management is a significant issue despite the small percentages within the forest boundaries. Research finds that ethnic minority groups may have particular demands from, and experiences of community forestry. For example, for Muslims religious practice means they may wish to limit their contact with dirt and particular animals, there might be particular fear of attack amongst some ethnic minority groups or of being treated as 'aliens' in a white dominated countryside (Burgess, 1995, 26-28) . The NECF remit also involves trying to attract people from beyond its boundaries, Newcastle has one of the highest percentages of ethnic minorities in the North East and greater attention to the particular demands those communities might make upon the landscape and how to involve those groups in planning and management is an issue that deserves more attention than it currently seems to receive.

When speaking of the difficulties in involving communities in landscape planning the Regional Director spoke of the *"difficult choices that have to be made between the aspirations of one community and the sentiments of another"* suggesting that; *"the scales of justice come into play here, we must ask, Where does the balance lie? Is it more negative than positive?"* However it must be recognised that the use of scales of justice may exclude the needs of marginalised groups. What is required is a *"splicing together of*

representative and participatory democracy" (Selman and Parker, 1999, 26) where a framework of principles ensures that the needs of dispersed minority groups, who may not be represented are still accounted for whatever the 'scales of justice' say.

XII: Conclusions

'Creating and Enjoying' but not 'Planning and Managing'

Within the NECF, community participation practice is almost exclusively focused on *'creating and enjoying'* rather than *'planning and managing'*. This is largely due to the constraints of private land ownership, limited resources and centrally administered grants. Practitioners recognise the benefits of on-going, inclusive, collaborative approaches to participation such as those utilised in the few Planning for Real initiatives within the NECF, however because of these market constraints they were unable to implement their ideals forest wide. This echoes previous research which suggests that participation in the practical management of the countryside has a better record than participation in the planning process (Green 1996,189).

Participation at the level of practical management, education and recreation ('creating and enjoying') within the NECF is important work producing many social and environmental benefits. It is helping to reach excluded and marginalised groups, building the skills of communities to participate further and helping practitioners take on the needs of those groups informally and feed them into wider NECF agendas. However, what such activities equate to is empowerment at the level of the individual not empowerment over projects to determine their planning and management as NECF policy rhetoric suggests.

There are strong eco-centric and anthropocentric arguments for Community Forestry, but on their own they are not enough to continue planting. To ensure that forestry is locally appropriate and achieves its many potential benefits, communities must be equipped and facilitated to have a say in the planning and management of that forestry. Participation in Community Forestry is both a management tool and right. Landscapes must be understood from both a management perspective at a national and international scale and as localized expressions of people and place.

NECF's current capacity to involve communities in the planning and managing of sites within the NECF is very limited. Focus is on the 'usual suspects' such as

Parish Councils, Residents Associations and interest groups who are not necessarily representative of the community. What is occurring at the level of planning and management is "selective stakeholder participation" (Carman, 2003).

Participation, Practitioners and Power within the NECF

Research, which reduces the problems of enhancing participation in landscape planning and management to the level of the individual practitioner, is found to inadequately reflect the situation within the NECF. Within the NECF practitioners, while lacking formal training, were well aware of what might constitute good community participation. Wider issues beyond their control resulted in NECF approaches falling short of their ideals. This study therefore confirms Rydin and Pennington's (2000) observation that research, which focuses on the individual practitioner as forming a major barrier to the uptake of substantive participation processes, over-emphasises the opportunities for participation. The most important factor in the construction of community participation processes tended to be that 90% of community forest land is in private ownership. This raises issues of public dependence on private interest and rights over privately owned land. However there is an influential land owning and forestry lobby within the House of Lords and gaining greater rights over private land will be difficult (Bishop, 1992)

The factors, which contribute to the construction of approaches to participation, can be conceptualised as falling within a net of variable power. Research, which assumes practitioners simply hand over power to communities in a linear fashion, ignores the complex nature of landscape management, participation and power. Community participation approaches are shaped by power, which is not fixed or statutory and emanates from many sources. All individuals are potential vehicles of power, in the case of the NECF this includes landowners, community characters and interest group members who have the time, resources and knowledge to shape participatory processes and outcomes. The participation which feeds into decision-making is not limited to formal techniques, but slips over into informal meetings and conversations.

XIII: Recommendations

In order to achieve the NECF aims of *"including all sections of the community in the planning and management of sites"* (GNF, Forest Plan,2003, 26) what is primarily required is not greater guidance (Hislop and Twery, 2002), but a tackling of some

of the underlying issues which currently serve to structure participation practices. This should start with funding and ownership of land.

In an ideal world from the perspective of enhancing community participation within the NECF and achieving Buchy and Hoverman's (2000) principles of good participation practice, community forests would be in public rather than private ownership. However as the Regional Director put it *"we are practising the art of the possible"* community forestry operates within a market, and what is being achieved for the community in terms of private land is quite a gain. However we must be wary that community participation doesn't simply become an extended public relations exercise, due to the enforced management of the NECF as if it were a commercial business (Wainright, 2003b). Market mechanisms should be used to best possible affect to achieve the maximum for the wider community rather than private interests.

Some final recommendations from this research:

1. With core funding from the Countryside Agency to cease by 2005 the NECF require reassurance of continued funding and its source in order to enable them to focus on issues of community rather than finance.

2. *"Power has to be strategic before it can be democratic"* (Ploger, 2001, *228).* The NECF needs to make maximum use of funding which is available and ensure it is targeted at areas of most need, not areas of easiest implementation. While 'bottom-up' initiation of community participation is what advocates of social capital and participatory democracy have been calling for, a participation strategy which is led by response may not reach areas of greatest need.

3. NECF should be given greater control over woodland grant money in order to be able to dictate the conditions under which the farmer could receive those grants. This could enable them to have greater control over how specific sites develop and help in achieving ideals of wide consultation at the planning stages.

4. More staff resources and funding are required in order to replace the piecemeal and selective participation which is currently occurring and achieve all-inclusive, substantive community participation. If tasks are contracted out efficiency may be increased but accountability and effectiveness may be weakened.
5. Practitioners need increased understanding and awareness of Ethnic Minority groups in the region to ensure they are targeted and catered for, particularly as there are plans to extend the forest boundaries to Newcastle.

6. Given the multi-disciplinary nature of community forestry, communication between those responsible for the area within the NECF and reciprocal understanding of each others perspectives objectives and activities is crucial. In particular greater co-ordination with LA21 is required.

7. There is a need to consider opportunities for involving wider potential catchment communities of the NECF. 1.5million are within easy reach of the community forests however it is only local communities and interest groups who tend to get consulted.

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> Note: This reference list includes all sources consulted during the writing of this dissertation, not just those which are referenced.

Appendix: Interviewee Profiles

Interviewee Title	Notes on Role, Responsibilities and Perspective
Regional Director	Management responsibility for both the Tees and the Great North Forest
Director Great North Forest	Previously worked within the Tees forest team, lives within the Tees forest area
Director Tees Forest	Responsibility for the Tees forest team, specialises in land acquisition.
Planning and Projects Officer Great North Forest	Preparation of Local Management Zone Strategies
Recreation officer Tees Forest	Responsible for site planning for recreation and community outreach work
Community Liaison Officer Tees Forest	Responsible for programmes of community and schools involvement. Recently moved post to Lifelong learning.
Community Programmes Manager	Responsible for transport strategy and management role for Outreach workers Only in post since September Previous experience with Groundwork and BTCV
Forest Manager Forestry Commission	Responsible for woodland planting, site management and farmers grants. Worked for the Forestry Commission in the North East for 30 years
Land Links Project Officer Countryside Agency	Development of land management plans and responsible for farmers grants in the past currently, developing Community Food Strategies. Within GNF team but post funded by countryside agency.
Senior Planner In one of GNF Partner Councils	Prepares unitary development plan with specific responsibility for the countryside, the environment, landscape protection and improvement. Spent almost all his life as a planner in the north east.
Senior Landscape Architect Durham County Council	Involved with Durham Landscape Character Assessment , Stakeholder Dialogue