Information Dissemination

and

Public Participation

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Synopsis

This study sets out to examine the relationship between the
efficiency of information dissemination and the levels of participation
in planning at a local level. The study attempts, through a gradual
narrowing in its focus from theory to practice to local area study and
analysis, to identify certain features which link the concept of
dissemination and participation. The starting point therefore is
necessarily theoretical, attempting to develop an integrated theory of
democracy, power and communications, features recognised as central to
the relationship between information dissemination and participation.
Each of these features is discussed in turn - the rising demand for a
participatory system of democracy, the position and nature of power in
society and the function of communications as a means of control -
in relation to the possibility of combining to develop an integrated
theory of participation. It was concluded that despite the rising
demand for a participatory system, the access to power was central to
the development to any such system of decision-making. It was suggested
however that by improving the efficiency of communication networks, they
could have an important role in reducing the overall control of power
holders.

The second chapter, looking more at the practical problems
associated with information dissemination, set out with the goal of
proposing a theoretical model of information dissemination. This was
pursued through the identification of certain structural and behavioural
elements present in the flow of information, whether they were positive
such as a good transmitter of information or negative, like the filtering
effect. It was recognised quite early that to identify the nature of
these elements an empirical study was required. In an effort to aid the
setting up of the proposed model, an information classification was
attempted. A critical analysis of the model which emerged took place

and some modifications were suggested which could be tested in an empirical study. The classification of information was related to Arnstein's "ladder" of participation in order to try and identify a link between power, participation and information type. This was again left for testing at empirical level. The chapter concluded by calling for an empirical study to test the various elements identified.

The third chapter continues the narrowing process by introducing the empirical research carried out in Glasgow's East-End. It procedes through the identification of the problem and the area involved, the identification of key persons in the communications network, the process of questionnaire design and interview and indicates an analysis of responses. The final section of the Chapter is a critical appraisal of the methodology employed as being weak, but the chapter concludes that as an introduction to the problem the methodology was adequate.

The fourth chapter is an extensive discussion of the findings of the empirical study. It sets out to build a series of models beginning with the proposed GEAR working organisation and by breaking this down into its components it is possible to analyse the patters of information dissemination of each of its members. From these, points of feedback were assessed. This enabled an overall model of information dissemination to be constructed for the local area. By doing this, the key nodes identified in the second chapter could be highlighted. It was also expected to be able to identify the most effective means of disseminating information, the most efficient participant, the fastest route and so on. This model is then compared to the theoretical model proposed in the second chapter. The variety of information abstracted from the local study is tested against Arnstein's "ladder" and the outcome of this is documented. The chapter concludes that, a study of greater detail is still necessary, an objective analysis is problematic and the way in

which available information is presented could and has to be improved.

It is with the improvement of information flow that the fifth chapter deals. It looks for improvements in three ways - structural, behavioural and in terms of presentation. Of these, the first two are seen as long term objectives and difficult to implement. The third approach looks critically at the way in which information has been presented and makes several suggestions for the alteration of the existing modes of presentation. The chapter goes on to suggest a series of more innovative methods of gaining effective levels of participation.

The conclusion points to the main themes which can be extracted from the study and in the light of these, questions the validity of the whole process of participation.

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Introduction

In recent years there has been growing interest in the relationship between political control and communications. Central to this relationship is the development of communication networks along which a variety of information is passed. This study sets out to ascertain how political power, in a local situation, affects the development of specific channels which disseminate information and those which absorb feedback, and how it affects the availability of information, presented in a suitable form, to less powerful groups.

The function of an effective system of information dissemination is central to any process which seeks to involve members of the public. Public participation in planning is one such process which recognised the necessity of a two-way flow of information, yet despite seeing this dual role as essential, the study argues, that it has yet to be effectively developed. The Skeffington Report first indicated the central function of information provision as a pre requisite to public participation in planning:

"The process of participation is dependent upon an
adequate supply of information to the public ..... it would
be unreasonable to expect members and officers of local
planning authorities to acquire highly specialised skills in
techniques of communication, but some knowledge and under-
standing of them is desirable." (paras. 100 and 101)

However, even in its final recommendations the Report never made explicit either what it considered participation to be or how the public were expected to contribute to discussion. A further criticism was that when implemented, local authorities had the right to develop systems of participation as they saw fit, which in many cases merely represented an extension of existing programmes of publicity. Therefore

communication networks were developed simply to provide official information to the public and not with an effective means of gaining feedback. The use of the public meeting is the best example of how participation was perceived by many local authorities.

Any study of communication networks has to take into account the likelihood of the emergence of different networks depending upon the prevailing economic, political and social conditions. The process of information dissemination may therefore vary, allowing the availability of information in one place but not in another. Demands for information may also vary with the existing conditions. Some demands may put pressure on the communication networks. Since the networks are a function of the distribution of power in society, they develop a series of barriers which filter any demands that threaten the status quo. These barriers also tend to determine what information is available to which local groups thus effectively determining levels of participation.

Any attempt at an analysis of the relationship between information dissemination and participation could help to pin-point the position and nature of the various nodes that exist, but having said that the nature of networks vary the analysis must concentrate at a local level. This study attempts such an analysis using the East-End of Glasgow as the area of study. The existence of the GEAR project makes it an attractive local study due to both the variety and differential quality of information which should be available and the official insistence that the public should have a major role to play.

At the outset of the study, the certainty of being able to identify the central nodes in the network of information dissemination was by no means assured. How this could be achieved objectively was unclear. Nevertheless it was hoped to gain some knowledge of a local system of information dissemination so that a general idea of how to improve levels

of participation could be proposed.

Two assumptions underly this study. The first is the general increase in the demand from people to represent themselves, the move towards participatory democracy. Any analysis which includes a reference to participation has to be related to the changing nature of democracy in Britain. The second assumption is that since the distribution of power precludes the availability of specific information to certain groups then effective action requires more efficient use to be made of existing information. This is not to say that a potential conflict situation will necessarily have to give way to a consensus approach, rather the study tries to point to the recognition of a conflict situation based on the mode of presentation and the effective availability of the information supposedly accessible.

With these two assumptions in mind, it is necessary to slacken or breakdown the barriers facing information dissemination. Only when this is achieved will a participatory system become effective.

Chapter One

Democracy, Power and Communications:

towards an integrated theory of

participation in the decision-

making process.

During the last few years, two distinct approaches to the
study of decision-making have developed. The most popular and widely
used is the power approach, where the debate between elitist and
pluralist theories of power is central. The other approach, less
popular but nevertheless as important and increasingly so as
organisational analysis develops, is the communications approach. In
this, it is not power but the flow of communications and their feed-
back through the various circuits that provide the central focus of
theoretical attention.

Any serious attempt at a rigorous theory of participation and
decision-making will have to integrate on theoretical and empirical
levels, both the power and communications approaches. In this chapter
it is the theoretical integration I am seeking to achieve. The main
step in such an integrative approach is to look in detail at the
individual components, power and communications, in order to identify
these characteristics central to the proposed synthesis. It is then
necessary to discuss the applicability of the set of hypotheses which
develop in terms of participation and decision-making. However, any
discussion and analysis of participation and decision-making has to be
viewed in relation to the changing nature of democracy in Britain and
it is from this point that the discussion must proceed.

(a) <u>Democratic Theory</u>. Democracy is not a static concept. It is a combination of political, economic and social variables which, depending on the circumstances, can alter the nature of the concept. Democracy, as I hope to explain, is at the root of all decision-making and who makes the decisions is dependent on these previously mentioned variables. Present day political theorists identify two extremes in democratic theory - representative democracy and participatory democracy.

The roots of the British tradition of democracy as it evolved from classical liberalism, centres on representative government to "fulfill its aims of liberty, liberalism and fraternity" through "free elections; majority rule; protection of minorities; and the assumption that government operates on a basis of widespread discussion and a responsiveness to an informed public opinion. Representative institutions are said to be democratic when all types of people can take part." [1] However such a view of democracy has been subject to a barrage of criticism. The participatory lobby, based on principles of Rousseau who believed participation had a triple function of education, giving the individual more control over his life and by generating a sense of belonging, questioned the ability of existing bodies to represent the whole range of modern interest and that if democratic theory is to remain relevant then it should be re-formulated to allow individuals to take greater part in the exercise of power at work and at home.

What is common and important from my point of view, is that democratic theory of whatever type places great emphasis on the need for channels of communication, since participation to whatever degree depends on peoples understanding of the issues involved. Thus

information provision in a democratic society is essential even if as Schumpeter argues that the only means of participation offered by a representative democracy is a vote.

Since the turn of the century, democratic theory has had to come to terms with a changing and complex society. These changes gave rise to two kinds of political re-orientation:

- mass political parties and pressure groups gave individuals an opportunity to make their views known and to influence political leaders, and

- political opinion was becoming organised.

What as seen perhaps as the main problem was the lack of interest and apathy about local service provision especially among lower socio-economic groups. Attempts at a reformulation of democratic theory in the light of these problems saw competition between elites for peoples votes as realistic democracy and that elites were responsible even if people were apathetic. It was believed that as long as elites competed for votes then they would also be responsible in action.

The 1960's saw a threefold attach on the reformulation of democratic theory along these lines:

1. The idea that theory needed to be re-written in the light of events ignored the fact that governments were secretive, hard to make accountable and often unresponsive. It would be as realistic to make operations of governments more accountable - as it would be to re-write the theory.

2. Citizen apathy should not be accepted but questioned - there should be an examination of society to see if individuals would wish to take a greater part in society.

3. The acceptance of the view that citizens formed a pressure group preventing power from being concentrated was too complacent - the poor, the elderly, and the unorganised had no voice.[2]

These factors were instrumental in the development of new theories which sought the involvement of individuals in the decision-making process, the ultimate objective being access to power. However, the tradition of representative democracy is rigorously defended against participation except through electoral channels. The principle method of defence is in the centralisation of power. This is one of the justifications of a representative centralised system in that "it gets things done". The problem lies in breaking into such a system.

The American approach to the problems inherant in seeking a system of participating democracy, as indicated in the Model Cities Programme, was to exchange federal aid for greater local involvement. This allowed the decentralisation of decision-making, but what it also did was to take the responsibility for failure away from those individuals already elected to administer these programmes. This suggests that representative democracy is a permanent fixture upon which participatory democracy is placed, and which does not in fact replace it. Nevertheless such a model is a start. It is argued that the use of local knowledge is the only way to reduce indifference in the presentation of local services. Local bodies are seen as preventing services becoming remote and isolated as well as providing feedback for political leaders.

One of the arguments in favour of representative democracy is that in deprived areas especially, there is not a body of knowledge able to take up this role and therefore there will always be the need for a

representative system. This suggests that the two dimensional model of a representative substructure and a participatory super-structure will remain. Supporters of participatory democracy see access to power as the key essential and that individuals will become involved to a large degree only if they are given power that will enable them to participate effectively and when they wish in the decision-making process. However, participating protest and direct action have not overthrown representative government but have managed to change attitudes and procedures. The problem is how to encourage participation within a largely unchanged system of local decision-making. Reports such as Skeffington (1969) stressed new forms of consultation were needed, whilst local government reform encouraged greater involvement through traditional forms but little in the way of community action. Through reform, government units became larger and more inaccessible but there were more elections taking place which, using Schumpeter's arguement, would increase participation with a representative system. Such a re-organisation discriminated against deprived sections of the community. The growth in the number of local community organisations and pressure groups was primarily a response to this. These groups effectively challenged conventional local democracy in two ways. On the one hand, there were those groups who argued that they should remain non-political and that their challenge should be based on seeking a more efficient provision of services. These groups, e.g. community councils in Scotland, were effectively institutionalised into the traditional system of local democracy. This form of community development stressed cooperation and collaboration. On the other hand, many groups remained outwith the formal governmental structure in order to take a more political role. Groups such as tennants associations and local action groups challenged the distribution

of power that the traditional system of local democracy gave to local authorities. Community action in this way was concerned with change and thus the potential for conflict. These groups wanted power in order to take an effective role in decision-making and not just to be consulted as appeared the role of community development groups. Traditional means of participation are unable to cope with the rising tide of protest. Representative institutions find it hard to meet all demands and often the differences in values between electors and elected exacerbate the problem. Consequently people are tempted away from existing channels of participation, no longer using their traditional vote, the alternatives being a variety of pressure groups or non-activity which seems to be the most popular alternative at present and which removes the justification for representative democracy in that representatives can no longer act on the basis of informed public opinion. The problem centres around access to power and who decides about local policy. To encourage effective participation individuals require a share in the power of decision-making, a chance to decide on their own future.

(b) Power. As has been suggested, access to power is central to an effective system of participatory democracy, but just what is power and who controls it?

Three conceptual views of power can be identified: elite, pluralist and bureaucratic views. Elite and pluralist theories as identified by Bachrach and Baratz[3] look at the distribution of power in society. Elite theory argues that power is highly centralised. Marxist analysis of power takes this further in identifying institutions as "centres of power" administered by elites who are a function of class division. Pluralist theory on the other hand argues

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that power in society is diffused. Lukes and Westergaard, supports of the bureaucratic view, take the opinion that power is "found more in routine than in a conscious exercise of will"[4] so that individuals have no power but the bureaucracy does.

For Bachrach and Baratz the debate is based on elitist versus pluralist theories. They offer four criticisms of the elitist approach to power:[5]

1. The basic premise of elite theory is that an ordered power structure exists. They reject this on the grounds that "nothing categorical can be assumed about the power in the community". They elaborate on this criticism by pointing to the fact that "at bottom, nobody dominates the town".

2. Elites see the power structure as stable over time whereas pluralists see it being tied to issues.

3. The elitist model equates reputed power with actual power which pluralists argue is an error.

4. Whereas elitist arguments look at the sources of power, pluralists look at the exercise of the decision-making process.

Just what decision-making is, is in doubt because of confusion over the nature of power and its related concepts of authority, influence and force. Power is relational rather than possessive or substantive. Its relational characteristics are threefold - in order for power to exist there must be a conflict of interest between two or more people; power exists only where one person bows to the wishes of another; power exists only if one of the participants can threaten to invoke sanctions: this threat is only valid if it is communicated to that person, if the proposed sanction is regarded as a deprivation by that person, if the person threatened has greater esteem for the

values that would be sacrificed should he disobey and if the proposed sanction is not an idle threat.

It is often inferred that because a group is unorganised, inarticulate and lacks effective access to key centres of decision-making it is totally powerless. This is not the case argue Bachrach and Baratz. It is possible that decision-makers alter their policy choices out of deference to the supposedly powerless group in anticipation that failure to do so would bring on serious problems. Such a move is known as "the role of anticipated reaction."[6]

It is also one of the major assumptions when talking about power theory that all power-holders use their power. The capacity to use power is therefore more important than having power. However, having power and not requiring to use it is also a further source of power.

Force differs from power in several ways. It is used when goals have to be achieved in the face of non-compliance. In a power situation, the powerless have to act, whereas in a situation of force, the power-holders act. The use of force has a tendency to reduce the degree of power held by a person even if the use of force is successful.

Influence is more akin to power than is force. Power depends on sanctions, influence does not, but the two concepts are mutually reinforcing in that power generates influence.

The final concept of authority is related to power but is not a form of power. Like power authority is relationed but it is so not in a conflict sense but where the use of the concept is reasonable.

In looking at the process of decision-making it is necessary to be aware of these concepts, since it is not power by itself that creates a given decision, but the use of that power. It is how these concepts are combined that creates the behavioural elements in decision-making.

It is in the exercise of decision-making that the behavioural concept "mobilisation of bias" [7] emerges. It is a set of predominant values and beliefs, "rules of the game", which benefit certain groups at the expense of others. The method of sustaining the given mobilisation of bias is "non decision-making". [8] This is the resulting consequence from the thwarting of a challenge to those values:

"......non decision-making is a means by which demands for

change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges

in the community can be suffocated before they are even

voices ...... or killed before they gain access to the relevant

decision-making arena ...... or destroyed in the decision

implementing state." [9]

Non decisions can take various forms such as the use of force, the threat of sanctions, the reinforcement of values and re-shaping the mobilisation of bias. Pluralists argue that by starting with decisions and looking at these involved and their behaviour, it is possible to obtain clues as to who rules.

For Bachrach and Baratz, pluralist theory of power is reality and focusses on: (a) the behaviour of individuals, (b) decision-making and non decision-making, (c) key issues, (d) observable conflict and (e) participation through relevant interests.

Lukes is highly critical of this perspective in three ways:-

1. Pluralism is too committed to behaviourism. Bachrach and Baratz approach the concept of power in a way which over-emphasises the role of the individual as compared to the social structure.

2. Pluralism is inadequate in its association of power with observable conflict. The insistence on actual conflict as being essential to power will not do, for two reasons: (a) power can

take the form of manipulation or authority, neither of which need involve conflict and (b) it is unsatisfactory to suggest that power is only exercised in situations of such conflict.

3. Pluralism insists that non decision-making power only exist where there are grievances which are denied entry with the political process in the form of issue, but if men had no grievances then they have no interests that could be harmed by the use of power!

For Lukes, his view of the theory of power was an extension of the pluralist model proposed by Bachrach and Baratz. He and Westergaard accepted the situation of open conflict but that the search for power had to go a bit further since conflict was in their opinion not always overt. Where they identified the real situation of power was in routine. Within the bureaucratic system lay the authority which (a) determined the character of a given society through favouring certain interests and through the mechanisms around which it worked and (b) forces the subordinate population to accept their role. For Westergaard, the extent to which people saw authority as legitimate was not that important since people have to accept what society offers in order to survive and therefore must adapt. In this way there is a co-existence of conflict and consensus in which conflict is being continuously institutionalised. The terms of the institutionalisation of conflict are crucial parameters of power which set the outer limit of the way things are contested.

Any Marxist analysis of power would look upon the institutionalisation of conflict or political protest as a means of preserving the cohesion of the system. The Marxist view of power is that it is highly

centralised in the hands of a small ruling elite so that individuals have power and not the institutions. Institutions are important in the Marxist analysis only in so far as they enable a social class to realise its specific objective interest. Thus terms such as "community power", "local power" or "urban power" are unacceptable since they imply that it is institutions rather than classes from which power derives. However when they say that local authorities are "centres of power" is not to say that they are open to any relation of power between classes. This might follow if local authorities were autonomous institutions. In fact they are subordinate branches of state aparatus and as such are involved in the state's function as guarantor of the interests of the hegemonic class. This structurally limits the power relations within them.

The power of policy making has by tradition of democratic theory lain in the hands of a few of ten elected representatives, the degree of centralisation of power depending on whichever view one takes. By necessity in the system of local government which we operate, policy makers are supplied with information upon which they base their decisions. Braybrooke and Lindblom argue that the strategy policy-makers use in making decisions is one of "disjoined incrementalism",[10] whereby decision-makers tend to look only at alternatives similar to or incrementally different from their present situation. The incremental evaluation is therefore very different from the rational-deductive system. Since the policy maker is acting on the basis of selected information he lacks the ability to deal systematically with non-incremental alternatives. The political system is thus highly dependent on channels of communications with technical/

bureaucratic advisers for the necessary information. As Rourke argues:

"...../bureaucrats do not have a monopoly power over policy-making, it is clear that they play a strategic role in the process by which decisions are made. While they are unable to rule alone, no-one can rule without them."[11]

In a situation where the demands for participation in the decision-making process are increasing, the problems this raises in the area of communications is central. It is an analysis of this problem which must now be looked at.

(c) Communications. During the last few years there has been a growing interest in social and political communications and in the relationship between communications, political control and social and political development. The essential connection between control and communication is relevant to the analysis of political systems. Such a connection is epitomised in the feedback process and highlighted in Weiner's term "cybernetics" for the study of the processes of steering and communication. [12]

The most important function of a communication's network is the transmission of messages containing information. A measure of the efficiency of that network is found in the degree of distortion of that information. The concept of "feedback" is very important in the study of communications. Feedback is action produced in response to information and "includes the results of its own action in the new information by which it modifies its subsequent behaviour."[13]

If the feedback is well designed the results will be a series of

diminishing mistakes, if theoretically no other inputs take place. If inadequate, then mistakes may become greater.

Cybernetics is a more sophisticated system of communications than the basic equilibrium model since rather than a relationship returning to a particular state, feedback ensures modification. Feedback theory is based on measurement of "lag" and "gain". Lag is defined as "the time elapsed between the moment a negative feedback system reaches a certain distance from its goal and the moment it completes corrective action". Gain is the "extent of corrective action taken."[14] Lag is the more important element since it can be reduced by an effective improvement of the system.

Simple feedback implies a measure of goal selection. The movement of messages through a complex communications network may involve the problem of value - i.e. the choice between routing messages differently within the network:

"If the channels through which one group of individuals receives information are characteristically different from these of some other group, then the two groups are likely to possess different perspectives and different amounts of information over the same decision area."[15]

Political systems depend upon the processing of information carried by channels of communication. Deutsch argues that "power produces changes; information triggers them off in a suitable receiver." Thus the important thing about information lies not in the power of that information but in the pattern of communications used to disseminate that information. Information which is potentially powerful and which could instigate change, may not be acted upon if received by unorganised individuals rather than an organised group.

Simon reflects the importance of technique of communication in influencing the distribution of decision-making functions.[16] However, formal channels of communication are soon supplemented by informal ones which often have a more important function than the formal channels:

> "Many of the more formal types of linkage can be helped and hindered, by-passed and facilitated by networking activity in, around and between the more formulated structures of linkage within which people work."[17]

Personal motivation has a major influence on the growth of the informal system. The problem in using informal channels is that information lacks the "official" tag and may not be acted upon as quickly, if at all. Simon also stresses the behavioural element of formal communications in that information is not automatically transmitted, it has to be passed by an individual who will only transmit information if "..... it won't have unpleasant consequences for himself; if superiors will hear from other channels annyway; if superiors need that information to give to their superiors."[18]

This introduces behavioural concepts into the analysis of communications which are very important. Concepts such as barriers, blockage, filtering, gatekeeping, modification and selection all have an effect on the network of communication channels that are built up. The channels form a network of linkages among participants which traces patterns of influence. The structure of the pattern is closely related to the degree of receptivity of policy-makers to new information. In general, when the points in the network are dispersed and decision-making is decentralised and non-hierarchical, there will be greater receptivity to new information. Centralisation may therefore aggravate the gap between information and power.

The nature of communication in the British system of local government varies with political, economic and social changes. Since, as the argument goes, democracy is impossible to have without an informed public opinion there has to be a system of communication, including feedback, between policy-makers and the electorate.

The role played by councillors was traditionally seen as that required to meet those communicative needs. The Maud Committee made it clear that the committee has a variety of contacts with citizens[19] which included informal contact with individuals, formal contact with individuals, contact through voluntary organisations, contact through party organisations, contact through special organisations, the local press, election campaigns and department officials and reports. Of these personal contact with individuals is by far the most frequently used channel.[20]

This impressive array of contacts gives a misleading picture of local government-citizen contacts. The Maud Committee found that only a minority of citizens have ever contacted their councillor directly. Administrative channels were far more important. It can therefore be concluded that:

"1. Councillors and citizens accord the available channels of communication different degrees of importance;

2. Councillors over-estimate their own importance in the local political communication network;

3. Administrative channels of communication are the single most important medium for electors;

4. Councillors and electors have an inaccurate picture of each others policy preferences."[21]

In spite of his beliefs to the contrary, the councillor's role is only one element in the network of local political communications - nor

is he the most important element. The councillor's role is that of a welfare officer and not, as many councillors believe, a gatherer of information for policy. The councillor's information network is therefore both limited and partial.

Brand argues that two alternative models can be identified which are made in line with realistic leader-citizen communication networks - the Party Structure Model and the Stratification Model. [22] The Party Structure Model, whereby workers gather information and pass it up, resembles many theories based on the so-called "two step flow of communication". [23] This argues that political ideas are rarely transmitted directly from policy-makers and media to the public. Instead these ideas are assimilated by persons of high political involvement. "Opinion Leaders" are then consulted by those to whom they pass on information, thus helping to modify the behaviour and beliefs of those who consult them. The Stratification Model suggests that political activists, including opinion leaders, consult with one another and not with the general public so that the mass media is left as the sole means of communication, which is in effect a one-way flow of communication.

What effect does communication have on participation in the decision-making process?

There is a growing interest in the control aspect of communications since this is seen as an increasingly important source of power. As the demand for participation increases, the demand for information also increases. Whoever controls the communication channels effectively controls the quality and quantity of information that participants require. Thus, demands for participation where the communications network is highly centralised is unlikely to meet with much success. Even

where the network is decentralised and where information is easy to obtain, the control element remains, through the provision of information of inadequate quality. This form of control also extends into the timing and the complexity of information provision. All these factors determine the level at which participation is allowed to take place.

The control of communications can easily prevent effective participation. The present incrementalist approach to decision-making is an example of how information is controlled by various groups to prevent radical change. With increasing participation tending to signal need for radical reforms it is conceivable that the control of communications will tighten preventing any effective alteration of the existing network. Participation as a workable concept can easily be prevented.

(d) <u>Towards an Integrated Theory of Participation in The Decision-Making Process</u>. The question which now has to be asked is to what extent is it possible to develop a theory of participation in the light of the analysis of democracy, power and communications?

If any headway is to be made towards a theory of participation it has to be made clearabout the purposes of what is suggested and its application to reality. Justifications for participation are often expressed in terms of three ingredients - health of democracy, self-fulfillment of citizens and the ability to get things done. Pateman, amongst others, is a supporter of the view that increased participation is a means for enhancing the sense of personal fulfillment of the citizen which in turn relates to health of democracy. The third element, the capacity to get things done, relates to power and that those in most need are generally least able to participate. Therefore

increased participation is justified in an attempt to redistribute power. This is the approach of community action.

The means of achieving participation is important in that it relates the justification for participation to practical reality. Bachrach and Baratz[24] discern two main modes of participation. Firstly participation as a form of grass roots activity undertaken by citizens on their own initiative. This view of participation implies that the "powerless" can acquire the power and influence needed to enhance life chances. Bachrach and Baratz label this "interest-oriented participation". Secondly, participation is seen as a customer-client relationship, where the powerless do not take action by themselves but join in the making of decisions. This is termed "cooptative participation".

Cooptative participation is apolitical and is channelled towards goals already set by higher political authorities. This tends to be the form of participation which exists at local government level in Britain today. This form of participation makes two critical assumptions - that people actually join in the decision-making process which in reality, due to the existence of elected representatives is false and that the interests of the people are also those of the policy-makers which, on a critique of the value orientation of councillors, can be shown to be false. However this form of modified participation - "consultation" - tends to gain acceptance and as Dearlove argues cooperation between the council and various radical groups is "a technique to control disturbance and channel dissent".[25] This form of participation concentrates on organisational problems such as improving service delivery and making local authorities more sensitive. It is doubtful if such an approach can get people to participate. A survey carried out in 1975, six years after Skeffington made a series

of proposals and recommendations concerning public participation, showed that local authorities have had little success in their efforts to involve the public in planning matters. [26] The report emphasised that the fault lay not with the public but with the system of participation which people were supposed to use.

Interest-oriented participation is, as pluralists would argue, already allowed for in that anyone can join any number of a plethora of groups. However the lack of the resources of organisation, expertise and money are often a barrier to participation of this type. These are the resources that are lacking in the poorest sections of society. Political consciousness is often rather weak as is the idea of what it takes to partake in civic affairs. The problem lies in how to enable grass roots organisations to get started in the participation process. In an attempt to set this in broad theoretical terms the concepts of democracy, power and communications can be used.

The strength of participatory theory of democracy is based on the argument that people are dissatisfied with traditional modes of political representation and that as a reaction to this individuals organise themselves into groups which can then participate directly, or by other means, in the political process. The evidence certainly bears out the recognition of the growing number of voluntary organisations and pressure groups. Their ability to participate in the political process is dependent upon their access to power. The pluralist theory of power argues that power is diffused among a variety of bodies and is not centralised. Consequently access to the process of decision-making is possible for any citizen who wishes to partake in the decision-making process. In order to make rational decisions, since one of the reasons for the dissatisfaction with the existing form of government was that decisions were seen to be

based on non-rational criteria, participatory bodies have to be supplied with relevant information. This assumes that the controllers of information are responsive to the needs of these participating bodies.

This model of an integrated theory contains elements essential for any grass roots participation in the decision-making process. The practicality of this model depends on the assumption that the concepts work as they do. However such a model of participation is impractical because the main concepts do not work as outlined. This raises doubts about the possibility of effective participation by grass-roots organisations in decision-making.

There are several criticisms of the proposed model.

1. The growth in the number of voluntary organisations cannot be denied, but is it those in need who are involved?

2. The continued existence of a system of representatives undermines the rationale behind the participation of voluntary groups. As long as representatives remain in the local government system they will command the decision-making process.

3. The effectiveness of participatory democracy depends on the decentralisation of power. It is those who have power that make decisions. Studies of the relationship between leaders and citizens in a local political system shows a high correlation between power and socio-economic group. It can be deduced from this that the needs of the poor are unlikely to be adequately represented.

4. Past experiences of participation in local government and evidence provided by existing area management approaches indicates that the community will have limited power in the decision making process. The Birmingham study suggests that community groups should have direct access to the city's policy - making system through "an informal area committee". It seems unlikely that this will be

achieved since the area committee also lacks access to power to influence the system.

5. Community groups rely heavily on official sources of information, as they lack the expertise to develop their own. Under the present system, control of communications lies in the hands of local authority officials and representatives and if they consider information to be politically unsuitable they would be unlikely to transmit it.

What it all comes down to is access to power. If power is lacking participation is highly unlikely. Official proposals, such as the Skeffington Report, can be seen as a political reaction to demands for participation, but which, because of the failure to recognise the wider implications that demand for participation have especially in terms of the decentralisation of power, turned into exercises in consultation.

However participation cannot be assumed to be a non-starter. It has started, the demand is there even if not representative of those most in need. In a political system where by tradition people do not participate it will take even longer for the poorer sections of society to seize upon the potential for change through participation. Communications has a vital role to play. Networks have to be developed which transmit the most efficient information, in the most useful form to these areas most in need, by using community specialists if necessary. Communications can be seen as the trigger for effective participation. As Deutsch comments:

"..... the power lies not in the information itself but in the pattern of communications." (27)

Notes

1. Hill (1974)   p.21

2. Ibid   p.33

3. Bachrach and Baratz (1970)   p.3

4. Lukes (1974)   p.18

5. Bachrach and Baratz   op. cit.   pp.4-5

6. Ibid   p.25

7. Ibid   p.43

8. Ibid   p.16

9. Ibid   p.44

10. Braybrooke and Lindblom (1963)   Chap. 5

11. Rourke (1969)   p.136

12. Deutsch (1966)   Chap. 5

13. Ibid   p.88

14. Ibid   p.90

15. Budge et. al. (1972)   p.125

16. Simon (1961)   Chap. 8

17. Friend and Spink (1978)   p.7

18. Simon   op. cit.   Chap. 8

19. Maud (1967)   Vol. 2

20. Newton (1973)

21. Rhodes (1975)   p.34

22. Budge et. al.   op. cit.   p.125

23. Lazarsfeld and Berelson (1948)   p.151

24. Bachrach and Baratz   op. cit.   p.201

25. Dearlove (1973)   Chap. 8

26. Social Research Unit (1975)

27. Deutsch   op. cit.   Chap. 8

Chapter Two

Information Flows and Participation:

- towards a model of

information dissemination

The purpose of this chapter is to expand and develop the relation-

ship, previously identified, between levels of participation in the

decision-making process and communications, the goal being to propose

an ideal model for information dissemination. In the previous

chapter, the relationship was couched in abstract theoretical terms,

whereas in this chapter it is more appropriate to look at the nature of

this relationship as it develops in practice. To do this, it is

necessary to discuss how information is disseminated within a political

system.

General assumptions about the nature of communication networks

cannot be made since the variable nature of local political systems

determine how information flows proceed. It could be argued that it

is possible to develop, at a city-wide level, a model of information flow.

However, I hope to show that such a procedure is fraught with

difficulties. Structurally, the involvement of different sets of

community groups, individuals and in certain cases even different

official bodies,[1] automatically ensures that the networks differ.

Behaviourally, the ability of people involved to use information is

a very important factor in network construction. On top of this,

the demand for information from different areas is unlikely to be

similar, thus allowing differing networks to develop. The term

"information" tends to be a very vague concept. It is necessary in

model building of this sort to define as accurately as possible what

is meant by the term since networks are likely to differ depending

upon the type of information being dealt with. Bearing these problems

in mind it is necessary to attempt to build such an a-priori

model at a local level against which empirical research can be

tested (in a following chapter). The effect of such a model can then

be analysed in relation to its likely effect upon levels of citizen

participation with a view to the alteration of the model to stimulate

increased participation.

Although the passage of information is an integral feature in the

process of generating effective participation, very little is known

about how information travels within the communications network that

develops. As indicated, political, social and economic factors affect

the development of the communications network so that any attempt to

improve information flow in the decision-making process will have to

contend with a number of these factors which structure information.

The existence of factors which structure the flow of information

raise important questions about the rational model of decision-making.

This model makes two assumptions - that all relevant information is

available and that it is communicated. Neither of these assumptions

are necessarily valid since there are limits on the ability of a

decision-maker to handle information and that any choice on a decision

has to be calculated in terms of the selection of information, which

is itself seen in relation to the frame of reference of that

particular individual. Such value premises preclude the idea of

objective rationality. Thus decision-makers are necessarily selective

in their attention to information directed at them. Consequently any

passage of information is subject to a process of sifting. Therefore,

any model based on the flows of information as a two-way process must

recognise that there are a series of barriers to communication, these

barriers being the factors that structure information flow. It is

valuable to recognised that these barriers are effective whether the

information is flowing as feedback to decision-makers or as policy,

to citizens.

In relation to the process of feedback, two problems can be identified even before the selection stage of the decision-makers. First, demands may not be articulated by citizens either because they are unaware of certain services being available or because of their lack of knowledge about local government. Second, even if citizens are articulate, there may be no easily available institutional means for communicating their information. Looking at information flowing in the opposite direction similar problems may arise in as much as decision-makers although knowing all the available institutional channels available, often have problems in managing to disseminate information efficiently. Very often decision-makers are unaware of the informal networks that exist and are therefore unable to utilise a vitally important community resource. These features of local political communication can be referred to as "blockages" and may be seen as the first set of barriers to communication.[2] In this respect, decision-makers are acting under the constraint of lack of knowledge about the problems of citizens.

Information flows directed at the local authority are not directed at a single entity. Opinions of citizens are voiced to both councillors and perhaps more often to officials. However, it is to the authoritative decision-makers which communications aimed at changing policy must be directed. Dearlove has shown in his study of Kensington and Chelsea, that decision-makers are more likely to be sympathetic to "helpful groups" whose demands are not in conflict with their own.[3] "This aspect of selection is called the gatekeeping function because it selects these acts of communication which gain admission to the decision-making system."[4] This can be seen as the second set of barriers. At neighbourhood level, community councils are used as the primary means of indicating policy to citizens. However, other means such as the media and local political parties are used. It

may be important to suggest that if policy decided upon is incrementally different from that demanded then information flows may be limited whereas if demands were completely overruled or totally accepted than information may pass more effectively either as a means of promoting objection or as a method for the distribution of good news.

Any action taken at policy level can be seen as a result of a process of interaction between decision-makers. Because decision-makers may vary in age, party and length of service they will have a differing set of values and means of selecting information. Thus in communicating and receiving information from other gatekeepers, different criteria for selection means that information is selectively passed on. This introduces the third set of barriers to communication - that of "a series of filters internal to the local authority. Not only does each group sift information from the environment through its gatekeeping function but communication flows between the decision-makers are sifted through a series of internal filters."[5]

During the process of interaction between decision-makers and prior to a decision being made, technical input from officials has to be assessed. This information may itself be subject to selection through value judgements of officials as to "what is right". Very little is known about the role played by officials in the communications network but that it is crucial is undeniable. Increasingly, the public are approaching officials not councillors for information. This has important consequences for any analysis of feedback. People tend to approach these persons from whom they derive most satisfaction and officials fit this role by having information available.

As officials often have different value appreciation systems from decision-makers, the implementation stage of a decision is subject to "editing by implementing actors".[6] Edited output becomes input for other groups and organisations and that information itself is subject to a series of barriers before it reaches the man in the street.

All information has to be transmitted and received. How effectively this is done has ramifications for the quality, quantity and timing of information flows. Since information has its greatest effect early on in the decision-making process the ability to get information to where it is needed as soon as possible is a great advantage. Late information however, is likely to be treated procedurally rather than substantively. Ironically, the incentives for organisations to generate new information are greatest late in the process. It is suggested here that the roles of transmitter and receiver are crucial in the analysis of the total network. Whether information is transmitted or not depends on its expected impact. Organisations and groups will transmit information only if they believe it will be heard. When a group thinks its opinions are not being listened to it will stop attending meetings, thus reducing its transmitting function. In the end, it comes down to individuals to assess the information they have. This can be supplemented, especially at local level, by another important role, that of information carrier. It is the function of the carrier to ensure that these groups requiring information receive the correct information. The ability of the transmitter to articulate demands, the receiver to assimilate information and the carrier to inform, is essential to the development of a responsive network.

Any analysis of the components that structure information flow raises two questions. First, would more or better information lead to improved participation? and second, what are the blockages to communications for lower socio-economic groups especially, and how can these be overcome? Any attempt to stimulate participation has to provide an answer to these questions. In due course, it is hoped that these questions will be answered.

The barriers mentioned thus far have been those which are internal to the system of information flow, i.e. those affecting demands which have been accepted into the communications process. Rhodes suggests that there are two blockages which prevent lower socio-economic groups from entering their demands into the communications network - "a scarcity of organisational resources and institutional failure to aggregate interests."[7]

(a) Scarcity of Organisational Resources. Within the trend toward participatory democracy, the most effective way of influencing policy is through organised participation. However, organisation requires time, expertise and money - the very qualities lacking amongst lower socio-economic groups. However, not all lower socio-economic groups are unsuccessful. They do have an important resource - local knowledge. Thus although the scarcity of resources is not a defining condition for lack of participation, it is a severe constraint,[8] which extends limitations on the capacity of groups to articulate demands, thus restricting information available to decision-makers. The Community Development Programmes attempted to overcome this problem, some argue through the politicisation of local people, others argue that political activists used their position for their own interests. However links between the deprived sectors of the community and officials remained tenuous. The effect the C.D.P.'s did have was to raise the

question of possible alternative channels of communication for the deprived as against the reformulation of existing channels.

(b) _Institutional Failure to Aggregate Interests_. The traditional channel of political communication is the election. Rhodes argues that "the way in which they are organised is a further source of blockage."[9] Too often, the demands of the city as a whole override the demands of a specific group within the city. Thus electoral apathy and city wide organisation further inhibit the flow of information. A further blockage are the rules governing the recruitment of candidates for election. Since urban politics is dominated by party organisation the process of choice is highly selective, being open to and used by a minority of articulate activists. The result of this is as Maud reports that in terms of occupation, income and education, councillors differ greatly from their constituents. Thus it can be argued that barriers effectively preclude those most in need of representation from getting it.

All these barriers combine to structure the communications' network in such a way as to force only certain information to travel through specific channels. What this arguement suggests is that instead of seeing information available generally from a variety of sources, it is consciously structured, for the benefit of certain groups so that it should be possible to scan the communications' network and having identified the type of information required, go to a specific point (an official, a councillor or a local community group) in the network to extract the information required.

What has been done so far in this chapter has been to expand upon the components that structure the communications' network. Little has been said about how information actually flows through the network for the simple reason that flow is dependent upon a variety

of ever-changing local factors. All that can be said is that routes are structured. This study is an attempt to shed some light upon the flow and to identify areas where improvement will have beneficial effects on levels of information. To do this, it is necessary to identify in a local situation, those persons or groups who act as the various components in the communications network, to find out if their role is positive or negative in relation to the flow of information, who they see their role benefiting, how they receive and present information, where the information comes from and goes to and how quickly it passes. It is also necessary to identify where the various components are positioned in the network. For example, (a) a bad transmitter of information who is positioned at a key node may have serious repercussions for the quality of information further along the network and (b) if every component is a node and that each node has its own form of information filtering system, due to value appreciations, then the greater the number of nodes having to be placed, the more selective information, both as policy and feedback, becomes. The type of information being dealt with has an effect on the amount of selection and the speed with which it passes through the network. Clearly, some information passes faster than others whilst certain information manages to pass without alteration.

Since the process of participation is highly dependent upon the information received about issues, problems and strategies, a public which is poorly informed about issues cannot retain a high level of concern, is unwilling to ask for more information or to demand to be included in the decision-making system. Also a group which consistently provides officials and decision-makers with information but sees no action being taken is likely to stop providing data.

A variety of studies have shown that the opportunities to participate and the benefits derived therefrom have not been taken by the lower socio-economic groups. However, this is not to say that lower socio-economic groups do not participate. So much is dependent upon the nature of the issue involved and the way in which information is presented. If an issue is identified as an immediate threat, then the demand for information pertaining to that issue can be substantial. It is therefore necessary to get away from the general idea of information to a more definitive notion of what comprises information, since levels of participation, or rather involvement, vary with the type of information being dealt with. So, just what is meant by information?

Information for the purposes of this study can be classified into four categories which combine to form the information network:

1. Administrative information

2. Technical information

3. Feedback

4. Political information

Each of these categories can be sub-divided further by looking at type; source; and form.

1. **Administrative Information**: The type of information available from this category is usually normative in nature. It provides answers to questions such as names of councillors, service availability, where these services are located and how to go about making contact with certain individuals and institutional groups. Information of this sort is usually provided by clerical staffs and to a degree by councillors. In an attempt to increase participation

through initiatives like the C.D.P.'s information centres were set up which dealt primarily with information of this sort. What can be achieved by the use of information of this sort is greater take-up rates of available benefits and perhaps improved service delivery. Information is usually available in pamphlet form but there is an increasing trend towards having personal service to explain the contents of these pamphlets. Overall, administrative information deals with problems as they exist at the present. Any demands for information are likely to be reasonably stable.

2. <u>Technical Information</u>. This type of information can be called directive since its function is not to advise usually but to tell groups and individuals about details of future proposals in certain areas. This type of information dealing with future policies can be looked on at two levels - general proposals and specific proposals or in planning terms at structure and local plan levels. Depending on which level is being dealt with, the demand for information differs. High levels of demand can be expected when dealing with specific issues such as housing, employment, health, transport, shopping, etc. High level of demand is often turned into high levels of involvement. Perhaps one of the reasons why Housing Associations are successful in getting people in deprived areas to become involved is because they deal in a small area with a specific problem which can be easily identified. The demand for information about general proposals is likely to be very small simply because they are never clear on what are to be the direct effects. The source of this type of information is the technical staff of the various departments involved. The source in this case is easily recognisable for persons who wish to make their opinions known. The outcome of this is to accelerate the flow of information about specific problems. This is in spite of the way technical information is presented. Maps and diagrams are

very rarely understood by members of the public, nor is the technical jargon which is often used when discussions between technical officers and the public take place. The plethora of statistical data is also a source of confusion. This all serves to make increasingly difficult people's ability to recognise what is going on in their area.

3. Feedback. This type of information serves to modify the technical information given. Its ability to do this depends upon access to the communications' network and the constraints therein. It allows the expression of locally generated demands; again the amount of feedback generated depends on the specificity of the issues involved. Unfortunately the types of information which generate greatest feedback, i.e. the problems facing individuals, provides least potential for an organised response. The paradox of the situation is that certain representative groups are set up with institutional aid, such as community councils, but whose remit only covers the general proposals about which few people develop an interest. Consequently the setting up of alternative groups takes place - small, isolated groups, lacking contact with other groups which have the same problems. The sources of feedback vary with the problem. Individuals and small protest groups provide feedback for specific problems. Institutionalised groups are the feedback source for more general problems. The form feedback takes is usually a letter, telephone call, or personal interview. This raises the problem of articulation. Many people know what they want to say, but they cannot express themselves.

4. Political Information. This type of information can be termed constraining since it sets limits on the type of information available and who is allowed access to that information. Political information enables people to identify those in power and access to

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this type of information is often a guarded resource. The availability of political information is limited so retaining power through knowledge in the hands of a few. The source of political information is limited to councillors, thus not affording people a chance to question the rationality of its use. Political information is structured by overall party policy which is available in party documents, but local decisions often vary.

It must be emphasized that these categories cannot be seen as units in themselves. There are a number of links between them so that an alteration of one is likely to affect the others. For instance, a political decision may generate greater demand for administrative information which in turn could generate high levels of feedback which forces technical information to be modified. In this way it is possible to construct an idealised model based on the flow of various information. Such a model at this level has to be simplistic since, as has been argued, models vary depending on local circumstances. Details, such as identification of barriers, transmitters, receivers and the type of information required and the rate at which it passes cannnot be provided. It is therefore the function of a model at this stage merely to indicate the complex arrangements of information flows that could exist given certain conditions. This model serves as a reference point against which its idealised structure will be tested.

Figure 2.1 shows such a model within other decision-making frameworks. It is emphasised that this model contains only some of the components that are involved at a local level. Such a general model fails to show several things.

1. It fails to show the relationship with other levels of Government and the effect of any input by semi-official bodies. It fails to acknowledge levels of coordination required in a decision-making process.

Fig 2.1   Theoretical Model of Information flow - Local Authority level

National Framework

Regional Framework

Local Policy

Committee Structure

Senior Technical Officers

Councillors (party)

Area Officers

Councillors (indivs.)

No Available Channels

Series of Community Groups

The Public
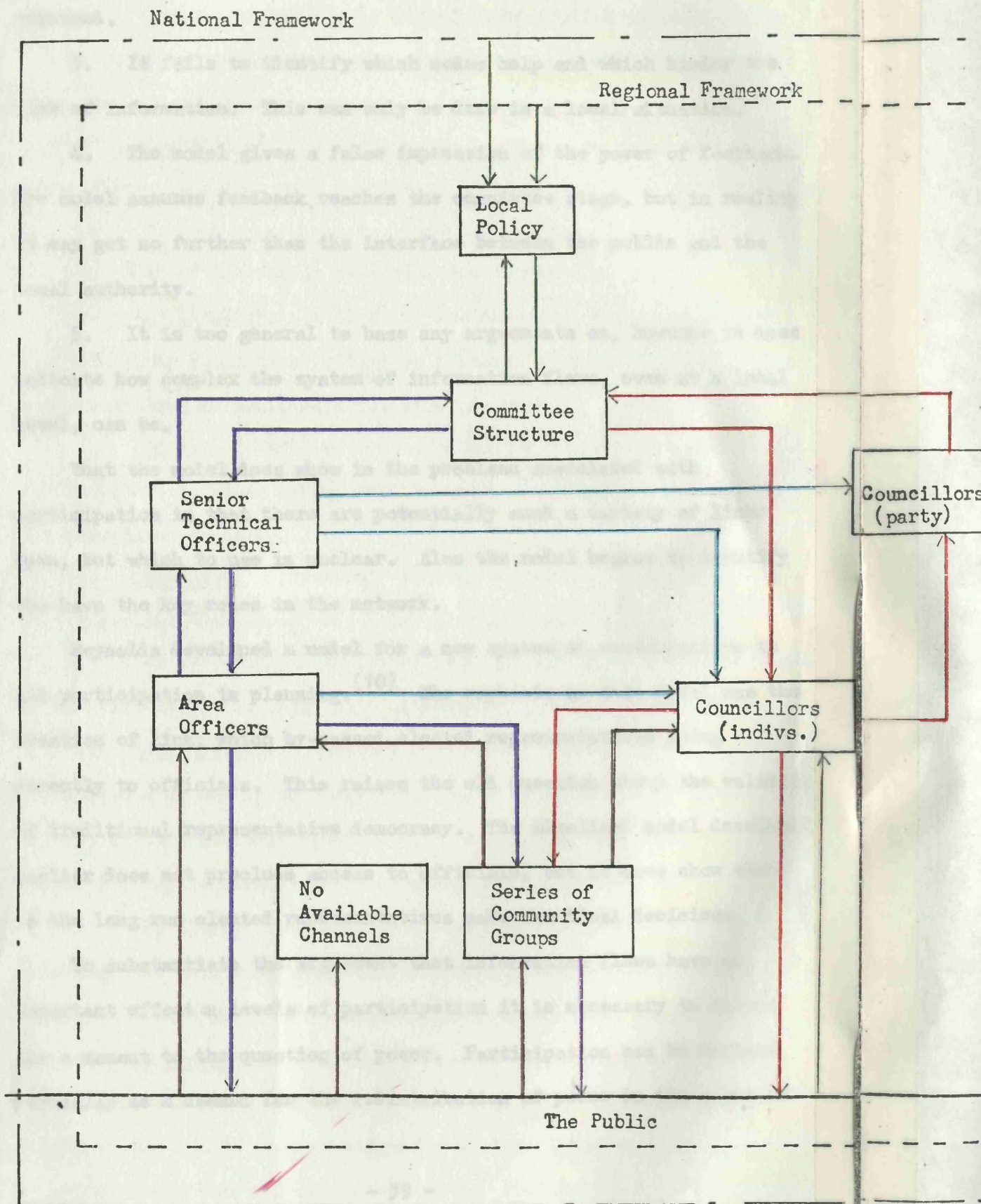
2. It fails to give any idea of which information passes through each node. In every case, not all local groups are necessarily informed.

3. It fails to identify which nodes help and which hinder the flow of information. This can only be done in a local situation.

4. The model gives a false impression of the power of feedback. The model assumes feedback reaches the committee stage, but in reality it may get no further than the interface between the public and the local authority.

5. It is too general to base any arguements on, however it does indicate how complex the system of information flows, even at a local level, can be.

What the model does show is the problems associated with participation in that there are potentially such a variety of links open, but which to use is unclear. Also the model begins to identify who have the key roles in the network.

Reynolds developed a model for a new system of communication to aid participation in planning.[10] The emphasis on this model was the creation of link, which by-passed elected representatives going directly to officials. This raises the old question about the validity of traditional representative democracy. The idealised model developed earlier does not preclude access to officials, but it does show that in the long run elected representatives make the final decisions.

To substantiate the argument that information flows have an important effect on levels of participation it is necessary to return for a moment to the question of power. Participation can be defined partially as a demand for the redistribution of power in the light of

the failings of traditional representative democracy. The failure
of this manifests itself in the alienation of some groups from the
process of decision-making. The aim of participation ought to be an
attempt at power redistribution that enables those citizens who lack
power to be deliberately included in the decision-making process.
However any participation without power is likely to generate
frustration. Arnstein uses a typology of eight levels of participation,
the rungs of which correspond to levels of power.[11]

In order of increasing participation these rungs are:-

1. Manipulation. In place of participation people are placed
on rubberstamp committees, giving an illusion of participation. Such
committees have no legitimate function or power.

2. Therapy. Problems here are seen in terms of pathology.
Participation in these terms looks at the problems of individuals
not structural problems.

3. Informing. Informing citizens of their rights can be the
most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation.
All too often the emphasis is placed on a one way flow of information -
from officials to citizens, with no channels provided for feedback.

4. Consultation. Inviting citizens opinions can be a
legitimate step but if not related to other modes of participation it
offers no assurance that opinions will be taken into account. The
public meeting is perhaps the best example of this.

5. Placation. This entails giving the public a vote but
ensuring that they will always be outvoted. This can be generated
through minimal levels of technical and organisational aid.

6. Partnership. This looks towards the sharing of planning
and decision-making responsibilities through such things as joint
policy boards. This is most effective if the community has an
organised power base and can afford to pay its leaders and hire

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technical assistants.

7. <u>Delegated Power</u>. This results where, through negotiations, citizens can achieve dominant decision-making authority.

8. <u>Citizen Control</u>. Where people have power which can be used for neighbourhood benefit.

Of these eight rungs, Arnstein analyses in the following way. Therapy and Manipulation he sees as a substitute for genuine participation which enables powerholders to "educate". Informing and Consultation he sees as giving the powerless a voice, but which ensures that voice may not be heard. This he calls "Tokenism". Placation he sees as a higher level tokenism. Partnership, Delegated Power and Citizen Control go towards providing effective participation. It is suggested here that Arnstein's typology can be extended to relate the levels of power and thus participation to the variety of information that flows in a communications' network, since as Deutsch argues, communications systems are carriers of power.

In this way a ladder of information and participation can be developed using the earlier information classification. Administrative information can be equated with Manipulation and Therapy where there are virtually no opportunities to participate. Technical information can be equated with Informing, Consultation and Placation so that participation takes the form of the token gesture of asking people what they want. Feedback can be equated with Placation and Partnership so that depending on the reaction to feedback (rejection or acceptance) the question of participation may be more effective. Political information has to be equated with Delegated Power and Citizen Control since if citizens have access to political information they also have the choice of making decisions or delegating responsibility. The practicality of this typology will be tested in following chapters.

A further means of substantiating the relationship between participation and information flow can be carried out by looking at the development of participation in planning. The dominant theme is the statutory requirement to provide the public with information. The quantity, quality and method of provision of information is related to the way in which participation has developed.

The emergency of statutory town planning in Britain came with the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. Perhaps the greatest landmark in plan making legislation in this country, it remained in force virtually unmodified until the 1960's. The essence of the '47 Act was the "development plan". However, by the 1960's, after two decades of use, the rate of social and economic change had increased to such a rate that the "development plan" concept was facing severe criticisms.

1.   Changes in society were creating problems that required comprehensive solutions

2.   The pace of change was too fast for the cumbersome 1947 Act to control

The development plan system was thus seen as deterministic, inflexible and placing an undue emphasis on the preparation of "a plan", a final product. Foley labelled such an approach as "unitary". These defects of the old system were later summarised as:-

"First it had become overloaded and subject to delays .....
inadequate participation by the individual citizen ..... and
insufficient regard to his interest ....." (Introduction to
1967 Town and Country Planning Bill.)

Developments in the planning system in the 1960's witnessed a change from a unitary to adaptive approach. The major impetus for change in the planning system came with the publication of a report prepared by the Planning Advisory Group (P.A.G.) in 1965. The

composition of this group has led some commentators to take the
view that the task of the committee was to improve administrative
efficiency.[12]   The group came out with the now familiar two tier
approach to planning, of structure and local plans.[13]   It was
hoped that this new system would replace the 1947 Act with "an
equally authoritative and stable planning system but one more
responsibe to change and less liable to procedural atrophy."
(Para. 7.8).

It therefore became very important if local authorities were to
avoid accusations of bias that the public be involved in preparing
these plans or at least be informed about them. P.A.G. was not
forthcoming on this issue and almost equated participation with
publicity. Participation at this stage was certainly not seen as
transferring power in decision-making away from the elected rep-
resentatives. The plan was to be prepared by the local authority
before seeking local community reaction. The P.A.G. report neverthe-
less raised the question about how far participation was seen as an
essential component of the new system or was it just added at the last
moment? It appears that participation was seen as peripheral, not
central.

Time has shown that the two tier plan system works satisfactorily
but that participation does not. This suggests that planning and
participation were not envisaged as part of the same system. Never-
theless the concept of participation was gaining support.

In 1968 the Skeffington Committee was set up to look at ways of
incorporating participation into the planning process. Reporting in
1969 it made nine recommendations concerning public involvement in
the planning process:-[14]

1. People should be kept informed;

2. Information and the opportunities for participation should be made available;

3. Participation should concentrate on the discussion of choices and, secondly the local authorities presentation of proposals;

4. Community forums should be set up giving local organisations the opportunity to discuss;

5. Proposals should be publicised in the areas affected;

6. Community development officers should be appointed "to secure the involvement of these people who do not join organisations";

7. People should be told what they have achieved by participation;

8. Citizens should be encouraged to assist with the planning process as well as expressing views;

9. Better education about planning should be developed both in schools and by the public at large.

Most of these recommendations are concerned with improving communications between people and the local authority through better information exchange. People should have more information, more information where to get information, particular information if they are to be directly affected and more information on the relative success of feedback. This relates to the earlier information classification.

Two factors which accounted for the popularity of the idea of participation were that planners saw it as a means of improving their image and that the public were showing greater concern about their environment. These interests meant that participation was willingly accepted. However, Skeffington tended to be rather atheoretical. It lacked theory of social organisation, of political decision-making and of communications and subsequent problems can be put down to this lack of awareness.

Because of this lack of awareness plus the inherant contradictions in the report, it was not acted upon for several years. Although the public and officials may have been enthusiastic, the decision-makers were less than happy. They feared a diminishing role. These problems were still unresolved when central government published its views in 1972 in the form of a circular (D.O.E. 52/72). This circular takes a more restrictive view of participation and drops Skeffington's idea of community development officers. It provides local authorities greater flexibility in the way they interpret the requirements of the 1968 Act. The tone of the circular is less enthusiastic about participation than Skeffington. This stems from a realisation of the political complexities that participation engenders. Thus on the question of information provision the circular states:-

"This does not mean that there should be an unending flow of information ....."

Overall, the circular attempts to tone down the idea of citizen participation. In practice this has serious repercussions in terms of those who participate. The methods adopted by local authorities have followed similar patterns. They have involved a combination of some or all of the following techniques:- distribution of information brochures often with a return questionnaire, sample surveys, public meetings, exhibitions and contact with organisations. These methods face the problem of lack of response. Consequently any response is un-representative. Local authorities have been limited in their approach to apathy by the removal by government of community development officers and their reluctance to provide community forums. Despite this, the usually apathetic sectors, have been forming local action groups when directly threatened. This action tends to come later in the planning process when its effect would be better felt earlier. Here arises a potential role for community councils in making people aware of problems

and issues earlier, to organise or stimulate self-help, to help those and to foster a sense of community responsibility for the residents.

It seems that in reality the flow of information both as dissemination from policy level and as feedback is not as straightforward and predictable as the model would suggest. The model has to be modified due to the presence of two main factors - the unwillingness of central government to give its blessing, for political reasons, to the development of effective participation and the unwillingness of certain sectors of the public to become involved in issues unless directly affected by them. These factors should lead one to believe that participation is, in Arnstein's typology, nothing more than consultation.

If this is the case, and evidence points to it being so, then better use of existing information is essential. As the model indicates, information has to pass through a variety of nodes before the public is informed. It ought to be possibe by reducing the number of nodes passed through, to provide better quality, less structured information. In reality the opposite is more likely to occur. A series of sub-committees, not indicated on the model, really ought to be since their existence adds further barriers to the flow of information, barriers not readily recognisable. The model also fails to show the different time scales involved in each leg of the network (between nodes) so for the model to be effective some form of temporal scale should be developed. The disseminating ability of local groups also differs which the model fails to show. Modification is required here too. The model is totally inaccurate in dealing with the reality of feedback. It assumes feedback on every disseminating leg up to committee. Feedback can be highly selective depending upon the issue. Also in reality the model will have to account for a variety of other inputs and a variety of levels of coordination. These may radically alter the simplistic notion of how information flows outlined.

These are just some of the modifications that reality requires of the model. As stated, the model requires testing and modification. To get the necessary details for this, a local area study has to be carried out. In the chapters to follow, data about information transmission and participation in Glasgow's East End will be used.

Notes:

1. In Glasgow for instance, the Scottish Development Agency is supposedly taking an active role in urban renewal in the east end of the city. In a similar scheme, the Maryhill Corrider Project in the north-west of the city; the S.D.A. is not involved in urban renewal.

2. Rhodes, (1975) p.11

3. Dearlove, (1973) Chap. 2

4. Rhodes op. cit. p.12

5. Ibid p.13

6. Ibid p.14

7. Ibid p.24

8. In Glasgow's east end, the Dalmarnock Action Group was one such group. It managed to produce a document, "The Dalmarnock Report" which was in effect an indictment by the people on the local authority for lack of effective action. Subsequently, the action group, starved of information, broke up.

9. Rhodes, op cit. p.28

10. Reynolds (1969) p.145

11. Arnstein (1969)

12. Damer and Hague (1971) p.120

13. The distinction being the structure plans deal with major policy issues whereas local plans are more concerned with smaller scale detailed issues.

14. Skeffington (1969) p.47

Chapter Three

Research Methodology and Design

The stepping down process from theory to general practice will now be continued in this chapter towards the level of empirical study. It is hoped, through a local area study, to test the feasability of the proposed integrated theory of participation in the decision-making process and at the same time attempting to identify these factors which structure the flow of information, their effect and their relative position in the communications' network. The methodology to achieve this can be divided into four stages:-

1. identification of the problem and the area of study;

2. identification of perceived key persons in the information dissemination network;

3. questionnaire design and interview;

4. analysis of responses

Almost unanimously, the studies examining the relationshio of socio-economic status to participation indicates a differential performance according to perceived social strata. This manifests itself in the tendency among the more articulate and better educated sections of society to join organisations. However, this tendency can be modified if the significance of the prevailing life style on participation is accounted for, which equates high density low-economic-status groups with localised organisations sharing the same aspirations or suffering similiar deprivations, whilst low density, high economic status groups tend to join a variety of organisations not necessarily localised. Consequently, the overall participants in the governmental process are hardly representative of the public as a whole and therefore, the use of the extended means of decision-making can hardly be used as a legitimate base to reformulate economic and social policy.

Fagence indicates the following as pre-requisites for effective
participation: "..... personal needs and problems, possession of the
necessary resources (skill, time and money), conducive attitudes and
social expectation."[1] From this a classification of levels of
activity was derived, (not unlike Arnstein's ladder), of which one
category was the "inactives", ".....those citizens who refrain from
participation because of lack of interest, a psychological detatchment
from the power play of politics and decision-making, a poor resource
base of skills, and little, if any, committment to conflict,
resolution or civic improvement."[2] The problem of coping with this
category has not yet been solved. There seems to be little intention
among this category to participate. As Batley observes: "..... the
citizens acquired statutory right to information and consultation is
of little meaning if he doubts that his involvement will have little
impact on planning and if the local authority doubts it has much to
gain from listening to his views."[3] This suggests that the existing
mode of communications does very little to encourage the "non-joiners"
in expressing their opinions.

These factors which appear as a necessary pre-condition for
participation in the decision-making process are those which are most
limited in areas of deprivation, thus suggesting that effective
participation in such areas is even less likely. Low socio-economic
group; low income; low levels of community involvement; low levels
of educational attainment and low levels of social expectation are
among features common to such areas.

In terms of the traditional indices, the east-end of Glasgow
was perceived as such an area of deprivation, to the extent that the
Glasgow Eastern Area Renewal Project, (G.E.A.R.) was announced by the
Secretary of State in May 1976 aimed at the comprehensive regeneration
of the area. "The area covered by the project includes the

communities of Bridgeton, Parkhead, Dalmarnock, The Calton, North

Camlachie, South Camlachie, Shettleston, Tollcross and Sandyhills.

The site of the former Clyde Iron Works and associated derelict land

was also included in the project area."[4]   (See Fig. 3.1). The

G.E.A.R. project was seen as a unique experiement in approaching the

problems of the inner city by combining the resources of Glasgow

District Council, Strathclyde Region, the Scottish Special Housing

Association, (S.S.H.A.), and the Scottish Development Agency, (S.D.A.)

to set in motion "a concerted programme for the comprehensive social,

economic and environmental regeneration of the entire area and in

doing so to consult with local residents and other appropriate bodies,

including voluntary organisations." [5]   A major thrust of the project

was towards "meaningful community participation".

However, the question has to be asked that given the nature of the

area, the fact that the majority of the young active members of the

area have moved away, the characteristics of these remaining and the

fact that for years promises had been made but not delivered, how was

"meaningful participation" expected to be achieved? In the light of

these factors the importance of the provision of information has taken

a central role. In early discussions with local voluntary organisations

and community groups, it became clear that the quantity of information

available in the area was substantial, but it was also made clear that

certain groups often received more information than they could cope

with, often of the wrong kind, often duplicated, often non-comprehensible

and many individuals did not receive information at all from the agencies

involved. Questions about the coordination of information dissemination

required to be asked. It was therefore necessary to look at the

patterns of information flows that had developed to see if there was a

means of achieving a more efficient network which would get the correct

information to the right people (the most effective transmitters), at

FIGURE 3.1
HOUSEHOLD SURVEY
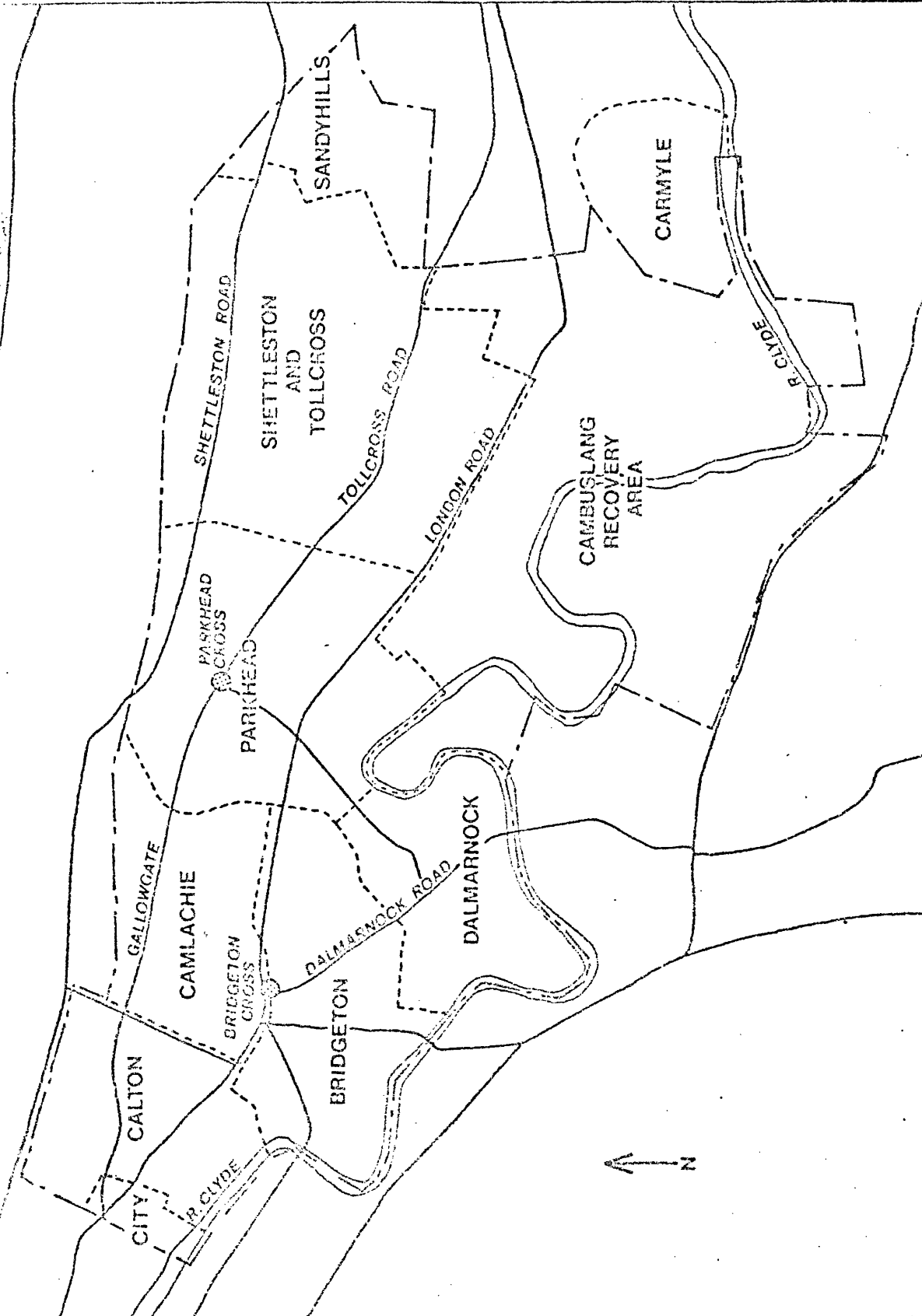
"GEAR" Boundary

Local Plan - Sub Area Boundary

Scale: 1:35 000 (approx)

the right time and in the most comprehensible way. Only when this is achieved can people begin to think about participating. Even then, however, the problem of information is not solved. The existence of four agencies raised problems. The functions of these various agencies has never been made explicit. People can easily be confused in relation of whom to approach, thus affecting the quality and quantity, if any, of feedback that exists. Overall, in such an area, it is essential to aim at achieving the simplest, most effective model of information dissemination. It was felt that this was not a primary concern in the G.E.A.R. area.

Having identified the basic problem of the relationship between participation and information flows and that it exists in the stipulated area it was necessary to identify key persons (nodes) in the process of information dissemination. This second stage of research was greatly assisted by the publication by Glasgow Council for Voluntary Services (G.C.V.S.) of the East End Directory of organisations and contacts in the area, both at local and official levels. In order to make the quantity of research more manageable, the two largest and most heavily populated community council areas were chosen from the six in the area - Glasgow East (Parkhead, Shettleston and Tollcross); electorate of 16,187 and the Calton, Bridgeton and Dalmarnock area; electorate of 10,903 (See Fig.3.2) - and from these key persons and elected representatives were identified. Key local activists were perceived as chair-persons of community councils, tennants associations, housing associations and other local groups, on the assumption that they would be the most efficient distributors of information. These were supplemented by both regional and district councillors. At the official level, the key personnel were seen as these involved directly in work in the area

FIG 3.2 COMMUNITY COUNCIL AREAS

SANDYHILLS

MOUNT VERNON

SHETTLESTON ROAD

GLASGOW EAST

FULLARTON

TOLLCROSS ROAD

CARMYLE

LONDON ROAD

R. CLYDE

PARKHEAD CROSS

CAMBUSLANG

GALLOWGATE

N.CAMLACHIE

RUTHERGLEN

S.CAMLACHIE

BRIDGETON CROSS

DALMARNOCK

DALMARNOCK ROAD

CALTON

P. CLYDE

CITY

N

"GEAR" Boundary

Community Council Areas

- 53 -
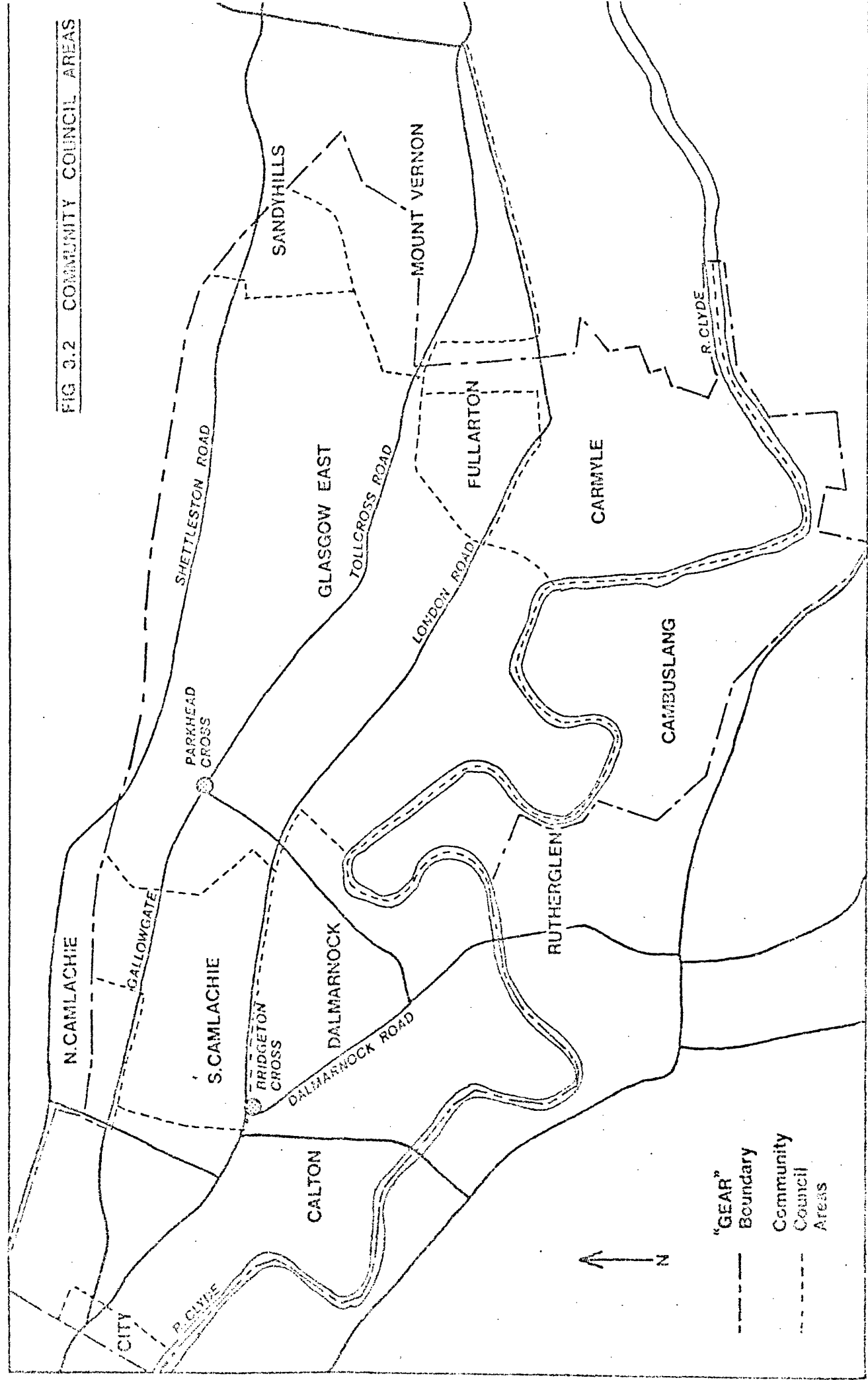
e.g. the various representatives of the district council, the region and the S.D.A. involved at the G.E.A.R. centre - a shop whose function is to provide information, planners employed by the district council who were in charge of the preparation of local plans for the area, and also those whose remit was to cover the total area of the east-end such as the S.D.A. and the S.S.H.A. officials. Appendix One gives a list of those seen as key persons who were contacted during the study.

Once key persons were identified a means had to be found of determining how they received information. To do this it was necessary to design a series of questions which, it was hoped, would provide a structured response. This third stage was to proceed through a combination of formal questionnaires and informal interviews depending on the function of the person involved. The questions were designed in such a way as to try and elicit certain features about information flow in the area under study, both horizontally and vertically. It was also hoped to gain some idea of individual perceptions about the quality of the information available, about the effectiveness of the various information providers and about the public view of the project in general. In order to achieve a structural response, the questions asked in the interview situation were based as closely as possible on these set down in the questionnaire. Since a wide variety of people were approached it was necessary to modify, to a certain degree, the way some questions were phrased in order to fit the question to the various agency or group. Examples of the questions asked and a sample of responses is attached in Appendix Two. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the questions will follow. In general, it was found easier and more fruitful to interview councillors and officials whilst through necessity due to problems of making contact, several of the

local activists had to receive questionnaires although interviews, face to face, would have been preferable as well as creating a better response. However, of the original selection as many as possible were interviewed.

The final stage in the methodology, the analysis of the various responses was carried out simply by comparing the various replies, determining points of contradiction and by constructing a series of flow charts for each organisational working structure in order to ascertain how much information was passed, what kind of information was passed, which information travelled fastest, where it came from, where it went to, how much coordination existed, which groups were most efficient in disseminating information and whether the links were part of the formal structure or had developed informally. The charts were then analysed in order to find where the various factors which contributed to the problems of information dissemination lay. By using this method it was hoped a more efficient model could be developed.

The research that was carried out was by no means a comprehensive, in-depth study of information dissemination in the G.E.A.R. area. However, as it developed a series of advantages of such a small scale study became apparent. By limiting the study to a certain size, the amount of research necessary was made more manageable for one person, in terms of cost, timing in relation to interviews and analysis. A larger scale project would have created problems of information overload, which could have affected the final analysis. The limited scope of the research enabled coverage to be completed in the small amount of time that was available so there was not a large time gap between initial interviews and the return of questionnaires. The research was

effective in that it did provide material on information dissemination, although the level at which this was couched did vary depending on who was replying. People do not relate to information flows as they do to specifies like housing or employment. However, by contacting a good cross section of those actively involved in the area, (raising the problem of are activist's representative?) a good indication of divergent opinion was achieved.

After a degree of change, of the original thirty or so people identified as key nodes in the network, twenty four were chosen for interview/questionnaire. Of these, nineteen were contacted successfully. Unfortunately out of eleven local activists contacted eight were done so by the sending of questionnaires of which only three responded. This tended to narrow the community input. It was suggested that active people in the area had been subject to so many questionnaires that they no longer considered them worth replying to.

On the negative side, this approach also suffered from certain deficiencies. The lack of an adequate interview technique and the associated problems was a major drawback in the early stages of research, although the technique did improve through experience. Other problems encountered in the informal interview situation were (a) at official/councillor level occasionally discussions tended to go off at a tangent. This was especially true when talking to councillors who tended to be very well versed on one or two topical issues to which they kept making reference and (b) at local level, as indicated previously, people were more inclined to talk about specifics rather than about information at a general level. This problem was further complicated in part by the questionnaire design and partly by the interview technique, by the asking of questions at a general level to which respondants could make no link to

information dissemination. The questions asked tended towards
subjectivity being based on the author's own opinion prior to full
research being carried out. However, these opinions had themselves
been coloured by the early discussions with local organisations.
Although the questions were unavoidably subjective, the underlying
concept tended towards objectivity. The questionnaire contained
open-ended questions which allowed people to expand on what they
considered to be important points. Subsequent replies were thus very
subjective and difficult to analyse. Early discussions showed that no
clear answers could be expected so this shaped the approach to overall
design.

Two final criticisms of the method are concerned with (a) the
scale of the research and (b) certain basic assumptions. The validity
of contacting nineteen people in an area with a population in the
region of 40,000 has to be questioned. However, in the light of the
number who actually participate, the figure of nineteen does not appear
so bad. In the Calton, Bridgeton, Dalmarnock Community Council area
something like eight people regularly attend meetings, of whom only
three are genuinely active. Is this an example of "meaningful
community participation"? The underlying assumptions made in approach-
ing local groups was that these would be effective information
disseminators and that the chair-persons would be involved in this
field. However, figures from the G.E.A.R. Household Survey showed
that only 8% of the respondants to that survey demonstrated an
awareness of their community council whilst in Bridgeton this figure
was given as 2% In the area as a whole only 4% attend community
council meetings, 5% attend Local Plan Working Parties (a Glasgow
District Council function), 6% attend S.S.H.A. Housing Meetings,
and 5% attend other meetings.[6] These figures suggest that

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effective participation does not exist and that groups and meetings seen by official bodies as efficient providers of information to the public require a radical re-think.

Overall it would be too easy to condemn this method as being weak, but as a means of introducing the problem it provided adequate data. Just how adequate can be judged from the series of flow diagrams and analysis developed in the following chapter.

Notes:

1. Fagence (1977) p.204

2. Ibid p.208

3. Batley (1972) p.95

4. S.D.A. (1978b) p.2

5. Ibid p.2

6. S.D.A. (1978a) Table 9.1

Chapter Four

A Local-Level Model of Information Dissemination:

- problems and analysis

Having discussed in general terms the problems of information dissemination and the impact this has on levels of citizen participation, it is necessary to apply this in a local situation. In the second chapter, a theoretical model was attempted, (Fig. 2.1) but the constraints on the accuracy of such a model lay in its lack of detail. As has been consistently argued, it is only by the analysis of a local situation can the fine details of information flow patterns be detected. Consequently only at a local level can a model be accurately depicted. However, even at this level total accuracy cannot be guaranteed, this being due to the existence of informal networks of communications which develop as a result of a specific situation and which are rarely made explicit. Nevertheless, setting this problem aside as unavoidable and indeterminable, it is the function of this chapter to develop as accurately as possible a model of local information flows with subsequent analysis of its component parts and elements in terms of those factors identified in Chapter Two.

The GEAR project provides an ideal opportunity to study the relationship between information dissemination and participation. The committment by the Scottish Office to participation within a strictly defined area of physical and social deprivation, clearly outlined in the previous chapter, and the existence in the organisational machinery of the project of four primary yet distinct governmental and quasi-governmental agencies, each of which has its own organisational structure in which members have their own objectives, provides the

basis for a systematic analytical approach to the problem. The problems facing participation was perhaps typified when in November, 1976, only six months after the project was announced there had already been a complaint from a spokesman from the Dalmarnock Action Group of lack of consultation.

Since the project comprises of four main agencies, the method of analysis chosen to study information dissemination is to break-down the overall organisational structure into its component parts and to study these individually. By doing this, a series of independent agency models of information dissemination can be constructed and links with the other agencies involved (if any) can be determined. The initial step therefore is to construct a model of the overall organisational structure of the project into which lines of communications are built. The overall organisational structure of the project as it developed and as it exists now, differs from that envisaged when the project was announced. A comparison of the different models is necessary since, as I shall argue, the difference has had an important effect upon the nature of information dissemination.

This will be followed by an examination of the patterns of information dissemination in each of the four agencies - the Scottish Development Agency (SDA), Strathclyde Region (SR), Glasgow District Council (GDC), and the Scottish Special Housing Association (SSHA). The efficiency of information dissemination from these agencies will then be viewed in relation to the patterns of information flow stemming from the public and community groups (feedback). In each of these cases attention will be focused on identifying the various nodes in the network and whether this pattern affects the efficiency of information flow, termed structural problems, and also the roles played by the various actors within those nodes. Whether they can be seen

as transmitters, receivers, barriers, carriers and so on, termed behavioural problems. The outcome of this is to attempt to combine all these elements to produce an overall model of information dissemination in the GEAR project. The examination of these factors is to continue in diagramatic and discussion form.

From the overall model and from replies in the interview situation, it is hoped that certain factors of information dissemination can be detected, such as the type of information which travels fastest and stimulates greatest feedback, the channels which provide the best routes, the local groups which react quickest and the advantages of certain routes.

The concluding part of this chapter seeks to test the practicability of the information/participation "ladder", outlined in the second chapter, with the reality of levels of participation identified in a local situation.

The most important single aspect of the project is the multiplicity of the organisations involved. Not only the four main agencies, but a variety of other actors are involved such as councillors and community groups. Consequently the overall working organisation is necessarily complex. The multi-organisational decision-making process developed recognised the need for a co-ordinated approach to the problems of the inner city as well as the demand by the public to be involved in that process. As Scott and Harris[1] point out, one of the arguements in favour of multi-organisations in the way in which single decision-makers can increase their power by combining with other decision-makers through the medium of a multi-organisation, thereby increasing the variety of actions available. Harris identifies three prerequisites for the development of an effective multi-organisation[2]:

1.   communications between those involved in making and taking decisions,

2.   appreciation between authorities of the nature of the issues they are attempting to come to some agreement on, and

3.   a representative body set up to co-ordinate.

The GEAR project seemed, initially at any rate, to reflect these demands.

Reflecting the commitment of central government plus the agencies involved, the general direction and control of the project was to rest with a Governing Committee. This committee was to consist of not more than three elected members each from the District and the Region and not more than two each at a comparable level from the SDA and the SSHA with a Scottish Office minister as chairman. The function of the Governing Committee was to propose to the responsible authorities the development strategy and overall plan and programme of action for the area. It was to serve as a forum for the consideration and initiation of ideas, resolve major points of conflict, give direction where appropriate and be responsible for the general progress of the project. (SDD 1976 paras. 3-4).

The technical level of co-ordination was seen as the GEAR Consultative Group. This was a group of senir officials, to meet as necessary, to keep the project under review, resolve difficulties so far as possible, ensure that the arrangements for the day to day co-ordination of the project were working smoothly and take decisions on such matters as the Governing Committee may have delegated to it. The SDA were to work in close consultation with the Consultative Group. Membership of the group was to reflect that of the Governing Committee and it was also to be chaired by the Secretary of the Scottish Development Department. It was the intention to use this group as a means of resolving, as far as possible, difficulties which emerged so

that only matters of major importance would fall on the Governing Committee (SDD 1976, paras. 6, 7 and 9).

To prevent work overload even at the level of the Consultative Group, it was proposed that reliance be placed as much as possible on the ordinary day to day channels of information interchange and communications between officials since formal meetings of both the Governing Committee and Consultative Group were not to be held more frequently than necessary. (SDD 1976, para. 12).

The SDA was to provide the co-ordinating management of the project and overall proposals and a programme of action. The Agency was to draw together as co-ordinator, proposals from each of the participants across the whole range of their functions yet each participating body was to remain responsible for the implementation of its own functions within the agreed proposals. The Agency, as co-ordinator, was to work in direct relationship to the Governing Committee and Consultative Group. It was also to act in co-operation and agreement with the other participants. (SDD 1976, paras. 14, 15 and 18).

Each of the participants was to retain its full statutory powers and responsibilities, except to the extent of choosing to delegate them. In exercising their powers, participants were to act in full consultation with each other as appropriate and with the SDA as co-ordinator. Participants were to have kept the SDA informed of all major developments or proposals for the area. (SDD 1976, paras. 19 and 20).

There was a clear recognition of the fundamental importance of the involvement of existing communities within the area in the planning and regeneration of the area. The arrangements for consultation and participation on the overall proposals and programme will rest with the Agency as co-ordinator, but the responsibility for community

regeneration and community activities will lie with the Region and District through the co-ordination of various policies in co-operation with the people of the area. The SSHA will also carry out its normal processes of consultation. Participants will keep the Agency informed of their activities so they are integrated with the overall proposals and programme. (SDD 1976, para. 23).

In the proposed model, the key area was that of overall SDA co-ordination and management. As co-ordinator, the SDA was to receive its information on the day to day running of the project from the Consultative Group of officials. It was then to ensure that the various participants carried out their relevant tasks. Technical links at a more day to day level came with the creation of the topic-based working groups. Having technical input only, ten such groups were set up dealing with the problems of employment, population and housing, community, social work services, health, education, leisure and recreation, shopping, transport and the physical environment. These topics, seen as "Key Issues" were later to be circulated in the area in an attempt to stimulate feedback.

A further node developed with the Local Plan Working Parties. Very much a district responsibility, these working parties had inputs from all main agencies plus political inputs from the District and Region as well as direct representation by members of the community.

Yet another important element in the organisational structure was the role of the GEARcentre. It was an attempt to link the main agencies with the public. Greater reference will be made to this later.

Figure 4.1 shows in diagramatic form the relative positions taken by the various participants within the organisational structure and attempts to indicate the patterns of information flow as they developed. Such a model makes it easier to identify the links as they existed.

Fig 4.1 Information flows - proposed G.E.A.R. working organisation.
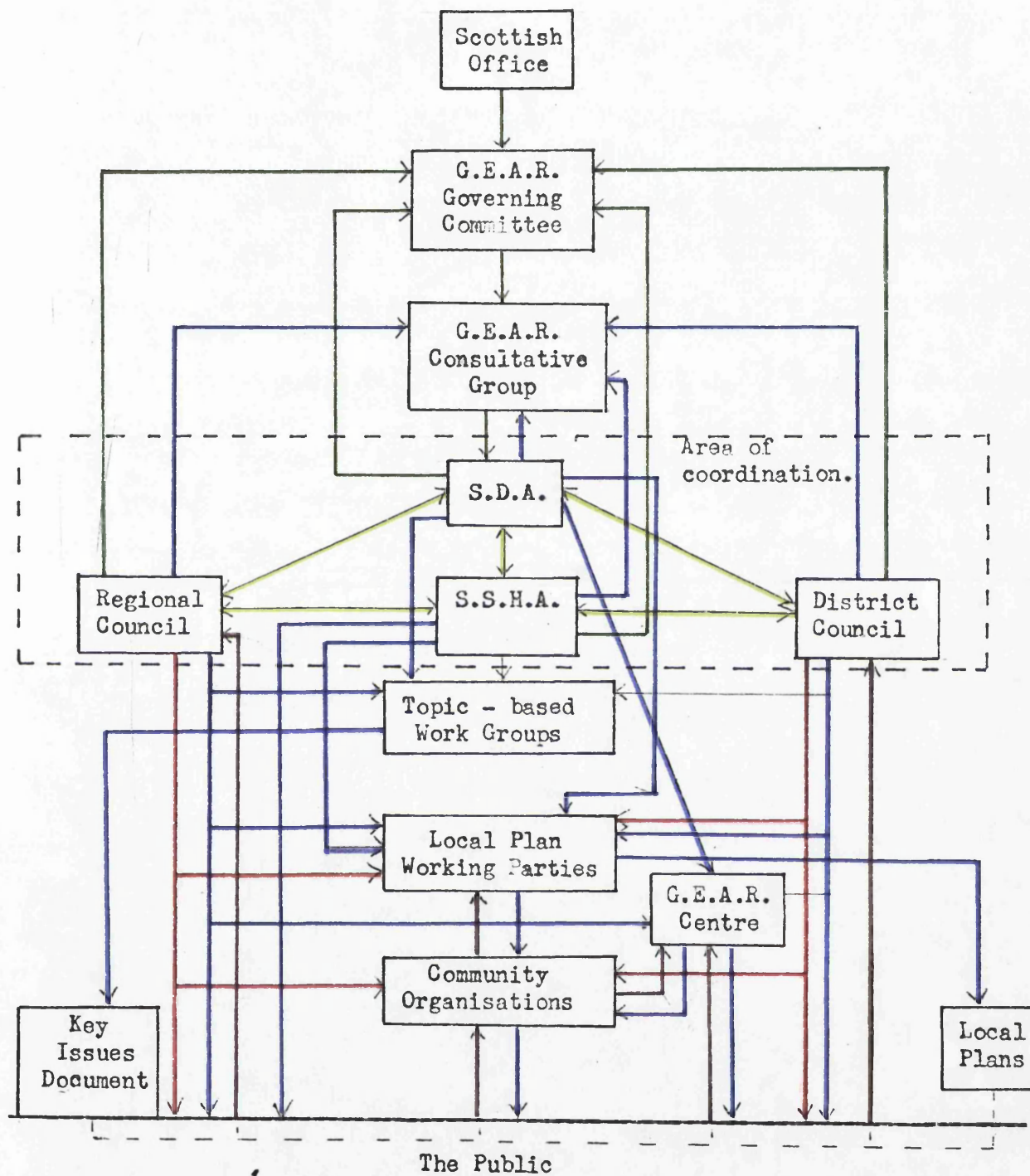
Key:
- Political Information
- Technical (vert.)
- Technical (horiz.)
- Administrative (vert.)
- Administrative (horiz.)
- Informal
- Feedback

Initial flows of information, of a political and administrative nature, feeding into the Governing Committee had five sources. Political information came from the Region, District and the Scottish Office, whilst administrative information came also from the Scottish Office plus the SDA and SSHA. The second stage of the process was the passing of administrative information in terms of policy proposals, from the Governing Committee to the Consultative Group of senior officials which had a further input of technical information from the respective agencies. The SDA being envisaged as project co-ordinator was in close liason with the Consultative Group and received information directly from the group primarily in technical form. The S.D.A. was also in receipt of technical information from the three other participants. Technical flows of information were supposed to develop between all four participants creating formal links between the agencies. The role of co-ordination, managed by the SDA, of the agencies involved was the centre of the project. Through this, it was hoped that an inter-agency corporate approach would emerge to deal with the existing problems. As the agencies retained their individual statutory power, they developed their own methods of passing information to the public so they do not show up too well when analysed at a general level.

However, it was from the area of co-ordination (see Fig. 4.1) that most information flows were to originate. Technical information flowed from each participant into the relevant topic-based Working Group. The groups received no other kinds of information in their initial stages, until the publication of the Key Issues Document (SDA 1978b) which was subject to a public meeting. Although information has come to light that "Key Issues" was never meant to be published as a discussion document. The four agencies were also represented on the Local Plan Working Parties. In terms of information flowing from

policy level to the public, the working parties were the first level at which the public were actively involved. Therefore they were very important in the provision of information of all sorts to community representatives. Consequently the working parties had technical input from the four agencies, the input of political information from the Region and District plus feedback (or community input). Although the public had access to agency officials and in certain cases elected representatives, this was the highest point the public had of approaching representatives of the multi-organisation rather as representatives of their individual organisations. The District and the Region both provided technical and political information to the public, but again this was seen as acting outwith the multi-organisation.

The GEARcentre was another important means information dissemination. The SDA tended to link with community councils as the primary means of disseminating information. Considering the figures in the GEAR household Survey (SDD 1978a Table 9.2), in the year 1977/78 only 4% of households attended community council meetings. An alternative source of information dissemination was required. The GEARcentre provided this link, although many councillors saw it as threatening their traditional role. The overall information structure was also designed with the concern of being able to absorb feedback. The GEARcentre was an essential component of that design.

These then were the basic network patterns which, it was hoped, would develop. The trend in multi-organisational design is towards liason but with the retention of individual powers. In practice this certainly appears to be the case with GEAR. In order to make such a system work, careful consideration needed to be given to the development of information flows to support inter-authority decision-making.

It appears that this was not thought through in GEAR. The project seems to be caught between the common problems of multi-organisational design - the retention of individual powers and the support of the multi-organisation. Yet, as Harris and Scott point out,[3] multi-organisations suffer from four problems: 1. participatory bodies are unwilling to abandon individual powers; 2. it is unlikely that all participants will have equal power, allowing the most powerful to force decisions; 3. there is the question of how much control organisations delegate to the multi-organisation; 4. the effectiveness and delegation of control depends on a shared appreciation of a common task.

Doubt about clear goals for the GEAR project have already been raised, but as Harris and Scott observe, using the analysis of Friend and Yewlett, the process of "Partisan Mutual Adjustment", leads to the emergence of common ground for decision-making and resolution of conflict even though the basic aims and values of participants may differ. Stemming from the appreciation of a common task is the degree of commitment of participants to the task of multi-organisations. To do this, multi-organisations are likely to limit proposals to those which are sure to retain the interests of the participants. By stimulating communications, a multi-organisation can improve the common perception of interest. The role of reticulist identified by Power (in Harris and Scott 1974) is a function set up in this case to improve the networks of communication. Through better communication flows, decision-making processes may be improved. To make decisions, power is involved. If the representative body, seen as a prerequisite to a multi-organisation, lacks power then it will be no more than an advisor, a medium of communication and a means of maintaining a common appreciation of the task.

All these criticisms relate to the multi-organisation that is GEAR. The process of decision-making in the project appears as non-rational in terms of the problems existing in the area. The reluctance of the participating agents to give up certain powers has prevented the SDA from fulfilling its role as reticulist and co-ordinator. Thus the project has suffered from not having a representative body which had any identifiable powers. It has been suggested to the author, that when the project was initiated, the SDA had the chance to take the power that was available in order to develop the organisational structure shown earlier, (Fig. 4.1). The Region and District were so disorganised after local government re-organisation, they could not have resisted the SDA taking power. This failure, couched in terms of the biggest mistake the SDA made, has to be seen against the fact that the Director of the Agency had not, as then, been appointed. It was also suggested that had a hierarchy been created, the running of the project may have been improved. However, as each participant came to be regarded as an equal partner, the documents produced all seek to obtain the consensus that would have been expected.

For these reasons, the actual working model of the organisational structure differs from the model as it was proposed in the Working Document (SDD 1976) (Fig. 4.1). The model differs in one key area and this has important effects upon the flow of information, (Fig. 4.2) The co-ordinating and management role of the SDA is removed, leaving the four main participants as equal partners. This reinforces the individual power of each participant with respect to the multi-organisation. The pattern of information flow changes in that there now develops a two-way flow of technical information between the Consultative Group and each participant. The alteration in the relative position of the nodes in the information network caused by the loss of the management role of the SDA, allows the input of information by the various participants into the Consultative Committee to assume greater importance and

Fig 4.2 Information flows – Actual G.E.A.R. Working Organisation
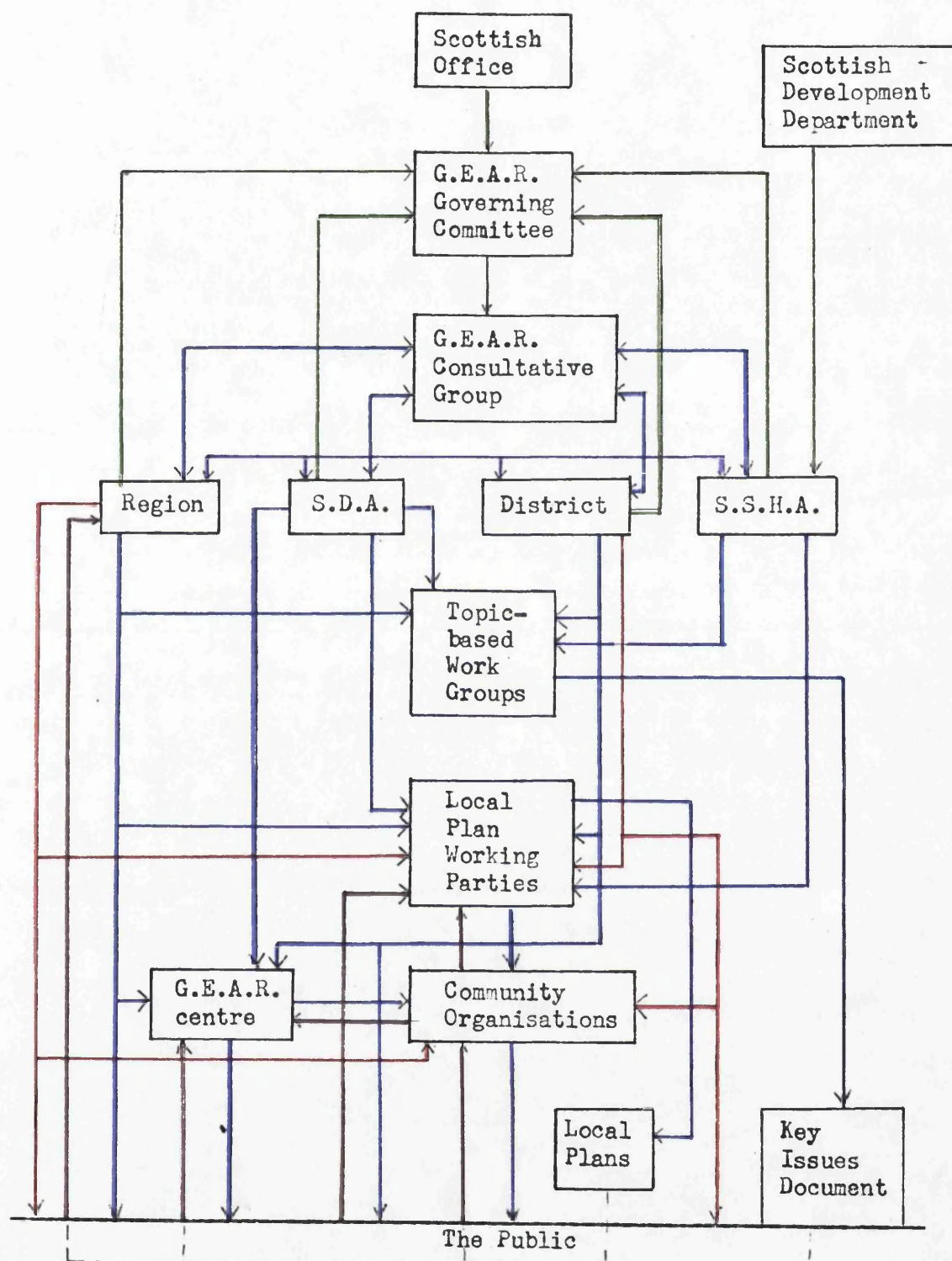
Key:

——— Technical (vert.)	——— Political
——— Technical (horiz.)	——— Informal
——— Administrative (vert.)	——— Feedback
——— Administrative (horiz.)	

individuality. This also affects dissemination in that information no longer needs to travel via the SDA. Since the pressure of co-ordination has been removed, participants are more likely to argue their own case, this having two implications for the multi-organisation. First, it is likely to be divisive, setting participants apart from each other, reducing links to informal levels and so reducing the amount of information passing between them. Second, the organisation with least statutory power, in this case the SDA, is likely to have a very much diminished role. With specific reference to GEAR, the SDA's only function (excluding its economic role) appears to be that of co-ordinator of participation exercises. The effect upon information is that it becomes very much more internal, relating only to the needs of individual participants. Information of this nature makes effective decision-making even more problematic.

Each participant has its own system of information dissemination. The type of information passed and the effectiveness of the process of dispersal and feedback in both structural and behavioural terms must be analysed in terms of generating participation.

The first system of information dissemination to be dealt with is that employed by the SDA. Figure 4.3 shows in diagramatic form the lines of information flow, both as dissemination and feedback, which can be expected to emerge. The diagram also indicates the relationship of the other participants to the SDA's network. In relating information dissemination to citizen participation, there are three important nodes, where, for the SDA, provision of information is crucial - the Local Plan Working Parties, to community councils and to the GEARcentre. It appears that the links with community councils are especially important.

The problem the SDA faces as a provider of information in stimulating participation is that it deals with policy proposals at a general level and leaves the details to other participants. These

Fig. 4.3 Information flows - SDA based.

Fig. 4.3 Information flows - SDA based.

Key:

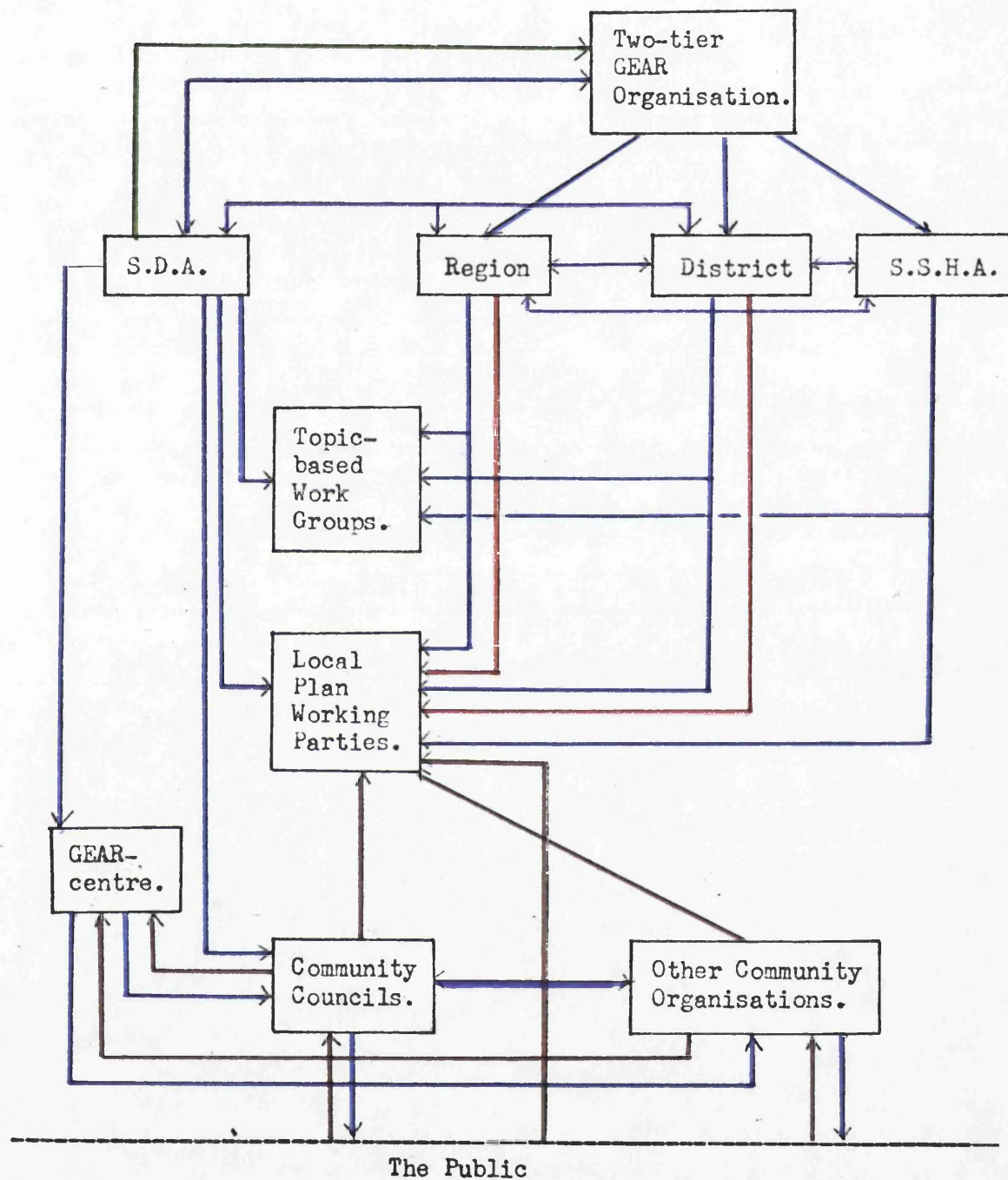|		
———	Technical (vertical)	——— Political
———	Technical (horiz.)	——— Informal
———	Administrative (vert.)	——— Feedback
———	Administrative (horiz.)	

general proposals make it very difficult for people to become involved or even to make comments. The Agency is aware of these problems and recognises the fact that the other groups are more likely to get feedback. Therefore at Local Plan Working Parties the information input and role played by the SDA is minimal since at this level, individual details are more important than general proposals.

At GEARcentre also, the Agency has to deal at too broad a level to have any major impact. Enquiries at the centre tend to be directed more towards the Region and District representatives, although the manager of the centre is an SDA official. As an exercise in participation the centre is a good idea. Figures from the Household Survey (SDA 1978a Table 9.1) show that 23% of households in Bridgeton, the area in which the centre is sited, have visited the centre, whilst only 1% from Shettleston and Tollcross have visited. Thus a new centre is to be opened in Shettleston. There have been criticisms of the centre as appearing too grandiose from the public. Many have stated that the image of the centre frightens people away as does the technical language of the officials, although this is less of a problem now. However the centre is a good idea, but improvements could be made.

The SDA also provide information to community councils. Again the information is couched at a general level, dealing with overall proposals. One of the criticisms about the project is that there is an information overload facing community councils and that they are unable to cope. The SDA must ask itself if it is providing information that is relevant.

These problems are intensified by the methods of information presentation. The SDA have used public meetings and glossy documents to present their information. There is also a proposals to establish a group with representatives of community councils which would meet to consider proposals at an earlier stage in order to incorporate public

opinion at a stage which is meaningful. In relation to public meetings, it is time that the effectiveness of these were seriously questioned. There have been too many public meetings in the area. People are getting fed up having to attend if they want to find out anything. These meetings rarely produce a two-way flow of communication so their usefulness to the various agencies is limited. Feedback is difficult to generate at public meetings. Glossy documents, such as "Key Issues" (SDD 1978b) are a good method of disseminating information. If the balance between the use of technical terms and everyday language is correct, then feedback may well result.

The measurement of feedback is a problem. Simple measures relate to the numbers of people attending public meetings, using the centre and enquiries from community councils to the SDA. However, the impressions gained are two-fold. Firstly, people are not aware of the central role the SDA has in organising participation and secondly, the SDA itself appears altruistic when looking for feedback in that it provides information at a general level, but expects the fruits of its work to be picked by the other participants.

In a structural sense, the SDA model of dissemination is very simple. It appears as very direct, giving the impression of knowing exactly who it is dealing with. This could be its biggest problem. Its view could be too narrow. SDA provides information at only three points. Figures have shown (SDD 1978a Table 9.1) that only 4% of households have had a member in attendance at community council meetings, 5% at local plan working parties and 5% at GEARcentre. Given a certain degree of overlap, the SDA process of dissemination is dealing with a very small percentage of the total population. Some remedy to broaden its base is required. On the positive side, the small number of nodes through which information has to pass could reduce the effect of sifting and editing allowing information to appear less distorted.

Much of the efficiency of information dissemination stems from the personalities involved in the relevant system. Feedback is a means of measuring this efficiency but it has to be allied to subjective opinion. The SDA are selective in the information they provide, different criteria being used for selection depending on where the information is flowing to. Thus the representative at GEARcentre is likely to receive a different type of information, which would then be subject to another level of editing prior to being passed to the public, from that received by community councils or available at Local Plan Working Parties. Subjectively the SDA representative at GEARcentre appears as a good transmitter of information but the efficiency of the process has to depend upon the ability of community representatives to receive, assimilate, carry and transmit information at local group level.

Overall, the following features can be drawn from the SDA's system of information dissemination:

1. the fewer the nodes, the less the degree of information distortion;

2. The closer the information gets to the public, the less useful it appears;

3. It could be argued that the SDA are trying to build participation from generalities down rather than using details as the basis;

4. From interviews, the impression gained was that the SDA was not very sympathetic to suggestions from local groups.

The second system of information dissemination to be looked at is that of Strathclyde Region. Figure 4.4 shows the diagramatic outline of the Region's system including the potential for feedback. The disseminating system is automatically made more complicated than that of the SDA by the presence of a political node and channels, plus those nodes required when dealing at a detailed level. The important area for

Fig 4.4 Information flows - Regional Council based

Fig 4.4 Information flows - Regional Council based

The Public
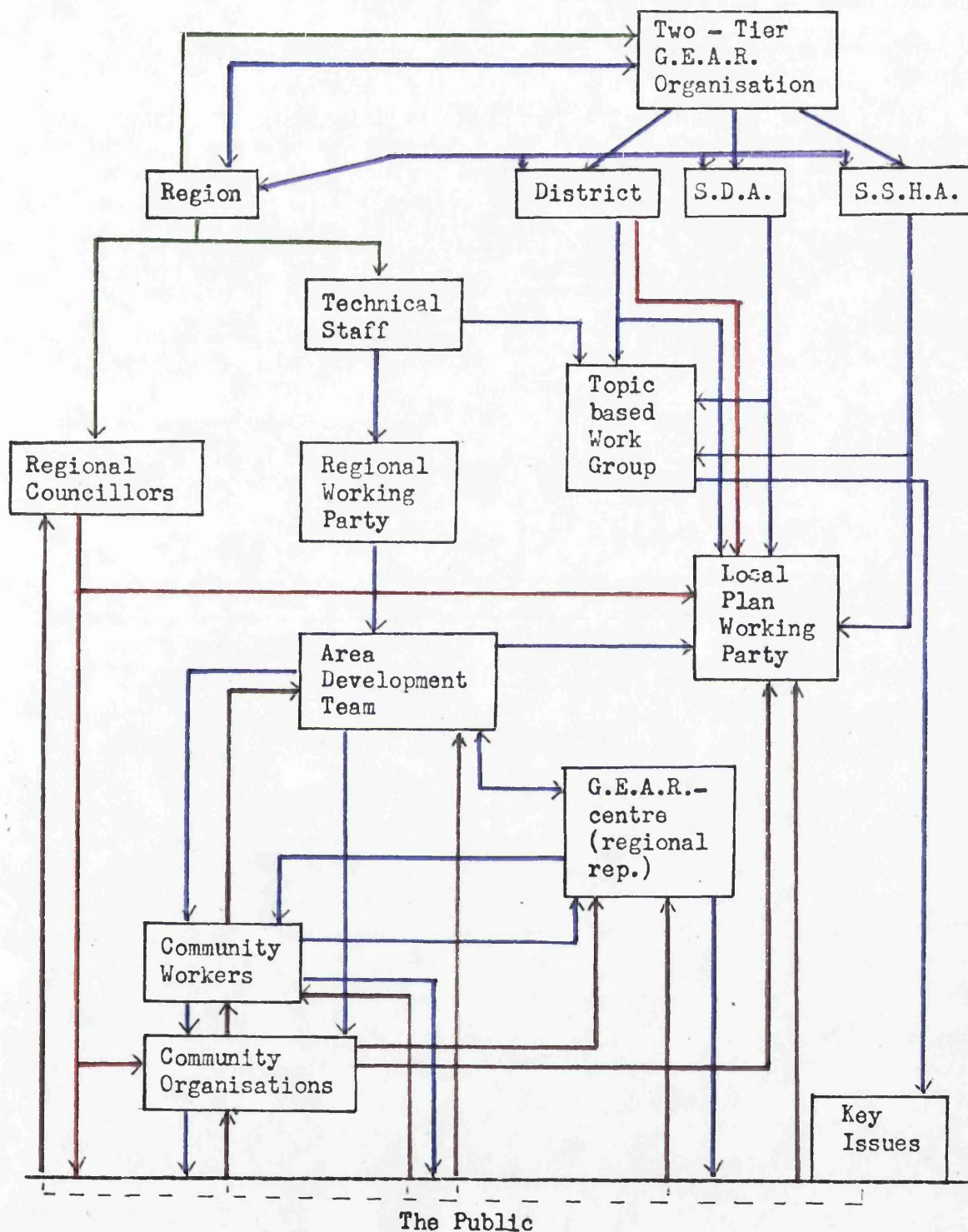
Note: Regional Working Party combines members of all departments
       involved in G.E.A.R.

Key: ——— Technical (vert.)
          ——— Technical (horiz.)
          ——— Administrative (vert.)
          ——— Administrative (horiz.)

          ——— Political
          ——— Informal
          ——— Feedback

information dissemination is the triangular link between the Area Development Team, the Regional representative at GEARcentre and the practicing community workers. The Region is faced with potential feedback on five fronts - the councillor, community workers, the representative at GEARcentre, the technical staff of the Area Development Team and the Local Plan Working Parties. There are therefore two distinct legs for the passage of information; political and technical.

The Region deals at detailed level with functions like social work, leisure and recreation, shopping and transport, therefore the feedback it receives relates to these issues. As a result, the role played by the Region depends upon the topic involved.

The role of the Regional Councillor in providing information in GEAR appears unclear. Appendix Two has given conflicting opinions about how local people see their councillor's role. Councillors pass information both to community organisations and directly to the public, but it tends to be only individuals who use the latter channel for feedback and not specifically for GEAR issues. In community organisations, the councillor appears to act as an advisor and in this sense often guides community organisations to technical officials who could be more helpful. No particular community organisation is favoured by the councillor but the problem of time could well restrict his helping certain groups. The Regional Councillor also has an information input into the Local Plan Working Party of his constituency. Councillors usually present information orally and as advice rather than as potential action. Councillors are seen by many as the final resort in solving a problem when feedback through technical channels is seen not to work.

On the political leg of the Region's information dissemination system, the structural links are very simple. The councillor relates directly to the public thus creating only one potential barrier to

dissemination. Studies of attitudes of councillors[4] have shown them to play a gatekeeping role in relation to feedback and an editing role when relating to the process of dissemination. Therefore, one is led to question the way in which councillors deal with information. The simple link may, in fact, have a greater effect upon the distortion of information than a leg with a greater number of nodes. Again it depends upon the personality of the individual involved. When interviewed, councillors responded in two ways: on the one hand they pass on all the information they receive and on the other hand they see selection of what to pass as necessary. There is a tendency for councillors to be wary of the concept of participation and the willingness to provide information is a manifestation of this latent fear. However, they see no threat from participation as it has developed in GEAR.

The technical branch of the Regional network is much more complicated. Five potential nodes can be passed before the public receives information. The possibility is that increased distortion takes place. Information emerges from the policy-making level of the council and is distributed to the various technical departments. The Region has a Working Party which consists of representatives from all the departments involved in GEAR, its function being co-ordination, meeting every four months. The Area Development Team is provided with information from this Working Party and is in contact with those persons employed by the Region who work in the GEAR area, - the representative at GEAR centre and the community workers - creating an important triangular link. The Area Development Team, meeting monthly, ensures that at least one member has contact with each of the community councils and significantly active tenants' associations. This provides an important source of potential feedback as are the community workers and the representative at the centre. Through this system there are a variety of available opportunities for feedback, both from individuals and community groups.

The function of the community worker is to take information closer to
the public and make it more comprehensible. In this way, apart from
the standard representation at public meetings, the Region can provide
information by discussion at an individual group level. One of the
advantages of the system adopted by the Region is that it combines
details of everyday importance with a means of getting information about
these details to the public. When interviewed, one councillor clearly
stated that he considered the attempts, by the technical staff of the
Region in presenting information, to be fair in that modern techniques
were used. However the problems of cost was mentioned. The councillor
suggested that by using local teachers as communicators of information
it would get over the problem of facing people with attitudes they had
never experienced previously. In further analysis of questionnaire
responses, the Region tended to receive a lot of praise about the way in
which it dealt with enquiries and problems. This would suggest that the
system has the potential to engender feedback. However, because there
are a large number of nodes on the technical side, there must be doubt
about how far into the organisational structure that feedback can
permeate. It appears advantageous to have nodes close to the ground,
but higher up the network the behavioural problems are clear. The
behavioural tendencies of councillors have already been mentioned.
Subjectively, those members of the Region interviewed appeared to be
good transmitters of information and receivers of feedback, but the
fact that they are subject to another level of editing makes
information flow efficiency difficult to assess.

The third system of information dissemination to be analysed is
that of Glasgow District Council. The District, which has probably
the weakest system of dissemination of the four main agencies, appears
to be making no attempt to improve this situation and has been severely

criticised by other agencies about its approach to participation in general and presentation of information specifically. Criticism of this order is justified in that the District deals with one of the most important problems facing the area - housing. Of all issues in GEAR, housing is perhaps the one which could stimulate greatest public involvement. Evidence for this is shown by the success Housing Associations have had in the area.

The public has four nodes through which to direct feedback, the Local Plan Working Party, direct to technical staff, directly to councillors or to councillors via community representatives, and through the GEARcentre. These are shown in Figure 4.5. Like the Region, there are two legs of dissemination - technical and political. The Local Plan Working Party appears to be the main concession the technical leg of the District has made to the process of information dissemination and it is central to the District Council's attempt at public involvement.

As with the Region, councillors have direct links with the public as well as inputs into Local Plan Working Parties and Community Organisations. Interviews have shown that feedback about the project to councillors comes from community organisations and not from individuals. Again, as with the Region, the District councillor acts as an advisor to local groups. As Dearlove has pointed out, councillors have definite notions of which groups to treat sympathetically or otherwise.[5] In interviews with councillors representing the GEAR area it was clear that since community councils were posing no threat to traditional power relations, they were received sympathetically. The behavioural aspect of the councillors means of dissemination can again be seen to equate with that of the Regional Councillors, the magnitude of gatekeeping or blockages being difficult to assess.

Fig 4.5 Information flows – District Council based
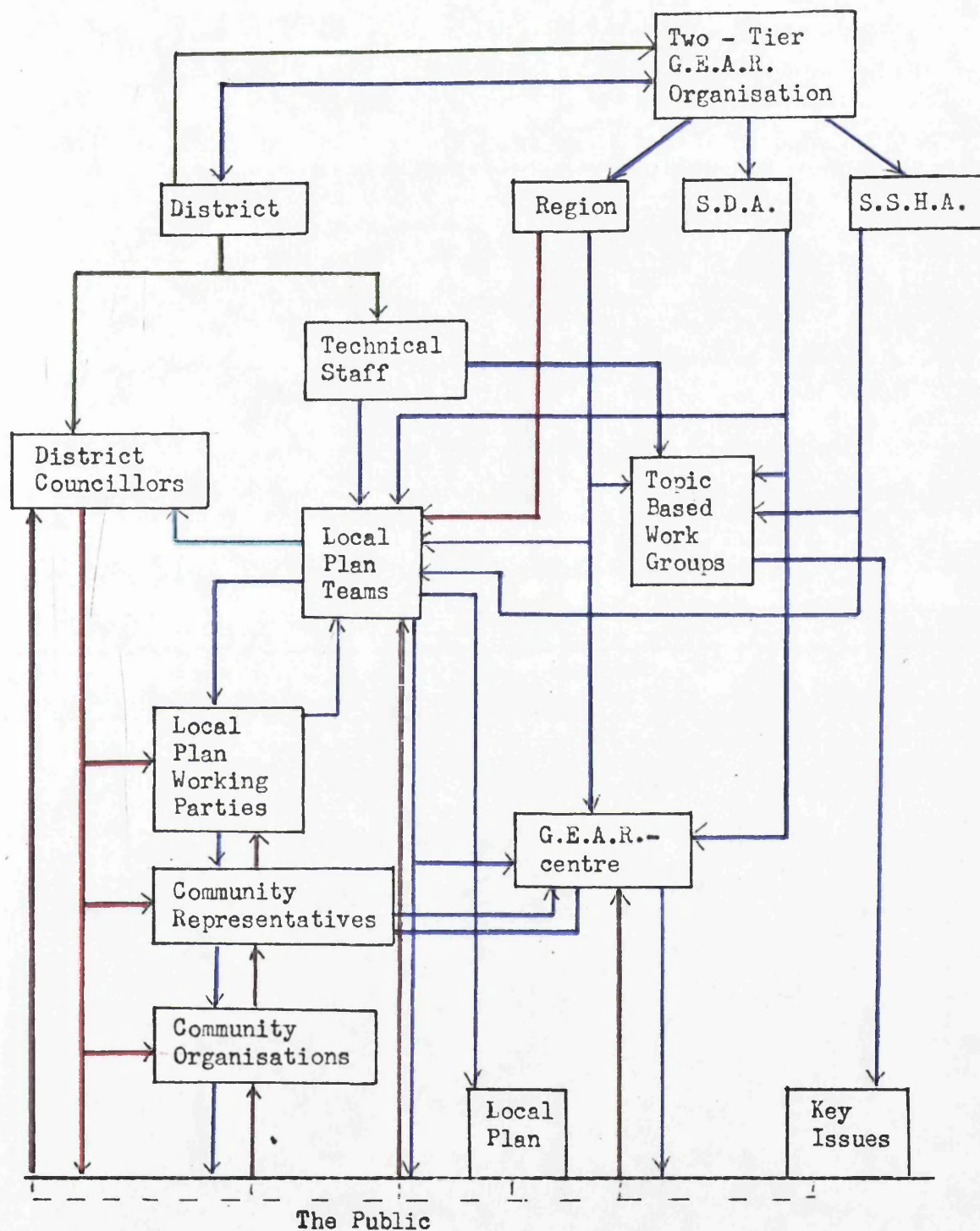
Note: For the District Council, the Local Plan Working Party is central.

Key:

———— Technical (vert.)   ———— Political
———— Technical (horiz.)   ———— Feedback
———— Administrative (vert.) ———— Informal
———— Administrative (horiz.)

The technical leg of the District system is itself quite simple. Information flows from senior technical staff to teams concerned with a local plan area. They in turn provide an information input at Local Plan Working Party level as well as providing information directly to the public. Therefore, before the public receives information, it has been subject to two technical barriers. Since the Local Plan Working Party is subject to feedback, the Local Plan itself may require alteration prior to final publication, upon which more feedback may be generated. The extent to which Local Plan Teams alter their proposals can be used as a measure of the efficiency of feedback.

Local Plan Working Parties do not appear as formal as public meetings. The mode of information presentation began with the official survey document for discussion and developed into the Local Plan. The District also held an exhibition of proposals at GEARcentre, but this was poorly attended. Attempts were made to keep the meetings on a regular basis but this failed partly due to the demands made on the public to produce input in documentation form. The rationale behind this was that if the officials had to prepare documents for the meetings then so too did the public. Little wonder people lost interest.

One interviewee has commented that when Local Plan Working Parties were first initiated and attendances were higher than they are now, the District were so badly prepared in terms of presentation, they did not use a microphone in a meeting of three hundred people! Despite a figure of 5% for households attending Local Plan Working Party meetings (SDD 1978a Table 9.1) the impression the District gives is that it is satisfied with the Working Party system and that alterations have not been considered. There still exists the tendency at Local Plan Working Parties for the District representatives to become overly involved in technical details which are not understood. One official stated that

there is a feeling sometimes that people do not understand. Another
commented in relation to the question of feedback, that it may be
ignored if "the planners" did not consider it relevant. Relevant to
who?

The District also provide an information source at GEARcentre.
However not wishing to be critical of individuals, the representative
is a relatively minor planning official compared with the representatives
of the Region and the SDA. This reflects the lack of commitment by the
District to providing information. Since the bulk of enquiries directed
at the District representative are on housing matters it would be more
sensible to have a higher powered housing official to bring rep-
resentation to an equal level.

Structurally, it appears that community involvement by the
District is not encouraged early enough in the process. The Working
Party system could function more profitably if there was a community
input at Planning Team level.

In discussions with District representatives and officials,
communication was found to be very difficult. They appeared very much
on edge afraid of what might be said or asked. A subjective assessment
made by the author would suggest that these are distinct blockages in
the information dissemination system of the District, and as transmitters
of information the officials are decidedly weak being highly selective.
As receivers, it has already been indicated that their notions of what
is correct dominates, thus acceptable feedback has to conform to these
pre-conceived ideas.

The SSHA is the last of the main agencies whose system of
information dissemination is to be studied. The most notable feature
about the SSHA is how it has developed its own system in relative
isolation from the other participants, especially the SDA. What links

that do exist are very tenuous and are through necessity rather than design. Figure 4.6 is a diagramatic outline of its system of information dissemination. The SSHA has been praised for its method of consultation and liason with the public. The main area of concern is between the officials in the area office and the members of the Tenants Representative Committees, (TRC). Although it does have links with Local Plan Working Parties, its interests are much more unitary.

The pattern of information dissemination begins with a public meeting, called after an extensive publicity campaign, and used as an introduction to the Association. N o feedback is expected at this stage. In relation to rehabilitation, schemes are usually split into phases and a TRC elected for each phase. Although area officers outline basic proposals, decisions are made in each phase. The TRC is given the responsibility for gathering local feedback. Since it is a small area being dealt with, most people are likely to know each other and are more able to come forward with their ideas. These are then taken back to the SSHA and discussed with technical advisors who can then decide upon the structural feasability of local ideas. In an attempt to keep the flow of information running smoothly the SSHA has tried to keep meetings as informal as possible so that people do not feel inhibited, it has tried to incorporate as many local ideas as possible, a local official is available on the site of rehabilitation two days a week and they have tried to encourage the chair persons of the respective TRC to run the meetings.

Initially the SSHA dealt at a very technical level but found this not to be successful. Now they provide only basic information of relevance and are having more success. Information is usually presented in brochure form, which are cheap to produce and easy to read, whilst there is a permanent exhibition on display at the area office.

Fig. 4.6 Information flows – SSHA based.
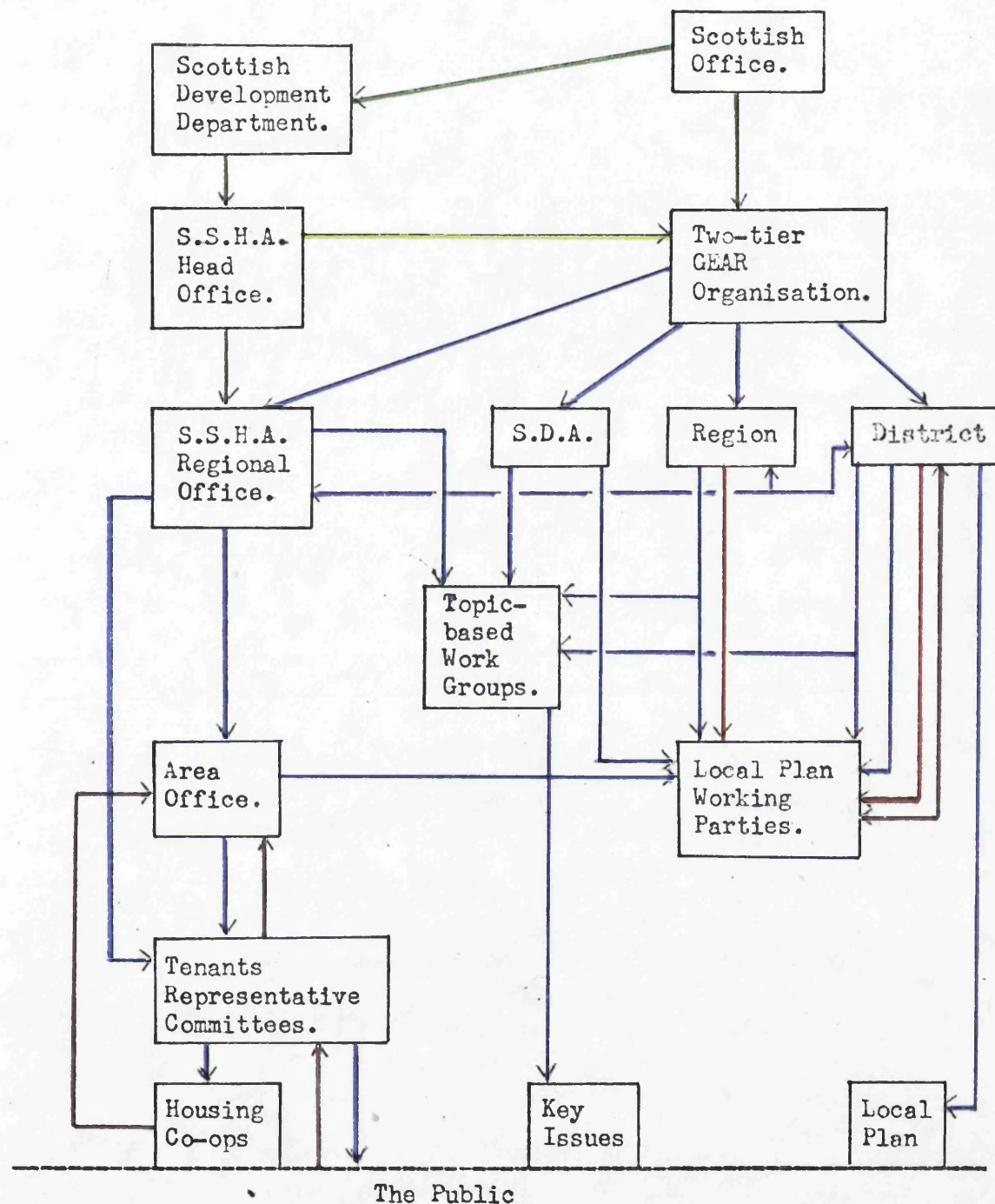
Note: A tenants representative committee is formed for each phase of development, i.e. each close (set of stairs).
The development of housing co-ops is actively encouraged.

Key:

——— Technical (vert.)	——— Political
——— Technical (horiz.)	——— Informal
——— Administrative (vert.)	——— Feedback
——— Administrative (horiz.)	

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It is possible to point to several reasons why the information system of the SSHA has been successful. On the sides of both the public and officials, people know who they are dealing with. In a structural sense, there is no passage of information through nodes to get the information to where it is needed. Information is therefore getting to these people who specifically require it and is not spread generally throughout the area. The SSHA are concerned with housing at a small scale level, dealing with relatively few people at a time. It is easier to get information to all relevant parties. The system also works on a day to day process so there are no long gaps between the receipt of information thus retaining interest. Since information that is provided is all relevant, the SSHA officials must be selective. In this situation, selectivity is more acceptable since there is a powerful belief that the SSHA not only provide better housing management than the District but better houses too. Overall, there is less suspicion in the GEAR area towards SSHA officials than there is toward officials of the other agencies. The SSHA representatives are seen to be more adept at transmitting information and more able to act upon information received. This goes to show that in a project where the public are supposed to be involved, confidence in those taking part is essential. Confidence in the SDA, the Region and the District must be in doubt. From the study of the information dissemination systems of each of the four participants, it is possible to build up a picture of where feedback is likely to occur within the individual agencies. It is as follows:-

SDA: GEARcentre; Community Councils; Local Plan Working Parties

Strathclyde Region: GEARcentre; all Active Community Organisations; Local Plan Working Parties; Technical Officers (Area Development Team); Local Councillors

<u>Glasgow District Council</u>:   GEARcentre;   Interested Community

Organisations;   Local Plan Working Parties;   Technical Officers

(Local Plan Teams);   Local Councillors

<u>SSHA</u>:   Area Office;   Tenants' Representative Committees.

This shows three things: 1. the variety in the number of nodes

available for feedback from certain agencies;   2. successful

information does not necessarily require a large number of nodes able

to accommodate feedback;   3. it shows that power lies with the

statutory bodies since the provision of a node for feedback is

dependent upon the agency's acceptance of its necessity and to its

perception of the threat the new node will have upon the existing

balance of power. Thus it could be argued, that nodes only exist where

their chances of influence is small. Unless people are made aware of

the different functions of each node, then the level of participation

is likely to be affected. Not enough use is made of feedback however.

Organisational structures often constrain local action. Inter-

organisational processes of the authorities are not set up to encourage

information flow between relevant departments and committees. Thus

local appreciation of the situation is lost.

One final problem in constructing a model of information

dissemination is in guaging how efficient community representatives

are in spreading the information they receive among their groups. This

is very much of a behavioural problem and depends on the individual, so

no general statements can be made. What is required is an in-depth

case study of a community organisation. The advantages these rep-

resentatives have is in their ability to speak the local language and

in their usual high standing within the community they represent. But,

they can only transmit what they receive and what they understand.

By taking the information flows identified and by accounting for the behavioural problems that exist; it is possible to construct a local model of information dissemination. Figure 4.7 shows how much more complicated such a model is compared to the theoretical model floated in the second chapter. There are so many more inputs, official, political and community than the theoretical model proposed.

The model does indicate the number of blockages faced by information through filtering, editing and barriers, both as policy and feedback. It also indicates which type of information passes through which node. It if could be assessed how each node reacts this would provide valuable data on which information suffers greatest distortion. The most effective feedback can be assessed in terms of coming closest to points of decision-making. In the case of GEAR, it appears that feedback entering the SSHA area office equates best with this. It also appears that by bringing the points of decision-making closer to the public, then even a minor degree of feedback would have an important effect on decision-making. This being an alternative to involving the public in the higher echelons of decision-making. The SSHA model must also receive credit for attempting to engender a learning process into the act of consultation by persuading local people to run meetings. This can be seen as the delegation of responsibility. Information on housing and general policy proposals tends to predominate. It is hard to assess which information travels fastest but replies have suggested that general ideas from the SDA, since they have the machinery and are not dealing in detail, can be very quick. However this information tends to slow down when it reaches community representatives in favour of more detailed information on housing, shopping facilities and employment.

The most effective channels need not be those with least nodes. Effectiveness depends on speed, lack of distortion and accuracy.

Fig 4.7 Overall model of information dissemination in G.E.A.R.
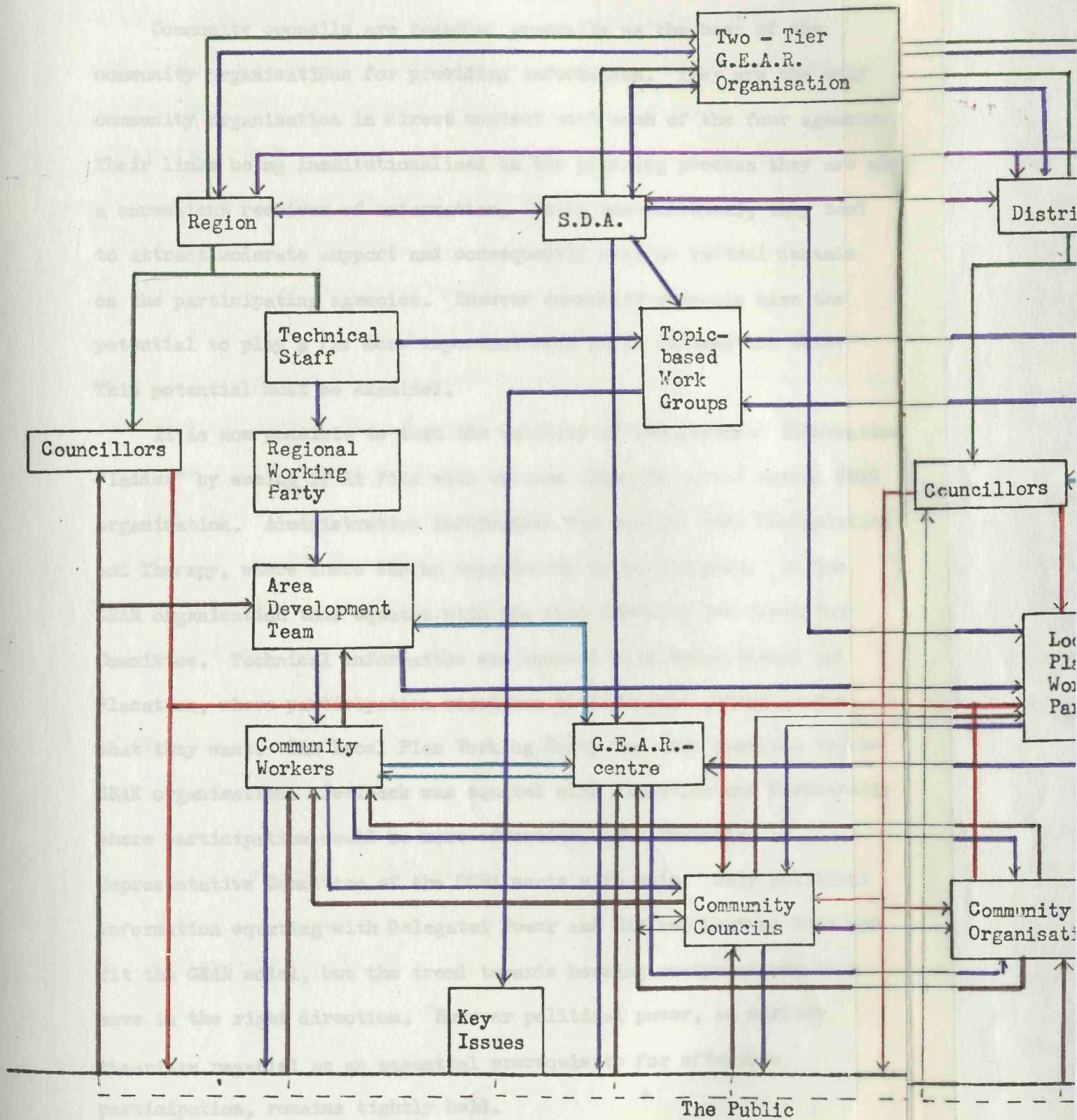
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Key
Issues

The Public

Key: ——— Technical (vert.)   ——— Administrative (vert.)   —— Politi
      ——— Technical (horiz.)   ——— Administrative (horiz.)   —— Inform

Again the model would suggest that the SSHA component provides the most effective channels.

Community councils are regarded generally as the best of the community organisations for providing information. They are the only community organisation in direct contact with each of the four agencies. Their links being institutionalised in the planning process they are also a convenient receiver of information. Being non-political, they tend to attract moderate support and consequently make no radical demands on the participating agencies. However community councils have the potential to play a far more important role as an information node. This potential must be examined.

It is now possible to test the validity of the proposed information "ladder" by seeing if it fits with various elements in the overal GEAR organisation. Administrative information was equated with Manipulation and Therapy, where there was no opportunity to participate. In the GEAR organisation this equates with the role taken by the Governing Committee. Technical information was equated with Consultation and Placation, where participation stretches to officials asking people what they want. The Local Plan Working Party has this function in the GEAR organisation. Feedback was equated with Placation and Partnership where participation could be more effective. The Tenant's Representative Committee of the SSHA meets with this. Only political information equating with Delegated Power and Citizen Control does not fit the GEAR model, but the trend towards housing co-operatives is a move in the right direction. However political power, as earlier theorists regarded as an essential prerequisite for effective participation, remains tightly held.

The importance of this ladder in relation to the empirical study is in its identification of various levels of participation in a local system depending on the type of information available and that the type of information available depends on how much power is delegated. So when one talks of receiving information, the nature of that information can be equated with expected levels of participation. Continued provision of technical information for instance without the acknowledgement of feedback, will never stretch the participatory boundaries further than consultation.

In conclusion, it has to be stated that to develop an effective model of information dissemination far more detail is required than was assembled for this study. The model developed goes some way to providing a guide to the problems, but detailed case studies of specific organisations are required. Information dissemination in the GEAR project can nevertheless be recognised as inefficient. Given the present situation in which structural and behavioural alterations are likely to be minimal how can information provision be improved?

Notes

1. Harris (1976) p.32

2. Ibid p.35

3. Harris and Scott (1974) p.34

4. Rhodes (1975) p.47

5. Dearlove (1973) p.169

Information Dissemination

- proposals for improvement in GEAR

Throughout this study, the emphasis has been on the relationship between information dissemination and levels of participation; the argument being that the general low level of participation found in areas like the east-end of Glasgow is in part caused by the ineffectiveness of processes of dissemination by the agencies involved in the local area. As Goldsmith and Saunders argue, "Information is one of the basic pre requisites of participation ..... the public needs a variety of pieces of information if they are to be able to participate."[1]

However, it would be naive to assume that through the provision of information alone improved levels of information could be guaranteed. But what can be assumed is that by providing a better system of information dissemination, more people are likely to have access to the type of knowledge which, given sufficient quantity and quality, would enable them to participate if they wished.

The study of the GEAR project underlines the need for improved information flow, but there are two very different approaches to be considered. A distinction has to be made between improved information provision and improved information presentation. It is argued here that the important differences between these approaches lies in their relationship with the concept of power. As argued in a previous chapter, information is a function of power so that whoever holds power in society effectively controls the output of information and by doing so controls the availability of knowledge and in this case the level of citizen participation. The control of information is achieved through a series of barriers and blockages, outlined in Chapter Two and identified in Chapter Three. To improve information provision, one has

to remove these barriers and strengthen the suppliers of information who are weak. This approach ultimately questions the distribution of power in society and can thus be seen as a conflict model. In relation to the GEAR project, there are two methods of breaking these barriers:

1. the structural method, which seeks to alter the positions of various nodes, improve coordination and even to alter the mode of participation and,

2. the behavioural method, which seeks through a process of education to enlighten certain people about the value perceptions and social expectations of others.

The second approach, that of enhancing information presentation is perhaps the most common method of improving communications in that it is consensus oriented, accepting the information available as given and does not question the distribution of power.

It is the intention of this chapter to deal with each of these methods in turn - structural, behavioural and presentation - relating them to the perceived problems of information dissemination in GEAR.

The structural problems relating to information dissemination in GEAR must be concerned with the large number of nodes and their relative positions in the organisational framework. The total number of official nodes capable of absorbing feedback is nine and for the traditional "non-joiner" this is increased by a variety of community organisations which exist to represent public opinion. So to whom does the man in the street go if he has a problem? The fact that few people are able to distinguish the functions of the various official agencies and local organisations, borne out by people approaching regional councillors with district questions, merely serves to confuse and not to enlighten as they should. It can therefore be argued that there are too many official agencies and community organisations competing in the GEAR area for the small amount

of feedback that is presently available in order to justify claims of being responsive agencies. By acting in an individual capacity, agencies are simply scratching at the surface of participation failing, due to inter-agency competition rather than cooperation, in their duty to the public and wasting their own resources in the area due to function duplication. These problems can best be solved in GEAR through a combination of rationalisation and coordination. No phrase expresses as frequent a complaint about the GEAR project as lack of coordination. No suggestion for reform is more common than "what we need is more coordination", yet the word coordination has a deceptively simple appearance. The SDA were seen as overall coordinators but have so far failed to coordinate. But to achieve an improvement in information dissemination and participation it is necessary for one body to establish itself as information/participation coordinator. From the study carried out, it can be judged that the District are neither in a position nor appear willing to develop the system of participation required. The Region has the organisational structure for the task but it is doubtful if it would be willing to commit itself to greater involvement in the project and there is also the problem of existing friction between themselves and the District. The SSHA can be ruled out due to its specific concern with housing. This leaves the SDA. The SDA was originally seen as the agency to coordinate participation but the individual approach of the other participants prevented its role being developed. It is now necessary in the interests of participation for the Agency to re-establish its role in a way which rationalises and coordinates.

In terms of rationalisation at an official level, what is required is the substitution of individual processes of participation by a single system under the aegis of the SDA, removing the problem of whom to approach. Excluding the SSHA, the idea would be for a series of small offices

throughout the area staffed by representatives of the remaining three agencies plus a full time local person, to deal initially with enquiries, financed through Urban Aid. There would be no drastic increase in manpower requirements if the SDA were allowed to utilise the existing resources in the area. All feedback and interest in participation would then be channelled through the SDA as would the information coming from the other participants. This would also have the effect of improving coordination at a local level. This idea is not aimed at reducing choice but to increase the simplicity of a public approach. Interested parties will still be able to attend Local Plan Working Parties. In this way, the first set of blockages could be circumvented.

It can be argued that it is undesirable to seek to rationalise community organisations, since they represent such a divergent range of opinion, but coordination is required. This can be encouraged by local voluntary organisations like GCVS who have tried to bring groups together, as well as acting as information providers. It would be advantageous for community groups to know what others are doing and have done in the past, using the learning process of certain groups to better effect. Community councils have an important role to play in this respect. Of all community organisations, community councils are seen by official groups as the most convenient and speedy for the distribution of information and as such they are best suited to act as coordinators of local pressure groups. This approach would certainly give the community a united front with which to tackle the problems of the area, as well as ensuring that information of all sorts penetrated further. The problem of this relates to the non-political stance of the community council which could engender inter-group tensions.

The principle means of overcoming the problem of a series of barriers that exist at official level is to close the gap between the point from where initiatives stem and the public. The various flow charts indicate how large a gap there is and how many filtering elements fill

that gap. At present, community input is confined to the talking stage. What is required is community access to those points where detailed procedures are worked out. This would have the double function of stepping over the various barriers and allowing local people to see how their ideas are treated. The alternative is to allow local people to make the decisions which affect them, within the bounds of policy, but it is doubtful if the information available would allow rational choices to be made. Certainly, during interviews, there appeared no objection to this approach but it is of doubtful practicality given the desire of certain power holders to hang on to their power.

At official level there are still a series of blockages, the most persistent being the gatekeeping role of the councillor. Politically, any attempt to remove this node is a non-starter. This doesn't mean that nothing can be done to slacken the barriers. The approach to getting the councillor to be more sympathetic and a more efficient information disseminating node has to be approached in another way. This is true also of the variety of official nodes which are essential to the functioning of the project but which also constitute barriers. It is often ignored that certain community representatives themselves act unknowingly as barriers too. The problem is how to slacken these. The approach necessary to deal with problems of this nature is behavioural. The arguement for improving information dissemination states that individual values, perceptions and social expectations condition people in the way they select and distribute information. It is argued that in GEAR information passes too many nodes before it reaches the public. In relating this method to that of the structural, it can be said that if there are fewer nodes then information may not be distorted to the same degree, but certain nodes will still make value assessments about that

information. Even if there are no structural alterations, behavioural alterations could lead to better information dissemination.

The behavioural method deals primarily with a process of education for participation, for officials, councillors and for the public especially. The Skeffington report made important references to the role education had to play in participation.[2] However this approach tended to concentrate solely on educating the public and this is also the function of education put forward by Jack and Hampton.[3] But greater emphasis is also required in educating councillors and professionals in the values and expectations of those people for whom they are representing and planning. If this is done, the type of planning which may emerge may well be of a more sympathetic nature, understanding some of the problems and demands various groups make upon the system. The educational system envisaged by Skeffington was a means by which "the public" could be brought round to accept the views of the planners. Unfortunately, the "them and us" mentality still pervades a lot of planning and this has to be removed. Education can be seen as the way to do this. Working with the community calls for developed skills other than those in which planners are professionally trained, but they have to be faced if there is to be more than token involvement. So far, the participation process has been destructive, inducing distrust, low morale and bad relations. Education on all sides is necessary.

Education for the public in participation is still most important. Different sectors of the educational system must be looked at with a view to encouraging the teaching not only of environmental education but also methods of organising, committee forming if the participatory system continues to insist upon the utilisation of the formal committee procedure, the basis of argumentation and so on. At present, schools are most unwilling to adopt these features in the curriculum. If GEAR

can do no more, it ought to pressure schools to adopt these features plus covering the cost of directing extra resources into the schools. Even if various officials were to go into the schools and begin discussions with the pupils it would be a start. Today's schoolchildren are tomorrow's participants. Ask anyone involved in community affairs in GEAR and they will point to the fact of lack of involvement by young people. Information is not getting to the young and feedback is not being received. 31% of the population of GEAR are under 19 years of age,[4] something needs to be done to improve communications with this group.

Schools aren't the only area of education that could be used. Adult Community Education provides another opportunity. The whole question about the role of Community Education is in the balance. At present in GEAR it teaches people how to run community centres and youth clubs. Useful, yes but not as far as it ought to go. Resources have to be channelled into the development of a system of Community Education which provides, in part, the organisational knowledge necessary to participate.

One of the major problems in getting people to participate even if they have adequate information, is the nature of the participatory process. For people never used to being involved in committees and speaking in front of other people, the experience can be traumatic, yet the organisations involved continue to organise meetings in such a way. By educating planners and officials to acknowledge this problem it may be possible to develop alternative modes of participation. Not enough thought has yet been given to the possibility of alternative processes.

The proposals so far have dealt with the attempt at weakening barriers in the area of information availability by structural alterations in the organisational network and by providing the knowledge necessary for

those lacking in the participatory and organisational skills required.
The problems of weakening the barriers in this way are immense. In
fact any perceived threat may induce a greater reaction which could
strengthen the barriers. These are problems which must be dealt with
through time, but the problem that remains and which must be dealt with
more readily is the effective dissemination of available information.

The GEAR Household Survey states that, "In total 48% of respondants
stated that they were aware of the project." (para. 9.2). It goes on,
"The origin of information concerning the project varied considerably.
The main sources were the Press (34%), T.V. (25%) and information from
friends (24%). Only 15% of households learned of the project from
meetings and only 9% from officials." (para. 9.3). These figures serve
to highlight the failure of the present means of information dissemination.
It is necessary in the light of these figures to question why they are so
low and what can be done to improve them.

In preparing a campaign involving the dissemination of information,
the following points have to be kept in mind:

1. The nature of the evidence, information needs will vary
considerably between groups;

2. The medium of presentation, some forms of presentation have
greater psychological impact than others;

3. The language used to present information, use everyday
expressions where possible;

4. The distribution of the audience, the catchment area of some
techniques is limited;

5. Frequency and type of presentation, a variety of methods used
once only is often more successful than a single technique used frequently.

The means which are most commonly used in programmes of citizen
participation are those which occur to the mind most readily, are least

costly, are least demanding on the time and the decision-making responsibilities of the local politicians and their professional staff, and are most conventional and therefore expected by the public. Such means include displays and exhibitions, public meetings, use of leaflets and glossy brochures, the use of questionnaire surveys and information centres. These are in effect exercises in public relations and publicity. They are of little use to the planning process because despite the "staged" face to face interaction, the means of participation employed caters primarily for a one-way flow of information, from the planner to the public. Such a comment does not minimise the significance of the information flow process, because it is realised that little intelligent community feedback can be expected if citizens are not kept informed of the data base from which decisions result. However, the existence of the most simple means of participation is insufficient to ensure a meaningful response will be made.[5]

The principle means of presentation takes four forms:
1. Information Documentation; 2. Exhibitions; 3. Public Meetings; and 4. The Media.

1. <u>Information Documentation</u>: Most local authorities produce a range of documentation which can vary from reports of surveys and statements of policy intention to news-sheets. Cost is often substantial; therefore there is a clear need to ascertain the purpose of each document and the public to which it is aimed. The South Hampshire Technical Unit produced a brochure, a comprehensive handbook and a draft strategy document, thus three "publics" were catered for with a level of detail sufficient to meet their information requirements.[6]

In the Coventry Structure Plan programme, journalists were employed to ensure the mass publicity document was written in suitable style. Some people have argued that it is necessary to positively

discriminate in favour of the information deprived sections of the community and that attention should be directed to their participatory needs.

In GEAR, this means of information dissemination has been weak. What has been published is the "Key Issues" document. A simple, glossy presentation, perhaps too glossy creating the wrong impression. It makes nice easy reading but could be criticised for being too simple and overly general. It was certainly aimed at the public, but its distribution was much wider. It was possible to produce a more detailed document since "Key Issues" stemmed from the Topic-Based Work Groups. It was suggested to the author, that one of the great fears within the project is of committing something to writing. The other important document is the Local Plan. A heavy going, detailed, jargonistic document, and very difficult to read. Little feedback could be expected from the public on this and there is certainly ammunition to support the case for a public version of the Local Plan.

2. and 3.   Exhibitions and Public Meetings, are the most commonly used techniques. Exhibitions need to be presented in an easily understood format and should be located in public places, such as a shopping arcade or even in schools, so as to be accessible to as many as possible. The use of a travelling exhibition has also been investigated. Both exhibitions and public meetings tend to attract the "joiner".

Skeffington favoured the use of exhibitions to encourage communication between planners and the planned. The committee recommended imaginative use of audio-visual aids, however most local authorities try to communicate simply and graphically. Exhibitions should not expect familiarity with planning concepts and language in order for the display to be communicative. Exhibitions may be seen as too obvious a public relations exercise or else as a means of information manipulation.

Static exhibitions are on display in GEAR centre and in the SSHA Area Office. Both combine maps and diagrams with a series of photographs and sketches. They appear reasonably attractive. The District however held an exhibition in the centre which was a total failure, perhaps due to poor pre-publicity.

Of all the methods tested, the public meeting is most traditional and perhaps most ineffective. Public meetings are susceptible to domination by the articulate, the vociferous and the well organised and prepared individuals or groups. They tend also to be very unrepresentative. They may be useful if (a) jargon is suppressed, and there is indications in GEAR that this is happening and (b) if the public seize the opportunity to ask questions. However in most cases the public meeting ends up with the planner telling the public of proposals which generates little or no feedback. Attendances at public meetings are often poor. Studies have shown that attendance varied in Structure Plan exercises between 0.04 and 3.4 per cent. (Stringer and Ewen (1974) L.R.P.2) of potential audiences. For this reason alone, it would appear that public meetings are an inefficient means of participation. It is argued that to be useful, public meetings should be restricted in size, localised and should concentrate on consideration of simple issues, like the SSHA in GEAR. The public meeting is too susceptible to control through restricting information flow and by neutralising creative discussion. The poor attendances reveal the public's interpretation of them.

With the variety of participants in GEAR, a large number of public meetings have been held. Too many public meetings has the effect of reducing interest. GEAR exhibits all the problems outlined and as argued earlier, it is time that the large public meeting was done away with if effective feedback is what is required.

4. **The Media.** (Press, radio and television). Almost 60% of the people in the area knowing about the project received their information through this medium. The local press is a vitally important source of information, and can act as a communications channel by giving space to readers' opinions and experiences. In the GEAR area, a community newspaper is a vital element in the communications machinery. The East End Forum, published by GCVS had the support of all the local groups and the demand was there from the public, yet due to pressure from a certain Regional councillor, the funding for the paper was cut off. This was an inexplicable decision, and one for which there has been no satisfactory answer. Serious questions about the control of information channels have, in the light of this, to be asked.

Immediacy and impact are the main features of radio and television, but generally they have yet to be important publicity channels. However, the features of the media of "going to press" or "going on the air" ought to be taken into account when local authorities release news items. Space in print and on the air is not particularly expensive so that most planning authorities could afford to make use of such publicity opportunities. Television is expensive and unless there is a relevant programme screened it is unlikely to be used.

In GEAR the media has been under-utilised in presenting information and with the demise of East End Forum, has been drastically curtailed. The value of local news sheets can be seen through the publication by Tollcross Housing Association of Tollcross News which is a simple way the housing association has of letting people know what is happening. Even a single page news-sheet available free of charge produced by the GEAR organisation and available from local newsagents would be an important disseminating point.

From this it can be seen that the principle means of information presentation in GEAR is highly inadequate, but what are the alternatives? Aside from not providing any information at all a series of new methods of communications/participation are being attempted which could be applied in GEAR. It is beneficial to indicate these methods. They can be classified in two ways - means of Self Help; Innovative Means.[7]

There appears to be a consensus that new forms of citizen participation are required. The conservative view lies in the development of self-help means of gaining information and of gaining a foothold in the decision-making process. The self-help means which have been developed mostly are (a) self-help manuals, (b) planning aid and (c) task forces.

(a) Manuals fall into three categories - consensus, conflict and negotiation;

(b) Planning Aid is deliberately fashioned to meet the technical requirements of a disadvantaged and largely threatened clientele. Planning Aid agents have three functions: providing information in the planning process, providing advice on how the rights available may be exercised and providing technical expertise;

(c) The use of task forces to compile detailed studies and to produce a report and recommendations for action is becoming a significant means of participation in decision-making.

In most planning systems attempts are being made to provide more effective means of achieving an intelligent dialogue between the planners and the planned. Experimentation is undoubtedly taking place. However, a recurring dilemma is the differential contribution to decision-making of which the particular participants or groups are capable. Groups or individuals have identifiable competences which renders them differentially capable of assuming responsibility in the planning process.

Contributions to decision-making can thus be expected when the
contributions are indispensible.[8]

The Delphi Method, the Nominal Group Method and the Charrette
are three of the techniques used to apply participation in areas where
the previous conditions are prevalent.[9] The techniques have two
common features: each is capable of being used in the conventional
decision-making system of government and each is dependent upon careful
selection of participants.

(a) _The Delphi Method_. This technique is essentially combining
the knowledge and abilities of a diverse group. It is devised to
ameliorate the problems of dominant personalities and the "bandwagon"
effect by providing for anonymity, through the use of postal
questionnaires, for a controlled feedback and for a statistical response.
The principle disadvantage is that it is best suited to participants
who can express themselves well in writing. It is therefore doubtful if
this method could be applied in GEAR.

(b) _The Nominal Group Method_. This technique is designed to
overcome many of the psycho-social problems common to conventional group
meetings. Individuals work in the presence of others but do not interact.
All individuals in the group participate. It attempts to ameliorate such
problems as personal inhibitions, reluctance to express opinions, the ease
of distraction and so on. The technique is designed to give each person
a maximum opportunity to participate. The advantages include the fact
that verbal skill is not essential.

(c) _The Charrette_. This is a means of developing a community plan
by achieving a working relationship of people within the community and
from those outside and by providing a learning environment, to heighten
the awareness of participants. It involves citizens, planners and
politicians. The method has four essential ingredients:[10]

1. a problem to be solved cooperatively;

2. a group of interested citizens willing to cooperate;

3. professional experts to assist;

4. a committment from the prevailing local government power structure to put into effect those plans which emerge from the Charrette.

Thus, it is a decision-making process in which the decisions are made and implemented at community level with the involvement and cooperation of all groups. The technique is not one of mass involvement and could conceivably be applied in the Local Plan Working Party situation.

Of these three innovative approaches, the latter two are worthy of consideration for testing in the GEAR area as an addition to the traditional means of encouraging participation.

It can therefore be concluded, that if any improvements in dissemination are going to take place, they will have to come, in the short term, through new methods of presenting the type of information that is available at present. This may well have the effect of increasing participation but in the form of consultation rather than citizen control. Consultation in itself does not ensure that the voice of the public is listened to. Until there are new methods of presentation able to accommodate a two-way flow of information then the likelihood is that participation will remain low.

The participants have concentrated on public meetings, production of official documents and information centres as principle means of disseminating information. Criticisms have been made against all three of these approaches. However, as a means of presentation they are useful in certain circumstances, but it appears that in GEAR different circumstances in terms of audience type and topic under discussion are not identified clearly enough. If greater emphasis was put on identifying the variety of planning matters then a greater range of

alternative presentations could be developed.

Overall presentation of information in GEAR is weak and limited.
Improved presentation is not only possible, it is essential.

<u>Notes</u>

1. Goldsmith and Saunders (1976) p.29

2. Skeffington (1969) p.47 para. 1X

3. Planning Exchange (1977) p.25

4. SDD (1978a) Table 1.Z

5. Fagence (1977) p.276

6. Stringer and Plumridge (1974)

7. Fagence <u>op. cit.</u> Chap. 7

8. <u>Ibid</u> p.291

9. <u>Ibid</u> Chap. 7

10. <u>Ibid</u> p.301

Conclusion

The conclusion to this study can be considered at two levels -
the general problems of information dissemination and the problems
specifically relating to GEAR. Central to the whole question is the
way in which the trend toward participatory democracy appears to be
encouraged whilst at the same time overall control through access to
power is becoming increasingly centralised. This raises immediate doubts
about the development of an effective system of participatory democracy.
Running through the discussion of information dissemination and
participation, and related to this, is the arguement that networks of
communication are developed in such a way as to prevent a redistribution
of power through the prevention of effective participation. This was the
basic theme of the study and this conclusion has to be seen in these terms.

There are several features this study can bring out in the general
analysis of information dissemination and participation. Despite the
argument that in many cases information dissemination is badly
organised, there is a notable unwillingness among agencies involved to
admit that their respective means of passing information is inefficient.
It would be fair criticism of these agencies to state that they generally
regard lack of involvement as either citizen apathy or satisfaction, and
not a structural problem. It is also fair to state that the disinclination
to seek possible alternative means of communicating with the public
reinforces the already low levels of participation. A further factor is
that the public do not normally perceive the distribution of information
as a problem. Where this study has shown information dissemination to
be a source of potential conflict, the public's attitude tends to be
one of grateful acceptance of what is given. If anything this study seeks
to provide various community groups and voluntary organisations with the
basis by which to question the effect of traditional forms of information

dissemination on levels of participation. At a general level too, the study points to the various positions where information can be modified either for the benefit or more likely otherwise, of local groups. The study points to councillors, area representatives of local authorities and even to community leaders as points at which information flow is altered. The nature of this modification does however require an in-depth study.

It was this that prompted the study of the GEAR area. Where the study started out with the intention of identifying the roles played by various nodes in the dissemination of information, it was soon realised that the level of analysis was too shallow to determine effectively the nature of each of the nodes and that any analysis which took place was necessarily couched in subjective terms. It was concluded that a study in greater detail of perhaps one or two local organisations would be more beneficial in tracing the dissemination of information, but the study carried out provided a valuable introduction to some of the basic concepts and early problems which face such a study.

The study of GEAR has shown that information dissemination was not perceived by the agencies involved, nor by the public, as a problem, despite the very low levels of participation. This allowed the dissemination of information to continue along traditional lines. It is perhaps surprising, given the identification of the area as deprived, both physically and socially and the committment made to public involvement, that no new forms and methods of participation were tried. It appears that the participatory element in the GEAR project was one of those last-gasp political requirements added at the end of an overall scheme and not seen as central as it should have been. It appears that very little thought had been given in providing the information required to stimulate

participation in the area. This would suggest that GEAR was not committed to participation other than as an exercise in consultation. The changes required in the area were never brought to light due to the effective control of information provision and the exclusion of certain groups (e.g. Dalmarnock Action Group) who had identified the need for a radical approach. The form of information dissemination, by channelling information to community councils, encouraged the development of non-political groups whose demands were made in line with these of the power holders. The information which was made available sought to, and has succeeded in containing demands to manageable proportions in terms of political, economic and social considerations.

The nature of the project necessarily encouraged the development of an extremely complex organisational relationship. Such a bureaucratic order had obvious implications for the effective dissemination of information. In many instances it was a case of "the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing". Whether this was used as a conscious method of control or not is unclear, but within the working organisation there was very little indication of formal lines of coordination between the agencies involved. Consequently in many cases information was duplicated and not provided at all in others. Thus the system of information dissemination was not coordinated. There appears to be no formal means of determining what information was made available to which groups, by which agencies. It was not uncommon therefore to hear of instances of a group receiving contradictory information. This certainly appears as a means of preventing participation. The strongly independent nature of the participants in GEAR makes it difficult to perceive how an effective system of information dissemination could be developed. As suggested it may require the government to re-establish the SDA as coordinator. This appears to be the only way of overcoming the control

of information exercised through the bureaucratic mélange.

The construction of a series of diagrammatic models indicates the position, within each individual system, of the crucial nodes, the type of information being dealt with and the quality of dissemination attained. Crucial nodes were identified as persons located at specific points in the system as well as various groups. Their function in terms of disseminating information was not defined effectively since, as stated earlier, at this level of study only a subjective point of view could be put forward. However, the very existence of a whole series of nodes has an effect upon the level of distortion suffered by a variety of information and the speed at which it is passed. The nature of the information being dealt with also affects this process. The study showed that a variety of technical information tended to dominate, the type of information the public found difficult to question. The effect this had on participation was effectively to position the public lower in the hierarchy of power. What is necessary is a reduction in the number of nodes which handle information, but the problem of personal interpretation remains. The study also shows the variation in the models of dissemination, from the most successful, the SSHA, to the least effective, the District. This indicates that it is possible to keep the public well informed. The variation in the type of information available also affects the level of participation. The continued insistence in producing general policy and highly technical information is likely to have the effect of reducing participation. Effective participation can only be encouraged initially through the availability and discussion of small scale items. Only when people are sure of their own security will participation extend to consideration of other issues. GEAR has failed to do this. The SDA do try to provide information but it is of a general nature. The most important provider of detailed information is the District whose

system of dissemination is the poorest. It would make a lot of sense to encourage the District to be more forthcoming in its attitude towards participation.

The presentation of the information that is available is also an effective control on the level of participation. There has been an insistence upon using traditional methods like public meetings despite poor turnout and little response. Alternative methods require to be developed. The insistence upon the formal committee structure has a regressive effect in that few people in the study area know how to organise along these lines. It has been left up to voluntary organisations like GCVS to help local groups form. Perhaps GEAR would have been more successful if it had tried to cover some of these problems.

The learning process is an essential factor in GEAR. More situations should be created to allow local groups the opportunity to coordinate allowing the abilities of one group to help another. Too often information is passed to community councils and not to other groups who often find themselves isolated which limits their ability to act. The study identifies a crucial role for community councils in the future development of the information process. Up until now they have been organisations looking for a function; information pivot could provide them with a more effective role.

Overall, the process of information dissemination as identified in the GEAR area acts as a significant barrier to the development of effective participation. To be effective, participation requires a two-way flow of information and ideas and since there is no suitable means of achieving this in GEAR it can be identified as a problem from which lower socio-economic groups suffer. However it can never be said that the provision of information will ensure participation, but the provision of information is central to further action and as such must be seen as a vital resource.

Many arguments state that access to power is essential for the development of participation, the argument here is that without adequate information, access to that power will never be forthcoming. The control of information must never be seen as absolute, for that would mean giving up hope of better things for poorer sections of society. Greater understanding and better use of information that is available may weaken the barriers to effective political involvement.

approx. 29,000 words
(including appendices)

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                          East End Office

Ms Marjory Cunningham   Secretary, Shettleston and Tollcross Action

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Mrs. Pam Harper   Bridgeton Citizens Advice Bureau; Member

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Mr. William Kennedy   Secretary, Maukinfauld Tennants Association

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Questions and Sample Responses

Since the research carried out involved three levels, local organisations, councillors and officials, I would like to structure this appendix along these lines. Each section will contain a selection of questions used and be followed by samples of responses given.

Section A   Local Organisations

1. Q.   What is the local feeling about G.E.A.R.?

   R1.   Disappointing

   R2.   G.E.A.R. has helped many local people in getting rehoused in their local area.

   R3.   A non-event. An extension of the Forestry Commission.

2. Q.   From which groups/agencies do you get your information? (list given)

   R1.   Community Councils, local ministers and Glasgow Council for Voluntary Services.

   R2.   Regional Council

   R3.   Tenants Associations

3. Q.   Do you get information on a regular basis?

   R1.   No.

   R2.   Local plan information is given prior to the meeting - about twice a year.

4. Q.   Do you exchange information with other local groups?

   R1.   Yes - local churches meetings, housing associations, tenants associations.

   R2.   That is our business.

5. Q.   Do you pass on information?

   R1.   Yes - to housing associations and tenants associations.

   R2.   Yes, information has been passed to local people by word of mouth or through the local newsheets.

6.   Q.   Is information readily available, or do you have to search for it?

     R1.   Mostly have to search for it.

     R2.   District and Regional Councils are only too helpful in giving information required.

7.   Q.   What is the most common type of information?

     R1.   Housing

8.   Q.   How are local ideas incorporated?

     R1.   G.E.A.R. is selective about what it helps.

     R2.   Write to the officials involved in the relevant agency.

     R3.   Discuss them freely in local groups.

9.   Q.   Do you hear any more about proposals you put forward?

     R2.   Very much so. District and the Region send post-cards to let you know that your proposals are being considered.

10. Q.   Do you prefer to approach individual agencies rather than going to G.E.A.R. centre?

     R1.   The centre is too inaccessible and is out of touch with the surrounding area.

     R2.   I tend to go to department officials although I believe the officials in the centre have been helpful.

     R4.   People don't like going into the centre. They are afraid of the jargon. There is a lack of confidence in the officials of the centre.

11. Q.   Which agencies give most satisfaction?

     R1.   Community councils, G.C.V.S. G.E.A.R. are good at talking but not so good at action.

     R2.   The S.S.H.A. are very professional.

12. Q.   As a local community group, do you consider the supply of information to be adequate?

R1.   No

R2.   From the Region and the District it is adequate and is provided quickly. If they were not efficient then the remedy is to consult with the respective councillor.

13. Q.   How do you regard your local councillor - help or hindrance? Do they have a role to play?

R1.   I find absolutely no help from either.

R2.   As chairman of the community council I get on quite well with the councillors, they certainly help a lot of people in the community. Their role is to attend meetings and give out any information that is of interest.

R3.   Councillors are carpet-baggers on the make.

14. Q.   Do you think councillors know more than they tell?

R1.   No.

R2.   Yes, I get the feeling they know more than they say at times.

15. Q.   Do you think the G.E.A.R. project fails to tell all?

R2.   On the project, months go by before information on a certain subject comes through.

R3.   They don't give a ..... for the area.

16. Q.   How useful/helpful is the information you receive?

R1.   Most answers are by 'phone - nothing to refer back to.

R2.   We cannot afford to take just what is going.

R3.   As useful as this question.

17. Q.   Have you ever received information from one source that contradicts that received from another?

R1.   Often

R2.   No, I do not believe I have ever experienced anything like that.

R3.   That is what local government exists for.

18. Q.   What are the means by which you get your information? (list given)

R1.   Working Party meetings and news media.

R2.   Glossy report and official letter/Document.

19. Q.   Do you think a community newspaper is a good source of information?

R1.   Excellent.

R2.   Very much so.

R3.   Yes, but lack of money and know-how.

20. Q.   What do you think of participation in the G.E.A.R. area? Is it tokenism?

R2.   The members of my community council do not go in for token gestures. We are genuinely interested in our area.

21. Q.   Do you think "the planners" have taken account of your views?

R1.   I think they will have to as the answers are to be found by talking to the people.

R2.   Very seldom had discussions with planners.

R4.   Planners tend to confuse people.

22. Q.   Do you think local people should be making local decisions?

R1.   Definitely.

R2.   Working Parties were initially seen as the sharing of decisions so turnout was good. As time went on decisions were being made by officials and turnout declined.

23. Q.   If people were making the decisions do you think more would become involved?

R1.   Yes.

R2.   As above.

R3.   People will only become involved commensurate with their political understanding.

24. Q.   Do you think more information of a better quality would benefit your area?

    R1.   Only if true and acted upon. We have had too much fiction.

    R2.   If officials made it clear they would welcome public involvement then I believe there would be a great response.

    R.3   Yes, but we live in hope of ever receiving it.

Section B.   Councillors

R1. and R2. - Region;   R3. and R4. - District

1. Q.   What are your feelings so far about the G.E.A.R. project?

    R1.   A lot of environmental improvements, trees. May not be a bad thing during redevelopment.

    R2.   It has speeded up existing plans.

    R3.   Will be a success - in a few years.

    R4.   Successful. Faster redevelopment due to coordination.

2. Q.   What do you consider the councillors role in G.E.A.R. to be?

    R1.   Both a promoter and liason officer. Direct people towards help. To provide local people with advice on committee procedure.

    R2.   Monitor, make representations, act as an information source.

    R3.   Link role. Provider of information not advice.

3. Q.   Do you act as a source of information both to the public and to the technical staff?

    R1.   Yes

    R2.   Yes, if they ask.

4. Q.   If participation were to increase, would the councillors role lose its legitimacy?

R1.   No. Someone has to make the decisions. Power had to be devolved - but someone still has to decide.

R2.   There will always be room for general policymakers.

R3.   More participation would be more helpful for the councillor.

R4.   The councillor makes decisions on a city wide level. Some decisions can be made by people.

5.   Q.   Do you have information about G.E.A.R. which local people do not?

R1.   All information is passed on.

R2.   There are some, perhaps necessary, secrets.

R3.   No. The councillor often is told things by the local organisation.

6.   Q.   Do you ever consider yourself a barrier to information flow?

R1.   No. There is no reason to retain information.

R2.   Officials who inform councillors deem it necessary for him to keep secrets. To an extent the councillor is a barrier. Sometimes officials don't pass information to the councillor.

R3.   No.

R4.   No, rather as a communicator.

7.   Q.   How do you think the people perceive you?

R1.   Hope as a helper.

R2.   It is variable depending on level of agreement.

R3.   Complaint fixer.

R4.   Generally as a helper

8.   Q.   What colours peoples opinion about the relative success of G.E.A.R.?

R1.   See success of G.E.A.R. in terms of what they want and what they are getting now.

R2.   For most people, if they are offered a new house G.E.A.R. has been a success.

9. Q. Do you think the supply of information to local groups is as effective as it could be?

R1. Certain groups get mounds of information, but its penetrability depends on the area, e.g. comparing Parkhead and Sandyhills. People are used to leaving decisions to others. Better use of existing information requires a certain kind of education.

R2. Volume is a problem.

R3. Various agencies do make an effort to provide information, but people have difficulty in understanding it. Jargon is less common than it used to be.

R4. Local groups are often presented with information as a proposal which is too far on for effective involvement. People need to be told earlier.

10. Q. Do local groups ever make it known to you that the information they receive is of poor quality?

R1. Often say they cannot understand it. See its usefulness in terms of whether or not they can act on it. People tend to be full of suspicion about information.

R4. Local groups would need a planner to explain the information.

11. Q. Are you aware of information quality deteriorating the closer it gets to community level?

R1. Yes.

R2. Information is tidied up and contains less detail

R3. Information is of a better quality

R4. The same or even better.

12. Q. What is your opinion about the presentation of information to community groups?

R1.   Fair enough. Some use is made of modern techniques
like slides and brochures. Problem of handling of people at public
meetings. Perhaps could use teachers in deprived areas to present
information.

R3.   Could be better, but planning department try.

13. Q.   Do you think there is a low level of participation in the
G.E.A.R. area?

R1.   The area as a whole cannot get people into positions of
responsibility. Participation tends to be high when dealing with housing.
Serious problem is lack of younger people participating.

R2.   Very low. People are more concerned with proposals,
not discussions.

R4.   Low level of participation. People want to know what
is happening but don't want to attend meetings. Participation can
create even more delay so people get fed-up. The bulk of participants
are women. Problems of articulation and committee organisation put
a lot of people off.

14. Q.   Do you think G.E.A.R. has done enough to encourage
participation?

R1.   G.E.A.R. is looking at too high a level which is
remote from people's immediate needs. Officials are afraid of
dealing with individual cases.

R2.   The S.D.A. are charged with encouraging participation
but they have not been promoting.

R3.   G.E.A.R. centre does provide help.

R4.   Low participation is not the fault of G.E.A.R. It is a
historical thing. Perhaps the idea was not presented in the best way.

15. Q.   As a councillor, do you regard the community council as
a potential threat to your position and power?

R1.   No. Would like to give as much power as possible to locals.

R2.   No.

R3.   No. The councillor knows all the community council knows.

16. Q.   Do you think there are too many organisations working in the G.E.A.R. area?

R1.   The more community organisation the better. Why bother to coordinate them.

R2.   No really, but require coordination.

R3.   Too many official organisations instigate too many formal meetings.

R4.   People tend to get confused about who to approach.

Section C.   Officials

R1 - District; R2. - S.S.H.A.; R3. - Region; R4. - S.D.A.

1. Q.   What is the official feeling about G.E.A.R.?

R1.   A bit early to assess as still in first phase. Nothing is happening that wouldn't have happened.

R2.   Overall G.E.A.R. has been a disaster.

R3.   Environmental improvements but basic problems to remain.

2. Q.   As an official body, where do you get your information from?

R1.   Statistical information from departmental survey reports. Local Plan Working Party is a vital source of information.

R2.   Information comes from the people in the area.

R3.   From two sources - official working parties and through community workers, plus informal links with other agencies.

R4.   Heavy reliance upon community councils. Informal links with other agencies.

3. Q.   Is there any horizontal information flow at official level?

R1.   The Governing Committee and Consultative Committees mainly. Some contact lower down but mostly informal.

R2.   Developing after slow start - only between G.D.C. and S.S.H.A. Small degree of liason with Strathclyde Region.

R3.   Technical liason at Working Group level and informal ties with District Council.

R4.   Liase on Working Groups.

4. Q.   Do you find information (feedback) easy to find?

R1.   Representative feedback is hard to come by. Local Plan Working Parties are often dominated by one person. However these meetings are open to anyone.

R2.   Feedback in terms of satisfied customers can be guaged by the small numbers of broken windows. The local office receives a lot of comments. Since people are more involved then their ideas are incorporated rather than existing as feedback.

R3.   Feedback through community workers and region's representative at G.E.A.R. centre. The region is not getting as much response as they would like.

R4.   Limited feedback through public meetings held with other agencies.

5. Q.   What kind of information generates most interest?

R1.   Housing, Employment, Shopping

6. Q.   Is there any mechanism for assessing feedback?

R1.   Listen to all that is heard, but don't have to take account of it all. There is not a standard method. Feedback is usually assessed by people working on the local plan.

R2.   Tenants Representative Committees get an idea of what is wanted and then take it back to S.S.H.A. and technical people, when design begins.

R3.and 4. Very subjective process. Usually depends on the person to whom feedback is directed.

7. Q.   In your role as information source do you provide -

    (a) information local people wish to know;

    (b) information G.E.A.R. feels would be useful or

    (c) all information you receive?

R1.   Sensitive issues may cause confusion, so do not tell more than is necessary. Its a case of having to be selective.

R2.   Since the people are involved to a large extent there is no information which they do not receive.

R3.   Have tried to encourage local groups to ask for information.

R4.   Provide limited information on general issues. Cannot deal at the level of individual enquiries about which people wish to know most.

8. Q.   Do you monitor the usefulness of the information you provide?

R1.   Very little monitoring is carried out by officials.

R2.   The usefulness of the information is reflected in the success of the programme of consultation.

R3 and 4. As above.

9. Q.   Do you think you provide the most adequate and important information?

R1.   Usually, yes. Information is based on what is needed.

R2.   Yes.

R3.and 4. As far as is possible.

10. Q.   Do you coordinate information/feedback?

R   At Local Plan Working Parties all bodies provide the same information and receive the same feedback.

11. Q.   Which is your most common form of information presentation?

R1.   At L.P.W.P. - general discussion at public meeting and official documents prior to the meeting. Use has been made of diagrams and there has been an exhibition at G.E.A.R. centre. The minutes of meetings are also provided.

R2.   Public meeting to begin with after public received a letter and a brochure introducing the proposals. Diagrams and plans are used in meetings where detail is required. Question/answer session.

R3.   Public meetings and documents

R4.   Glossy publications (Key Issues) and public meetings.

12. Q.   Have you considered changes in presentation?

R1.   Not really. The belief is that the Local Plan Working Party system works well enough. However perhaps the local plan itself could be produced more in tune for the public.

R2.   Basic system works well enough but there is scope for greater use of local ideas.

R4.   Hope to establish a group with representatives of community councils in order to consider proposals at an earlier stage.

13. Q.   Do you provide information at a level understandable to local people.

R1.   Generally try to explain as simply as possible. The use of technical jargon is sometimes unavoidable, but there is a feeling sometimes that people do not understand.

R2.   Detailed plans are inevitable but things are tried to be kept simple.

R4.   Information is provided as simply as possible.

14. Q.   Do you think there is a serious local desire for participation?

R1.   The low attendances suggest there is not. In many cases more officials attend meetings than local people.

R2.   There is a lot of demand for participation when concerned about housing. The S.S.H.A. give people new hope.

R3.   Participation and action do not go together. Participation slows down the process. One of the criticisms of G.E.A.R. was that it was too slow. There is no detectable desire for participation in the area.

15. Q.   Do you think local people should make local decisions, using the planner as an advocate?

R1.   No reason why not. There are practical problems which tend to get glossed over. The move towards housing cooperatives is along these lines.

R2.   The S.S.H.A. are attempting to devolve as much responsibility as is feasible. Encouragement of housing cooperatives.

R3.   Good idea but impractical. Very few people have the necessary experience.

It is necessary to point out here, that the views put forward in this appendix are personal opinions of certain representatives of various agencies and cannot be said to be the official policy of those agencies involved.

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