This article explores what appears to be a major shift in the policies and practices of national and international governments — the increased attention to, and use of, citizen engagement strategies as a basis for developing more participatory forms of governance. The article examines recent citizen engagement initiatives of the Queensland state government which have grappled with these complex political, policy and service concerns. The potential innovation and effectiveness of citizen engagement techniques and approaches are examined. The limitations of technical methodologies based on a traditional consultative framework are highlighted. The article analyses the relationship between these citizen engagement practices and more strategic democratic reforms based on notions of participatory governance.

The nature of public policy both nationally and internationally appears to be undergoing a significant critique and reconceptualisation. These changes have involved greater attention by governments to citizen engagement as well as shifts towards forms of participatory governance. For the purposes of this article we distinguish between citizen engagement and participatory governance. We take the former mainly to involve efforts to expand citizen participation into decision-making. The latter is based on active partnerships and collaboration between civil society, the private sector and governments.

These notions represent an attempt by researchers, policy-makers and practitioners to address the changing nature of state/market/civil society relations. Notwithstanding a lack of clarity and consensus of meaning, they reflect a growing re-emergence in academic and policy thinking of the ideas of community, social capital and localism as the foundations of political activity and policy-making. The dominance of New Public Management and competitive market solutions as the central tenets of political debate and policy-making has been questioned, while support grows for a supposedly revitalised community as a preferred site for political and policy activity (Adams and Hess 2001). There is also an increasing political imperative for governments to be more responsive to spatial disadvantage and the broader impacts of economic restructuring (Smyth and Reddel 1997).

The recent resurgence of policy interest in more engaged, collaborative and community-focused public policy and service delivery is evident in the international context, particularly the United Kingdom and the European Union. The Blair New Labour government in the United Kingdom has popularised a number of reforms centred on the ideas of ‘devolution’, ‘stakeholders’, ‘inclusion’, ‘partnerships’ and ‘community’ in responding to social exclusion and disadvantage (Atkinson 2000; Geddes 2000).

The notions of citizen participation and engagement, particularly in the context of the spatial dimensions of public policy, have a considerable (if intermittent) history in Australia (see Reddel 2003). In recent times, the Howard
Commonwealth government has shown some interest in notions of social capital, community and participation as important, but often undefined components of welfare reform (McClure 2000), rural policy and natural resource management (Herbert-Cheshire 2001). This national perspective is also increasingly being reflected in state jurisdictions where a range of community-building, citizen engagement and joined-up government strategies have been developed (see IPAA 2002). While the primary focus has been on state governments, the role of local governments should not be excluded. Human service planning, community development activities and citizen participation in landuse planning are increasingly seen to be important directions for local government (Cuthill 2001; Saggers et al. 2003).

This article explores and analyses these diverse ideas by examining recent citizen engagement and participatory governance initiatives of the Beattie Queensland state government. Initiatives to be highlighted include the Community Cabinet process, the Community Renewal Program and Cape York Partnerships. Three important dimensions will focus this examination. First, the relationship between various citizen engagement approaches and a fundamental shift towards an effective framework of participatory governance will be discussed. Second, the limitations of technical methodologies of citizen engagement, based on a traditional consultative framework, will be examined. The paper concludes by highlighting the vexed relationship between participatory and representative forms of democratic organisation. The contentious issues of authority and public accountability are explored.

The Queensland experience: From management to engagement?

Initially based on the need to address the electoral success of the Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party in 1998, a range of initiatives have been constructed by the Beattie government in Queensland around the need to respond to increasing citizen alienation and disillusionment with traditional political and policy processes (Smyth and Reddel 2000). These initiatives and later the citizen engagement agenda of the Beattie government should be seen in some contemporary historical context. The previous Labor Party government of Wayne Goss (1989–1996), elected after 32 years of conservative National Party rule, was influential in shaping the political and policy approach of the current Queensland government. The Goss government sought to reform the state’s political, policy and bureaucratic institutions, based on the discourse of openness, accountability and responsiveness (Stevens and Wanna 1993;5), in contrast to Queensland’s legacy of political corruption and citizen disengagement (Coaldrake and Wanna 1988).

Complementing these institutional reforms was the limited rediscovery of improved agency coordination, service integration and community consultation (Reddel 2002). A small list of citizen participation, social planning and human service integration ‘experiments’ was trialed by the Goss government (Jones 1995). However, the lack of an overall policy framework and the limited scale and capacity of these initiatives meant that a strategic approach to citizen engagement remained underdeveloped (Reddel 2003).

The demise of the Goss government in February 1996 precipitated debate and reflection on its style of policy-making and governance (see Fagan 1996). It can be argued that the Goss government appeared to operate in a paradox, with radical reform to the operation of government institutions and administrative systems on the one hand, and caution in developing more participatory policy processes on the other.

A short-lived minority National and Liberal Party coalition government under the premiership of Rob Borbidge (1996–1998) was formed following the end of the Goss government. Significantly this period also saw an emerging place and community policy trend in Australian public policy. Increasing momentum for more spatial and community-sensitive policies was informed by a developing research agenda on locational disadvantage (Gregory and Hunter 1995; Badcock 1998), together with the increasing recognition of the political dimensions of spatial inequality as exemplified by the One Nation Party. Davis and Stimson (1998) have commented that if the maps of growing regional socio-economic inequality have become clearer, so also has the political geography of regional economic and social decline. Support for the One Nation Party was shown by Davis and Stimson to be spatially specific.

In response to these imperatives, the Beattie government elected in June 1998 promised a more
responsive policy development and program delivery (Smyth and Reddel 2000). Specific initiatives based on spatial and people-centred policies were implemented aimed at providing public sector leadership for a citizen engagement agenda (see Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2001). These policy and program initiatives were complemented by a regular schedule of Community Cabinet meetings.

At a broader level, the government instituted a more holistic and strategic approach to its policy objectives and financial imperatives based on a set of ‘whole-of-government (policy) priorities’ formalised in the Charter of Social and Fiscal Responsibility (Mackenroth 2001) and the Managing for Outcomes (MFO) financial management framework. Interestingly, the stated aims of the MFO framework were couched in joined-up and community terminology:

The aim of MFO is to ensure that the social, economic and environmental outcomes for Queensland communities are optimised through the efficient and effective management of available government resources and strategic alliances with industry and engagement with communities (Queensland Treasury 2003).

These whole-of-government policies emphasised multidimensional responses to the needs of clients and communities, centred on more responsive government policy processes and improved place-based service delivery (see Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2001). The language of community, participation, engagement and cross-government practice was used to describe the broad intent of these initiatives. There appeared an implicit but often unstated view that traditional notions of consultation and centrally managed community input into the policy process were no longer sufficient to manage community expectations and the complexity of modern political life (see Davis 2001:230). The notions of multi-sector partnerships and citizen engagement became central planks in the government’s rhetoric as the following comment by Premier Beattie (Queensland Government 2001:10) illustrates:

There is … an emerging service delivery model involving governments working in partnership with communities to determine needs, implementing activities consistent with these strategies and ultimately monitoring results. The emphasis is on community empowerment and not on traditional functional program delivery.

This shift in policy approach was by no means a completed project. We point to a policy aspiration the practice of which has not yet been comprehensively operationalised and evaluated. However, the Beattie government has produced a significant package of policies and programs which underscore the trend towards a more participatory approach to policy-making and service delivery. Based on this paper’s scan of government policy documents (and where available, independent analysis), Table 1 provides an overview of key citizen engagement initiatives of the Beattie government.

Space prevents a detailed examination of all these initiatives. A further limitation for this article is the relative paucity of evaluated or analytical documented research regarding these initiatives. Given these parameters, three initiatives have been selected based on the available research and documentation in order to provide a more detailed discussion and analysis of the citizen engagement in Queensland. These initiatives encompass political, program delivery and integrated service models of engagement. From this examination, the effectiveness of these approaches will be discussed and the implications for citizen engagement and participatory governance explored.

Community Cabinets

The implementation of a program of regular Community Cabinet meetings was one of the new Queensland government’s first major policy decisions in August 1998 following an agreement between Premier Beattie and the independent member of parliament, Peter Wellington (Bishop and Chalmers 2001; Davis 2001:224). Developed in the context of electoral success of the One Nation Party and as a practical expression of a commitment to more participatory government, Community Cabinets extended previous ad hoc decisions to hold Cabinet meetings in regional and rural areas of Queensland. Instead, a systematic program of Community Cabinet meetings encompassing Brisbane suburbs, regional cities and towns and rural areas was implemented. The Community Cabinet process
Table 1  An overview of Queensland government citizen engagement initiatives 1998-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Stated purpose</th>
<th>Organising concepts</th>
<th>Methodology and approach</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Cabinets</td>
<td>‘Government by discussion’</td>
<td>Social capital; political reform based on rebuilding relationship of executive government with local communities</td>
<td>Community forums</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Formal meetings</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Informal discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Engagement Division</td>
<td>Bringing government and community together</td>
<td>Community–government engagement; around ‘people’ and ‘place’ public sector leadership/political reform</td>
<td>Collaborative policy development and research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Renewal Program</td>
<td>Reduce disadvantage and build community identity and confidence</td>
<td>Place; local governance; community partnerships and community outcomes</td>
<td>Action plans Community reference groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Prevention Strategy</td>
<td>Strengthening community involvement in crime prevention</td>
<td>Place; social capital; community partnerships</td>
<td>Local action plans and partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape York Partnerships</td>
<td>Formation of cross-sector partnerships to address disadvantage</td>
<td>Public, private and community partnerships; local governance; capacity building; linking economic, social and environmental policy</td>
<td>Community/public/private sector roundtables Community/bureaucratic leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional communities</td>
<td>Giving regional communities input into government decision-making</td>
<td>Social capital; community partnerships; local governance; political reform</td>
<td>Ministerial community forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional development</td>
<td>Sustainable regional economic development policy</td>
<td>Capacity building and linking economic, social and environmental policy</td>
<td>Targeted stakeholder partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Service Delivery project</td>
<td>Improve public sector responsiveness</td>
<td>Agency coordination and service integration</td>
<td>Networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane Place Projects</td>
<td>‘Joined-up’ and place-based models auspiced by Brisbane City Council and Queensland government</td>
<td>Capacity building, agency coordination and service integration</td>
<td>Networks and partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEQ 2021/FNQ 2010/Wide Bay</td>
<td>Regional management of population growth</td>
<td>Partnerships and agency coordination</td>
<td>Targeted stakeholder partnerships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

includes traditional formal deputations by local individuals and groups to ministers and, significantly, an emphasis on informal discussions and community forums conducted by the Premier personally. The importance of formal and informal processes is emphasised by Premier Beattie (http://www.thepremier.qld.gov.au/communitycabinet/index.htm):
At Community Cabinet functions, individuals and community groups are able to make formal deputations to Ministers or chat informally over a cup of tea at a community gathering. These forums are designed to bridge the gap between the Government and the people.

The process and structure of Community Cabinets reflects this mix of formal and informal arrangements. Ministers, their advisers and the chief executives of all government departments arrive at the Community Cabinet location late on Sunday morning. Sunday afternoon is structured around a three-part meeting comprising a community forum led by the premier; separate informal meetings involving community members, ministers and their staff; and finally formal deputations to ministers dealing with specific issues. There is a formal process via the local media inviting community members to seek a meeting with any minister/s concerning these local concerns. The formal cabinet meeting is then conducted on Monday morning followed by an informal lunch with community members. Feedback processes include formal written responses to participants regarding specific issues and more generally a regular newsletter outlining key issues dealt with during the Community Cabinet meeting (Davis 2001:225–6; Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2002).

The Community Cabinet process has extended the reach of executive government to Queensland citizens. From a quantitative perspective, ministers have conducted almost 5,000 formal deputations during the 60 Community Cabinets between 1998 and April 2003 (Beattie 2003:1221). Interestingly, there has been a steady increase in the volume of ministerial deputations, particularly in recent years, even after several visits to a particular community. A 1999 survey of participants who attended Community Cabinets found a high level of satisfaction with the process, especially the opportunity to discuss issues with ministers and officials and an improved understanding of government decision-making processes (cited in Davis 2001:226; Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2002).

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From a programmatic perspective, the re-engagement of disaffected citizens and places has been a key feature of one of the Beattie government’s major social/economic program initiatives — the Community Renewal Program (CRP). Its primary aim is to reduce the level of disadvantage and raise the confidence and image of identified disadvantaged communities. Key features of the CRP include: a place-based focus; delivery of services across a range of government activities; participation by government officials, elected political representatives, local community members, community organisations and the private sector; and an emphasis on the collection and analysis of indicators of community well-being. The CRP is administered by the Department of Housing with a program budget of approximately $84 million for 1998 to 2004 which is distributed to 15 local communities across Queensland (Walsh and Butler 2001).

The planning, implementation and governance of the CRP involves a complex network of stakeholders including politicians, bureaucrats, business groups, community organisations and local residents. Of relevance to this article has been the CRP’s attempt to develop new methodologies of citizen engagement, local partnership and inter-agency collaboration. Given its place focus, these methodologies have varied in their objectives, structure and capacity across program sites. Notwithstanding this diversity, network building and an integrated view of local
community needs have been critical strategies for the CRP. Community involvement in program decision-making and engagement with local networks has been formalised through the establishment of area-based community reference groups comprising local residents and community groups (Walsh and Butler 2001). These groups vary in their representativeness, resources and overall decision-making capacity. Indeed, the formal evaluation of the CRP raised concerns about the representativeness of community reference groups, particularly that they were ‘drawing on those who are already engaged’ (Walsh and Butler 2001:33). Some concerns also linger about the capacity of community reference groups to allocate adequately relatively large amounts of funding to local community projects.

Regardless of the importance of existing stocks of local social capital, the need to enhance engagement across diverse communities and build local accountability remains a challenge for the CRP. Structures such as community reference groups should be seen as only one pathway or engagement strategy into a community. Engaging diverse local groups and interests (such as young people) requires innovation, leadership, skills development and dedicated resources (Walsh and Butler 2001: 34). Building a more formalised partnership capacity involving political representatives, government agencies and the community sector is a critical challenge for enhancing the governance arrangements of the CRP. Significantly, partnership building was seen as encompassing existing institutions and structures while also exploring the viability of new governance arrangements at both central government and local levels of CRP activity. However, the precise mechanisms to formalise inter- and intra-government partnerships and local engagement (formal protocols or memoranda of understanding) remain undeveloped (Walsh and Butler 2001:42; Queensland Department of Housing 2003).

This generalised overview and evaluation was complemented by a localised account of CRP in one of the most disadvantaged areas of southeast Queensland — the suburb of Goodna, 30 kilometres west of the Brisbane CBD (Woolcock and Boorman 2003). The Goodna Service Integration Project (SIP) highlights some key lessons for developing more participatory, engaged and integrated service and local governance models. SIP’s model was based on an alignment of local community outcomes with state government priorities in conjunction with: an operating framework of strategic leadership by government, local community members and a local university research centre; community learning strategies; horizontal and vertical relationship building involving a mix of stakeholder participation ranging from local residents to elected representatives; and measurement and modelling using social and community well-being frameworks (Woolcock and Boorman 2003:40).

Community forums were a fundamental engagement method used during SIP’s development and operation. The primary goal for these forums was: ‘to provide a sustainable and participatory mechanism by which diverse members of the Goodna community can have input into service provision’ (Woolcock and Boorman 2003:94). This goal was operationalised through an 11 part organising framework outlining SIP agency roles and responsibilities complemented by less formal processes to engage marginalised groups and strategies to build collaborative relationships with government agencies. These strategies included shared communication and decision-making protocols and creating opportunities for shared learning (Woolcock and Boorman 2003:72–3). Communication tools such as quarterly updates distributed widely documenting the recent actions of SIP’s community forums proved to be especially effective in sustaining momentum and authenticity for the project.

From a governance perspective, SIP highlighted the strength of collaborative network arrangements, the need for defined community goals and outcomes to guide these networks and the accepted ‘messiness’ of government and community relations (Woolcock and Boorman 2003:98–110). It also stressed that effective citizen engagement needed to resource relationship building at multiple levels including within government departments, between government agencies and community associations and across the three tiers of government.

**Cape York Partnerships**

Arguably the most innovative and important episode in citizen engagement and participatory governance to occur so far in Queensland has been the Cape York Partnerships initiative. The **Cape York Justice Study Report** (Fitzgerald 2001)
highlighted the multidimensional nature of social and economic problems in Cape York communities pointing to the social problems with ill health, poor education outcomes, alcohol, violence, crime and the way these were interlinked with issues of land rights, governance and economic development. Economic development, the report emphasised, could not be separated from social development; a point given added weight by the critique of so-called ‘welfare dependency’ by the indigenous Cape York leader, Noel Pearson. The report emphasised the central link between economic and social policy and enhanced local community action when making its recommendations (Fitzgerald 2001:369).

The Beattie government’s response — *Meeting the Challenges, Making Choices* (Queensland Government 2002) — proposed such an integrated model and demonstrated a greater willingness to experiment with new forms of governance and citizen engagement through bureaucratic and community-based systems such as the Cape York Partnership Unit, which uses negotiating ‘tables’ linked to action plans and regional budgets. These negotiating tables facilitate structured dialogue between government departments and local communities as the basis for action planning and resource allocation. Action plans have been negotiated in each local community and are designed to meet the immediate needs of the community (such as reducing alcohol-related social problems) and to promote economic development opportunities. These plans recognise the rights of the local community — ‘to country, culture, safety, security, education and health’. A community governance strategy has been implemented based on reform and support of the existing local indigenous community councils and improved planning and service delivery by state agencies. In addition, a system of ‘Community Champions’ was established whereby Directors-General of state government departments were nominated or approached by local communities to ‘champion’ specific communities. This role includes advocating for the community in government decision-making, encouraging private investment and infrastructure and developing ongoing positive working relationships with local communities. Significantly, the state government’s response was not only focused on improved planning but also addressed directly key economic and social issues such as achieving better health, educational outcomes and alleviating rampant substance abuse and community violence.

**Strategies and methodologies: Directions and dilemmas**

The ideas and practices reflected in these initiatives highlight popular, if not accepted, discourses about the deficiencies of current political and policy institutions and also ‘recipes’ for a more inclusive system of governance. However, the strategic foundations and policy methodologies require elaboration. A key task, then, should be to build a better understanding of the policy foundations and methodological approaches of citizen engagement and participatory governance. It is not this article’s intention nor capacity to canvass the full range of theoretical and strategic policy issues evident or implied in these various policy and program initiatives. As a basis for further discussion and analysis, however, this section will canvass three broad strategic and methodological directions underpinning or at least suggested by the Queensland initiatives.

**How different is citizen engagement from consultation and coordination?**

The distinctiveness and innovation of these specific initiatives and the overall citizen engagement approach raise fundamental questions. How effective were these processes in opening up policy-making and political decision-making? Do they represent a real shift in policy-making and governance? Queensland’s historical legacy of undemocratic governance practices, centralised approach to policy-making and limited pathways for citizen participation remains significant. Despite the political and policy reforms of the Goss and Beattie governments, a dissonance between the centre and periphery of policy activity continues (see Reddel 2003). The distance between the dominating political, policy and administrative centre and the various local, regional or consultative processes of the 1990s was not simply a function of Queensland’s decentralised population settlement but also reflected the lack of capacity by the centre to recognise more peripheral institutions and processes (Reddel 2002). Mainstream public sector responses failed to appreciate the critical role of local governments, community associations and other forms of civil society. When
attempts were made by state governments to include these actors in consultative or more deliberative policy processes, their diversity and complexity was not easily accommodated. The subsequent emergence of the One Nation Party at a Queensland and later national level was a key expression of this disengagement (Leach et al. 2000).

The Beattie government’s response to this malaise, based on its citizen engagement discourse, appears at this point somewhat aspirational. There is a powerful tendency for traditional policy approaches to be both overly prescriptive and descriptive, resulting in an uncritical consensus of issues and interests (Ham and Hill 1993:80). The sustainability of more innovative and inclusive policy frameworks, in the context of the inherently deterministic inclination of traditional models of policymaking, is a critical concern. Innovative policymaking based on citizen engagement cannot be isolated from the realities of political systems, the pervasiveness of rationalist policy design and the embedded nature of hierarchical and market forms of public administration, which fosters largely passive notions of consultation and agency coordination (Healey 1997).

To date, objective and critical analysis of recent Queensland experience remains limited to ‘insider’ accounts and evaluations (see Davis 2001; Walsh and Butler 2001) or commentary on specific initiatives (see Bishop and Chalmers 2001). Without drawing any direct comparisons, recent critiques of attempts at more engaged policy and governance processes in the United Kingdom make a useful point of reference (Newman 2001; Parsons 2001). The Blair government’s policy reforms, based on notions of social inclusion and ‘modernising government’, highlight the disparity between the rhetoric of engaged policy-making and the realities of policy practice. The attempt to reframe policy problems in terms of social factors rather than by government activity or function promote more inclusive, learning centred and evidenced based policy processes (Parsons 2001:94; Newman 2001:64–72). These reforms, however, can become subsumed in a technocratic framework which fails to appreciate that ‘policy-making takes place in conditions of ignorance, unpredictability, uncertainty, chaos and complexity’ (Parsons 2001:108).

There is no doubt that a number of Queensland’s citizen engagement initiatives appreciate to some extent these complex policy conditions. The genesis for the Community Cabinet process, the CRP and Cape York Partnerships were all premised on the need to respond to the diversity and complexity of Queensland’s political, social and economic life. However, there are dangers and limits. Diversity, complexity and engaging with the ‘disengaged’ are not easily accommodated given the dominance of managerialism and rational policy approaches. The badge of ‘community’ is a limited descriptor for the range of organisational forms and perspectives evident in the Queensland initiatives including local networks of service providers, loose alliances of resident action groups, community agencies, peak bodies, regional networks of local government representatives, business leaders and community members. In this respect, the relatively slow emergence of a community sector infrastructure in Queensland (see Marston et al. 2000) has both helped and hindered citizen engagement initiatives by challenging government initiatives to seek community input from beyond the traditional peak bodies without ever harnessing a consensual ‘voice’ of communities being targeted through such initiatives. ‘Community’ as a response to contemporary political and policy challenges is contested because of the term’s ideological ambiguity (Everingham 2001) and the dangers implicit in construction of a dichotomy of community versus the state (Berman 1997). Constructing a sustainable citizen engagement agenda must respond to these tensions and dilemmas and promote a form of policy-making which embraces political complexity and promotes sustainable forms of citizen participation rather than strategic control (Parsons 2001:104). Critically and pragmatically, evidence must be gathered (as has commenced in the Goodna SIP) that these largely process-driven agendas can make a tangible difference and deliver improved community outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged people and places.

Methodologies and practice dimensions

Notwithstanding such limitations, these initiatives displayed some methodological innovation. The use of community forums, negotiating tables and the realisation that such formal processes must be complemented by less organised arrangements can be distinguished from traditional approaches. The notions of
partnerships and networks were promoted as alternative methodologies to consultation and coordination. However, the range of policy actors and communities participating in these arrangements appears limited, reflecting the pragmatics of government policy-making and the institutional authority of community-based processes. In particular, questions remain as to the capacity of these engagement strategies to develop and maintain relationships and networks beyond attention to traditional interests, leaders and elites.

The indicative patterns evident in the Queensland initiatives highlight the potential of policy networks and partnerships, while also alluding to the distance between their theoretical construction and policy practice. The tentative steps by government policy-makers, program administrators, community organisations and local groups to engage with each other, outside the traditional routines of a consultation event or an agency coordination meeting, are often clumsy and difficult but also innovative and challenging given the traditional dominance of hierarchies and policy control agendas. From a theoretical perspective, these findings also reflect some of the literature’s definitional debates about the terms ‘policy networks’, ‘policy communities’ and ‘partnerships’ (Rhodes 1997; Lowndes and Skelcher 1998). At a more technical level, the key properties underpinning these concepts, such as trust, resource exchange, negotiated processes and outcomes, knowledge, power, legitimacy and the capacity to influence policy outcomes (Rhodes 1997), require further examination.

This discussion highlights the fact that policy research and practice has traditionally focused on the technical aspects of citizen participation and the policy process (see Dalton 1996). As a reaction to the shortcomings of traditional consultative models, a significant literature has developed which provides a more dynamic set of ideas combining the ideals and values of participatory democracy with effective and innovative modes of policy practice and organisation. Writers such as Considine (1994 and 2001), Marsh (1995) and Mayo (1997) have highlighted key principles and methodologies relevant to the practice of citizen engagement and participatory governance, including: innovation, negotiation and transformative partnerships; privileging local as well as technical knowledge in the policy process; and the reinvention of government based on system-wide information exchange, knowledge transfer, decentralisation of decision-making and inter-institutional dialogue.

From another complementary perspective, recent work the role of social capital in development theory, research and policy has argued that disadvantaged communities, by developing alliances with key state/civil society/market networks and institutions, can improve their social and economic development and enhance state–society relations (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). OECD (2001) studies have also argued for formalised agreements between stakeholders and clearer processes of policy learning, monitoring and evaluation, including incorporation of local strategies as sources of innovation and ideas to inform national policy. Sullivan (2001), in a similar vein, proposes a locally based community governance framework within a broader multi-level system of national governance in the United Kingdom.

Proponents of critical participatory approaches to spatial planning such as Healey (1997), Douglass and Friedman (1998) and Gleeson and Low (2000) have also made significant contributions by applying the principles of deliberative and dialogic democracy to a more multi-tiered approach to urban and regional policy and governance. Significantly, their approaches recognise the importance of dealing with power differentials, linkages between participatory and representative democratic systems and the need for adequate closure to deliberative processes. Complementing this critical approach to spatial planning is more generalised attention to the institutional design of deliberative democracy (Lowndes and Wilson 2001; Fung and Wright 2001). These writings extend previous abstract debates by applying deliberative principles to practical community concerns, reinforcing the interdependent relationship of state institutions with civil society, and defining democratic and deliberative institutions such as citizen’s juries that are both participatory and effective. From an innovative public administration perspective, Hess and Adams (2002) argue that the skill base for the contemporary public sector must be developed from new understandings of knowledge linked to notions of cooperative and local inquiry.
Linking participatory and representative governance

The Queensland experience provides tentative signposts to reframing the problematic relationship between representative and participatory governance. At first glance, the main agendas of executive government appear distant from the needs and aspirations of communities such as Goodna or the indigenous communities of Cape York but the real challenge that both of these projects appear to have tackled effectively is to make the link more explicit and transparent. The state parliamentary sitting in Townsville in 2002, the development of e-democracy initiatives (such as electronic petitioning of parliament) and in particular the personalised engagement between ministers and local communities fostered by Community Cabinets may provide a stimulus for improving linkages between representative, executive and participatory democratic models. More ‘personalising’ of the everyday operations of government may provide a practical means for citizens to become effectively engaged in political and policy processes.

Despite their individual merit, these initiatives remain fragile and need to contribute to a broader strategy which appreciates the realities of Queensland’s political system and Australia’s federal system of governance. The multiple relationships between federal, state and local governments and the increasing importance of the private and community sectors in the planning and delivery of services means that the sources of authority and legitimacy are often ambiguous and contested. This account of recent Queensland experience also highlights some of the tensions between hierarchical state-centric and more diversified and participatory notions of authority and legitimacy. Democratic authority has been achieved traditionally through instrumentalist forms of hierarchical control and in more contemporary policy settings via competitive market forces (Davis and Rhodes 2000). Dryzek (2001) provides an alternative approach based on the notion of ‘deliberative or discursive legitimacy’. He proposes that democratic legitimacy and, by extension, authority can be enhanced by marrying collective decisions with informed public opinion based on the democratic contestation of ideas (Dryzek 2001:664–6). The implementation of such new models of democratic legitimacy and authority remains untested and the challenges considerable as evidenced by the Queensland experience.

In a similar vein, traditional approaches to political and bureaucratic accountability are under pressure. Accountability systems have been constructed in terms of hierarchical command and control and based on legal obligation and economic performance. Government officials are answerable to their respective departmental managers and chief executives, who are then accountable to their ministers who are collectively responsible to parliament (see Edwards 2002:58). More attention to horizontal accountability based on an organisational culture of shared values and principles, network theory and understanding process as a device for feedback and review is necessary. As with much of the network tradition, the tools of horizontal accountability are lacking. Rhodes (1997:21) acknowledges that horizontal accountability has the potential to ‘undervalue(s) the traditional mechanisms of representative democracy’. These issues and tensions were evidenced to some extent by the Goodna SIP’s attempts to align local community outcomes with the state’s government’s strategic priorities. Similarly, Cape York Partnerships is attempting to foster more localised forms of accountability. The challenge is for central authorities (parliaments and executives), bureaucracies and the civil society to collaborate in defining roles and responsibilities and developing accountability systems which encapsulate vertical/hierarchical and horizontal dimensions (Edwards 2002:59).

Conclusion

This article has provided a critical overview of current ideas about citizen engagement and the promise of more participatory governance in one Australian state. We do not suggest that there has been a radical shift in Queensland toward a truly participatory governance system with effective and accountable pathways of citizen engagement. Despite the individual merits of programs such as Community Cabinets, Community Renewal and Cape York Partnerships, the long-term impact of citizen engagement on the key political and policy drivers of the state government remain uncertain. Departmental policy-making and resource allocation systems are still centrally driven. As such, the capacity of engagement strategies to influence these agendas and ultimately assist in delivering improved community outcomes is untested, particularly where there
remains much ambiguity about what measures are appropriate to assess citizen engagement effectively. Detailed analyses of policy-making processes and citizen engagement outcomes are necessary to assess the strategic significance of these initiatives. Complementing this macro analysis, more attention to ethnographic styles of policy research can provide a window into the real dynamics of citizen engagement by examining the behaviours and relationships of diverse actors within ‘everyday’ policy settings (Rhodes 1997; Watts 2002).

Building on this policy research approach, the techniques, skills and rule systems for citizen engagement and participatory governance must move beyond often contested and under-theorised concepts such as ‘partnership building’. Dangers exist in replicating previous consultative models, linked to rational and linear policy-making, thus reducing citizen engagement to a selection of ‘menus’ which ultimately reinforce centralised and passive models of decision-making. Notions such as diplomacy, negotiation, problem-solving and stakeholder analysis provide critical tools for developing a creative craft of citizen engagement. There are dangers in promoting networks, engagement and partnerships as alternatives to legitimate political and policy institutions. The state and the public sector have critical roles in collaboration with an engaged civil society in constructing sustainable political and policy institutions. The aspirations and experimentation evident in the Queensland experience may provide a foundation for constructing new models of participatory governance. Whether or not these models evolve in practice will require more time, resources and commitment by political leaders, the bureaucracy and civil society.

Notes

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2. Peter Wellington was elected at the June 1998 state election as the independent member of the Queensland parliament. His agreement to support the ALP in parliament enabled Peter Beattie to form a minority state government.

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