



**Wales Institute of Social & Economic
Research, Data & Methods**

Sefydliad Ymchwil Gymdeithasol ac
Economaid, Data a Dulliau Cymru

The Social Participation and Identity Project in Wales

WISERD RESEARCH REPORTS SERIES

WISERD/RRS/007

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April 2012



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1. Introduction

The Social Participation and Identity Project is based on a qualitative sub-study of 220 in-depth biographical interviews conducted as part of the age 50 sweep of the National Child Development Study (NCDS), the UK's pioneering birth cohort study which began in 1958. Its substantive focus on participation reflects a particular interest in claims, and associated policy concerns, about the decline of social engagement and cohesion in Britain over recent years. Methodologically, it is the first project in the world to address this and a range of related issues by conducting a systematic qualitative enquiry with members of an existing longitudinal, quantitative cohort study, with the possibility therefore of linking biographical narratives to structured survey data collected throughout the life course.

The project was originally confined to England and Scotland, where in 2008-09 researchers from the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute of Education, University of London and the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-cultural Change (CRESC) at the University of Manchester carried out 170 interviews.¹ In 2009-10, funding from the Welsh Assembly enabled the Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) to conduct a further 50 interviews with NCDS cohort members in Wales.

This report describes some of the key characteristics of the Welsh sample. It also discusses some of the main themes arising from a reading of a sub-sample of the Welsh interviews and considers what these might suggest in terms of areas for research development. Firstly, however, it summarises the rationale for the project as a whole and the methodology that it developed for collecting qualitative narratives of social participation and identity.²

2. Studying social participation and identity

Social participation and its relationship to the formation of personal and group identities are areas of great topical interest. Questions of whether, why, and to what extent social participation is declining in the UK have become central to debates on inequality in recent years, informed by both academic and public policy concerns about falling levels of social capital in modern Britain. However, contrary to the picture painted by Robert Putnam's work on the United States (Putnam 2000), most British research suggests that there has been no simple or universal decline in social capital here. Rather, the basis and dynamics of

¹ The original project was funded by the ESRC under the title, 'Social Participation and Identity: Combining quantitative longitudinal data with a qualitative investigation of a sub-sample of the 1958 Cohort Study'. It was led by Jane Elliott (CLS), with Mike Savage (CRESC) as Co-investigator, and Andrew Miles (CRESC) and Samantha Parsons (CLS) as named researchers.

² For more detail on the background to the project and its methodology, see Elliott *et al* 2010.

participation may have shifted, so that, for example, while trade union involvement has fallen, memberships of environmental associations and sports and leisure clubs have increased. Similarly, although formal political participation and electoral turnout has declined, informal networks and direct action have grown. Summarising his extensive review of recent work in the field, Halpern (2005) concludes that any decline in social capital in the UK has been socially uneven, to the extent that 'we should place the UK's middle classes in a category of gently rising social capital and the manual classes in a category of falling sharply' (216).

The wider value of studying of social participation and identity is that it allows us to probe both the expression and dynamics of social capital through participation together with its wider impact on stratification and life chances. For example, how people form their identities as involved or uninvolved and how this impacts on their social relationships and interactions (Mische 2007), the relationship between formal participation and neighbourhood and friendship networks and why there appears to be little overlap between these domains (Li *et al* 2005), or how certain forms of participation are tied up with generating a sense of belonging (Savage *et al* 2005). Previous research has also indicated strong stratification and mobility effects on participation (Goldthorpe *et al* 1980, Coleman 1988, Li *et al* 2008, Patterson, 2008) but the processes linking social and cultural capital with age or 'getting ahead' are only partially understood (Scherger and Savage 2010).

3. The NCDS and the value of a qualitative sub-study of participation

A key limitation of previous research in these areas is that it relies largely on cross-sectional data. Cohort studies have been used to compare trends between generations, but have rarely been used to study change through the life course. Thus we know little from survey evidence about the individual level factors which affect the intensity and sequencing of people's involvement over time. Combining the structured survey data collected in the regular quantitative sweeps of the NCDS with information from biographical interviews allows these individual level dynamics to be identified and explored in unprecedented detail.

The NCDS began as a single wave Perinatal Mortality Survey of over 17,000 children in Great Britain born in one week in March 1958. This group was subsequently followed up as funding permitted at ages 7, 11, 16, 23, 33, 42 and 46 years. In addition, at age 42/43 a biomedical survey of cohort members was carried out by specially-trained research nurses. In childhood, information came from interviews with parents and teachers and from medical examinations on the whole cohort, while the children themselves underwent educational tests. From age 16, the cohort members themselves were interviewed, and their

examination results, and other qualifications over the years, were added to the record. Adult sweeps have collected data in domains including physical and mental health, demographic circumstances, employment, housing, attitudes, and social participation. There has inevitably been some attrition due to loss of contact, refusal to participate, emigration and death, but response rates remain high, with each of the adult surveys including approximately 11,000 individuals who continue to take part in the survey (Plewis *et al.* 2004).

Qualitative data are particularly important for the light they can shed on the meanings of participation for people and the formative influences on their identities. Recent work has highlighted the bias of survey sources towards measuring more formal kinds of participation at the expense of less organised or visible kinds of involvement (Bennett *et al.* 2009). This is equally true of the NCDS, which to date has asked only a limited range of questions restricted to cohort members' formal associational practices. By contrast the qualitative interviews allow us to probe how individuals conceptualise social participation and the kinds of activities which are significant to them. Likewise, by giving cohort members a chance to provide their own participation narratives, linked to accounts of their social relationships and the circumstances of their life histories, the interviews enable an exploration of how far people's involvements are tied to their own sense of identity, their perception of their social role, and what kinds of participation flow from this (Preston, 2004).

4. Collecting qualitative data: the interview topic guide

We approached the question of how to generate narratives of participation and identity for a sub-sample of cohort members by developing a semi-structured interview guide with six sections, (containing a total of 31 questions) as follows:³

1. Neighbourhood and belonging

This section asks about people's involvement in neighbourhood activities and their housing and migration histories. It explores the shaping and substance of trust through neighbouring and the balance between pragmatic and symbolic investments in place.

2. Participation

In this section respondents are asked to reflect on the spare time activities they had engaged in over the past week and weekend and how typical that pattern was; to review any formal involvements in clubs and associations; consider whether their interests had changed or developed over the course of their lives; and identify any overlaps between leisure time, family life and work.

³ The full topic guide is reproduced in Elliott *et al.*, 2010, Appendix 3

3. Friendships

In order to capture data on informal ties and networks cohort members are asked to map their friendships on a ring diagram ('personal community maps' taken from Spencer and Pahl 2006) placing them in relation to the centre of the diagram according to their importance. They were then asked a series of questions about their relationship to the people they had included.

4. Life Stories and Trajectories

Here respondents are given up to half an hour to recount their 'life story' as they see it. This is set up in the form of an open and unformatted invitation, as we were interested as much in how people construct an account of their life course as the specific detail. They are then asked to identify the key influences and turning points in their life and to choose which from a series of 'life diagrams' (taken from Ville and Guérin-Pace 2005) best represents their own trajectory

5. Identities.

This section first asks about people's sense of personal identity by asking how they define themselves. It then asks them to reflect on the importance to them of a number of established sociological categories of identification, including class, work, age, generation, nationality and gender.

6. Membership of the NCDS

Finally interviewees were asked about their experience of being members of a cohort study; partly to explore whether this exceptional form of participation had affected their sense of self-identity and in turn impacted on the way they participate (the 'Hawthorne effect', Landsberger 1958) but also to provide an opportunity to feed back on how the study could be improved in the future.

The topic guide was built up over several months through an iterative process of development and review, drawing on the previous work of members of the research team and adapting lines of questioning from other qualitative studies. Its design was influenced principally by the need to illuminate core issues and debates around participation and identity, outlined above. However, we also wanted the interviews to be useful to investigators working across a broader range of sociologically relevant themes and subject areas and, given that our interview sample was drawn from the NCDS, we were concerned to establish multiple links with the main study data.

In our approach, as well as collecting information from the interviews about people's practices, attitudes and life histories we wanted to examine how participation and identity were discursively constructed by cohort members. This required careful wording of questions

and timing of prompts in order to accommodate unstructured responses. Working within our own time parameters, we also needed to balance out the desired coverage of subject areas within a limit of approximately 90 minutes per interview.

5. Collecting data: sample design

One major advantage of recruiting members of an existing longitudinal study that collects mainly standardised or quantitative data in a systematic way for interview is that it is possible to identify groups of respondents that are of substantive interest and hence to carry out sophisticated stratified or theoretical sampling based upon known characteristics of the target sample. At the same time, one of the core aims of the Social Participation and Identity Project was to produce data from a broadly representative range of respondents that can then form a resource for subsequent analysis by future researchers. To best meet this aim, the sample was stratified using two main criteria; geographic location and social mobility.

Social mobility is a sociological concept that encapsulates the degree to which an individual or family's position within a social structure or hierarchy changes between generations or over the life course. Following the influential 'class structural' perspective (e.g. Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992), we operationalise this as the degree to which an individual moves within the social class system based on occupational class measured at two time points; their father's⁴ occupation, based on Socio Economic Group, when they were 16 (in 1974) and their own occupation, again based on Socio Economic Group, at age 46 (2004).⁵ For sampling purpose, a simple two-class classification was used to profile the social mobility of NCDS cohort members resulting in four categories: a) the stable service class, (b) upwardly mobile into the service class, c) downwardly mobile from the service class, and d) the stable other (mainly working class).

Sixty interviews were planned in each of the four regions of Britain covered by the project: the North-West and South-East of England, Central and Southern Scotland, and throughout Wales. The target sample of interviewees, balanced by sex, was then selected to reflect the

⁴ Although we are sympathetic to approaches which recognise that the paid employment of mothers is also significant to a household's class position, we were confident that in 1974 this would not have had a major influence on many cohort members.

⁵ This was the latest information available when the interviews were being planned as the age 50 wave of the main NCDS survey had yet to be completed. To minimise data loss, if a cohort member had not participated, or had not provided occupation information at age 46, information was taken from the age 42 survey. Likewise, if there was no information recorded about their father's occupation when the cohort member was 16, we used information from when they were aged 11.

(geo-demographic) 'Mosaic' profile⁶ of cohort members living in these geographic areas. In order to ensure sufficient cases for comparative analysis, it was decided to over-sample - by comparison with their weight in the NCDS study as a whole – those who had been downwardly mobile and those who were stable service class, so that in every region we aimed to recruit 10 people from each of these groups and 20 each from the larger groups of stable working class and upwardly mobile cohort members.

6. Characteristics of the Welsh sample⁷

The latest (age 50) wave of the NCDS was carried out between 1 August 2008 and 18 May 2009. A total of 9790 cohort members were surveyed, 541 (5.5%) of which were living in Wales. The sample for the Welsh qualitative interviews was initially drawn from the 406 cohort members in Wales who had been interviewed in the main survey by before March 2009, amongst which longitudinal social mobility and good contact details were available for 256 (63%) people: 129 men (50.4%) and 127 (49.6%) women.

Figure 1 below shows the distribution of this valid longitudinal sample throughout Wales. The recruitment of the 60-strong qualitative sub-sample was designed to broadly reflect this national distribution, with a target of 30 interviews (or 50% of the total) set for South Wales, 20 (33.3%) to be carried out in the North and 10 (16.7%) in the West. In the event the response rate to the qualitative sub-study in Wales was 67.1%: 76 cohort members were contacted and 51 interviews were completed⁸, 30 (or 58.8%) in the South, 13 (25.4%) in the North and 8 (15.7%) in the West. As Figure 2 indicates, the social mobility profile of the achieved sample closely matched the intended weights of longitudinally stable and mobile groups

⁶ The Mosaic classification paints a rich picture of UK households (consumers) in terms of their socio-demographic profile, lifestyles, culture and behaviour. In total, information held in 400 variables from a variety of data sources has been used to build Mosaic. For further details see: Mosaic United Kingdom: The Consumer Classification for the UK. (2006) Experian Ltd.

⁷ This section is based on analyses carried by Samantha Parsons at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies.

⁸ Although 51 interviews were completed and recorded, one of the sound files was corrupted and couldn't therefore be transcribed, making the working sample size 50.

Figure 1 - Geographical distribution of the valid longitudinal sample of NCDS cohort members interviewed in Wales at age 50

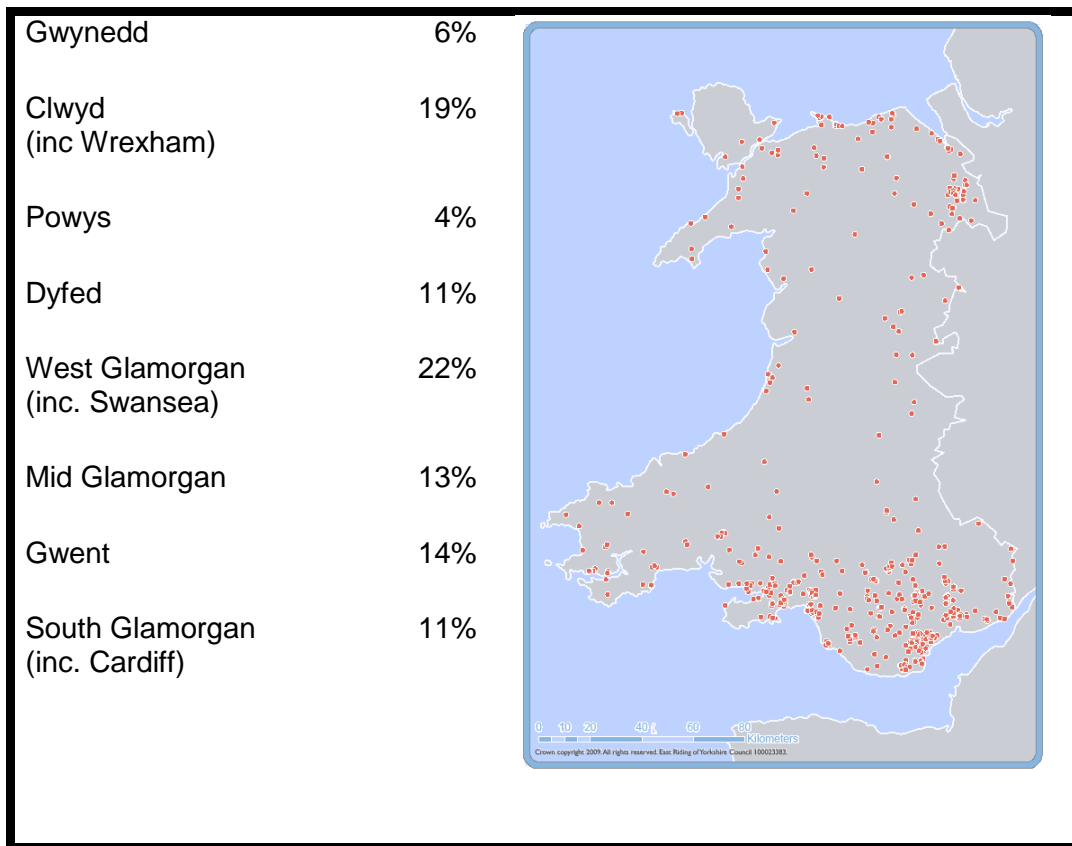
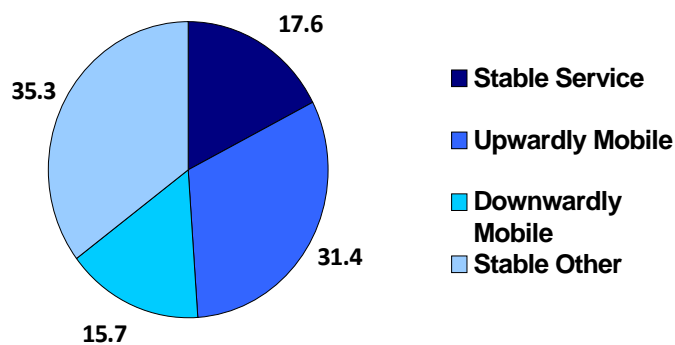


Figure 2 - Social mobility profile of NCDS cohort members in qualitative study Wales (per cent, n=51)



A total of 11 out of the 76 cohort members contacted (14.5%) refused to be interviewed (including some who initially agreed but then cancelled, were not in at time of interview or could not find time to be interviewed within the fieldwork schedule). Fourteen (18.4%) were not contactable; either they had very recently moved, the phone numbers were not valid, or the interviewer only left messages and never actually spoke to the cohort member.

A good gender balance was achieved in the final qualitative sample, with 24 (47.1%) men and 27 (52.9%) women interviewed. Table 1 shows that in Wales (but in contrast to the English and Scottish branches of the sub-study) response rates followed the expected pattern of being higher for women than men (Elliott and Shepherd, 2006). This was due to both higher refusal and non-contact rates among men.

Table 1 - Interview recruitment outcomes by sex

	England & Scotland			Wales		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Interviewed	78.2%	65.6%	71.4%	58.5%	77.1%	67.1%
Refused	10.0%	22.7%	16.8%	22.0%	14.3%	18.4%
Non contact	11.8%	11.7%	11.8%	20.5%	9.6%	14.5%
<i>N (100%)</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>238</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>76</i>

Table 2 - Interview recruitment outcomes by longitudinal social mobility

	England & Scotland				Wales			
	Stable Service	Upwardly Mobile	Downwardly Mobile	Stable Other	Stable Service	Upwardly Mobile	Downwardly Mobile	Stable Other
Interviewed	71.8%	70.7%	81.8%	67.9%	75.0%	61.5%	61.5%	72.0%
Refused	15.4%	17.1%	6.1%	21.4%	25.0%	23.1%	23.1%	8.0%
Non contact	12.8%	12.2%	12.1%	10.7%	0%	15.4%	15.4%	20.0%
<i>N (100%)</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>25</i>

Although numbers are small at this level of analysis, Table 2 suggests that willingness to be interviewed was socially stratified. Refusal rates in Wales were lowest among those who were not in the Service Class and whose fathers, likewise, were not in the Service Class when they were children. However, this - largely working class - group were also the hardest to reach when trying to make contact. Again, this is at odds with the pattern prevailing across English and Scottish samples, where both the highest refusal and lowest contact rates were found amongst this same group of immobile, non-Service class cohort members, and where the most amenable to interview were, in fact, the downwardly mobile.

7. Social participation and identity in Wales

This section draws on a reading of 10 (20%) of the 50 qualitative interviews achieved in Wales. The aim here is to identify some emergent themes bearing on the issue of social participation and identity among cohort members living in Wales, and also to illustrate the richness and potential of the biographical narratives. The interviews have been selected by mobility profile to cover a wide range of experiences and to provide potential points of comparison. Thus, using an expanded seven-class frame, they include examples of men and women who experienced long-range upward and downward mobility between the working class and the service class, service class stability and working class stability (see Appendix 1 for more details).

Stories of Everyday Participation

Data from the main NCDS survey (Table 3) indicate that rates of formal participation - in clubs, associations and institutions – are similar in Wales to the rest of the UK, and that while most people have been engaged in this way at some point in their lives, currently only a minority are.

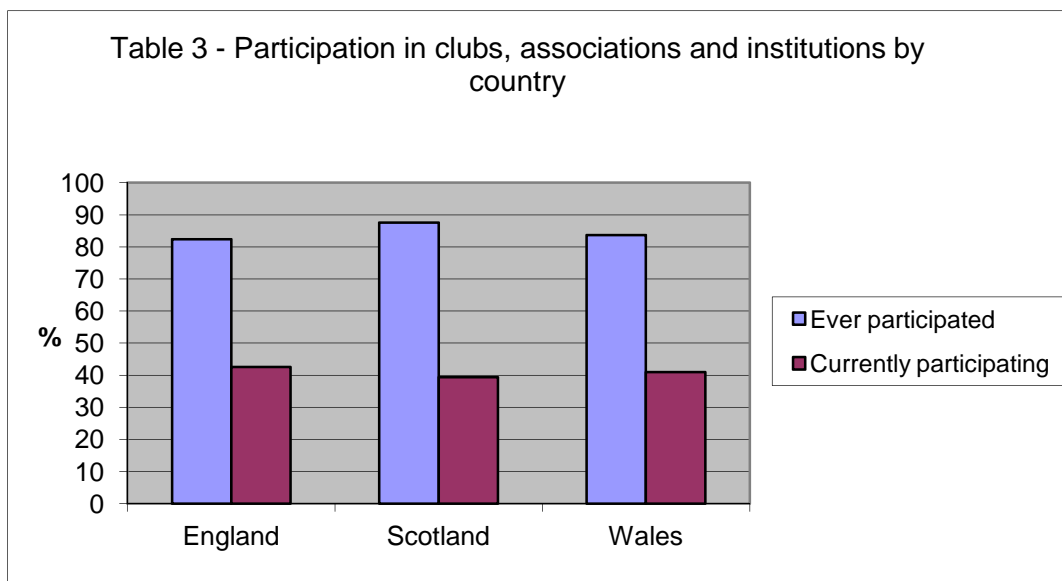
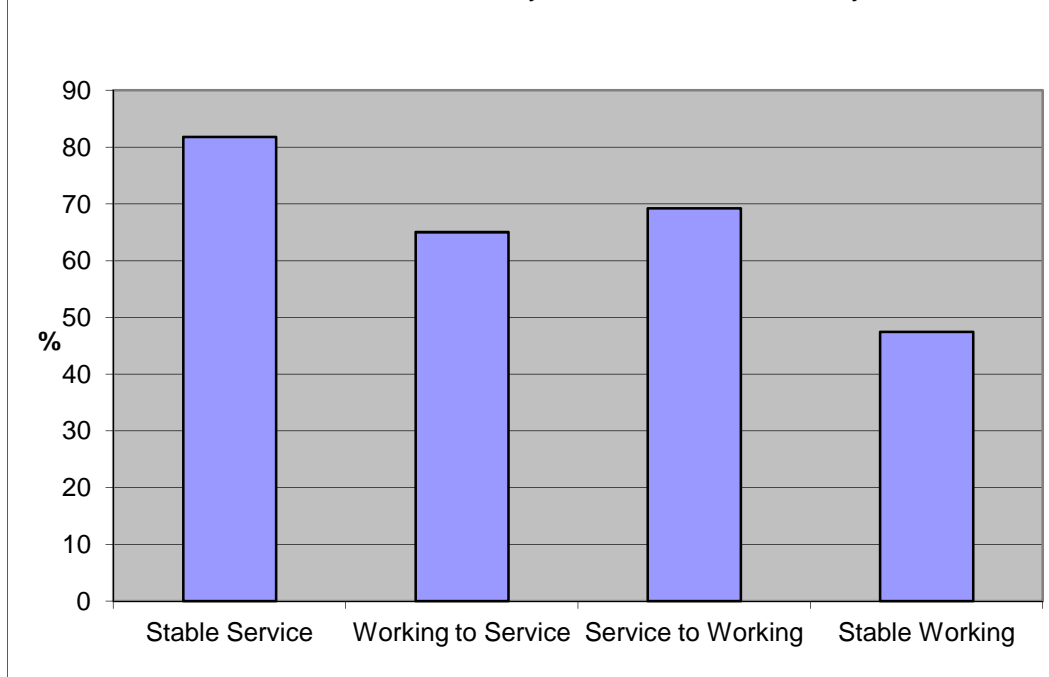


Table 4 - Current participation in clubs, associations and institutions in Wales by social class and mobility



It also shows (Table 4) that participation in this sense is strongly stratified by class and mobility, so that those who have at some point been in the service class, and particularly longitudinally stable members of service class, are both likely and in the process much more likely than the stable working class groups to be participating in formal activities.

The biographical narratives in Wales confirm this picture of predominantly middle-class engagement with traditional, structured activities. Senior Finance Manager P1341's account is dominated by his involvement in musical productions. P1153, a pharmacist, is Chair of the local Community Council, involved in the church and its choir, a member of the local amateur dramatic group and a school governor. She explains involvements as a way of being accepted in a community she moved into after marriage broke up,

Yeah, I've--, I mean it's--, I don't have a social life other than a--, if you like, a committee type of social life or a club type of social life. I found it very hard when I first came as a young single woman, particularly I think in a farming sort of area, you were looked at with a little bit of suspicion because, you know, in case you were on the catch for people's husbands type attitude. So I did keep myself very much to myself at the beginning and I suppose I'm a little bit old fashioned because I'm not the sort of person--, as a single person would have gone out on my own, wouldn't have gone clubbing or anything like that. So joining the different clubs and societies was a way of having a social life but without being that social, if that's not a contradiction in terms.

Two things are interesting here. Firstly, P1153's multiple activity profile repeats a pattern found in the English and Scottish interviews, whereby middle-class women tend to range across a number of formal involvements, whereas men, like P1341, but of all classes, are more likely to have single, focused interests. The second interesting feature of P1153's account is her reference to making a social life through structured, organised activities, when, for most interviewees, participation is defined by and organised around mundane everyday practices, and social and family ties: reading, walking the dog, going to the pub, looking after grandchildren, and so on.

Such informal activities can be no less involved. P1349, a housewife is almost a polar opposite to P1153 in rejecting structured engagement, also for social reasons, but she is no less committed or embroiled.

I've never thought about joining anything particularly. Hmm, I don't know, I've never thought about going to a night school, perhaps because I don't need to, because I have got all these social network things, or people I could call on if I need to something or want to go somewhere and that sort of thing. I mean, you know, the girls that I referred to that I worked with, I mean we can go to the theatre together if we want to, you know, or a couple of us can ring and say, "Oh do you fancy doing so and so?" And off we would go.

...we're like a second family to each other, all of us. We've all been through all sorts of experiences... we've all had our children and they've all grown up and some of them are grandmothers, [inaudible 17:59] and they are--, we're all like a second family, all 12 women, we're only 12 women, but we all keep in touch, you know, if there's something going on, somebody will ring somebody else. And, you know, once a month we all meet and have a good natter and drink and--,

P1349 maintains contact with a second social network around the holiday caravan she and her husband keep in West Wales and which she maintains contact with throughout the year via Facebook. Meanwhile, at home she engages in a range of everyday, informal activities.

Well I like--, I really like computer games and things like that, we do have a Wii and a couple of computery things. And I--, I love doing crosswords and the sudoku's and things like that. I love anything like that and funnily enough we both sit of an evening now and we've taken to watching the quiz [inaudible 22:32] quiz on BBC Two it is I think. I can't remember what--, six o'clock or something like that and we sit--, and University Challenge, [laughs] I'm terrible now, [inaudible 22:42] "Are you mad, are you mad [laughs]?" And that sort of thing, but yeah we like music as well and films. [Husband's name] reads a lot, I'm not such avid reader, I'd rather watch a film.

A prominent and recurring theme in people's accounts of participation, which doesn't apply in the case of P1349, concerns the impact of work in shaping social and cultural participation. The constraining and limiting effects of working patterns, especially shift work, is highlighted by working class respondents in particular. P1173, who drives a lorry five

nights a week, occasionally goes for a beer with his brother, but spends 95% of his spare time around the house, gardening, walking the dog, 'staying in playing crib, watching telly, you know....',

I'll sit down and do a bit of reading, I like going down to the bookies, bits and pieces, because again I can't do it during the week, when the weekend comes I'll have a--, a little bit of a bet and I mean it's something I look forward to because I--, you know, working all these hours I--, I like to have a little bit of a release like, you know.

Similarly, the response of P1275, a care worker, to being asked to talk about her leisure interests is to talk first about work.

I do a lot of work mind because, like I say, I work mornings and evenings, spare time, watch telly, go over to the pub.

Life stories as family stories

The prominence of narratives constructed around family dynamics and trajectories is a striking feature of the collection of 10 texts read for this report. Family and relationship concerns either prevail within or dominate seven of the life stories that are told by this group of cohort members.

These are accounts that in different ways reflect the complexities and the, often long-term, impacts of relationships with parents, siblings, partners and children. While these stories can be very positive and re-affirming, they are just as often tales of trauma - of death and disaster, breakdown and separation. P828 begins his life story thus,

Yeah, well really, from what I can remember it started--, what I can--, I can only remember from when I was round about six and that's the day when my mother died, hmmm, or she hadn't died, she was--, it was actually when she died. Little things before, 'cause she was in a house fire, she was in the hospital and the only time I can remember is when I was walking home from school and my uncle John came and told me my mother died, and I was six so he had to walk us home. And from then on I can't really remember nothing 'til I was nine or ten, like people have told me I didn't speak for 18 months or whatever, but I can't remember nothing about that

Noting that his is 'a very confusing family', he goes on to recount his parents' separation, the break up of the family after his mother's death, the death of his biological father the day after he first went out to work and the complicated relationship he had with his stepfather, and then the impact of the recent death of his younger brother.

I didn't tell my other father, my father died, well I didn't even tell him I went to the funeral, which was strange, he didn't know 'til months after. Plus, when my mother died, 'cause all of my brothers and sisters was going to be taken into care, the older

sister came back into the family and she--, into the family house and took care of us, but me and my--, the youngest one who died, we went to live with my father, my stepfather, and he took care of us and I used to take care of my younger brother, I brought him up really from--, well I was eleven and he was six and until now really and he died two years ago. So he was the closest thing to me in my life really, except for my wife and kids, but I just blanked it all out, and that's the only way I can cope with really.

P1281's first recollections are of her parents' divorce and her mother leaving the family, which she begins to relate but in doing so becomes upset and decides she can't go on with the story. When the interview resumes she feels she won't go into detail but recounts subsequent events in outline, a story of life as 'an uphill struggle',

Yeah, had a big impact on my life, yeah. I just--, I don't think I can go really into it, I mean, hmmm, I can briefly tell you, but, I mean I looked after my dad and my brother then. But my father got married again and my stepmother and stepdaughter come to live with us. I was then in a relationship with a guy and I got pregnant, I had me daughter, I didn't get married to him and I've been a single parent ever since. I've never had a boyfriend as well. I've always worked hard with--, I start--, I was nursing when I had my daughter and my dad supported me, he was a tremendous support to me but then he died. Hmmm, and then it was just an uphill struggle really, and then five years ago I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer so that was another major event in my life which I... I tried to get over. But, hmmm, that's why I try to enjoy myself so much I think, but I'm okay at the moment, I'm fine, I'm enjoying life, I'm quite happy

Even in more stable circumstances the impact of family relationships can be profoundly marked. P1153 had quite a privileged background and upbringing. She was encouraged by her father, sent to private school, and even though her marriage broke up forcing her to bring four children up on her own, has had a successful professional career. However, her self-image and confidence is still affected by her relationship with her academically less able but more outgoing sister when growing up.

I was never very good socially; my...sister was always the life and soul of the party and I was always the wallflower. And that's right from when we were teenagers and started doing things and I think that has always stayed with me, which is why my social life consists of groups and clubs and things like that where I have a role to play rather than just socialising for the sake of socialising.

In a similar vein, P1316, who narrates a life story dominated by a rich, cohesive and largely untroubled family life, chooses to begin his account by identifying a seemingly innocuous house move as a child as a profound turning point.

[Sighs] It's very--, one of the big things in my life is--, it doesn't bother me or anything but I would have preferred not to have moved house when I was 12. Because you strike up your relationships with your friends and all that in your formative years, in your teens you cement all them relationships and move--, and it's only five miles

down the road, but moving house when you're 13, 12/13, to a new school, new friends, I had some brilliant friends in my teens, don't get me wrong. And the way things have panned out is great, but... you know you've got this identity where--, you asked me earlier on, where are you from?

Class and identity - modest stories

A major early finding from the analysis of the English and Scottish interview samples is the tendency of middle-class and upwardly mobile men is to disavow their success and to disidentify from their class position (Miles, Savage and Bühlmann 2011). Instead, they prefer to relate 'modest' stories, which downplay their achievements and divert attention from their status. This also comes through strongly in a number of the Welsh narratives. P1341, for example, who has worked his way into a senior position as a company finance manager, presents himself as lacking any great ability or career ambition.

So I'm quite easy going and--, and I'll carry on doing what I want to do and I'm not really a control freak or anything like that, so I'm not really worried about things like that, and even--, I mean even that's personified in--, not personified, that's exemplified at work because at work I've slowly made my way up to senior [laughs] management, not meteoronic and really I wouldn't fall over anybody to get to the top, I'm not really that sort of person, but I'll just do as decent a job as I can, I'm not the brightest spark but I'll do--, I'll do as much as I can and I'll--, I'll get things done and I think it's a good company to work for. And that's the other thing, the grass is always greener, people leave the company but, you know, I've had some fantastic experiences with that company, so I'm quite happy, I don't--, I'm not really sort of a big explorer or somebody who'll go off and do lots of things

P1341 also refuses to place himself as middle-class, choosing instead to refer to his family's working-class roots.

I don't think class really works anymore... I think, you know, the middle and working is blurred...to me it's much more blurred than it used to be and it's--, it's possible for anybody to get whatever they want and class I don't think is a massive—

...even when I was growing up I didn't [feel I belonged to a social class] because you would say that my father was working class 'cause his father was in the steelworks, but he went to the Navy at quite an early age and--, and then became a minister, so what's a minister, I mean it's not, you'd say it's middle class professional but, you know, he came from a very working class--, and so it's all mushy there isn't it.

This modesty trope is again employed by P1202, an upwardly mobile head of department in a local school, who rather skates over his progress, presenting it in a qualified, matter-of-fact way: 'I mean, I've always been quite academic, I probably haven't been the hardest--, was never really the hardest working, but I used to be--, I suppose, I used to remember things quite well'. Unlike P1341 he is happy to accept a class label, and indeed 'class awareness' is

a more general characteristic of this sample of Welsh interviewees, male and female, with only two people refusing to assign themselves in this way. However, at the same time he is concerned to impress that being middle class does not confer superiority over others, which he also does by identifying with his working-class roots.

Hmmm, I suppose that I would see myself as, sort of, middle class, I suppose, because of the profession that I'm in. But, hmmm, with the job that I'm doing, the majority of the pupils I come into contact, are obviously working class, and a lot of the people that I meet, the parents and things like that...And I would say that, because my background was definitely working class, that I've got an empathy with them and I can understand where they're coming from and things like that. But it's, you know, it's a question, I would say, that I'm--, no I'm definitely middle--, I class myself--, as definition is, I must be put in the bracket of middle class, but I still think--, I often think along the lines of working class, you know.

Stories of belonging - local, national

This group of cohort members seem to be much more fixed locally than their English and Scottish-based peers. Few have elaborate migration histories and all have lived in the same place for at least 12 years, the majority much longer (the average is 23 years). However, while most have a keen sense of place, and, like P1316, whose five-mile move at the age of 12 took on the scale of a migration, are sensitive to the distinctions between local places, there is little talk of strong community identities.

Most explicit talk of places having a sense of community is made by English incomers, such as P1153, seeking to 'get a foot in the door' or a rural community that is 'quite sort of clique-y and closed', who may be Chair of the Community Council but 'I am still an outsider'. P1173 considers where he lives in South Wales much more 'community bound' than the neighbourhood of a city in South-West England in which he grew up.

The two accounts by Welsh nationals that resonate most with ideas of community identity - which nevertheless remain largely unspoken - are by P1275, about living in an isolated working-class area with an extensive friendship network focused on the local pub, and P1316, whose sense of belonging in the village he's lived in for 25 years is partly articulated through he and his wife's close involvement with the local bowling club (c.f. Putnam, 2000)

More often, cohort members describe relationships with people in their communities in terms of 'loose' neighbouring, which is limited spatially to people next door and up to a few doors down. These are friendly but even though they may have known their neighbours for many

years, largely exterior, distanced relationships, which involve being sociable without socialising.

P1202 was born in the Rhondda and so feels at home in his current Valleys-type environment but talks about being a part of the community in terms of his job as a local school teacher rather than his social networks.

I think we were probably about the tenth or twelfth family to move in here, because they'd built it up from the bottom of the street up. Mostly young families moved in, and the people that were up the way here--, it's been quite stable, the people who live here. Obviously, I've seen the local families grow up, next door I've seen them from little babies and how they've grown up. There's a few people our age, but I would have thought the majority of people are younger, and as I said, with young families. We've had--, obviously I know the people around four, five doors to either side, obviously quite well. I talk to them out in the street, but we're--, I certainly don't socialise with them in their houses, we're probably not that--, not sort of that level of--, but we talk to each other on the street, and obviously the next door neighbour. We have one or two barbeques together in the back, and I would say, when the snow comes down, we all work together and we would dig a path down the road, and things like that. So socially it's out on the street.... People are very, very sociable, we stop and have a chat and things like that, but that's probably as far as it goes.

1363, a resident of a Cardiff suburb for 20 years, talks about how local estate roads mark out the territory of his interactions with neighbours.

I've got great neighbours. I've got--, there's only six houses in this little block and then the road is split, so my neighbours--, 'cause I have no neighbours across the road...I wouldn't have a clue who lives up the other end...We have our own little post code here. There are 40 odd houses--, well, I'd say 35 houses on the end of the road, I wouldn't have a clue--, I'd probably name three people and I've been here 20 years.

For 1281, a resident of a heads of the valleys town all her life, who has lived in the same house since she was eight years' old, the changing profile of her neighbourhood means community is a thing of the past. Asked to characterise the street when the family first moved into the house, she responds,

Well it was more friendly street, you know, it was full of families, we all sort of, hmmm, were very friendly together, you know and then, hmmm, well some of the elderly people passed away, died and, hmmm, people started to move on a little bit. And, hmmm, and there's some of the original neighbours but a lot of the houses now are rented out, so it's changed quite a lot really... Hmmm, the original neighbours are still quite friendly, I mean we can sort of chat on the door, I mean my neighbour next door been here all the time and we chat over the wall. But the other neighbours who've moved around which are, are youngsters, they don't even bother to communicate with you, you know, not at all. You say, "Hello" to them and they don't bother to communicate at all.

Comparing all cohort members interviewed for the Social Participation and identity project by region, it is those located in Wales who identify least with the idea of being British. Just over half mention this as a label of identity, compared to 73% in Scotland and 88% in North-West England. At the same time, two-thirds of those interviewed in Wales would call themselves Welsh.

In more detail, the narratives themselves reveal a mixture of responses to the questions about nationality in the interview topic guide, most of which can be characterised as expressing forms of relaxed and/or relational Welsh nationalism. The most assertive and adamant statement amongst the group of interviewees being considered here is made by P1349, a Cardiff-born housewife married to a successful businessmen, 'I'm Welsh [laughs]. Sorry but I'm Welsh, I know I don't speak it but I may not sound it but to me, it's part--, I don't know, how do you explain it, it's a piece of what you are, it's in there, you know.'

Her sense of what it means to be Welsh is rooted in her association with the Valleys, which she makes through her Welsh-speaking grandparents, and invests with an image of a particular form of cohesive community spiritedness that is, as we have seen, absent from most people's accounts of the places in which they actually live.

whether that's generally what Welsh people think I don't know, but to me that was--, that is very important. Because again it goes back to my family is my--, you know, I can appreciate what they as family had or didn't have, you know, and that's where my parents were brought up, I can see the connection that I have. And my father says, you know, I should have been a valleys girl, I should've been brought up a valleys girl because I am, for all intents and purposes I'm a valleys girl, but I happened to be born in [Cardiff 110:12] [laughs]

Like a number of others, she refers to her support of the national rugby union team as an important expression of her patriotism.

[Do you think your--, do you think of yourself as being patriotic then?] To Wales yes, oh yes [laughs], you want to see me in the Welsh rugby matches [laughs], oh boy, oh yes, oh yes. And if I hear the Welsh National Anthem, oh I'm gone, completely gone, you know, loving all over the place. But yes, I do.

The other dimension of P1349's Welshness is defined by what she feels it means to be English, which, in contrast to the presence of a culture shaped by community and language, is associated with their absence. This, she claims, is something, both recognised and reinforced by English people. When asked where she says she is from, she replies,

it depends when you're talking to somebody who's English, because if you say you come from [inaudible 8:46] they don't have a clue, you know, "What, where, spell that, how do you say that?" But I'd just say Cardiff. And again, if we're abroad I get--, it depends whether you're talking to somebody that knows Wales as Wales, then it tends to be, "Well we're Welsh," rather than British or--, never English, never English [laughs].

Later, she talks about reactions to her daughter doing an item on Welsh for her (English) university radio station.

*they loved the fact that she was Welsh and she had these words, she could speak a little bit of Welsh, you know, but there is something about being--, the English don't seem to have that, I don't know why, but the people I've spoken to, English, it's just--, it's England, it's just nothing--, you know, but to be Welsh, there's something in that, there's something behind it...
... the English consider it something to be Welsh but they don't consider it to be something to be English.*

The ordering of Welsh first, British second, combined with ambivalence towards Englishness is a common frame of reference. Having begun his account of what 'British' means to him by referring positively to multiculturalism, the teacher P1202 talks positively about Britishness from the perspective of multiculturalism.

I would call myself Welsh first, and then I would call myself British. When I'm abroad and people ask me what I am, I always say Welsh. Hmm, I try to avoid--, I would probably use Welsh first, then I would use British, and I would use English last of all, because my feeling, when you're in the rest of Europe and other countries, English has got a bit of a label or a bit of a tag with it, which is quite negative. So I'm quite willing to explain where Wales is and how separate we are from England, but I would definitely classify myself as British. Hmm, and it is a multiethnic, multi, you know, as far as I can see, that's what British society is.

Among the English incomers in the read sample, P1153's account seems to give some credence to P1349's claims about the positive draw of the idea of Welsh national identity to outsiders, in that she became immersed in her children's Welsh medium education, learning the language herself, and now feels 'adoptive Welsh because the children are all Welsh and I think I feel more identity now with the Welsh than I do the English'. On the other hand, P1173's account of the way both his feeling of Englishness and his wife's Welsh nationalism are accentuated when they are essentially out of place, visiting each other's families, reiterates the relational quality of their national identities.

I'm only English when I'm over here, or when I'm in England, you know, when I'm over home, I'm--, I'm a local boy like, you know, I'm a local English lad...

And vice-versa, she's totally Welsh and when she's over there and she's with my parents or we go out and about, she's totally Welsh, I [inaudible – 01.24.43] Welsh, like. I don't think she's got more--, she's patriotic or anything, she's 100 percent, she

was, you know, Welsh girl. And she'll tell you that in her accent, you know, she's--, you know, like yourself, you know, you're Welsh and she'll tell you that.

Only one of this group of cohort members, P1316 from North Wales, talks in any detail about the politics of Welsh nationalism. Like P1202 his pride in being Welsh is also bound up with a sense of being part of a bigger, diverse British community. Partly because of this he is dismissive of the idea of national independence.

Oh God, no, no, no, we've part of a bigger community than that, aren't we? Besides you conquered us bloody five hundred years ago. [Both laugh]...

Yeah, it's another layer of bureaucracy isn't it? That's all it is. It's all power [inaudible 01:13:48] and stuff. It's just token, token government really isn't it? That's how I see it anyway...

...our Welsh assembly is in Cardiff and [North Wales town] and Cardiff are a million miles apart. It's 140 miles for a start, so we've no good road works, not good rail links. Hmmm, and what they do down there just--, they forget us, they forget about us up here. It needs--, if it's going to be local, let it be local, let it be North or North East Wales or something like that. But don't have a tier of government in Westminster and another one in Cardiff, it's--, it's just too much [inaudible 01:14:34]. Costs too money to start with, doesn't it, you know? We're paying them thousands and thousands of pounds to administer it and we don't need it.

8. Conclusions

This report has outlined the rationale and design of the Social Participation and Identity Project and its extension to Wales. Here, 50 in-depth qualitative interviews with NCDS cohort members at age 50 were successfully completed, which raises the final total of interviews achieved across the project to 220. The profile of the Welsh sample is well balanced by gender and closely matches the intended sampling frame based on the longitudinal social (im)mobility of cohort members.

The resulting collection of biographical narratives provides a rich source of qualitative data on the contexts and dynamics of cohort members' participation and the ways in which they negotiate, construct and reflect upon their identities. This is of particular interest for understanding processes of social capital formation against the background of claims that British society is becoming more fragmented by civic and social disengagement. However, the depth and coverage of the interviews, together with their stratification by mobility and geography and the fact that they can be linked to structured survey data collected throughout the life course, connects them to a much broader range of sociologically relevant themes and subject areas.

The narratives can be analysed in their entirety, or cross-sectionally by question. A sample size of 50 allows for internal comparison between groups and sub-categories of Welsh respondents and, more interestingly perhaps, for national/geographical comparisons of patterns in the English, Scottish and Welsh samples. In this report a selection of 10 interviews with cohort members living in Wales has been used to provide a flavour of their reach and content and to identify some emerging themes. These can only be indicative but might suggest interesting lines for development or further enquiry.

In summary, this sub-sample of the Welsh interview collection appears to confirm that formal organisational involvements are highly stratified, minority practices but also indicates how most people engage in a range of ostensibly mundane, everyday activities and associations which are nevertheless socially and culturally significant.

They suggest that few people identify themselves as members of cohesive communities, maintaining friendly but socially distanced relationships with the people who live nearby. On the other hand, family involvements, which are often complex and which tend to predominate in life history accounts, seem particularly important for this group of cohort members.

Careers and work histories, although less prominent in life stories, are felt to be important sources of identity. However, middle-class and upwardly mobile interviewees repeat the practice of their English and Scottish peers in presenting modest accounts of their lives that downplay any success they might have had. Welsh interviewees are perhaps more ready to accept or identify with class labels than their counterparts elsewhere in the UK but in doing so are keen to detach these from any associations of superiority (or inferiority).

Most of the Welsh-born in this sample identify themselves firmly as Welsh nationals. This tends to be done in a relaxed but also pointedly relational way. None rejects the label British, which, while seen as a secondary category of belonging, is one that is important for some because it represents a multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan culture of which Wales is part. Rather, there is a concern to disassociate from the idea of Englishness, which is viewed more negatively as lacking substance. At the same time, there is in this particular group of narratives little discussion of what it actually means to be Welsh.

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APPENDIX 1: Welsh interviews sampled

Below is a list of the 10 interviews sampled and read for this report by their project specific serial number, their 'official' mobility profile - i.e. comparing their Father's SEG at age 16 (or 11 information at 16 was missing) with their own SEG at age 46 (or 42 if this was missing at 46) - and their broad occupational title, also at age 46/42.

- P1341: senior finance manager, stable service class, SEG 2 to SEG 1
- P1153: pharmacist, stable service class, SEG 1 to SEG 2
- P1316: telephone engineer, downwardly mobile, SEG 1 to SEG 6
- P1349: housewife/ex nursery assistant, downwardly mobile, SEG 1 to SEG 7
- P828: replenishment co-ordinator, upwardly mobile, SEG 6 to SEG 3
- P1363: foster carer/ex civil servant, upwardly mobile, SEG 7 to SEG 3
- P1202: schoolteacher, upwardly mobile, SEG 6 to SEG 3
- P1281: senior nurse, upwardly mobile, SEG 6 to SEG 1
- P1173: lorry driver, stable working class, SEG 6 to SEG 6
- P1275: carer, stable working class, SEG 7 to SEG 6