

**Institutionalising Equalities? Exploring the  
Engagement of Equalities Organisations in the  
Welsh Third Sector-Government Partnership**

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Submitted to Cardiff University in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Social Sciences  
Cardiff University  
January 2022

## Abstract

This study explores how a sub-state partnership between government and the third sector promotes and/or frustrates the advancement of equalities. It uses the lens of feminist institutionalism with reference to equalities theory and relevant civil society literatures. Policy actors' accounts are utilised to examine the case study which is the Welsh third sector-government partnership. This is an innovation associated with devolution and set out in legislation. It is designed to foster inclusive governance by providing a nexus for civil society to influence public policy. It consists of the Third Sector Partnership Council and Ministerial Meetings, through which representatives of the twenty-five third sector thematic networks discuss policy with Welsh Government ministers. This study finds both strengths and shortcomings associated with the Partnership. The analysis reveals divergent institutional discourses about representation, which are reflected in the complex multi-layered network structures and impact how the equalities third sector participates. Moreover, the findings show equalities organisations use informal action repertoires alongside formal institutional mechanisms to promote substantive representation. This offers a broader understanding of policy-influencing tools than traditionally seen in equalities mainstreaming accounts. Equalities organisations are found to occupy multiple positions on the insider-outsider spectrum which is enabled by their partnership role. Institutional structures and informal discourses simultaneously shape equality organisations' collaboration and competition, which is shown to restrict the advancement of intersectionality. The analysis also reveals a hierarchy between equalities strands where certain categories are less advantaged. Ongoing challenges identified include failings in the scrutiny of the Partnership which inhibits institutional learning and institutional change. The original contribution of this study lies in providing new empirical insights and transferable lessons from this case study of a government-third sector partnership at the often-neglected meso-level of governance, informed by a synthesis of feminist institutionalism with cognate literatures.

## Acknowledgements

*I am indebted to the people who participated in my research. I want to express my gratitude to the representatives of the equalities organisations. Your work is incredibly important. I am also hugely grateful to the individuals from Welsh Government and WCVA who gave your time and valuable insights to this research.*

*My thanks to my supervisors, Dan Wincott and Paul Chaney, for generously sharing your academic expertise. Thank you Dan for your splendid metaphors and Paul for your forensic eye for detail and exceptional hard work. I would like to extend my appreciation to the academic community of WISERD, from whom I have learnt so much. I especially want to give my heartfelt thanks to three academics: Christala Sophocleous, Esther Muddiman and Sioned Pearce. Your encouragement along this road has meant a great deal. I also want to acknowledge the hidden women of academia, who make up a large part of the professional services staff. Particular thanks to Corinda Perkins, Jane Graves and Gwennan Thomas for your kindness. The intersecting challenges of being a mature female postgrad would have been harder to overcome without you six women. I am also grateful to follow in the footsteps of inspiring Welsh equalities scholars like Rachel Minto and Alison Parken. Recognising key influences from my earlier life - Enormous thanks to my rebellious tutor, Steve Clarke, who inspired my study of the communities of Wales. In memory of my unconventional (and sometimes inappropriate) mentor, Colwyn Williamson, who ignited my interest in philosophical argument as an undergraduate and encouraged me to do a PhD back in the 90s. Key third sector organisations that influenced my field of research deserve recognition. So, thank you to Dynamix and my fellow cooperative workers for instilling me with a passion for equality and a belief in social change. Thank you to the volunteers of Ty Fforest, especially Carol Davies and her descendants, who taught me a lot about equality and what community really means.*

*Finally, I am grateful to the significant people in my life. Thanks to Ben Hyde for his patience and the welcome distractions. Thank you to my friends, Jo Stephens and Eleanor Norton, and also my childhood friend, Anna Guina. Your friendships have kept me grounded when it got tough. I also wish to pay tribute to my dear friend and PhD twin, Pip Davies who has shared this journey with me. Thank you for your humour and inspiring the feminist in me. Thank you to my super sisters, Ellie Ford and Lucie Warren. You are my heroes. I am grateful to Cal, Gabe, Jonah, Cormac, Soren and Everett for bringing me such joy. To Tim, thank you for being marvellous. We miss you. Thank you to my father, Jocelyn Sanders, and my stepfather, Andrew Lewis (Louie) for believing in me. To the doctors in my family who set the trend: Lucie, Marty, Jen and saving the most important person until last, I am eternally grateful to the most influential academic in my life, my mother, Dr Lalage Cambell (formerly, Sanders), who has supported me throughout. I aspire to be like you. One thought underpins these words and that is of those who had opportunities and those who had theirs taken away. Here's to a fairer world.*

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## List of abbreviations

<b>EHRCo</b>	Equality and Human Rights Coalition (Note: This is different from the EHRC - Equality and Human Rights Commission)
<b>EIA</b>	Equality Impact Assessment
<b>GOWA</b>	Government of Wales Act (1998;2006)
<b>LGBTQ+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Plus
<b>MS</b>	Member of the <i>Senedd</i>
<b>SEP</b>	Strategic Equality Board
<b>TSPC</b>	Third Sector Partnership Council
<b>TSSW</b>	Third Sector Support Wales
<b>TSU</b>	Third Sector Unit
<b>WCVA</b>	Wales Council for Voluntary Action

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Research aim

This study's overarching research aim is to undertake a feminist institutionalist analysis of how a sub-state partnership between government and the third sector can promote and/or frustrate the advancement of equalities. It draws on a particular aspect of feminist institutionalism which is its capacity to investigate how institutional configurations can both promote or foreclose equalities strategies (Mackay 2011:194). Feminist institutionalism has recognised that formal and informal facets of an institution can have a gendered impact (Chappell and Waylen 2013). This research expands and adapts this understanding of feminist institutionalism to a broader equalities focus. This analytical lens is also underpinned by discursive institutionalism (e.g., Schmidt 2008). The case for this theoretical integration is set out below (see Sections 2.1.3 - 2.1.4). Moreover, existing work has called for feminist institutionalism to shift its focus from parliamentary studies to examine government policy-making practices (Chappell and Waylen 2013). We answer this call in the following analysis with reference to government engagement with voluntary sector organisations in a governance structure. Feminist political scientists have argued that what constitutes the political space should be extended and the voluntary sector can form part of how this is achieved (Lovenduski 1998). Both partnerships and networks feature in governance literature (e.g., Newman 1998). A partnership is an appropriate setting to apply the present analytical lens because, whilst informal networks have been subjected to substantial scrutiny (e.g., Stoker 1998; Rhodes 2007), less attention has been given to partnerships which have more formal structures and procedures (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998). Therefore, it is apposite to examine how third sector organisations engage with the executive through a partnership. Equalities interest groups have hitherto frequently been classed as a sub-set of other interest group literatures, such as those concerned with civil society organisations, special interest organisations or social movements (Beyers et al. 2008). Thus, there is a need for examining governance partnerships specifically from the

perspective of equalities interest. The sub-state level offered by devolution presents new opportunities for equalities policy claims to be pursued (Donaghy 2004). How equalities third sector organisations engage with third sector-government partnerships at this level has often been overlooked with analysis concentrating on state-wide practices. This underlines how the sub-state level is a suitable theoretical focus for this study. Another theoretical justification for examining how sub-state government engages equalities third sector organisations via a partnership is that it allows us to draw together the literatures on equalities theory and civil society. Hitherto, these have tended to be addressed discreetly. Further theoretical justification for this research aim is offered in Chapter Two (see Section 2.1).

### **1.2. The case study partnership**

Our case study is the formal, statutory partnership between Welsh Government and the third sector, which is set out in legislation, specifically, the Government of Wales Act (GOWA) (1998 s114; superseded by GOWA 2006 s74). It requires the Welsh Government to uphold the interests of the sector and publish a Third Sector Scheme which will outline how the government will consult and assist the sector. This partnership is an innovation associated with devolution in Wales. It formed part of a partnership approach that was witnessed across the UK associated with Blair's third way (Newman 2001). Devolved government in Wales readily accepted this partnership agenda (Keating et al. 2009; Heley and Moles 2012). Notably, the embedding of a civil society partnership in legislation particularly put the voluntary sector at the centre of Welsh politics (Dicks et al. 2001). The singular nature of this Partnership is its legal grounding. Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) was made "a significant and key player" as the coordinator of this partnership (Dicks et al. 2001:118). Thus, the Welsh third sector-government partnership coordinated by WCVA is a notable and worthy case to study.

It is also appropriate to examine how equalities organisations are engaged within this partnership because Welsh Government has made a

commitment to promote equality of opportunity in the exercise of devolved functions, including policymaking, under the terms of successive devolution statutes (Government of Wales Act 1998 s.120; 2006 s.77) (Minto and Parken 2020). Furthermore, Welsh Government has adopted a multi-strand approach to equality (Parken 2010), which renders it useful for examining broader equalities engagement and investigating applied intersectionality. The time period covered by this study is 2011-2019. The period covered by the study allows attention to centre on the “politics of implementation”, rather than “politics of adoption” (Engeli and Mazur 2018:125).

An overview of the partnership structure is as follows: Foremost is the Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC) (originally known as the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council) and a series of Ministerial Meetings addressing different cabinet portfolios. Together these comprise the Partnership meetings between the government ministers and the third sector. Both are managed by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), the representative body of the Welsh third sector. Partnership meetings for the TSPC and each set of Ministerial Meetings are intended to take place bi-annually. Jointly, the TSPC and the Ministerial Meetings form the main mechanisms of the statutory third sector-government partnership between ministers and the third sector representatives. The third sector representatives are drawn from twenty-five thematic third sector networks. Of these, eight are directly concerned with an equalities category (gender, sexuality, youth, children and families, older people, disability, religion, and ethnic minorities), whilst other thematic networks are concerned with multiple equalities categories (for example, the networks for asylum seekers and refugees; or health, social care and wellbeing). Thus, this study explores equalities third sector organisations' engagement with this third sector-government partnership (including the TSPC, the Ministerial Meetings and the thematic networks).

Further justification for this case study choice and the periodisation used is provided in Chapter Three, which furthermore offers greater detail on the nature of this partnership.

### **1.3. Research design and research questions**

This research adopts a social constructionist approach that draws upon the situated knowledge of a range of policy actors concerned with equality and the Partnership (see Section 4.1.1). An analytical framework is developed based on feminist institutionalism. The overarching research question informs the nature of this analytical framework:

*From a feminist institutionalist perspective, how does a sub-state partnership between government and the third sector promote and/or frustrate the advancement of equalities?*

The corresponding literature review enables the development of the following four research questions that each contribute towards this overarching research question:

- 1. How is the descriptive representation of equalities groups shaped by an institution of a third sector-government partnership?*
- 2. How have equalities organisations engaged with the institution of the third sector-government partnership to promote substantive representation?*
- 3. How is the equalities sector and its potential for intersectional practices shaped by the institution of the third sector-government partnership?*
- 4. What are policy actors' perspectives on efficacy, agency and change in the third sector-government partnership?*

As noted, the primary research method consisted of semi-structured, elite interviews with key actors in this partnership. A purposive sample was used to select policy actors from Welsh Government, WCVA and Equalities Third Sector Organisations. Discourse analysis was undertaken to analyse the data, in keeping with this study's constructionist approach. In addition, a document analysis of publications concerning the third sector-government partnership was also carried out. Further detail about the methodology of this study can be found in Chapter Four.

#### **1.4. Terminology**

Constructionism recognises that meanings of words are continually constructed and reconstructed through their use in discourse (Burr 2015). Whilst recognising the fluid nature of language, it is useful to explain the key terminology chosen in this thesis to refer to the third sector, the partnership, equalities organisations and devolved government in Wales.

Third sector is a contested term. There are various terms associated with the third sector including voluntary sector, not-for-profit (or non-profit), charities, social economy, non-governmental, voluntary and community sector (Carmel and Harlock 2008; Davies 2011; Chaney 2015a; Alcock 2016). It is frequently contrasted with the state and market in a tripartite classification (Carmel and Harlock 2008; Howell and Lind 2009; Jessop 2020). It is sometimes used interchangeably with the similarly contested term “civil society” (Alcock 2016). The latter is taken to refer to associations in a general sense, but which associations are included in the definition can vary (Edwards 2014:4). The term civil society can be conceptually problematic referring to heterogenous institutions and agents (Jessop 2020), and is sometimes taken to include businesses, churches, political parties or trade union interests (Edwards 2014). Either choice of term has its limitations. Carmel and Harlock (2008:156) described how the discursive use of “third sector” lays the foundations for organisations to be viewed as “generic service providers”. The choice of term is also political in the UK given the association of “third sector” with Blair’s New Labour, and the preference for “civil society” by Cameron’s Conservative-led coalition government (Alcock 2016) and subsequent Conservative governments. “Third sector” has a narrower, more specific meaning (Buckingham 2012; Milbourne and Murray 2017). It recognises organisations that are not for profit, formally constituted and self-governing and often with an element of volunteering (Davies 2011; Alcock 2012a). It is also the term that was most used by the policy actors who participated in the Partnership, as is

reflected in the name TSPC (Third Sector Partnership Council). This is why it is predominantly used in this thesis.

The third sector-government partnership studied here does not have one overarching name that encompasses all its components. For ease of reference, it is henceforth referred to as “the Partnership” throughout this thesis. This term refers collectively to the TSPC, the Ministerial Meetings and the twenty-five, thematic, third sector networks. Together these mechanisms comprise the Partnership instigated in response to the legal duty set out in GOWA (1998; 2006, described above). The “Ministerial Meetings” themselves were also known as “Portfolio Meetings” by certain policy actors within government.

The plural “equalities” is used throughout this thesis. This is an established trend in equalities theory and is in recognition of the many facets of equality that are encompassed within this term, reflecting the different experiences of “diverse social groups” (Chaney 2011:2). There are multiple identity categories, to which it might refer. One source that details these is the Equality Act (2010) which lists nine protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, ‘race’, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation). However, this is by no means a definitive list of equalities categories. For example, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000 article 21) lists 17 categories: “sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation” (Hermanin and Squires 2012). Intersectionality theorists remind us that there are also a multitude of social groups (McCall 2005) or sub-categories that can be found within and across identity categories (Hancock 2007). Additionally, there is the distinction between political and economic equality where the former is associated with identity categories and the latter is concerned with class and redistribution (Phillips 1999). This plethora of equalities types is why the pluralised term is used.

The equalities organisations that are of interest to this case study are detailed further in the Methodology (Section 4.2.1). However, a specific issue is raised here about ‘race’ equality, since the choice of term is itself a contentious issue (Mügge et al. 2018:20). The term “race equality” is used when referring to representatives of racialised people and their associated organisations. The term ‘race’ is in quotation marks to recognise that it is a “social and legal construction” (Obasogie 2015:342). This position is derived from critical ‘race’ theory and the insights on “racialism”, which refers to the erroneous presumption that racial identity objectively exists (Crenshaw et al. 2018:916). Early use of the term “BAME” (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) in this research project was subsequently rejected. Adebisi (2019:1) explains that the various meanings of “Black” and “Asian” render them non-comparable, and questions both the notion of numerical minority, and the insidious use of “ethnicity” as a substitute for ‘race’. Adebisi (2019) argues that “BAME” becomes a synonym for “not-white” that pathologises racialised people rather than racism itself. Thomas and Shobiye (2019) also argue that BAME is a problematic term and maintain that racism cannot be understood without the term ‘race’.

“Ministers” is the collective term that refers to those Members of the *Senedd* that have been chosen to be part of Welsh Government by the First Minister. They are called Ministers and Deputy Ministers in law, though in practice, the former are known as Cabinet Secretaries and the latter as Ministers (Thomas 2018). It is the third sector’s relationship with Welsh Government rather than the Welsh Parliament that is the focus of this study. It should be noted that during the course of this research the devolved legislature, the Welsh Parliament, changed its name from the “National Assembly of Wales” to the “Welsh Parliament” or “*Senedd Cymru*” (on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020) and it is commonly called “*The Senedd*” (*Senedd Cymru* 2020). It is referred to as “*Senedd Cymru*” throughout this thesis to reflect this change. At the same time, elected representatives became known as “Members of the *Senedd*” (MSs) where they had previously been known as “Assembly Members” (AMs) (*Senedd Cymru* 2020). The most contemporary terms are used in this thesis.

### **1.5. Structure of the thesis**

The next chapter presents the literature review and thus examines how feminist institutionalism informs this study's overarching research question, before detailing the relevant cognate literature in four key areas. This is used to set up the analytical framework and develop the four research questions. Chapter Two culminates with a summary of the analytical framework which underpins the study. Chapter Three introduces the case study partnership. Chapter Four details this study's methodology, which includes an examination of its constructionist foundations and the epistemological considerations that underpin a mixed methods approach. It then details the underpinning rationale that informed key decisions around the semi-structured interviews, discourse analysis and the document analysis. In turn, Chapters Five-Eight present the findings concerning each of the research questions. In keeping with the constructionist approach of this study, these chapters integrate the empirical findings with a discussion of their significance to extant theory. Chapter Nine is the final discussion and conclusion. It provides overview of the empirical findings and examines the original contribution to knowledge associated with each of the research questions as well as the broader theoretical contribution associated with the overarching research question. It then details the limitations of this study before a consideration of the implications for future research and closes with outlining the policy recommendations.

## **2. Literature review and analytical framework**

### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews the feminist institutionalist literature and draws on cognate literatures which address equalities, civil society and interest mediation in order to inform this study and set up its analytical framework. The overarching research question of this analytical framework is: *From a feminist institutionalist perspective, how does a sub-state partnership between government and the third sector promote and/or frustrate the advancement of equalities?* The first part of this chapter will explain the origins of this overarching research question by laying the foundation for a feminist institutionalist approach, considering its broader applications and relating it to wider institutionalist literature. In so doing, it aims to demonstrate how a feminist institutionalist study of equality organisations' engagement in a sub-state governance partnership addresses gaps in the extant literature. The second part of this chapter introduces the four empirical research questions which are informed by key literatures at the nexus of feminist institutionalism, civil society and equalities theories. This draws on literature to examine understanding of descriptive representation; substantive representation; equalities inter-organisational relations; and institutional efficacy, agency and change to develop these research questions.

### **2.1. Feminist institutionalism applied to an equalities analysis**

This section introduces feminist institutionalism and relates its origins to its neo-institutionalist antecedent, before justifying this study's extension of feminist institutionalism to a broader analysis of equalities. It then considers the strengths and limitations of its theoretical integration with other forms of institutionalist theory.

#### **2.1.1. Feminist institutionalism**

The primary concern of this study is the way that feminist institutionalism can be used to examine how institutions can promote and foreclose

equalities strategies (Mackay 2011). This use of feminist institutionalism must be explained in the broader context of feminist institutionalist theory. Feminist institutionalism is concerned with the interplay between gender and political institutions. It draws on neo-institutionalist analysis to address key concerns of feminist political scientists (Mackay et al 2010). Even before the term *feminist institutionalism* had been coined, Lovenduski (1998) called for studies of political institutions through a gendered lens to be explicitly theorised. The move to synthesize institutionalism and feminist political science is based on the latter's shift towards understanding the role that macro-level structures play in constructing and reinforcing gender inequality (Krook and Mackay 2011). Thus, feminist institutionalism moves beyond actor-focussed approaches in order to understand how an institution impacts on gender (Minto and Mergaert 2018). Krook and Mackay (2011) justified combining these approaches because they both offer a predominantly social constructionist view and recognise the significance of institutions in shaping behaviour of their members. Both feminist political science and neo-institutionalism pay close attention to formal structures, processes and rules and to informal discourses and norms (Krook and Mackay 2011).

Given the neo-institutionalist foundations of feminist institutionalism, it is useful to provide an overview of the distinct contribution that neo-institutionalism makes. 'New' or 'Neo'-institutionalism differs from old institutionalism, which sought to compare whole systems of government, and focused on making governments perform better or examining how state structures determine political behaviour (Lowndes 2008; Peters 2012). In contrast, neo-institutionalism concerns itself with both informal conventions and formal structures, focusing on values and power relations in institutions and how institutions interact with members' behaviour (Lowndes 2008:156).

Different strands of neo-institutionalism have developed with disparate understandings (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). However, theorists have identified key components common to all forms of neo-institutionalism.

These include that institutions are a structural feature with some stability over time; and that an institution consists of both formal structures and rules as well as informal norms and discourses, and these shape and are shaped by the behaviour of its members (March and Olsen 1984; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Mackay et al. 2010; Peters 2012). Hereafter throughout this thesis “institutionalism” refers to neo-institutionalism.

Consideration is now given to two key contributions that feminist institutionalism makes. First, it provides greater nuance to understanding formal and informal facets of institutions (Chappell 2006), and how these can have an unintended gendered impact (Chappell and Waylen 2013). For example, the “logic of appropriateness” concept is at the heart of sociologically-informed institutionalism in which expectations are established through informal norms that prescribe and proscribe appropriate behaviour within an institution (March and Olsen 1984; 2006). Gender analysis brings a more nuanced understanding of this in recognising that gender as a process means institutional norms prescribe and proscribe appropriate masculine and feminine forms of behaviour (Chappell 2006; Chappell and Waylen 2013; Minto and Mergaert 2018). Thus, feminist theorists have identified the way that seemingly neutral rules interact with informal norms and discourses to reinforce inequality (Chappell 2006; Lowndes 2014; Minto and Mergaert 2018).

Beyond this, reflecting feminist political science’s transformative agenda, a second contribution feminist institutionalism can make is to extend understanding of how institutional change can occur (Mackay et al 2010; Mackay 2011). Feminist institutionalism can broaden our understanding of how the formal and informal facets of institutions interact to enable and promote gender equality (Lowndes 2014) and thereby contribute to processes of change (Chappell and Waylen 2013). Conversely, feminist scholars have also recognised that informal norms and discourses can subvert formal rules to inhibit equalities strategies (Chappell and Waylen 2013). For example, feminist literature has examined the resistance strategies that may be used by the status quo in institutions to frustrate

interventions intended to promote change towards gender equality (Acker 2006; Mackay 2011; Chappell and Waylen 2013; Celis and Lovenduski 2018; Engeli and Mazur 2018; Minto and Mergaert 2018). These can result in a decoupling of formal commitments to equalities strategies from institutions using informal norms and discourses that undermine them (Chaney 2006; Chappell and Waylen 2013). However, scholars also maintain that informal norms can complement formal rules so that the two can work together in concert (Chappell and Waylen 2013). In so doing, feminist institutionalism promotes understanding of how an institution constrains and enables gendered change (Minto and Mergaert 2018). Mackay (2011:194) explains that feminist institutionalism can be used to investigate how institutional configurations operate both to “promote and foreclose” equalities strategies. It is this capacity of feminist institutionalism that is of primary concern in this study.

### **2.1.2. Rationale for expanding the feminist institutionalist lens**

The analytical framework used in this study builds on feminist institutionalism and expands its application to a broader interpretation of equalities. There are two justifications for this. Whilst the association between the equalities literature and institutionalism has been led by feminist institutionalists who highlight the ways gendered power relations are constructed or maintained through formal and informal institutions (Mackay et al. 2010; Krook and Mackay 2011), there is also an institutionalist provenance to other strands of the equalities literature. This is clearly evidenced in the accounts of radical approaches to equalities which recognise that discrimination in institutions is endemic (Johns and Jordan 2006; Lombardo and Verloo 2009; Johns et al. 2014). For example, in disability equality literature, ableism values certain abilities (Wolbring 2008). This leads to disablism, which refers to the institutional barriers experienced by disabled people (Bagilhole 2009). Institutional ableism is therefore systemic and pervasive (Chaney 2015c). Central to this literature is the move from the “Medical Model” to the “Social Model” of disability which requires a shift in focus from medical accounts of the disabled individual to understanding how societal institutions exclude or

disadvantage disabled people (Barnes et al. 2002; Thomas 2002). Institutional analysis is also seen in the concept of institutional racism, which views racism as pervasive in the cultures and structures of organisations. This was highlighted in the UK with the Macpherson Inquiry into Stephen Lawrence's murder in 1999 (Mason 2000:118; Bagilhole 2009:98; Chaney 2011:4; Craig 2012:29). Correspondingly, institutional homophobia is concerned with the multiple levels of oppression and discrimination faced by gay and lesbian people (Butler 2007) and institutional ageism is concerned with the systemic discrimination faced by older people (Lloyd-Sherlock et al. 2016). Thus, the case for applying an institutionalist lens to equalities has been made by different equalities literatures.

This wider application of feminist institutionalism is also justified theoretically by intersectionality theory which examines how gender is not discrete but intersects with multiple identity categories that are cross-cutting and mutually reinforcing (Crenshaw 1991). Feminist theorists have long recognised the interaction of sex and gender with other identity components such as race, ethnicity, nationality, class, age, sexuality and physical ability (Lovenduski 1998). The theory of intersectionality consolidated this and has driven feminism towards a broader understanding of equalities. (Intersectionality is explored further in Section 2.4.1.)

An example of a similar shift from feminism to broader conceptions of equalities is found in the mainstreaming literature. It originated as gender mainstreaming, but has been broadened to equality mainstreaming, particularly in the UK (Beveridge and Nott 2001; Nott 2005; Hankivsky et al. 2019). Mainstreaming refers to embedding equalities considerations in policymaking through the systems and processes of institutions (Rees 2005) (This is examined further in Section 2.3.2.). The expansion of gender mainstreaming approaches to pan-equalities mainstreaming is contentiously debated in feminist literature (Donaghy 2004; Nott 2005). However, it is also argued that such an approach to multiple equalities and

institutional contexts has been under-researched and creates promising new opportunities for understanding intersectional practices (Hankivsky et al. 2019). Furthermore, this wider application of mainstreaming is in keeping with a shift away from gender equality to multi-strand approaches seen across Europe (Donaghy 2004; Rees 2005; Krizsan et al. 2012b). Consequently, this study makes the case for broadening feminist institutionalism to a pan-equalities approach, and thus understanding how multiple, simultaneous identities are enabled and/or constrained by institutions.

### **2.1.3. The strengths of theoretical integration with other forms of institutionalism**

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer a full comparative analysis of the different strands of institutionalism and there is a wealth of literature that has done so (for example, see Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Hall and Taylor 1998; Hay and Wincott 1998; Peters 2008, 2012). However, it is helpful to offer a short overview in order to discuss the question of their theoretical integration with feminist institutionalism and the associated strengths and limitations.

Though the number of institutionalist forms is debated (Bogason 2008), this thesis broadly aligns with feminist institutionalist thinking that has identified four key forms of institutionalism: rational choice, sociological (or normative), historical, and discursive (or constructionist) (Mackay et al. 2010; Krook and Mackay 2011). The differing core principles for each of these is summarised below.

The underpinning logic of rational choice institutionalists (for example North 1990; Ostrom 2015) is that individuals interact with institutions based on their own set of preferences and rational inclination towards strategic self-interest (Hall and Taylor 1996; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Peters 2008, 2012; Mackay et al. 2010). Sociological institutionalism draws on March and Olsen's (1984) understanding of how norms explain individuals' behaviour within an institution which inform the "logic of

appropriateness” (discussed above, Section 2.1.1) (Hall and Taylor 1996; Peters 2008,2012). This approach represents a turn towards cognitive and cultural explanations for behaviour, underpinned by organisational theory and it recognises the persistence of practices that are taken for granted (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). As Hay and Wincott (1998) explain, the distinction between the two can be framed in terms of the “calculus approach” of rational choice institutionalism, whereby members make a strategic calculation to accord with the institutional structural rules, and the ‘cultural approach’ of sociological institutionalism, whereby individuals are guided by established routines and familiar patterns. In contrast, the argument of historical institutionalism is that policy and structural choices made during formative periods of an institution will persist over time, and ‘path dependency’ is central to understanding why people behave as they do in institutions (Hall and Taylor 1996; Hay and Wincott 1998; Peters 2008, 2012; Mackay et al. 2010). Finally, discursive institutionalism gives primacy to discourses and ideas which must be understood in their contextual usage so that ideas are given their “meaning-context” (Schmidt 2008:304). It therefore considers how language and ideas shape institutional design and development and vice versa (Mackay et al. 2010; Krook and Mackay 2011; Peters 2012). In taking a feminist institutionalist position, it is important to locate how our analysis is related to these four core forms of neo-institutionalism, which is considered below.

There is a trend towards converging the models in institutional studies to combat the fragmentation of institutionalism (Hall and Taylor 1996). This trend is embraced by feminist institutionalists (Mackay et al. 2010; Krook and Mackay 2011). Notably, a similar argument is made by discursive institutionalists who argue that their institutionalism is complementary to other models (Schmidt 2008). However, there is some debate about whether all strands of institutionalism can be grouped together as one (Hay and Wincott 1998; Peters 2012). As Hall and Taylor (1996) explain, it is important not to pursue a crude synthesis that fails to consider which elements of the different models are incongruent with each other.

Therefore, the theoretical integration of these different forms of institutionalism is now considered.

Hay and Wincott (1998:951) argue that rational choice and sociological institutionalism particularly “are based on mutually incompatible premises or ‘social ontologies’”. Additionally, they argue that historical institutionalism is also incompatible with rational choice and must not be interpreted in such a way to give a superficial impression that it has addressed these differing ontological approaches. Rational choice is also concerned with micro-level analysis that scrutinises individuals’ rational motivations (Mackay et al 2010), which is not the focus of this study. Given these arguments, this thesis does not engage with rational choice institutionalism.

However, the justifications that were given above for the integration of the other modes of institutionalism are compelling arguments. Their integration may enable a more holistic understanding of institutional processes. Furthermore, feminist institutionalism also argues that the different forms of institutionalism reflect the mixed motivations and constraints on institutional members’ behaviour (Lowndes 2014). However, consideration must be given to whether such an integration of feminist institutionalism with sociological, historical and discursive institutionalism is coherent. First, we will consider the arguments that support such an integration and then consideration will be given to the arguments against it.

This chapter has already examined how feminist political science can gain from and build on the sociological institutionalist idea of informal norms and the logic of appropriateness (see Section 2.1.1). Relatedly, feminist sociological institutionalism is an established branch of feminist institutionalism (Minto and Parken 2020). We have also detailed the feminist scholarly contributions to understanding strategies for policy change and accounts of resistance to change (see Section 2.1.1.) The shared interest in institutional design, processes and change has led

feminist institutionalists to particularly engage with historical institutionalism (Chappell and Waylen 2013). This integration can develop our understanding of how equalities processes can be incorporated in institutional settings (Minto and Parken 2020). The case for integration of feminist institutionalism with discursive institutionalism is also strong. Since discursive institutionalists understand discourse as a medium of power and understand institutional change to be achieved through discourses, there is a particular alignment here with feminist institutionalists who are concerned with how feminist demands can be framed in institutional discourses (Mackay 2011). As Lowndes (2014) explains, dialogic approaches are well suited to the feminist institutionalist task because they facilitate reflections on the uncovering of informal rules.

There are additional arguments for integrating discursive and feminist institutionalism for this study. Discursive institutionalism focuses on the social construction of institutions (Acheson and Laforest 2013). This is in keeping with this study's constructionist position and the way it seeks to draw on policy actors' perspectives (see Chapter Four, Methodology). Beyond this, discursive institutionalists maintain that institutions serve as both structures that enable and constrain actors and are also constructs that are created and changed by those actors (Schmidt 2008; Mackay et al. 2010). The advantage of discursive institutionalism therefore is that it enables an examination of both how an institution influences policy actors and in turn, how their discursive ideas shape the nature and functioning of the institution. As well as these advantages of a discursive institutionalist approach, it is also more closely linked with policymaking than the other forms of institutionalism (Peters 2019). This means that it can be readily adapted to considering the relationship between the institution and the development of equalities policymaking for the purpose of the present study. Furthermore, given its role in policymaking, Peters (2019:141) maintains discursive institutionalism should examine how different policy actors have contrasting policy objectives and how they assess the quality of policies associated with institutions differently. Thus, discursive institutionalism recognises there are different subjective interests and that

there are multiple ideas attached to these factors and accordingly examines the processes by which some succeed, and others fail (Schmidt 2008). Therefore, this lends itself well to a scrutiny of the different policy aims within multiple equalities strands. So, there are many advantages in approaching this study using a feminist institutionalist approach underpinned by discursive institutionalism. However, it is important to assess any limitations to the theoretical integration of feminist, sociological, historical, and discursive institutionalism.

#### **2.1.4. The limitations of theoretical integration with other forms of institutionalism**

Peters (2019) details the qualities that separate the different forms of institutionalism that he claims makes their integration difficult. He is particularly critical of the potential for integration with discursive institutionalism. Consideration shall be made here of his argument about these qualities. The first of these qualitative differences is the differing accounts of what constitutes an institution, and the second is the differing accounts of institutional stability and change. Both of these are now considered.

Discursive institutionalism is often associated with a broad, flexible definition of an institution, which is less concerned with structures, and more focussed on institutions as a phenomenon “bounded” by ideas (Peters 2012). In contrast, other institutionalists dissociate from such broad definitions, defining institutions in narrower terms (Mackay et al. 2010). For example, the organisational theory roots of sociological institutionalism mean organisations are seen as the locus of the institution (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). Peters (2019) criticises discursive institutionalism because the institution is conceived as a virtual entity or an analytical construct and thus has indefinite boundaries. Peters (2019) maintains that this difference in understanding of the nature of an institution renders it difficult to integrate discursive institutionalism with the other models.

Lowndes (2014) recognises Peters' concern over the conceptual stretching of the notion of institution and proposes that feminist institutionalism can critically and creatively pick up this challenge. As she explains, institutions, whether formal or informal, are "specific to a particular political or government setting" (Lowndes 2014:686). So feminist institutionalism adopts a more concrete understanding in allowing for this specific political or government setting.

This defence has also been applied to discursive institutionalism. As Schmidt (2008) explains, most discursive institutionalists do not deny the existence of the material world. Schmidt (2008) maintains that an institution is simultaneously both a structure and a construct internal to agents. Therefore, the structure is important in discursive institutionalism but our understanding of it is mediated by how it is constructed in the discourses of its members. (This ontological discussion is expanded further in the Methodology Chapter, Section 4.1.1). Thus, discursive institutionalism, like feminist institutionalism, does not prevent the interpretation of an institution as a specific organisational structure, particularly a political or governmental structure. On the contrary, it can be seen as a valuable complementary approach.

In some institutionalist literature, formal institutions are conceived as distinct entities from informal institutions (Peters 2012). This dichotomy is sometimes referred to as political institutions as distinct from cultural institutions (Roland 2004). This *formal institutions-informal institutions* dichotomy is commonly found in feminist institutionalism (for example, Mackay et al 2010; Chappell and Waylen 2013). However, such phrasing brings us back to Peters' (2012) criticism of the loose notion of discursive constructs. Therefore, to avoid confusion, this study limits itself to identifying both the formal and the informal facets contained within one political institution, rather than conceiving of them as separate entities.

The different institutional models also give differing accounts of how institutions impact on members' behaviour and crucially how they account

for institutional stability or change (Hay and Wincott 1998, Peters 2019). Peters (2019) cites these differences as another factor that makes the integration of these institutionalist forms challenging. Peters (2019) argues discursive institutionalism's reduced focus on persistent and stable structures limits its capacity to explain how the institution shapes the behaviour of an individual. He offers this as another difficulty in terms of integrating discursive institutionalism with other institutionalist approaches. This criticism is scrutinised below.

Much of sociological and historical institutionalism has focussed on institutional stability and the persistence of institutional equilibrium. Sociological institutionalism attributes this stability to the logic of appropriateness that underpins institutional norms and historical institutionalism attributes it to the paths of dependency that have built up from historical decisions that were made at the origins of the institution (Mackay et al 2010; Peters 2012). Both these accounts have been criticised for failing to adequately explain how institutional change can occur and not giving sufficient attention to the role of agency (Hay and Wincott 1998; Wincott 2004b; Bogason 2008; Pierre et al. 2008; Schmidt 2008). In contrast, discursive institutionalism has developed more recently (Mackay et al 2010), and it seeks to overcome the more equilibrium-focus of the other forms of institutionalism by putting "the agency back into institutional change" (Schmidt 2008:316). Discursive institutionalism recognises that individuals have discursive abilities to dissociate themselves from institutions so that they can critically appraise them, which allows for individuals to change the institutional constraints on behaviour (Schmidt 2008). Thus, individuals are understood to be reflexive and can monitor consequences, learn and adjust their strategies (Hay and Wincott 1998). Such an understanding allows for structure and agency to not be antagonistic but instead they are a complex duality linked in a creative iterative relationship between the institution and their members (Hay and Wincott 1998). It is this quality of discursive institutionalism that Peters (2019) uses to criticise it for having a flexible conception of an institution that fails to have persistence or stable structures.

Notably, feminist institutionalism shares this position with discursive institutionalism. Thus, feminist scholars have focussed on feminist agency in relation to institutions (Chappell 2006) describing institutional actors in terms of whether they are institutional “rule -makers, breaker or shapers” (Chappell and Waylen 2013:606). Thus, feminist institutionalism lends itself well to institutional dynamism, which recognises that although institutions lean towards stability, institutional actors give them the ability to adapt and change (Chappell 2006). Yet feminist institutionalism is also cognisant of the danger of giving too much primacy to actors (Chappell and Waylen 2013). It recognises that the institutional context which constrain actors and their ability to perceive the normalised and taken-for-granted constraints should not be underplayed (Chappell and Waylen 2013). In doing so, feminist institutionalism overcomes the argument put forward by Peters (2012) that such an account neglects the stability of institutions. Thus, feminist institutionalism, offers a conception of institutional change linked to the agency of actors which also recognises the powerful institutional forces that resist such change. In doing so, it overcome Peters’ objections to the theoretical integration of discursive, sociological and historical institutionalism.

As has been evidenced, both feminist institutionalism and discursive institutionalism make a case for integration of the different institutionalist models. In doing so, this allows us to explore the multiple explanations of how equalities organisations are constrained or enabled by an institution (Schmidt 2008; Lowndes 2014) as well as to explore how they are able to resist this continuity and introduce change (Mackay et al 2010; Mackay and Krook 2011; Minto and Mergaert 2018). (The literature on institutional change is explored further in Section 2.5.) Having laid out the case for taking a feminist institutionalist approach underpinned by discursive institutionalism, and drawing on sociological and historical institutionalist literatures, attention is now turned to how it can inform an analysis of sub-state governance.

### **2.1.5. Examining interest mediation in a sub-state governance partnership**

Above, we have been clear that by *institution*, we are concerned with an organisational structure, and the institution of interest should be conceived in a “particular political or government setting” (Lowndes 2014:686). In this section we consider which particular setting has been underexplored by feminist institutionalism. This study is primarily concerned with interest mediation between government and equalities third sector organisations in governance partnerships at sub-state level, so it is important to be clear why this is of interest theoretically.

The early work of feminist scholars largely focussed on women’s political behaviour at elite levels (Lovenduski 1998). In parliamentary studies, gender scholarship tended to neglect the executive in favour of studying the women’s representation and quotas in the legislature (Chappell and Waylen 2013). Thus, a call has been made for shifting the analysis of feminist institutionalism onto the core executive (Chappell and Waylen 2013).

Separately, feminist political science became preoccupied with extending the definition of what constituted political space from the public to the private to include “the family, communities [and] voluntary groups” (Lovenduski 1998). A particular strand of feminist scholarship has developed which has concerned itself with how interest groups such as the voluntary or third sector might mediate with the executive. From a feminist institutionalist perspective, there are some excellent examples of how feminist institutionalism has been applied to understand interest mediation in the European Union (E.g., Minto and Mergaert 2018). At state level, and with a broader equalities focus, Krizsan et al. (2012a) did a comparative institutional analysis across European countries to consider how equalities interest groups engaged with governments to apply intersectionality in policymaking. However, relatively little feminist scholarship has focussed specifically on the devolved level (Minto and Parken 2020). Even less has been done to examine a broader notion of

equalities interest mediation at the sub-state level (Hankivsky et al. 2019), with some notable exceptions (E.g., Parken 2010; Chaney 2011; Hankivsky et al 2019). Yet, devolution can result in divergent and sometimes innovative policymaking at sub-state level (Chaney and Wincott 2014). Therefore, devolution provides “a window of opportunity” for sub-state analysis of the position of equalities civic groups in policymaking (Donaghy 2004:52). This has fuelled the interests of feminist institutionalism because this “substantial institutional change” towards regionalisation and decentralisation has created an opportunity to place equality in the broader political discourses of democracy (Krook and Mackay 2011:2). The impact of (re)creating national legislatures at the sub-unitary state level should be analysed to consider its impact on contemporary developments in the advancement of equalities (Chaney 2011). This study therefore seeks to address this gap by applying its focus on equalities interest mediation at a sub-state level.

In order to explain why government-third sector partnerships are the institutional structures of interest to this feminist institutionalist study, it is useful to refer to the governance literature. Governance is a polysemous concept (Jessop 2020), and it carries considerable theoretical and ideological baggage (Osborne 2006). New governance refers both to the theory by which society is governed (Stoker 1998) and the sharing of responsibility for governing (Rhodes 2007). It can be achieved between different sectors and also across multiple levels of government (Newman 2001). A definition of *new governance* offered by Stoker (1998) is that it refers to a set of institutions that are drawn from and beyond government, in which the boundaries between the public, private and voluntary sectors are blurred, including the locus of responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues. This constitutes a ‘new process of governing’ and ‘a new method by which society is governed’ (Rhodes 1997:6). Thus, it includes the idea that there should be multiple actors (including civil society or third sector actors) beyond government in both the provision of public services and in policymaking (Newman 2001; Evans et al. 2005). Therefore, new governance has significant implications for study of interest mediation with

government, and correspondingly, for the advancement of equalities (Chaney 2011). It follows then that new governance is an appropriate focus for this feminist institutionalist analysis of how equalities interests mediate with sub-state government.

A full theoretical exposition of the many facets of new governance theory is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is important to sketch out the particular facets of new governance that are of interest to this study. Ansell and Gash (2007), offer a definition of collaborative governance:

*A governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-orientated, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programmes or assets (Ansell and Gash 2007:544)*

This definition is useful because it focuses on governance structures as formal structures that meet collectively and are initiated by the public sector. This brings us closer to Chappell and Waylen's (2013) call for feminist institutionalism to examine interests mediation with the Core Executive. However, this definition has its limitations because it presumes the decision-making of such mechanisms is achieved through deliberation and consensus. Yet, from an institutionalist perspective, how decision-making and policymaking are achieved should be empirically scrutinised. Furthermore, the above definition neglects the term "partnership" which is commonly used to understand the nature of these formal structures.

The term "partnerships" accompanies "networks" in much governance literature (E.g., Newman 2001). However, network theory conceives of networks as autonomous self-governing informal networks of actors (Rhodes 2007; Stoker 1998). Lowndes and Skelcher (1998:314) distinguish between networks and partnerships, where the former are informal and self-organising, but partnerships are defined as formalised structures and procedures. Lowndes and Skelcher (1998:321) allow that partnerships may have been networks in their pre-partnership state and suggest the informal networks may persist as a substructure. Thus, partnerships can include

both loose networks and defined structures (Newman 2001), thereby the concept ties in informal facets alongside their formal structures. However, their defining feature is their formal structure. It is specifically formal partnerships concerned with policymaking that fulfil the feminist institutionalist goal of examining how equalities are promoted or foreclosed. (Further examination of partnerships in the UK context is offered in the following chapter).

Thus far, the case has been made to justify formal partnerships at sub-state level as the governance structure of interest to this feminist institutionalist study. The “gendered implications of the changing institutional and legal arrangements as a result of devolution” has attracted the interest of feminist institutionalists to scrutinise sub-state institutional arrangements (Krook and Mackay 2011:5). This approach is also supported by broader literature on the appropriateness of applying institutionalist theory to governance structures. Theorists have argued that an institutionalist analysis is well suited to understanding civil society’s position in pluralist modes of governance (Lowndes 2008:163). It should be noted that the governance literature itself has an institutionalist provenance with its emphasis on the “organizational arrangements” (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998:319) and the analysis of “institutional forms” (Justice and Skelcher 2009:738). Moreover, as the discussion above reveals, the governance debate around the formal and informal qualities that underpin accounts of networks and partnerships reflects the similar formal-informal binary in institutionalism.

Notably, Peters (2012, p 143-157) feels that the structuring of relations between the state and civil society is so significant to institutionalism that he makes a case for this being viewed as a distinct (albeit it non-discrete) form, which he calls “societal institutionalism”. He recognises that the structures which form collections of organisations and network of interest groups are rich settings for structural institutional analysis. He identifies that such structures are stable and offer patterns of behavioural expectation in keeping with an institutionalist approach (Peters 2012:150).

His account is limited since he draws his conception of this form of institution largely from network theory. Therefore, Peters' (2012) assumes it is largely concerned with self-organising networks, thus neglecting to recognise more formal partnerships. However, his argument reinforces the appropriateness of applying institutionalism to this study. Thus, institutionalism offers a valuable perspective on such governance structures.

#### **2.1.6. Understanding equalities interests within the broader interest group literatures**

The nature of the interests that are conceived as being mediated through governance structures varies in different bodies of literature. For example, the interest groups that Peters' (2012, pp. 153, 144) describes in his account of "institutions of interest representation" are limited to political parties and the private sector, thus, he neglects other forms of interests. Although "interest groups" can be broadly interpreted (Knodt et al. 2011), this study's feminist institutionalist focus is concerned with the sub-population of "equalities" interest groups, particularly those third sector or civil society organisations that represent the interests of equalities categories (as detailed in Section 1.3). Much of the interest group literature fails to recognise equalities interests as a distinct grouping and they are instead associated with other interest groups. There is an overlap in the subpopulation of interest groups that are variously referred to as civil society organisations or social movements organisations (Beyers et al. 2008), so both of these literatures must be considered.

There is a large body of literature concerned with how civil society organisations specifically mediate with the institutions of government (Beyers et al. 2008). The scholarship that has concerned itself with civil society organisations as interest groups, has variously been conceived as voluntary sector or third sector studies (Alcock 2016), although civil society has a broader, sometimes contested, definition (Edwards 2014; Jessop 2020) (see Section 1.4). Scholars of this field have not tended to exclusively

consider equalities organisations, with a few important exceptions (e.g., Taylor 2001; Williams and Chaney 2001).

In contrast, social movements, according to Diani and Della Porta (2006:20), are defined as consisting of actors with a distinct collective identity engaging in collective action of a conflictual nature and linked by dense informal networks. The term *new social movements* refers to a specific cluster of movements which arose with societal changes that reflected a post-materialist concern and a weakening of traditional cleavages in society (Kriesi et al. 1995). They include the environmental movements, peace movement, solidarity movement, women's movement and movements concerned with the rights of discriminated minorities (Kriesi et al. 1995; Peterson et al. 2015). They are distinct from old social movements which are more associated class cleavages, unions and the labour movements (Peterson et al. 2015). Although this distinction has been described as a "tired duality between old and new" (Peterson et al. 2015:294), the widespread use of "old" and "new" social movements renders the distinction valuable for identifying particular families of interest (Kreisi et al. 1995). Clearly, new social movements encompass many equalities movements (albeit not all equalities organisations) but also many non-equalities movements. For example, a range of rural protests, including environmental movements, are encompassed in this definition (Woods 2016). Social movements are conventionally conceptualised as extra-institutional, thus situated outside of the state (Pettinicchio 2012). Some social movements literature would contest this attribute (E.g., Ruzza 2011). Yet the implication of this conception is that equalities organisations involved in governance institutions would cease to be considered social movements. Social movements are also associated with informal networks (Diani and Della Porta 2006), whilst this study is concerned with formal partnerships. For these reasons, this study does not centrally locate its analytical framework in the theory of new social movements. However, it recognises that the extensive literature on new social movements pertains to this study in specific ways and these shall be selectively applied. Where this is done, their inclusion will be robustly defended as cognate literatures

to the overall thesis. For example, the theory of new social movements is highlighted here to demonstrate that it intersects with equalities interest groups but is distinct.

This study instead makes the case for a greater equalities focus to the interest group literature concerned with governance and seeks to contribute towards addressing this gap. It furthermore recognises that most equalities organisations are third sector organisations, and this enables us to draw on the extensive literature on third sector or civil society's engagement in governance to examine this area.

The different facets of theory detailed above will now be pulled together to justify the overarching research question of this thesis.

#### **2.1.7. The overarching research question**

This chapter began by developing the argument for an adapted and expanded mode of feminist institutionalism with a broader equalities focus. As has been shown, such a feminist institutionalist approach requires particular attention to be paid to how equalities strategies are both constrained and enabled by institutional context.

The theoretical integration between different forms of institutionalism has been examined to understand the strengths of their synthesis. The limitations of integrating different forms of institutionalism have also been addressed and a defence of integrating feminist institutionalism particularly with discursive institutionalism was offered. Discursive institutionalism recognises that policy actors' behaviour is shaped by institutional discourses and also that policy actors discursively shape institutions. When this is applied to feminist institutionalism it encourages us to explore how equalities are both constrained and enabled by institutions, by considering how the institution shapes and is shaped by institutional discourses of policy actors. In recognising the limitations of some interpretations of discursive institutionalism which can inhibit theoretical integration, this study adopts a form of institutionalism which

allows that an institution is an organisational structure and avoids sliding into radical constructionism. Justification was also offered for feminist institutionalism to draw on sociological and historical institutionalism, particularly with respect to understanding the informal normative qualities of institutions and in order to extend feminist institutionalist's construction of institutional change. Furthermore, the analysis of the related literatures led to a recognition of the complex interrelationship between structure and agency in both feminist institutionalism and discursive institutionalism which we have argued overcomes concerns about its integration with historical and sociological institutionalism. Therefore, the case has been made for discursive institutionalism to be synthesised into our feminist institutionalist analysis and allow for a degree of theoretical integration with sociological and historical models of institutionalism, in so far as they can frame the analytical discourses.

This first part of the literature review then made the case for how sub-state analysis is a suitable arena for feminist institutionalism to explore the role of equalities interests. Additionally, consideration was given to how such a lens is appropriate for governance mechanisms that entail formal partnerships between state third sector actors. Explanation was then given as to why a specific focus on equalities interest groups' involvement within this has hitherto largely been neglected in other interest group literatures. Bringing these strands together, this approach is captured in the following overarching research question that underpins this thesis:

*From a feminist institutionalist perspective, how does a sub-state partnership between government and the third sector promote and/or frustrate the advancement of equalities?*

Four key research questions then allow us to address this overarching research question. These will be applied to a particular case study partnership (detailed in the following chapter). These are:

1. *How is the descriptive representation of equalities groups shaped by the institution of the third sector-government partnership?*

2. *How have equalities organisations engaged with the institution of the third sector-government partnership to promote substantive representation?*
3. *How is the equalities sector and its potential for intersectional practices shaped by the institution of the third sector-government partnership?*
4. *What are policy actors' perspectives on efficacy, agency and change in the third sector-government partnership?*

Henceforth, the second part of this chapter will discuss the underpinnings of these four research questions to explain their development and how they contribute to addressing the overarching research question. This will be achieved by exploring the extant literature in relation to four key topics: descriptive representation; substantive representation; equalities inter-organisational relations; and institutional efficacy, agency and change. We begin with descriptive representation.

## **2.2. How descriptive representation is shaped by institutions**

Descriptive representation is one facet of democratic representation, and its understanding has largely been advanced by feminist scholars. It is seldom taken up in the study of the third sector or civil society, which presents an opportunity for this study to expand its use. The term descriptive representation was first coined in the equalities arena by Pitkin (1967). Descriptive representation is defined as the sharing of characteristics between representatives and those they represent (Celis et al. 2014), which means they belong to the same societal group (Celis and Lovenduski 2018). As Mansbridge (1999:629) explained, it refers to those who “are in their own persons and lives in some sense typical of the larger class of persons whom they represent”. Thus, descriptive representation draws attention to the nature of the group that is represented, referred to by Saward (2010:145) as “the constituency”. This focus on the relationship between representatives and their constituency shall now be located within the broader literature of democracy theory and its relation to governance structures in order to understand its relevance for this feminist institutionalist study.

### **2.2.1. Interest group representation and democratic principles**

Political theory has long debated whether interest groups' participation in politics enhances or detracts from the "democratic credentials of a political system" (Dür and Mateo 2016:207). Thus, there is value in exploring how democratic principles are "designed into the governance of partnerships" (Skelcher et al. 2005:574). Klijn and Skelcher (2007) analyse the extent to which governance networks threaten representative democracy. Yet representative democracy is not the only model of democracy and Bogason (2008, pp. 22-23) maintains that plural democratic models compete with one another within institutions. These democracy models can be broadly categorised into those decision-making systems that involve "elected 'officers'... to 'represent' the interests and/or views of citizens" (representative democracy) or those in which "citizens are directly involved" (direct and participatory democracy) (Held 2006:4). Thus, participatory democracy is also significant to governance structures (Klijn and Skelcher 2007; Dean 2017). One way that participatory democracy is conceived is by giving the third sector a voice in policymaking (Dicks et al. 2001; Taylor 2001; Davies 2007; Royles 2007; Justice and Skelcher 2009). Civil society networks are thus seen as a route to engage citizens in policy (Baker and Eckerberg 2008). This underlines the need to study contemporary approaches to participatory democracy and governance structures that engage third sector organisations.

Institutionalism can offer new insights to this analysis of interest groups' impact on democracy, although hitherto it has largely been neglected by democracy theory (Pierre et al. 2008; Schmidt 2013). Thus, scholars have argued for an examination of institutional discourses, norms and processes to understand which democratic principles underpin institutional practices (Skelcher et al. 2005; Bogason 2008). One example is Royles' (2007) scrutiny of the interrelationship between civil society and democratic development in Wales.

This study builds on this approach to address a gap in extant literature by examining how the engagement of the equalities third sector in governance structures is shaped by institutional discourses around democracy principles. In so doing, it applies the feminist institutionalist consideration of the implications for the promotion and/or frustration of equalities advancement. Thus, the next section considers the contribution that equalities literature makes to notions of representation.

### **2.2.2. Participatory democracy and representation of equalities groups**

The literature concerning participatory democracy describes advocacy on behalf of citizens and in this way is able to conceptualise the third sector as enabling citizens' democratic involvement in the work of government (Royles 2007; Edwards 2014). Some participatory democracy literatures imply the constituency of representatives consists of "all citizens" (Held 2006:211). However, there is a complex interpretation of civil society organisations presenting either broader notions of the "citizen voice" participating in the "public sphere" (e.g. Edwards 2014) or engagement of marginalised groups in policymaking (e.g. Chaney 2011).

Theorists concerned with descriptive representation have considered how representatives should be selected in institutional contexts. For example, Mansbridge (1999) provides an account of the selection criteria for institutional representation. She compares "proportionality", in which interest groups are represented "in proportion to the number of that group in the population" with a selection process that in some sense compensates "for the effects of some other process that interferes with an expected proportionality" (Mansbridge 1999:633/634).

Participatory democracy is often justified when traditional representative democracy mechanisms do not provide adequate input from marginalised or vulnerable groups affected by policies (Batory and Svensson 2019). For example, Pateman relates the development of participatory democracy to the failure of representative democracy to give equal representation with respect to gender, 'race' and class (Pateman 1979; Held 2006). Thus, the

selection of equalities groups' representatives in governance partnerships is justified in terms of compensating for their historical disadvantage and marginalisation in many representative democracies.

A different justification for the descriptive representation of excluded and marginalised groups is the specialised knowledge that they can provide to governments (Grant 2014). Mansbridge (1999:634) argues that descriptive representation is needed in policymaking to put forward "new information, perspectives or ongoing insights" pertinent to the understanding of a relevant policymaking decision. Such an argument is similar to that put forward by feminist epistemology. This recognises the value of insights from disadvantaged groups and thereby rejects objectivity that legitimises hegemonic masculinist positions (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002). Thus, standpoint theory draws our attention to knowledge which takes into account the social position of the agent. Thus, this specialised knowledge from first-hand experiences to inform policymaking is a different justification for the value of representatives selected because of the disadvantages they represent.

However, in cases where equalities groups are the focus of policy engagement, mainstream liberal discourse has sometimes criticised these practices on the grounds that identity categories are "vestiges of bias or domination" (Crenshaw 1991:1242). It has been argued that this is undemocratic and results in a focus on narrow sectional interests that might not concern the wider constituencies or society as a whole (Greenwood 2007; Beyers et al. 2008; Radnitz 2011).

Therefore, an analysis of institutional discourses of representation should interrogate the extent to which they are concerned with equalities groups or notions of the wider population. Feminist institutionalism can address a gap in understanding here by analysing how, in institutional settings such as governance partnerships, these institutional discourses constrain or enable the representation of equalities identity groups.

We have examined the debate around whether representatives should be chosen according to their ability to represent an equalities constituency or a wider constituency. However, there is a different understanding of representation which is yet to be examined and is frequently neglected and this is considered below.

### **2.2.3. Third sector representation**

Avritzer (2008) described the factors underpinning the legitimacy of an organisation to represent other civil society organisations. However, third sector organisational representation has seldom been addressed within civil society or governance literature.

Although third sector representation is often neglected, third sector organisational concerns have been raised in the context of welfare pluralism. For example, scholars have identified the challenges faced by the third sector in delivering services on behalf of the state and the implications for the third sector-government relations (Evans et al. 2005; Fyfe et al. 2006; Davies 2007; Bristow et al. 2008; Davies 2011; Buckingham 2012; Milbourne and Cushman 2013; Edwards 2014; Archambault 2015; Jacklin-Jarvis 2015; Salamon and Toepler 2015; Alcock 2016; Egdell et al. 2016; Hemmings 2017; Zimmer and Pahl 2018). Furthermore, it has been found that such challenges are on the increase in the wake of post-2008 austerity in the UK (Davies 2011; Milbourne and Cushman 2013; Hemmings 2017). Notwithstanding this, extant literature has not given sufficient attention to how these third sector concerns are raised with government. Moreover, work that has considered it sits within third sector literature, and the equalities literature has not tended to engage with organisational needs to the same extent.

The two facets of new governance theory are useful here because governance can refer to both representation in policy development or third sector delivery of welfare services (Stoker 1998; Newman 2001; Rhodes 2007; Justice and Skelcher 2009; Heidbreder 2014; Peters 2014). Thus, new governance theory connects the third sector's representative role with the

third sector's role in welfare pluralism. Moreover, governance scholars have identified the conflicts that arise when the third sector plays both roles (Davies 2007; Martin 2011; Egdell and Dutton 2016; Hemmings 2017). However, this has tended to focus on how the advocacy role is compromised by service delivery, rather than framing it as advocacy of third sector per se. An underexplored area is to examine how the third sector's own organisational needs are represented to government.

One arena where this is discussed is with the notion of "vested interest", when an organisation is seen to represent its own interests, which contradicts the principles of impartiality that underpin some notions of interest representation (Dean 2017:225). However, there is a distinction between a third sector organisation representing its own organisational needs and the needs of other third sector organisations. Arising from this, an analysis of the institutional discourses found in contemporary governance structures is required to consider the extent that third sector organisations' interests play a part in the *raison d'être* of third sector-government partnerships. Pertinent to this study is the related gap in extant equalities literature in the analysis of how organisational needs of equalities organisations are understood in such institutional discourses, and the implications for the advancement of equalities.

Therefore, representation needs to be understood with respect to representing either equalities constituencies, the wider population or simply third sector organisations themselves. By applying a feminist institutionalist lens, there is an opportunity to consider how these differing understandings of representative constituencies promotes or inhibits equalities representation.

Consideration is now made of whether the notion of representation is undermined by an imperative for direct participation.

#### **2.2.4. Direct participation**

Direct participation is frequently recognised as a key feature of participatory democracy (Held 2006:215). Some scholars of governance partnerships have drawn on the participative-representative tensions in democratic theory (Chaney and Fevre 2001b; Taylor 2001; Casey 2004; Sørensen and Torfing 2005a; Royles 2007; Saward 2010; Edwards 2014; Heidbreder 2014), particularly with respect to the legitimacy attached to such mechanisms (Greenwood 2007; Avritzer 2008). However, they have not tended to engage with institutionalism to explore it. This study will address this gap and examine institutional structures and discourses to consider the tension between both direct participation and alternative forms of representation.

As Schmidt (2008:311) explains, the arrows of discursive institutionalism can go both “top down and bottom up”. With the latter, citizens can impact on the institutional discourses. Conversely, in top-down mode, institutions may only admit third sector organisations with “sophisticated forms of communication” and “a high level of expertise” (Makarovič and Rek 2014:694). At the heart of this tension then is distinguishing between the engagement of expert professionals as opposed to citizens through institutional structures. Accordingly, a distinction should therefore be made between settings where citizens’ voices are being heard in contrast to professionals advocating on their behalf (Martin 2011). When the third sector is criticised for failing to bring citizen voices into policymaking, this taps into this well-established tension between expert representation and direct participation in democratic theory (Saward 2010; Makarovič and Rek 2014; Shapiro 2016).

This distinction is also found in the feminist literature and three examples are offered here. For example, the case for direct participation is found in feminist epistemology and standpoint theory, which values the situatedness of the knowing subject (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002) (see Section 2.2.2). Secondly, the distinction between expert representation and direct participation is also addressed in the feminist literature about mainstreaming. For example, Nott (2000:269) identified two forms of

mainstreaming: the expert-bureaucratic model and the participative-democratic model. The former involves a policy analysis process undertaken by experts with experience, training and a sophisticated understanding of equality issues. The latter places an intrinsic value on the participation of equalities groups or individuals in policy development with “empowerment” as an inherent goal (Nott 2000, pp. 269-270). Thirdly, “the empowerment argument” reinforces the participatory imperative and is found in the broader equalities literature which advocates giving marginalised groups a voice that will empower individuals (Hahn 2002). This empowerment argument is particularly prevalent in disability equality theory. From a feminist institutionalist perspective, this raises the question of whether contemporary institutional structures such as partnerships enable the equalities third sector to represent the voices of their constituencies or whether they are creating opportunities for the people with protected characteristics to directly participate.

Some of the equalities literature expresses a preference for direct participation. For example, some mainstreaming theorists identify “democracy” as one of the fundamental principles of mainstreaming (Rees and Parken 2003; Chaney and Rees 2004; Rees 2005). Additionally, the participative-democratic model of mainstreaming is seen as more recent than the expert-bureaucratic model (Donaghy 2004), and as a progression (Squires 2005).

However, other mainstreaming theorists defend expert representation. For example, Walby (2005:333) criticises the notion that expert representatives are elites that have undue influence. Relatedly, some theorists claim participation in all government decision-making is neither desirable nor practical (Fung 2006; Prosser et al. 2017). There are arguments in favour of representation over direct participation. For example, Saward (2010:117-118, 162) maintained that any form of representational claim is “authored” and therefore “partial and selective”, and that “the gap” between the represented and representative is key to democracy. He thereby justified representation over direct participation. Grant (2000:216) offers a different

justification for representation, which is that many people would prefer not to be involved in politics. Another form of justification comes from some feminist institutionalists, who have recognised the danger of being over-reliant on their constituency of grassroots women activists to carry the agency for change because it attaches “an unrealistic degree of voluntarism” (Mackay 2011:190). Similarly, the partnership literature has recognised the danger of “burnout” or “activist fatigue” (Bristow et al. 2008:904). These arguments for expert representation over direct participation across the different strands of equalities literature and interest representation have not yet been comprehensively pulled together. A feminist institutionalist analysis should draw out the informal discourses in an institution to interpret these concepts of direct participation or expert representation and relate them to equalities constituencies.

Where structures rely on expert representation, this does not rule out the prospect of participatory democracy. Walby (2005:333) maintains that an expert can make use of their technical knowledge, whilst also drawing on their democratic accountability. This raises the political accountability of those experts and their relationship with non-experts (Squires 2005). An exploration of the structures that connect representatives with their constituency is therefore required. This endeavour is fundamentally institutionalist in nature because it requires an examination of the formal institutional structures. Accordingly, the literature concerning the structural relationship between representatives and their constituency is reflected on next.

#### **2.2.5. Formal partnership structures**

It is frequently argued the third sector’s legitimacy to participate in governance structures depends on whether it is seen to engage its own constituencies in a democratic manner (Sørensen and Torfing 2005a; Justice and Skelcher 2009; Rocha Valencia et al. 2015). However, there is a tension in institutional structures between efficiency and fair representation (Newman 2001; Bristow et al. 2008). In short, achieving a

fair degree of participation, whilst at the same time not having to interact with an unmanageable multiplicity of different interests, is a balance that must be struck in third sector-government partnerships (Royles 2007).

Some authors question the third sector's ability to be representative where it lacks electoral processes (Kalyvas 2002), warning such organisations may not be democratic (Taylor 2001). This criticism is explicitly institutionalist in nature (though seldom expressed as such) because it raises fundamental questions about institutional structures and procedures of individual organisations. Royles (2007:153, 163) argues that the organisations most conducive to promoting participation are those that promote active membership in decision-making and campaigning, but she also observes that these are often the organisations least able to participate in policymaking partnerships. Furthermore, it has been argued that the third sector is seen to lose touch with its beneficiary base when its activities are closely aligned with government (Casey 2004; Royles 2007; Buckingham 2012). These earlier studies focus on the membership engagement within individual third sector organisations. A fertile ground for further examination that will be pursued here is the extent to which the institutional structures of a partnership that purports to represent multiple third sector organisations are viewed as a vehicle for constituency participation in public policymaking.

This study is particularly concerned with formal partnerships as the governance structure of interest mediation. As noted above (Section 2.1.5), there is a distinction between informal networks arising from voluntary collaborations and organised partnerships (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998). However, the inclusion of specific literature on network theory can be useful for elucidating the institutional structure in this analysis of formal structures.

The network literature of interest here is that put forward by Marsh and Rhodes (1992); (see also Rhodes and Marsh 1992) who provided a network typology, that recognises different levels of coordination in making a

distinction between “policy communities” and “issue networks”. The former are conceived as having a more regularised, hierarchical structure with a strong membership, and the latter are perceived to be looser in nature and have a large fluctuating membership (Rhodes and Marsh 1992:186-187). Regarding participation in this typology, Marsh and Rhodes (1992) describe how networks differ in the size of membership, the types of interests represented and the frequency and type of membership interaction. Although the authors were concerned with informal networks, each of these qualities can be used in an examination of the formal institutional structures that underpin a formal partnership. This can be used as a lens to interpret the participation of constituencies in different levels of formal structures in third sector-government partnerships.

This literature on network structures has been dealt with quite separately from both equalities literature and third sector literature, and this exposes a gap in understanding such structures in relation to equalities third sector engagement in state policymaking. The analysis of formal structures, which accompanies analysis of the informal in feminist institutionalism, can thus draw on such accounts of network governance structures. This can be used to interpret how the formal structures in governance partnerships facilitate or frustrate equalities constituencies’ participation and the implication of this for the advancement of equalities.

Thus far we have examined the benefits of exploring descriptive representation and the relationship between representatives and their constituencies both with respect to formal structures and informal discourses. Consideration is now made of how to bring these strands of theory together.

#### **2.2.6. Synthesising these theories into research question 1:**

Whilst the overarching research question focuses on the advancement of equalities in a sub-state third sector-government partnership, the specific facet addressed in this section is how the representation of equalities is shaped by the institution of a partnership. The descriptive representation

of equalities organisations has emerged as a key theoretical construct from the aforementioned literature (Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2) and specifically enables a focus on the relationship between representatives and their constituencies. The feminist institutionalist lens allows a focus on how the formal structures and informal discourses of an institution shape this relationship. Analysis of the extant literatures on representation and constituencies highlighted the relatively underexplored area of using informal institutional discourses to consider how these constituencies are discursively constructed. Specifically, there is room to attend to whether these imply constituencies of equalities groups, a wider population's interests, or the organisational interests of the third sector as a whole. This analysis can then be interpreted through a feminist institutionalist lens to consider whether the institution advances or constrains equalities representation. The analysis of the formal institutional structures was related to governance network theory to inform our understanding of the relationship between representatives and their constituencies. Furthermore, this section of the literature review drew attention to the tensions between representative and participatory democracy in governance settings. Again, the institutional discourses on these different forms of democracy can be interpreted through feminist institutionalism to consider their implication for the representation of equalities. This analysis of the gaps in extant literature on representation leads to the development of the first principal research question:

*How is the descriptive representation of equalities groups shaped by the institution of the third sector-government partnership?*

This research question is applied to the case study institution and is addressed in Chapter Five.

This section has considered descriptive representation of equalities groups from a feminist institutionalist perspective and the related literatures concerned with representatives and their relationship with their constituency. The following section moves on to consider substantive representation.

## **2.3. How substantive representation is promoted in institutions**

### **2.3.1. Substantive representation, claims and claims-making**

Pitkin (1967) first coined the term “substantive representation”, which she says, “links representation with activity”. She describes it as “an acting for others” referring to “the substance of the activity itself” (Pitkin 1967:12). In applying it to how equalities organisations act to influence policy, substantive representation can be understood as a “process” whereby equalities organisations act to promote equality of opportunity (Celis et al. 2014:151).

Research into substantive representation in civil society settings has been relatively underexplored as a political space (Chaney 2016). A justification for doing this through an institutional lens is given by Schmidt (2008:305), who maintains that discursive institutionalism allows an analysis of “the power of persuasion” and “the construction and reconstruction of interests” in the political sphere. Feminist theorists, Celis et al. (2014, pp. 151, 159), similarly recognise the significance of “the landscape of institutions and civil society groups”, arguing substantive representation should be conceived of “occurring inside and outside formal institutions”. Thus, a feminist institutionalist lens on this analysis draws attention to how equalities claims-making is shaped by both formal and informal rules of the institution.

Saward (2010, pp. 4-5) builds on Pitkin’s notion of substantive representation by focussing on “the idea of the representative claim” as well as the action. Here, it is useful again to revisit a particular facet of new social movements literature to draw on the distinct contribution it makes to understanding how interest groups might pursue substantive representation. Tilly’s (2005) work on social movements is useful for understanding the different facets of how organisations seek to influence policy. He identified that this includes “campaigns”, which he described as “sustained, organised and collective claims”, and “repertoires”, by which

he referred to the deployment of a range of political influencing actions (Tilly 2005:308). The first factor is akin to Saward's (2010) understanding of the representative claim and repertoires are akin to Pitkin's (1967) activities. "Repertoire" is an appropriate term because it recognises the "performance" and "innovation" and conjures up a "stock" of activities from which the key actors select (Alimi 2015:2). Tilly (2005:309) also described the "qualities" organisations "need to display" in order to make the "powerful assertion of popular sovereignty" and to have "the capacity to change things". In terms of qualities, as Saward (2010:121) recognised, a representative claim can only have influence if it is made by a group with the necessary "profile". Tilly's (2005) concepts of claims, action repertoires and qualities to be displayed are a useful tool for understanding the components of how the equalities organisations' substantive representation is constituted.

New insights can be gained by applying a feminist institutionalist lens to these concepts. From a feminist institutionalist perspective, the claims and repertoires can be recognised as the way that equalities actors seek to shape policy through the institution, but the qualities they must display represent how the institution shapes the way that equalities organisations seek to influence.

In understanding the nature of the claims, various literatures on substantive representation have recognised that this can occur at multiple stages of the policy process (Franceschet 2011). Thus, it can range from simply raising awareness about issues to lobbying decision-makers in order to effect specific policies or develop new laws (Betsill and Corell 2001; Jones 2011; Archambault 2015; Egdell and Dutton 2016). Alternatively, their distinct approach might be to monitor state programmes in order to hold the state to account (Betsill and Corell 2001; Chaney and Fevre 2001a; Buckingham 2012; Edwards 2014; Salamon and Toepler 2015; Hemmings 2017). Therefore, there is an opportunity to scrutinise the claims made by equalities organisations and consider what the institutional discourses reveal about the policy process they seek to influence.

The literature on action repertoires has been closely associated with insider-outsider theory, and this has resonance with institutionalism, so this is addressed next.

### **2.3.2. Positionality, influence and institutions**

A governance institution such as a partnership raises questions about third sector positionality, and how the equalities third sector's position is constrained and/or enabled within the institution. Positioning refers to the decisions organisations make to position themselves to be heard in society (Ries and Trout 2001). It can be applied to third sector organisations to understand their strategic decisions in how they position themselves (Chew and Osborne 2009). Insider-outsider theory is the classic exposition of this and has been used widely in social and political science. Grant (2000, 2014) uses it to look at how interest groups seek to influence political decision-making. Insider groups are consulted regularly by government, but outsider groups either "do not wish to" be in such close relationships with government or are "unable to gain recognition" (Grant 2000:19). Although this literature is not discreetly institutionalist, it is frequently aligned with institutionalism (Pettinicchio 2012; Weiler and Brändli 2015).

Several interest group theorists have identified a number of divisions on the insider-outsider continuum to create typologies (Maloney et al. 1994; Young 2000; Justice and Skelcher 2009; Buckingham 2012). These can be against a range of dimensions (Aiken and Taylor 2019; Evers and Von Essen 2019). Such typologies are valuable in revealing the complexity and entanglement of different categories of insider-outsider, contractor-noncontractor and antagonist-collaborator relationships in institutional settings. However, the position of the third sector on these different dimensions is continually being reshaped by "the discourses of institutional actors", resulting in a restructuring of the environment in which third sector representatives operate (Aiken and Taylor 2019:16; Evers and Von

Essen 2019). Therefore, an analysis of institutional discourses to explore this positioning is valuable.

Both insider and outsider approaches are recognised for their ability to impact on government policy in different ways (Jones 2011). Notably, where insiders influence public officials through formal channels, outsiders use tactics such as mobilising grassroots activism (Casey 2004; Ruzza 2011). Literature on new social movements has developed our understanding of these outsider positions (Pettinicchio 2012), and protests are their principal activity (Diani and Della Porta 2006). However, some authors recognise how social movements are also developing sophisticated insider strategies (Ruzza 2011). In the civil society literature, formal governance structures are often seen to place third sector organisations in an insider position (Taylor 2001). Organisations that have close insider relationships have also been observed using informal relations outside of the formal institutional setting to influence policy (Chaney 2015b:1480). Gaps remain in the existing literature on partnerships, not least, in relation to the effect on third sector claims-making of governments' attempts to create an "Inside Access Model" where selected groups have "easy and frequent access to political decision makers" (Cobb et al. 1976:135).

Further insights on how policy influence occurs inside formal institutional settings can be gained from the equalities literature on mainstreaming and is useful for our feminist institutionalist analysis. Definitions of mainstreaming vary (Beveridge and Nott 2001; Donaghy 2004; Rees 2005), but gender mainstreaming can generally be understood as "embedding gender equality in systems, processes, policies and institutions" (Rees 2005:558). It requires a "systematic incorporation of gender issues" throughout government and other institutions (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000). A full discussion of literature on gender mainstreaming is beyond our scope, but it is presented here to recognise the contribution it makes to understanding how equalities organisations can engage with governments inside formal institutional settings. Evidence of the alignment between mainstreaming and institutionalism can be drawn from the

institutional prerequisites that are described in mainstreaming literature (Chaney and Rees 2004; Chaney 2006; Parken et al. 2019). The mainstreaming literature also details the tools prescribed for influencing policy (Rees and Parken 2003; Rees 2005; Parken et al. 2019). An underexplored area is to relate these tools to the action repertoires utilised by equalities organisations' engagement inside formal governance structures.

A limitation of some insider-outsider accounts is the assumption that organisations occupy just one position (Buckingham 2012). For this reason, Craig et al. (2004) preferred to refer to insider and outsider strategies rather than insider or outsider organisation. Hemmings (2017) proposed that organisations can take a multi-faceted, nuanced and complex range of insider-outsider positions. Relatedly, "venue shopping" describes multiple venues being used to influence policy (Baumgartner and Jones 1993), whereby organisations strategically switch institutional venues to achieve policy influence (Dür and Mateo 2016; Zahariadis 2016). In identifying the range of potential venues, it is important to recognise that, as both governance theory and feminist institutionalism underline, the state is not a monolithic, undifferentiated whole and should be broken down into departments and sections (Rhodes and Marsh 1992; Krook and Mackay 2011). An underexplored area of research is to consider how equalities organisations' involvement in a third sector-government partnership at sub-state level relates to their institutional positioning with respect to these multiple venues and targets in sub-state governance and the implications for equalities being advanced.

In addition to recognising that the equalities third sector might engage with the institution of the Partnership both formally and informally in differing positions, another feminist institutionalist perspective is to consider the extent that these organisations' substantive representation efforts are constrained or enabled by the institution. We examine an example of this below.

### **2.3.3. Third sector independence and being critical of the state**

March and Olsen (1984:741) introduce the idea of “rules of appropriateness” in which the actions and qualities deemed appropriate in institutional contexts are “defined by the political system and transmitted through socialization”. Thus, informal norms prescribe and proscribe certain behaviours under the “logic of appropriateness” (March and Olsen 1984,2006; Mackay et al. 2010). The “subtle pressures for conformity” imposed on all members come from key actors of “dominant organisations” which inform the institutional members through this “socialization” (Powell and DiMaggio 1991:30). Discursive institutionalists describe the ways that these informal norms are established as “coordinative discourses” that are shared between members and are central to the functioning of the institution (Schmidt 2008; Peters 2012:116). Therefore, a feminist institutionalist lens on substantive representation requires an examination of how key actors frame their understanding of the institutional structures, including its formal structures and informal norms and discourses, that shape the nature of equalities claims-making.

In exploring how institutional positionality constrains or enables the equalities third sector, reference to the literature on how civil society plays a critical role in democratic governance is an important consideration. De Tocqueville’s interpretation of civil society holding the state to account described civil society as essential for protection against state despotism (De Tocqueville 1835; Edwards 2014). Governance models that are premised on civil society providing critical oversight of the elected representatives offers a different justification for participation than is offered in participatory democracy literature (Dean 2017), that was discussed earlier (see Section 2.2.2). A particular form of this critical third sector role has developed in response to public dissatisfaction with welfare provision, and aided by development of new forms of communication between citizens and the administrative system (Bogason 2008). The use of such structures to provide a service-user voice can be traced back to Beresford and Croft (1986) and earlier. However, existing works highlight

concerns that the state's management of the third sector can threaten the sector's autonomy and distinctive voice (Rhodes 2007; Carmel and Harlock 2008; Milbourne and Cushman 2013; Archambault 2015; Jacklin-Jarvis 2015; Alcock 2016; Hemmings 2017; Milbourne and Murray 2017).

The scrutiny of the third's sector's critical voice is often examined under the rubric of welfare pluralism; when the third sector is contracted to deliver services on behalf of the state this can compromise its independence (Chaney and Fevre 2001a; Evans et al. 2005; Rhodes 2007; Royles 2007; Edwards 2014; Jacklin-Jarvis 2015; Salamon and Toepler 2015; Alcock 2016; Egdell et al. 2016). In turn, this may stunt its advocacy role (Salamon & Toepler, 2015; Casey, 2004; Archambault, 2015). Jacklin-Jarvis (2015:286) describes the "distinctiveness/incorporation tension" where the need to work collaboratively with the state can make it difficult for organisations to maintain a distinctive voice from the statutory sector. In the current era, this is exacerbated by the impact of austerity where third sector organisations' funding dependencies on the state leads to "self-muzzling" and "self-censorship" with muted criticism of government (Hemmings 2017:42; Milbourne and Murray 2017:8; Aiken and Taylor 2019). A gap in knowledge is the extent this restriction might occur in a policy-making partnership. Interpreting this literature through a feminist institutionalist perspective requires consideration of whether a partnership institution constrains or enables the equalities third sector's ability to be independent and critical of the state.

#### **2.3.4. Synthesising these theories into research question 2:**

In constructing this part of the analytical framework, the theoretical concept of substantive representation was drawn from the extant literature on equalities and on policy influence concerning civil society and interest groups more widely. Thus, mainstreaming literature offered accounts of how equalities organisations can exert influence in formal settings from an inside position, whereas new social movements literature accounts for how organisations can exert influence in more contested ways and was originally conceived as being from a more outsider position. One

aspect of the new social movement's literature of particular interest was Tilly's (1995) account of how claims, claims-making and the qualities needed to be displayed by organisations to achieve policy change. Our feminist institutionalist focus allows an examination of equalities third sector organisations' policy claims and policy-influencing activities applied both formally and informally, as well as a consideration of how the institution of a governance partnership constrains or enables substantive representation. We have made a case for examining how substantive representation is shaped by positionality in relation to the government and strategic institutional alignment in terms of insiders and outsiders, as well as considering how these factors potentially shape the equalities sector's ability to play a critical role in their relationship with government. The present analysis synthesises these relevant strands of extant literature on how policy influence is achieved and leads to the development of the second principal research question:

*How have equalities organisations engaged with the institution of the third sector-government partnership to promote substantive representation?*

This analysis is applied to our case study Partnership in Chapter Six.

From a feminist institutionalist perspective, the particular contribution of this section to the overarching research question has been to consider how equalities organisations seek to promote equalities in policymaking through a formal partnership at the neglected sub-state level and how they might be constrained institutionally by a partnership. In line with the overarching research question, this literature review now progresses to consider how the equalities third sector itself might be shaped by the institution of such partnerships.

## **2.4. How the equalities third sector is shaped by a formal partnership**

### **2.4.1. Multi-strand approaches to equalities and intersectionality**

The previous sections treated the equalities third sector as a whole, but here we consider the literature on the interrelationships between and within equalities categories and how these are shaped by institutions. To

contribute to this, intersectionality theory is examined in this section. As noted above (Section 2.1.2), intersectionality, introduced by authors such as Crenshaw (1991), rejects linear understanding that prioritises one protected characteristic. Instead, it focuses on the interwoven nature of these categories, recognising that social identities interact, creating complex experiences between and within groups (Chaney 2011; Hankivsky and Cormier 2011; Winker and Degele 2011). Whilst an extensive literature explores intersectionality as a lived experience at an individual level, there is a gap between the aspiration for intersectionality at an institutional level and its implementation in policymaking (Engeli and Mazur 2018). This is pertinent because methods within policy development practices for integrating intersectionality are still under-theorised (Hankivsky and Cormier 2011) and there is a paucity of empirical work (Hancock 2007).

This need for theorising intersectionality practices is inherently institutionalist because the nature of intersectionality is shaped by the institutional setting (Cho et al. 2013). Accordingly, identifying intersectional practices requires an analysis of institutional structures that shape the patterns of interaction between different equality categories (Krizsan et al. 2012b). In doing so, this will further demonstrate the benefit of extending the applicability of feminist institutionalism to a broader interpretation of equalities. The new contribution this study can make to intersectionality is to apply a feminist institutionalist perspective, to consider how an institution can promote and/or frustrate the advancement of intersectionality in policymaking.

Krizsan et al. (2012a) did a comparative institutional analysis of applied intersectionality across European countries. They found that evidence for intersectional practices in policy development or law enforcement across Europe is scarce. Therefore, gaps remain and an original contribution to knowledge can be gained with an analysis of how institutional factors promote or constrain intersectionality.

The case for applying a feminist institutionalist lens to intersectionality should also be related to mainstreaming literature. As noted above (Section 2.1.2), there has been a shift both theoretically and in practice from mainstreaming's initial focus on gender to a multi-strand approach in equalities mainstreaming (Beveridge and Nott 2001; Donaghy 2004; Nott 2005; Rees 2005; Parken 2010; Krizsan et al. 2012b; Hankivsky et al. 2019). Yet a "multiple approach" in which institutions address more than one inequality but treat them separately differs from an "integrated approach" in which institutions address inequalities in a way more consistent with intersectionality (Krizsan et al. 2012b:2). However, much of the mainstreaming literature touches on concepts akin to intersectionality, although it is not always framed explicitly in intersectionality terms. For example, amongst the underpinning principles that mainstreaming theorists describe, the one principle that is consistently referenced is the notion of "the whole person" (Rees and Parken 2003; Chaney and Rees 2004; Rees 2005; Parken 2018; Parken et al. 2019). Explanations of this principle underline that there must be recognition of how other categories are understood in relation to gender (Rees 2005; Squires 2005). Relatedly, Squires (2005:367) makes a case for "diversity mainstreaming as opposed to gender mainstreaming". Although Squires (2005) terms this "diversity", she envisages it as recognising the intersections between categories and thus it bears some hallmarks of intersectionality. Furthermore, some research has taken place to adapt mainstreaming and develop an applied intersectionality (Parken 2010; Parken et al. 2019). Such accounts of mainstreaming thus lay the foundation for understanding intersectionality as an equalities goal, and the inherently institutionalist nature of mainstreaming suggests this intersectionality should be scrutinised in institutionalist terms.

In order to examine applied intersectionality, it is important to understand the literature on the different forms of intersectionality. McCall's (2005) distinction between anti-categorical, inter-categorical and intra-categorical intersectionality is important to understanding the interrelationships between equalities organisations. "Anti-categorical" intersectionality refers

to the deconstruction of the analytical categories (McCall 2005; Winker and Degele 2011). By contrast, “inter-categorical” intersectionality analyses relations of multiple inequalities between socially constructed groups and therefore requires the provisional adoption of the categories (McCall 2005; Winker and Degele 2011). The third type is “intra-categorical” intersectionality, which refers to intersections of a single dimension of equalities category on a micro-level, recognising the complexity within such groups (McCall 2005; Winker and Degele 2011). A different distinction of intersectionality types is one made originally by Crenshaw (1991). She distinguishes between structural intersectionality, which recognises when one identity category amplifies the disadvantage experienced by another, and political intersectionality which recognises where one identity category can obfuscate or marginalise the disadvantage experienced by another.

The consideration of political intersectionality above also introduces the notion of some equalities strands being advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to others. The literature on this is further examined below.

#### **2.4.2. The interrelationships between equalities identity categories**

Krizsan et al. (2012b:2) question “the relative importance of different inequalities for policymaking” and ask whether some categories “deserve wider protection”. This is consistent with key theories on the “hierarchy of inequalities”, which may form in response to resource variation (Nott 2005) or political salience (Verloo 2006). Likewise, Hancock (2007:68) describes how a pluralist model leads to an “Oppression Olympics” in which groups compete to be seen as the most oppressed. Notably, this literature tends to focus on which strands are most advantaged by the political salience of their subject or the allocation of resources. Thus, a gap in the literature is to consider whether and how any groups are disadvantaged in different institutional settings. Given that feminist institutionalism examines how institutional practices can promote or constrain the advancement of equality (Krook and Mackay 2011), the recognition that some equalities categories might be advantaged or disadvantaged in such governance mechanisms can be understood as a

fundamentally feminist institutionalist observation. Therefore, there is a need to explore how the formal institutional structures and informal institutional practices affect the dynamics between equalities organisations and the potential inequality between identity categories.

To understand how the hierarchy of (in)equalities can be explored in institutionalist terms it is useful to draw on the equality of opportunity literature. Equalities literature distinguishes between equal treatment and radical approaches (Rees 2005; Squires 2005), and this is commonly characterised as the difference between equality of process and equality of outcome (Johns and Jordan 2006; Chaney 2011; Johns et al. 2014). Equal treatment approaches are characterised as equalising conditions to create a level playing field for individuals (Johns and Jordan 2006; Chaney 2011; Johns et al. 2014). Such approaches contrast with radical, outcomes-focused approaches which understand discrimination as endemic, question individualism and recognise institutional inequality (Johns and Jordan 2006; Lombardo and Verloo 2009; Johns et al. 2014) (see Section 2.1.2). Through an institutionalist lens, equal treatment tends to focus on institutional processes in the pursuit of equality of opportunity for individuals whilst radical equality aims to target inequality outcomes inherently embedded in institutional structures. Mainstreaming theorists have sought to document the progression of equalities strategies from equal treatment to radical positive action to mainstreaming (Rees 2005). Yet it is important not to use this understanding to diminish the value of equal treatment strategies. A relatively underexplored area of equalities literature is the consideration of how equal treatment applies to the representation of equalities organisations in institutional processes in formal governance settings. Thus, a feminist institutionalist analysis applied to a pan-equalities study such as this, can scrutinise the institutional processes and discourses to consider how equality of opportunity applies to equalities organisations engaged in such partnership structures.

To further explore the relationship between equalities organisations, Lombardo and Verloo (2009) call for more research into the dynamics

behind the alliances, competition and hostility between different equalities representative groups. The literature on intersectionality and hierarchy of (in)equalities can usefully be brought together with the analysis of inter-organisational relations that is found in the interest groups and third sector literature. This leads us to consider the literature on inter-organisational relations in the third sector.

### **2.4.3. The interrelationships between third sector organisations**

There has been much scholarly work on policy makers' expectations for the third sector to present a unified voice. For example, Sinclair (2011) describes how third sector-government partnerships are disposed towards achieving consensus. Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) point to collaboration theory to explore the benefits of collaborative working for partnership members. Both studies reflect the broader literature on the requirement for "collaboration" in the third sector to "display" a unified voice and "collective" goals (Tilly 2005; Peters 2014:302; Dean 2017). Here, there is a concern that such an expectation might suppress diverse voices (Taylor 2001; Day 2006; Bristow et al. 2008). Jacklin-Jarvis (2015) refers to this as the unity-diversity tension in her analysis of third sector-government relations. Similarly, the institutionalist literature has called for an examination of how "intersectoral coordination" can be achieved that "encourages diversification" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:79). In the intersectionality literature there also is concern about the suppression of a sub-group's difference for the sake of achieving a united voice (Hancock 2007). However, until now there has been little application of this literature on the 'unity imperative' to understand the interrelationships between equalities organisations within governance institutions such as sub-state partnerships.

There has been some emphasis on "inter-organisational relationships" within the governance literature (Lindsay et al. 2014:193). This recognises that competition for delivering contracts can undermine collaboration between third sector organisations (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998; Chapman et al. 2010; Egdell and Dutton 2016). Contrastingly, competition between

organisations has also been understood in the arena of pluralism and agenda-setting theory, in which interests are conceived to compete to shape the policymaking agenda (Cobb et al. 1976; Dahl and Lindblom 1976). Agenda here refers to “the list of subjects or problems” to which government pay serious attention (Kingdon 2011:3). Additionally, equalities scholars recognise that some marginalised groups might not be in harmony with other marginalised groups (Johns et al. 2012). However, these different strands of analysis on competition are rarely brought together with the consideration of consensus through an institutionalist perspective.

One exception is Kumar and Das (2007) whose institutionalist study identified the collaboration-competition tension between partners in an alliance. However, they were researching private companies rather than equalities organisations. Krizsan et al. (2012b:22) argue that the degree of “interaction, convergence and competition” between equality categories is shaped by how the state engages with those equality groups. Therefore, these differing notions of competition and collaboration within state-third sector relations which have tended to be dealt with discretely in civil society literature, can be used to inform our understanding of how intersectional practices are shaped within the context of the Partnership.

#### **2.4.4. Synthesising these theories into research question 3:**

The aim of this section of the literature review has been to explore extant theory on how an institution of a third sector-government partnership shapes the equalities sector, particularly their inter-organisational relations. This part of the analytical framework brings together the equalities literature on intersectionality and hierarchy of (in)equalities with the third sector literature and other cognate literatures on competition and collaboration. This approach acknowledges the iterative, dynamic nature of institutions wherein the equalities third sector seeks to influence government policymaking, but also how an institution in turn impacts on the equalities third sector itself. This literature review has detailed how both institutional structures and informal discourses can be used to inform

us about the potential for applied intersectionality, with reference to the different forms of intersectionality. This analysis allows us to relate this examination of equalities inter-organisational relations to the institutional discourses of both unity and competition. The scrutiny of the political intersectionality literature alongside the hierarchy of (in)equalities has been used as a springboard for scrutinising how some equalities organisations might be institutionally advantaged or disadvantaged. The analysis of the gaps in extant literature on a multi-strand approach to equalities leads to the development of the third principal research question:

*How is the equalities sector and its potential for intersectional practices shaped by the institution of the third sector-government partnership?*

This analysis is undertaken with respect to the case study Partnership in Chapter Seven.

Thus far, we have addressed the overarching research question by considering the literature concerned with how an institution shapes and is shaped by equalities third sector organisations, with respect to the achievement of descriptive and substantive representation, and in terms of inter-organisational relations. The following section attends to a different aspect of the overarching research question by shifting the focus onto the nature of institutions themselves, with a discussion about the relationship between policy actors' perceptions of institutional change, efficacy, and agency.

## **2.5. Factors shaping institutional change**

### **2.5.1. The relationship between efficacy and institutional change**

Mackay (2011:194) calls for feminist institutionalists to investigate how institutional configurations operate both to “promote and foreclose” equalities policy changes. Yet it is also important to acknowledge that change in institutional structures is qualitatively different from the achievement of policy change (Rhodes and Marsh 1992). As discussed

earlier (Section 2.1.4), feminist and discursive institutionalism recognise that institutional change is dependent on the abilities of the institution's members to examine the efficacy of these institutions (Schmidt 2008). Given the two forms of institutional change, there is a distinction between the efficacy of institutional processes for equalities third sector participation and the efficacy of a partnership to achieve equalities policy change. Both the efficacy of a partnership's processes and the wider impact of the partnership are considered here.

Peters (2008:4) uses the term "empirical institutionalism" to describe scholarship which seeks to establish whether institutions make any difference to policy outputs. A similar notion is put forward in feminist institutionalism by Engeli and Mazur (2018) who called for both policy outputs and policy outcomes to be examined. Notably, they adopt the distinction between outputs and outcomes also commonly used by third sector practitioners to distinguish between the steps taken to implement change (outputs) and the long-term societal change that is being sought (outcome) (Engeli and Mazur 2018). However, the two notions are frequently conflated under the term "output" in academia. Thus, it has been argued that policy outputs should be scrutinised to examine institutional policy change.

However, measuring outputs is difficult to assess. This is partly due to the causality question, where a number of factors means that it cannot be said which outputs are solely a result of third sector influence (Jones 2011; Engeli and Mazur 2018). For example, many influencing activities are at play, often informally and sometimes covertly, and there can be multiple organisations exerting claims-making collectively and simultaneously; and furthermore, there are multiple ways to measure success, and these can shift over time (Betsill and Corell 2001; Walby 2005; Jones 2011).

Moreover, a constructionist perspective casts doubt on whether the technical properties of outputs can be empirically proven given that they are socially defined (Suchman 1995:580). Thus, constructionist researchers

have concentrated less on measurable policy change and more on the discursive construction of policy outputs (Schmidt 2013). Therefore, analysis of the discourse around perceived efficacy of equality policy change is a more appropriate approach for this study and also in keeping with this study's constructionist methodology.

A similar problem exists with evidencing the efficacy of institutional processes, and this study's epistemological position is not in keeping with an objective measurement of efficacy in this regard either. Given this study's constructionist position, and discursive institutionalist orientation, it is the policy actors' perception of efficacy in the governance structures and processes that we are concerned with addressing.

Literature on third sector-government partnerships informs our understanding of process efficacy and this has highlighted failings in processes to achieve representation and participation. For example, Bristow et al. (2008) warn of an emerging partnership crisis where partnerships are not sufficiently inclusive of representative interests. The concern is that larger organisations are positioned well, are politically articulate and have the resources to participate in governance, but smaller ones are disadvantaged by not having the resources or capacity to engage and remain ignorant of the engagement structures available (Chaney and Fevre 2001a; Dicks et al. 2001; Taylor 2001; Casey 2004; Hodgson 2004; Day 2006; Bristow et al. 2008; Chaney 2011; Egdell et al. 2016; Engeli and Mazur 2018). Royles (2007) described the tendency for a two-tier civil society to develop in Wales, which has an elite inner circle alongside an excluded outer collection of civil society organisations. Other theorists have pointed out that those not participating rather than being excluded may have chosen not to engage in partnerships (Casey 2004; Buckingham 2012). Thus, the efficacy of institutional structures and processes is bound up with issues of the different degrees of participation and accounts of why some third sector organisations do not engage.

The relevance of these accounts of perceived efficacy both with respect to policy change and institutional processes should be related back to our overarching research question. The efficacy of a partnership to achieve policy change is important to feminist institutionalism because one of its primary goals is the achievement of policy change to advance equalities. The efficacy of the institutional processes of a partnership is important to feminist institutionalism because it allows scrutiny of the equality of opportunity to participate in the processes. Yet both of these are concerned with institutional change, so it is important to revisit our account of institutional change, that was discussed earlier (see Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.4).

### **2.5.2. Differing accounts of how institutional change might occur**

It is beyond the aims of this chapter to offer an exhaustive account of the literature on institutional change. However, it is useful to give an overview of key distinctions that inform the understanding of institutional change and its relationship with perceptions of efficacy. Two distinctions discussed here are between exogenous or endogenous change and between incremental or fundamentally transformative change.

Institutionalist literature about change has tended to be dominated by policy change precipitated by an exogenous event. For example, “Policy window” refers to a short time period after the appearance of a problem or a political happening, “when the conditions to push a given subject higher on the policy agenda are right” (Kingdon 2011:88). Thus, the notion of “policy windows” is used to explain change by pointing to exogenous pressures from socio-political events (Schmidt 2008; Mackay et al. 2010; Krook and Mackay 2011). In contrast, some theorists have given accounts of endogenous change. For example, Hay (1999) gives a detailed account of how endogenous change can be accomplished. In his account perception of efficacy plays an important role. As Hay (1999:324) explains, change requires the perception of failure, so that the systemic failure has “become

politically and ideationally mediated". This highlights the relationship between key actors' perceptions of institutional failures in efficacy and endogenously generated change. An underexplored area of research is to consider whether perceptions of systemic efficacy failures in outputs or institutional processes meet the conditions to precipitate endogenous institutional change.

A different account of institutional change is found in the literature concerned with incremental change (Lindblom:1959; Schmidt 2008; Krook and Mackay 2011). This refers to "small shifts in institutional power dynamics" that add up to significant change over time (Mackay 2011). Layering, conversion, and mission drift have been identified as different facets of how incremental change occurs in institutional settings and these are popular within feminist institutionalist accounts (Schmidt 2008; Mackay et al. 2010; Krook and Mackay 2011; Mackay 2011; Minto and Mergaert 2018). Layering is a strategy of inserting new rules and processes on top of existing rules and processes (Mackay 2011; Celis and Lovenduski 2018; Minto and Mergaert 2018). Conversion is about adapting the rules and processes to adopt a new goal in which old arrangements are co-opted and re-interpreted (Mackay 2011; Celis and Lovenduski 2018). Mission drift is where old institutional arrangements are either neglected or co-opted (Mackay 2011). Considered below is the complex relationship that these forms of incremental change have with the perception of institutional efficacy and change.

Peters (2008:13) describes the common "incrementalist problem" of identifying how big a change constitutes a change. Incremental changes are criticised for not showing a clear trajectory (Hay and Wincott 1998; Mackay 2011). This raises the question of whether an incremental adaptation in response to perceived efficacy failings constitutes a meaningful change. Congruently, Hay (1999, pp. 320, 328/329) describes "reactive", "unreflexive" adaptations to systemic failure drawn from within pre-existing, unmodified structures which do not resolve failure. He contrasts

this to cases of fundamental transformation. Therefore, incremental accounts of change within an institutional structure should be scrutinised to understand the extent to which they are perceived to have a consistent, intended trajectory and constitute fundamental change over time.

Given the centrality of formal and informal design in institutionalism (Mackay et al. 2010; Peters 2012), a related point of inquiry raised by incremental change to institutional processes is the degree the changed processes are perceived to be formal. As noted earlier, historical institutionalism maintains that institutions are shaped by initial “choices made when an institution is being formed” (Wincott 2005; Mackay 2011:70; Peters 2012). This foregrounds initial choices in institutional design in defining formality, which raises the question of the extent changes would be considered formal processes. “The degree of formalism” is difficult to define, since it depends on the degree to which practices are institutionalised or decisions are perceived as binding (Wincott 2004a:228). Thus, here again, it is the perception of incremental change and efficacy that impact on whether such changes are considered formal structures or informal norms, and this in turn impacts on whether they are perceived to constitute institutional change.

These incremental accounts have thus far been discussed with respect to institutional structural change. However, incremental change is also useful for understanding the achievement or constraints on equalities policy change. For example, feminist institutionalists have used the concepts of layering and conversion as examples of equalities strategies for implementing change (Celis and Lovenduski 2018) and for institutionalising equalities strategies to keep them on the agenda (Minto and Mergaert 2018). Mackay (2011) also made a case for understanding how mission drift can be used to inhibit equality reforms. Thus, these different forms of incremental change can be understood in terms of both promoting equalities policies and inhibiting them.

However, Kingdon (2011) contests the application of incremental change to explain policy change. He observes that with agenda change, rather than seeing a gradual heightening of interest in a subject, it instead suddenly “catches on” or “takes off” (Kingdon 2011:80). Given these debates about the explanatory power of incremental change, a feminist institutionalist analysis can address a gap in understanding by considering the extent that incrementalist change is understood to take place to achieve equalities policy change or equality in institutional processes.

The foregoing has reviewed the literature on the relationship between efficacy with respect to policy change and change in institutional processes (Sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2). Mackay (2011) makes a call for feminist institutionalism to take agency into account to refine our understanding of change. To do this, we examine the literature concerned with agency with respect to policy change, institutional processes and institutional change.

### **2.5.3. Agency in policy change and institutional processes**

When considering policy change it is helpful to consider who has the ability to instigate policy change. The earlier literature review of substantive representation (Section 2.4) was concerned with how equalities third sector organisations act to pursue policy change. An underlying assumption of this literature is that policy interest groups, which in the present study refers to the equalities third sector, have the agency to achieve policy change. However, there is a considerable, established literature on agenda-setting that contests this. Given the breadth of agenda-setting theory, it is inappropriate to attempt a full exposition of the literatures here, but the discussion below highlights which aspects pertain to our understanding of agency.

The term agenda-setting does not simply refer to the literal agenda of meetings but is more concerned with “government priorities” that form the policy discourse (Zahariadis 2016:5). Of particular relevance is the theory of *non-decision making* which highlights the policy subjects that do not make it onto the policy agenda (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). Bachrach

and Baratz (1962:948) explain that power is frequently exercised by the confinement of decision-making to “safe” issues, and institutional practices are reinforced to limit the scope of these. In the context of a feminist institutionalist view of policy change, these ideas underline that it is germane to ask which policy actors have control of setting the policy priorities and the institutional processes that underlie this.

Hay and Wincott (1998:955) make a useful distinction when they describe the dynamic relationship between “institutional architects” and “institutional subjects”. This distinguishes between those that can have agency within the institutional setting and those that are subject to others’ agency. In addressing this it should be noted that the relationship between state and the third sector is often not considered to be a “partnership of equals” (Chaney and Fevre 2001a:153). Scholars frequently observe that the state has the power to veto, override and substantially amend policy proposals in a partnership (Chaney 2011). Accordingly, it is important to consider the extent that the state is perceived to steer the third sector and networks through such governance mechanisms (Davies 2007; Baker and Eckerberg 2008). One view is that the apparent reduction in state power through governance structures is an illusion which enabled the state to incorporate and disarm the sector (Casey 2004). Scholars have frequently described the government as making the third sector a “governable terrain” (Carmel and Harlock 2008; Chapman et al. 2010; Milbourne and Cushman 2013:491; Alcock 2016:99; Milbourne and Murray 2017).

Meta-governance literature is concerned with how governance networks are managed (Sørensen and Torfing 2005b), and it contains the presumption that state-steering is desirable. It details how governments and their elected politicians should steer institutional structures and processes (Sørensen and Torfing 2005a,b; Connell et al. 2019). Meta-governance theory is a broad body of literature, and it would not be appropriate to detail it here, so it is only referenced to demonstrate that some theorists view state-steering in positive terms. Conversely, other accounts recognise that institutions are not always benign structures

beneficial to their members but can also be sites of coercion, power and domination (Mackay et al. 2010). Thus, institutionalist analysis of agency requires scrutiny of the extent that the state is perceived to steer policy discussions in a third sector-state partnership and how agency is understood by policy actors in terms of the institutional processes.

In this context, the literature concerned with gatekeeper positions should also be considered. A gatekeeper refers to an “independent” “intermediary” who is able to withhold “necessary cooperation or consent” (Coffee Jr 2006:2). This literature reminds us that agency can be located with policy actors outside of the state. Relatedly, this notion of withholding consent is referred to by institutionalists as “veto players” who have a role in rejecting policy decisions (Tsebelis 1999; Peters 2008:6). Veto players refers to independent “individual or collective actors whose agreement is necessary” to achieve policy change (Tsebelis 1999). So, it is useful to consider who these gatekeepers or veto-players might be in a partnership setting. Agenda-setting theorists argue power rests with those that coordinate the engagement processes because they decide who participates and therefore who sets the agenda (Parsons 1995). A number of umbrella bodies can serve as the conduits between the state and the multiple equalities organisations (Chaney and Fevre 2001a). A relatively underexplored area is to apply these theories of veto-players, state-steering and gatekeepers to understanding how agency plays a role in agenda-setting through institutional processes. From a feminist institutionalist perspective, an analysis of agenda-setting needs to examine the locus of agency in a partnership to assess the impact on the promotion or constraint of equality matters through the institutions of a partnership.

Thus, agenda-setting theory is a valuable analytical tool for understanding agency with respect to policy change and institutional processes. The next consideration is to examine agency with respect to change in institutional structures themselves.

#### **2.5.4. Agency in institutional change**

To apply the concept of agency to institutional structural change, it is useful to revisit the earlier analysis of endogenous change (Section 2.5.2) and consider the literature on the mechanisms for achieving this. The understanding of “institutional learning” has developed since March and Olsen (1984, pp. 745-746) described it. Hay and Wincott (1998, pp. 954-956) discuss how “strategic learning”, can result in institutions reorienting future strategies and overcoming “institutional inertia”. Thus, institutions can use their experience of institutional inefficiency to impact on future institutional “organising logics” (Powell and DiMaggio 1991:33). Extensive literatures exist on both institutional learning and institutional failure, but there are less studies about how institutions can learn from failure (Dunlop 2017). As noted earlier (Section 2.1.4), an advantage of a feminist institutionalist approach informed by discursive institutionalism is that this encourages a focus on agency, and specifically the policy actors’ ability to reflect on and instigate change. Minto and Mergaert (2018:210) describe how a key indicator of effective formal accountability mechanisms is that actors responsible for them should be identifiable. Thus, consideration can be made of whether such formal mechanisms are in place and who carries responsibility for them. Additionally, when considering concrete examples of institutional learning mechanisms, Engeli and Mazur (2018:117) recognise attitudinal preconditions that need to be in place. They describe that if there is a lack of “political power” behind the evaluation processes then this compromises its ability to result in meaningful institutional learning. An opening exists for exploring discourses on such institutional learning, both in terms of formal mechanisms and informal attitudes to understand which policy actors have the agency to enable institutional learning.

Another benefit of applying a feminist institutionalist lens is that it also enables us to consider how agency figures in the prevention of change. Feminist institutionalists have led the way in developing theories of resistance to change, recognising both direct opposition and the informal resistance strategies that need to be overcome if equalities strategies are to be effective (Acker 2006; Mackay 2011; Celis and Lovenduski 2018;

Engeli and Mazur 2018; Minto and Mergaert 2018). Beyond the equalities literature, it has been argued that those involved in policymaking mechanisms resist change because they favour “the *status-quo* or the existing balance of interests” (Rhodes and Marsh 1992:198). This would suggest that it is within the interests of policy actors engaged in a partnership to resist change. An alternative view is presented by Hay and Wincott (1998), who highlight that policy actors’ ability to transform institutions is restricted by the strategic resources and knowledge of the institutional environment available to them. This account differs because it removes culpability from accounts of failures to change. So, there must be scrutiny of actors’ views of what inhibits change and who if anyone, is responsible for this. Here, agency is understood in terms of who gets to shape or indeed prevent the shaping of institutional mechanisms for change.

Dean (2017:217) distinguished between “negotiated participatory spaces” in which the condition of participation can be negotiated by the participants, and “prescribed participatory spaces” in which decisions about the process of participation are determined outside the space and imposed upon the participants. Applying this to our understanding of agency, this highlights the importance of recognising whether the agency for shaping mechanisms lies with all institutional members or with a specific group or department and/or with the gatekeepers of the institution.

#### **2.5.5. Synthesising these theories into research question 4:**

This final section of the literature review has focussed the feminist institutionalist lens on partnership institutions themselves, their ability to change to promote equalities processes within a partnership structure and their ability to achieve wider policy change for the advancement of equalities. This has allowed us to examine literature on institutional change both in terms of policy change and institutional structural change. Therefore, perceptions of efficacy were explored with respect to literature on policy change outputs and institutional processes. Following this,

accounts of agency and the locus of agency between state and third sector in governance were examined. This was related to, first, the agenda-setting of policymaking and its institutional processes, and then institutional change itself. This drew on theories around institutional learning and the part this plays in enabling or constraining endogenous change to occur. This examination of how agency in policy processes impacts on the pursuit of equalities matters and the achievement of equality of opportunity to participate in partnerships accords with the feminist institutionalist aim to use equalities theories to extend the understanding of institutionalism. This review therefore demonstrates the need to revisit institutionalist accounts of agency and change through the fresh perspective of feminist institutionalism. The analysis of this gap in extant literature on institutional change leads to the development of the fourth principal research question:

*What are policy actors' perspectives on efficacy, agency and change in the third sector-government partnership?*

The findings related to question four are discussed in Chapter Eight.

This literature review is concluded by pulling the strands together to present an overview of this study's analytical framework.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

The theoretical aim of this thesis is to provide a feminist institutionalist exploration of the pursuit of equalities in a sub-state partnership. It addresses Mackay's (2011:194) call for further theorising on how "institutional configurations may work in different directions to promote or foreclose change". Accordingly, the theme of feminist institutionalism is here expanded to include a multi-strand approach to equalities which, as the foregoing discussion attests, has been articulated as a valid adaptation of feminist institutionalism. This development of feminist institutionalism to examine equalities third sector organisations' engagement in a formal sub-state partnership has been shown to be an underexplored field that is appropriate for such an analysis. As noted in Section 2.1 above, the

synthesis of these theoretical goals led to the overarching research question:

*From a feminist institutionalist perspective, how does a sub-state partnership between government and the third sector promote and/or frustrate the advancement of equalities?*

Full analysis of the dynamics of the intersection of equalities, or even of all policies relevant to equalities organisations, is well beyond the scope of a single study. However, this study makes an original contribution to our understanding of the advancement of equalities in policymaking using feminist institutionalism within the context of a sub-state formal partnership.

Each of the key research questions contributes a different facet to the overarching research question in understanding the promotion and constraints on how equalities are advanced from a feminist institutionalist perspective. These research questions are:

- 1. How is the descriptive representation of equalities groups shaped by the institution of the third sector-government partnership?*
- 2. How have equalities organisations engaged with the institution of the third sector-government partnership to promote substantive representation?*
- 3. How is the equalities sector and its potential for intersectional practices shaped by the institution of the third sector-government partnership?*
- 4. What are policy actors' perspectives on efficacy, agency and change in the third sector-government partnership?*

In reflecting on how these four research questions fit together in the analytical framework to contribute to the overarching research question, it should be noted that descriptive representation and substantive representation are key theories concerned with equalities strategies which have been substantially advanced by feminist scholarship. If substantive representation is conceived as the wider impact that equalities interests hope to achieve, then descriptive representation is the means through

which that is achieved. Feminist institutionalism enables scrutiny of how both forms of representation can be improved (Waylen 2011). Locating them in separate research questions (Questions 1 and 2) to consider the advancement of equalities through the partnership allows a thorough analysis of each. The relationship between them will be fully explored under the overarching research question in the thesis conclusion. Whilst the first two research questions approach the overarching research aim by considering the equalities third sector as a whole, Research Question 3 recognises the different interests within equalities groups and examines the interrelationship between them. This is where the full advantage of applying a feminist institutionalist approach to the broader interpretation of equalities really shows its theoretical strength. It enables a distinct contribution to the overarching research question through an analysis of how an institutional setting can promote or foreclose applied intersectionality relating this to equalities inter-organisational relations. The means and ends dichotomy of descriptive and substantive representation is picked up again in Research Question 4, with the analysis of perceptions of efficacy in the Partnership, where efficacy is concerned with partnership processes and the wider impact on equalities policymaking. The implications of this for the achievement of change, and the role of agency within this, enables this feminist institutionalist analysis to approach institutional change from a new perspective. It ties together this study's contribution to the overarching research question by focusing on how institutional change for the advancement of equalities is promoted or frustrated by the partnership.

As well as their contribution to the theoretical aim of the overarching research question, each specific research question makes its own theoretical contribution. Thus, the first research question aims to bring a new theoretical understanding of descriptive representation by using a feminist institutionalist lens to synthesise participatory and representative democracy theory. It aims to do so through its analysis of informal discursive construction of representation and relating this to formal institutional structures.

The second research question aims to extend understanding of substantive representative using a feminist institutionalist lens to scrutinise both formal insider equalities strategies, such as mainstreaming, with informal policy influencing strategies and other positioning strategies. It thereby considers theory around positioning in relation to the insider-outsider binary.

The third research question aims to make an original contribution to knowledge through extending equalities theories concerning applied intersectionality and the hierarchy of (in)equalities literature by applying theoretical concepts of competition and collaboration found in governance and interest group literature.

Finally, the fourth research question culminates with an analysis of the key actors' perspectives on the partnership's effectiveness, including the extent to which it has been open to change. This research question aims to advance understanding of institutional change by amalgamating perceptions of efficacy in the achievement of change with perceptions of agency. It draws together agenda-setting theory and theories on institutional learning to better examine agency in such a setting. Its original contribution will be to contribute to the feminist institutionalist goal of advancing understanding of institutional change.

In summary, the main gap in knowledge that this thesis addresses is extending the application of feminist institutionalism to interpret the advancement or constraints on equalities through a sub-state partnership. In addition, a further original contribution is to utilise feminist institutionalism in this setting to extend understanding of descriptive and substantive representation, applied intersectionality and equalities inter-organisational relations, and institutional change.

Here, we have examined the overarching theoretical contribution of this thesis and how each research question feeds into this, and also considered

the scope for each research question to make a distinct theoretical contribution. Collectively, these form the analytical framework of this thesis.

The Methodology (Chapter Four) explains how this analytical framework was operationalised in this study's data collection and data analysis. However, before this, it is apposite to detail the research context and the particular case study sub-state partnership to which this analytical framework is applied (Chapter Three).

### **3. The Welsh Case Study Partnership**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter looked at the theoretical justification for locating this feminist institutionalist research in a formal sub-state partnership between government and the third sector (Section 2.1.5). This chapter introduces the particular case study partnership that has been selected for this research. It is the Welsh statutory third sector-government partnership 2011-2019 with a focus on the engagement of equalities organisations in this partnership. This chapter begins by explaining why it is suitable as the case study. It then offers a contextualisation of the UK and Welsh political culture that shaped the emergence of this partnership. This contextual background is used to justify the period chosen for this study. Following this, the chapter provides further detail about the partnership structure, progressing to explain how it evolved prior to 2011 and during 2011-2019. This is followed by a discussion of how this contextualisation contributes to our understanding of the research questions.

#### **3.1. Case study rationale**

The advantage of a case study approach is the breadth of detail it allows, providing a nuanced view of expert context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg 2016). The aim of a case study approach is not to generalise about a population (Silverman 2013), but instead to reveal the unique features of the case (Bryman 2012). In this research, the term “case study” refers to the choice of what is studied, rather than a distinct research method (Creswell and Poth 2017). Case studies are defined within specific parameters (Silverman 2013; Creswell and Poth 2017), so the purpose of this section is to explain what these boundaries are and how these decisions were made.

##### **3.1.1. Why this partnership is of interest**

Structures for third sector representation in policymaking across Europe are limited (Enjolras 2018:166). However, devolution in Wales embraced a partnership approach (Keating et al. 2009; Heley and Moles 2012) and this

case study partnership is just one example of this. This partnership is set out in legislation (Government of Wales Act (GOWA) 1998 s114; superseded by GOWA 2006 s74). The specific partnership arrangements are detailed further below (Section 3.3.1) but an overview is offered here. The legislation places a duty on Welsh Government to uphold the interests of the third sector and publish a Third Sector Scheme outlining mechanisms by which government will assist and consult the sector. As laid out in successive Third Sector Schemes (2004,2014a), the principal structures of this Partnership are the Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC) and a series of Ministerial Meetings. Jointly these form a key nexus between ministers and representatives from twenty-five Welsh Third Sector thematic networks. The bounded nature of this case study is therefore concerned with the government's formal engagement mechanisms with the third sector (the TSPC, Ministerial Meetings and the thematic networks, henceforward referred to as "The Partnership"). Thus, this Partnership meets the criteria identified in the literature review as a formal partnership between the third sector and sub-state government.

Such partnerships can serve as either a policymaking forum or a contractually-based arrangement for service delivery (Lowndes and Sullivan 2004), but the former is the principal purpose of this case study. It is seen as an "un-paralleled step in the positioning of the third sector in public policy" (Kendall 2000:542). This was noted in the National Assembly when the First Voluntary Scheme was adopted:

*There is no similar requirement in England, Scotland or Northern Ireland... There is no such statutory scheme anywhere else in Europe. (National Assembly for Wales 2000:2)*

Embedding state-third sector relations in legislation in this way is a unique governance feature (Dicks et al. 2001; Birrell 2009), which makes Welsh devolution a key locus to explore contemporary third sector-government relations. It is, therefore, a "revelatory case", in that it offers an opportunity to understand a phenomenon that has not been previously accessed by research (Yin 2014:48).

### **3.1.2. The significance of equalities organisations to the Partnership**

Here consideration is given to the position of equalities organisations within this partnership and justification is provided as to why this is of particular interest in this Welsh Case Study. This is different from and yet complements the theoretical justification that was offered in the previous chapter (see Section 2.1). The engagement of equalities third sector organisations in this Partnership is a valid locus of enquiry for this case study for a number of reasons. In Wales, the Welsh Government is under a statutory duty to promote the advancement of equality of opportunity in the exercise of all devolved functions (GOWA 1998 s120; GOWA 2006 s77). This is frequently referred to as the equalities clause. This equalities clause is evidence that devolution provided a critical juncture for the advancement of equalities in Welsh policymaking (Chaney 2006; Minto and Parken 2020). The broad interpretation of equalities applied in this study is particularly appropriate for the Welsh case given that the equalities clause requires Welsh Ministers to have “due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for *all people*” (GOWA 2006 s77) (emphasis added). It is therefore concerned with a universal application of equalities. This multi-strand equalities approach renders Wales a valuable context for examining broader equalities engagement (Parken 2010). Additionally, a mainstreaming equalities approach was formally adopted by the devolved government (Chaney 2006,2008; Birrell 2009). These developments should be understood in the context of the aspiration associated with Wales for a new politics that aimed for “inclusive governance” (Chaney and Fevre 2001a; Day 2006). The drive for a new politics founded on inclusion, equality and partnership was central to the Welsh pro-devolution rhetoric (Andrews 1999; Chaney and Fevre 2001a, b; Chaney et al. 2001). Scrutinising the position of equalities in such governance structures is, therefore, an opportunity to consider whether devolution delivered on the new politics promised twenty years previously. Given these pioneering developments, it is appropriate to examine the extent such a Partnership is being used to advance equalities.

### **3.2. Contextualising the Partnership**

### **3.2.1. UK and international political context of the Partnership**

The partnership approach was part of a wider UK strategy of New Labour and the political discourses of Blair's Third Way (Dicks et al. 2001; Newman 2001). This sought to overcome ideological barriers to private sector partnerships by locating the discourse in the partnership between the third sector and state (Newman 2001). The Third Way agenda had several facets, including fostering an active third sector and promoting third sector organisations as service-providers. (Dicks et al. 2001; Davies 2011; Buckingham 2012; Milbourne and Cushman 2013; Edwards 2014). Consequently, public spending on the voluntary sector increased significantly (Milbourne and Cushman 2013). Relatedly, the number of third sector organisations in the UK grew as did their workforce (Alcock 2012b,2016). Another facet of the political discourse about the Third Way under Blair was the conceptualisation of the third sector being engaged in policy development (Alcock 2016). It is this aspects of the Third Way which provides a backdrop to the development of the Welsh case study.

The Third Way under New Labour was characterised by the Voluntary Sector Compact which attracted worldwide interest when introduced (Plowden et al. 2003). The compact refers to the development of a formal agreement between the government and the third sector and was thus a tangible expression of the new relationship between the two (Kendall 2000; Alcock 2016). The compacts were later criticised for failing to impact on government-third sector relations as well as failing to build communication processes or fair contracting practices (Fyfe et al. 2006; Milbourne and Cushman 2013). However, the Voluntary Sector Scheme in Wales was perceived as the most well-developed of the devolved nations' compacts (Hodgson 2004).

It is important to note that the UK's Third Way rhetoric was also mirrored by international theorising about third sector- government relations (Milbourne and Cushman 2013; Salamon and Toepler 2015). There has been a growth in third sector organisations across the world since the 1980s (Edwards 2014). Consequently, third sector-government

partnerships are of growing global concern, with not just Western European countries adopting partnerships (Bristow et al. 2008) such as the Netherlands (Brandsen and Pape 2015), France (Archambault 2015) or Italy (Ranci 2015) but also much of Eastern Europe, including, Poland (Nałęcz et al. 2015); and Russia (Krasnopol'skaya et al. 2015; Remington 2015; Salamon et al. 2015), Post-communist states generally (Cook 2015; Shapovalova 2015), and further afield (Salamon and Toepler, 2015), including China (Yuanfeng 2015).

Thus, the Welsh statutory partnership that was established in 1998 should be understood in the context of policy rhetoric of New Labour's UK Government and also its relevance to the wider global picture of evolving state-third sector relations. Against this backdrop, attention is now given to the specific context of Welsh devolution.

### **3.2.2. Devolution in Wales and the partnership approach**

Devolution in Wales was triggered by a referendum in 1997 (Wyn Jones and Scully 2012) and continued to develop in the wake of successive devolution statutes (Navarro and Lambert 2007). However, aside from the legal developments, Welsh devolution needs to be understood in its wider political context. It should be noted that devolution in the UK was part of the shift to new modes of governance (Newman 2001). Thus, just as the involvement of the third sector in state policymaking is a feature of new governance (see Section 2.1.5), it is also the case that UK devolution was a different manifestation of new governance. Therefore, Blair presented devolution as one facet of his Third Way, in so far as it promoted decentralisation and pluralism (Chaney et al. 2001).

Beyond the UK picture, devolution forms part of a broader process of spatial rescaling of governance that has occurred across Europe (Keating et al. 2009). It has been described as a 'scalar turn' in which the national (state-wide) scale of governance is challenged by local and regional scales (Jones 2001). In the UK, this scalar turn was in evidence with the creation of the National Assembly of Wales, The Scottish Parliament, and the

Northern Ireland Assembly, alongside other steps towards devolution in England (Jones 2001). It can also be seen as part of an international movement towards multi-level governance (Hooghe and Marks 2003). Therefore, the different levels of governance impacting on Wales at the point of devolution included 'the European Union, the UK government, national government and local government' (Entwistle et al. 2014, p. 310). Welsh devolution should be understood in the context of these wider UK and international governance changes.

Welsh Labour has claimed an identity distinct from the Labour Party in Westminster with Rhodri Morgan's phrase 'clear red water' symbolising this distinction (Chaney and Wincott 2014, p. 766). Much of the literature on the UK third sector has neglected the differentiation created by devolution (Egdell et al. 2016).

Differences between the third sectors in each of the countries of the UK existed before devolution (Alcock 2012b; Chaney and Wincott 2014; Chaney et al 2020). Wales has a history of community involvement and community spirit which is frequently linked to a general sense of "Welshness" (Goodwin et al. 1997; Day 2002). Civil society in rural Wales was particularly shaped by this "Welshness" in terms of its cultural identity and the Welsh language (Clarke et al. 2002; Day 2002, 2006). Welsh civil society was also distinctive in its religious foundations (Day 2006) with the rise of the independent, non-conformist chapel movement alongside the established church populations (Clarke et al. 2002). Additionally, Welsh civil society is characterised by collective action, which was strengthened by industrialisation and underpinned by a mutualism ethos that created welfare halls and working men's associations (Clarke et al. 2002; Day 2002; Sanders 2004). This tendency towards collective action was also later shaped by the adversity faced by the working-class population with tenancy associations responding to poor housing conditions and unionised resistance to the 1980s Conservative Government policy of mine closures (Clarke et al. 2002; Sanders 2004). Thus, Welsh civil society was already

distinctive through these trends in community involvement, Welsh identity, religious influences, collective action and mutualism.

This notwithstanding, in the early phases of devolution some commentators described Wales as having a weak civil society (Hodgson 2004; Day 2006; Royles 2007). Certainly, the voluntary sector in Wales, was more dependent on public funding than England (Alcock 2012b). Yet, third sector organisations were the most-ready out of a range pluralist interests to engage with and to lobby the National Assembly of Wales from the outset (Dicks et al, 2001). For example, the National Assembly Advisory Group (NAAG), that had been established in 1997 to undertake preparatory work for the development of the standing orders of the Assembly, had a range of third sector representatives alongside business sectors, local government, trade unions and cross-party representation (Chaney and Fevre 2001b; Williams and Chaney 2001; Hodgson 2004; Royles 2007). Although NAAG was criticised as more symbolic rather than effective participatory decision-making (Chaney and Fevre 2001b), it did foreshadow the strong position of the voluntary sector in devolved structures of governance. The sector was considered to include both Welsh civil society and civil society in Wales, where the latter refers to organisations operating as UK-wide bodies (Royles 2007:5), so this could be one reason the distinctiveness of the Welsh third sector might have been masked. Subsequently, devolution afforded an opportunity for Welsh civil society to become even more distinctive.

As discussed, one distinctive feature of Welsh civil society following devolution was the extent of its engagement in the partnership agenda (Heley and Moles 2012). Thus, an array of partnerships was established at different scales. These included partnerships at sub-state level (involving business, trade unions and local government) as defined by the GOWAs (1998; 2006), but also at local government level, at sub-regional level (Heley and Moles 2012) and at community level by establishing community regenerations partnerships (Bristow et al. 2008; Sophocleous 2014). The

present case study Partnership should be recognised as an exemplar of this distinctive Welsh way of working following devolution.

In 1999, Ron Davies, then Secretary of State for Wales, described devolution as “a process not an event” (Davies 1999). This is significant from our institutionalist perspective because it predicts how the statutory partnership has been subject to change as the process of devolution has unfolded. One key development was the shift from one government body to two as Welsh devolution was remodelled on parliamentary lines. The Government of Wales Act 1998 established the National Assembly as one legal entity without a separate executive. The formal separation of the executive from the legislative branch of government came about following the Government of Wales Act 2006. The executive, then known as the Welsh Assembly Government, took on all ministerial functions that had previously rested with the National Assembly (Navarro and Lambert 2007). (In 2011, the Welsh Assembly Government subsequently became known as the Welsh Government.) In law-making terms, the Government of Wales Act, 2006 created an intermediate stage of devolution (Navarro and Lambert 2007; Wyn Jones and Scully 2012) which allowed for primary law making hitherto denied to the devolved body (in the form of Assembly Measures) (Navarro and Lambert 2007). This predated the 2011 referendum that gave the Senedd full legislative powers (albeit in tightly defined areas) under the terms of the Wales Act 2014.

Jones & Scully (2012, pp. 55-56) attributed this ‘piecemeal and crab-like fashion’ of Welsh devolutionary progress to Wales being dominated by one political party: Welsh Labour. The one-party dominance of Welsh Labour in devolved government has continued (Chaney 2015b). However, its position was altered by the turn of events in UK politics in 2010, which is considered below.

### **3.2.3. The political context in the second decade of Welsh devolution**

Divergence between the different UK devolved nations had a slow start because there were Labour-led administrations in each of the devolved

states at the same time that Labour was in government in Whitehall (Alcock 2016). Yet the impact of devolution was anticipated to become more evident when the political administrations of Wales and Scotland differed from the party in power in Westminster (Newman 2001). When Labour lost power following the 2010 UK general election there were different political parties holding office in the four UK nations (Alcock 2012b), although Labour retained its dominance in Wales.

It is helpful to recognise how these political changes impacted on the third sector. Initially, the UK policy discourse of support for the third sector continued much the same as it had under Labour (Alcock 2012b; Milbourne and Cushman 2013; Alcock 2016; Ketola and Hughes 2018; Bennett et al. 2019). It was repackaged by Cameron as the Big Society, but this was seen as a short-lived peculiarity of English third sector discourse (Alcock 2012b). The Big Society was suspected to be a means of replacing state-run services by volunteers and communities (Macmillan 2013; Bennett et al. 2019). It was also rejected by the devolved UK nations on the grounds that their civil society was already thriving (Alcock 2012b). Yet a significant feature of the Westminster Conservative-Liberal UK Government was the substantial cuts to third sector funding in England in line with the Westminster austerity agenda (Milbourne and Cushman 2015). Consequently, the space for the third sector to influence government shrank at UK Government level (Milbourne and Cushman 2015) and their engagement centred more on the delivery of services (Aiken and Taylor 2019). This was described as a decoupling of the state from the sector at UK Government level (Macmillan 2013; Ketola and Hughes 2018). These changes accorded with the UK coalition government's policy agenda of localism, which encouraged local community action to provide their own solutions to local needs (Alcock 2016). It was associated with an increasing instrumentalization of the sector (Ketola and Hughes 2018). Under May's Conservative government this decoupling continued (Bennett et al. 2019). This was demonstrated by the 2018 Civil Society Strategy (HM Government 2018), which included an expansion of the definition of civil society to include business and the private sector (Bennett et al. 2019). Thus, in England, third sector

discourses shifted from partnership approaches towards market solutions (Aiken and Taylor 2019).

However, whilst these developments put considerable strain on the sector in England, this decade was experienced differently by the Welsh third sector. Although there were significant reductions in the budgets of the national third sector infrastructures in England and Scotland, WCVA was spared similar rapid reductions (Alcock 2012b). However, the UK Government's settlement agreed with Welsh Government put a considerable strain on the Welsh Government's budget (Alcock 2012b). As discussed below, these changes make this period a suitable focus for this study.

#### **3.2.4. The time period covered by this study**

This study is concerned with the partnership between 2011-2019. The period covered by the study allows attention to centre on the "politics of implementation", rather than "politics of adoption" (Engeli and Mazur 2018:125). The period studied encompasses the fourth (2011-2016) and the majority of the fifth (2016-2021) parliaments.

The rationale behind this time period is two-fold. It is when devolved governance in Wales "came of age", with a consolidation of a parliamentary model of working, and the acquisition of primary law-making powers. This allowed *Senedd Cymru* to pass Acts affecting many areas of Welsh policy, thereby making the Welsh legislature broadly comparable to other "regional" legislatures across Europe and elsewhere. Moreover, during this period, the Conservative-led coalition government at Westminster had been elected on a manifesto of austerity, which impacted on budgets and spending of Welsh Government. During these parliaments, the Welsh Government and the UK Government were led by opposing political parties. Thus, this is a period when the Partnership was put to test by the downturn in public finances and political differences between Cardiff and Westminster. Furthermore, the research interviews were undertaken twenty years on from the publication of the original devolution

legislation that put the Partnership on the Statute Book. This twenty-year milestone encouraged reflection amongst key policy actors to review the Partnership through this study.

Having considered the political context that shaped the Welsh case study partnership and justified the time period of this study, this chapter now provides further detail about the Partnership arrangements and examines how they have evolved.

### **3.3. The Background of this Partnership**

The following overview of the Welsh case study Partnership and how it has evolved is largely based on documentary analysis of key publications associated with the Partnership produced by WCVA and devolved government in Wales. (see Section 4.5 for further explanation of how these grey literatures have been used in this research). The accounts given through these documents are supplemented by the research findings of earlier studies concerned with this Partnership. In line with our feminist institutionalist lens, consideration is given to the formal institutional structures and processes, the formal aims of the Partnership as laid out in legislation and also how the informal institutional discourses that are contained within the key publications impacted on the Partnership.

#### **3.3.1. Introducing the Partnership's Structure and Processes**

The institution of the Partnership is the responsibility of the Third Sector Unit within Welsh Government (Alcock 2012b). It is managed for Welsh Government by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) (National Assembly for Wales 2004). As noted above (Section 3.1.1), the legislation requires Welsh Government to produce a scheme setting out how it proposes to promote the interests of relevant voluntary organisations (GOWA 2006 s74). The current formal mechanisms of the Partnership as the Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC) and the Ministerial Meetings (WCVA 2015,2016; Welsh Government 2016b), which were also noted above.

The TSPC is seen as a means to either involve the third sector in policymaking or to consult with the third sector about how Welsh Government policy might impact on the third sector (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000c). It is also seen as a means for the third sector to hold Welsh Government to account in abiding by the commitments made in the Third Sector Scheme and duties in the devolution statutes (Welsh Government 2013a; WCVA 2015,2016; Welsh Government 2016b). The Ministerial Meetings are scheduled to take place twice a year between the third sector and each minister or cabinet secretary (National Assembly for Wales 2004; Welsh Government 2014a). Each official Ministerial Meeting is typically preceded by two planning meetings (WCVA 2015, 2016). The third sector representatives are expected to attend at least one of these if they want to come to the Ministerial Meeting (WCVA 2015, 2016). Part of this preparation is to enable the third sector to draw up papers to be presented at the Ministerial Meetings (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000a; WCVA 2015,2016). There also may be a pre-planning meeting for the third sector on the day that the formal meeting takes place (WCVA 2015,2016). Responsibility for publishing the minutes of the TSPC and Ministerial Meetings rests with Welsh Government (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000c; WCVA 2015; Welsh Government 2016b).

Neither the legislation nor the Third Sector Scheme stipulates how the Partnership representatives are selected. The scheme simply states that

*The Welsh Government, in conjunction with Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), will identify the relevant third sector networks and umbrella bodies with an interest in its work and agree practical arrangements for dialogue and co-operation at the operational level. (Welsh Government 2014a s3.5)*

The current process of selection is that representatives are drawn from twenty-five thematic networks, and they can attend both TSPC meetings and the Ministerial Meetings. The organisations that lead the different networks are supposed to be decided via an election that takes place twice yearly (Welsh Government 2014a). One lead representative is drawn from each of these thematic networks.

To understand how these formal network structures can serve to promote the advancement of equality, in line with the overarching research question, it is important to be clear about the position of equalities within the Partnership. Of the twenty-five network themes, eight are directly concerned with equalities protected characteristics (Children and Families, Disability, Ethnic Minorities, Gender, Older People, Religion, Sexuality, Youth) (WCVA 2016). Yet most of the other thematic networks are also associated with equalities in different ways. This is particularly true of the Health, Social Care and wellbeing network and the Refugees and Asylum Seekers Network.

The above describes the Partnership arrangements during the period under study. Consideration is now given to how these arrangement evolved in the years prior to 2011.

### **3.3.2. Key changes in the Partnership prior to 2011**

The first Voluntary Sector Scheme was adopted in July 2000 (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000b). It was revised in 2004 (National Assembly for Wales 2004) and again in 2014 when it was renamed the Third Sector Scheme (Welsh Government 2014a). The devolution statutes dictate what must be specified in this scheme. This includes (i) how the Assembly (now Senedd Cymru) proposes to provide assistance to relevant voluntary organisations; (ii) how the Assembly proposes to monitor the use made of any assistance; and (iii) “how the Assembly proposes to consult relevant voluntary organisations about the exercise of such of its functions as relate to matters affecting, or of concern to, such organisations” (GOWA 2006 s114). The key action that was identified to achieve these first two, i.e., the provision and monitoring of assistance, was to develop a Code of Practice for Funding the Voluntary Sector (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000c,a). Consequently, the principal focus of the Partnership became this third aim which was to consult with the voluntary organisations on matters that affected or were of concern to them. Other requirements of the GOWA (1998, s114) were for the Scheme to be

reviewed and revised if needed, and for an Annual Report to be published yearly that considered how the Assembly had implemented the Scheme.

One of the earliest records of the intended Partnership structure was described by Assembly Member Jane Hutt and Peter Bryant from WCVA in the Institute of Welsh Affairs handbook for the National Assembly (Bryant and Hutt 1998). Bryant and Hutt (1998) laid the foundations for the formal institutional structures which included the TSPC, Ministerial Meetings, the thematic networks that fed into them, the underpinning equality principle and the role of WCVA as the administrator. However, these structures were not yet known by these names. For example, Bryant and Hutt (1998) referred to meetings between the third sector and Assembly Secretaries which only later became known as the Ministerial Meetings (or Portfolio Meetings by some officials). Prior to 2007, the TSPC was actually known as the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council (VSPC) (Welsh Government 2016b). Originally, the VSPC included twenty-one voluntary sector representatives, three WCVA representatives and also eleven Assembly Members with cross-party representation (Chaney and Fevre 2001a; Royles 2007).

According to the GOWA (1998 s114) the original responsibility to make the scheme sat with the National Assembly for Wales. In the Assembly's first term the Corporate Body principle was rejected, and an Executive (the Assembly Government) became distinct from the Assembly (Royles 2007). This foreshadowed the major restructuring of the legislature along parliamentary lines (discussed in Section 3.2.2). This change strengthened the VSPC as the primary mechanism of third sector engagement because it was the mechanism through which the third sector could influence the Executive (Royles 2007).

With the new GOWA (2006), very little changed in the wording concerning the voluntary sector from that found in the original legislation (GOWA 1998), except that the responsibility for the Scheme now lay with the Welsh Ministers instead of the Assembly as a whole (GOWA 2006 s74). In

addition, a new requirement was added to the legislation that the Ministers must “lay a copy of the annual report before National Assembly for Wales” and similarly must lay any revisions to the Scheme before the Assembly. Thus, this instigated a scrutiny role carried by the National Assembly to examine Welsh Government’s delivery of the Scheme. This formally replaced the aforementioned cross-party Assembly members who had originally been listed as members of the VSPC. The only other small difference in the legislation can be seen in Table 3-1 below. As is demonstrated here, the requirement to review the scheme at the beginning of each term of Government had been dropped by the 2006 legislation. Consequently, the Scheme was less likely to be revised in each Assembly term after 2006.

*Table 3-1 Comparing clause (5) in the different Government of Wales Acts (1998, 2006)*

(5)The Assembly shall keep the scheme under review and in the year following each ordinary election (after the first) shall consider whether it should be remade or revised.	(5)The Welsh Ministers — (a) must keep the voluntary sector scheme under review, and (b) may from time to time remake or revise it.
Government of Wales Act 1998 s:114	Government of Wales Act 2006 s:74
<i>Differences have been highlighted</i>	

Alongside these formal changes in legislation, other developments concerning the Partnership were signified by the publication of key documents. In order of publication these included: the revised Voluntary Sector Scheme (National Assembly for Wales 2004); the revised Scheme Action Plan which was called “The Third Dimension” (Welsh Assembly Government 2007); and the revised Code of Practice for Funding (Welsh Assembly Government 2009). The shift in institutional language from voluntary sector to third sector took place after GOWA (2006). Consequently, the VSPC changed to the TSPC in 2007 (Welsh Government 2016b).

From analysis of these key documents, it is apparent that some changes in institutional processes had started to emerge. The tendency to publish an Action Plan was seen in the first term (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000c) and continued into the third term of devolved government (Welsh Assembly Government 2007). As well as the removal of the cross-party members, the aforementioned three WCVA places on the VSPC were no longer recorded (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). However, it was clear that WCVA played a significant role in setting the agenda. For example, WCVA began to arrange pre-meetings before VSPC and Ministerial Meetings so that the third sector could decide on an agreed strategy, which was the beginning of an expectation for the third sector to present one voice (Royles 2007). Another change which was described in the Third Dimension, was the introduction of the Compliance and Funding Sub-Committee (Welsh Assembly Government 2007, p. 47). It aimed to ensure compliance with the commitments within the Scheme and the Code of Practice for Funding.

As noted earlier, the Partnership started out with twenty-one networks (Royles 2007) and this was still true in 2007, according to the Third Dimension (Welsh Assembly Government 2007). Responsibility had been attributed to WCVA to map out the existing third sector themes and identify the networks that should be in place (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000a; Welsh Assembly Government 2007; WCVA 2015). Considering our feminist institutionalist analysis of how the Partnership advanced equalities, it is useful to note that the explicit equalities networks on the Partnership at this point did not yet include the themes of older people, sexuality, refugees, nor the Welsh language. For Welsh language organisations, not having an “inside track” position in the Partnership was shown to be a disadvantage (Royles 2007, p. 97). However, representation for LGBTQ+ was not similarly disadvantaged because the leading LGBTQ+ organisation had been given a standing position as a consultant advisor to the Assembly’s Equality of Opportunity Committee (Royles 2007, p. 134). This difference in the standings of equalities organisations from different equalities categories is important to our later analysis.

Both the Voluntary Sector Scheme (National Assembly for Wales 2004) and the Third Dimension (Welsh Assembly Government 2007) recognise that some organisations and networks needed to build their capacity to participate in these structures. At the outset, key voluntary organisations called for an investment in the network structures so that the network leads could engage with the organisations in their network (Chaney and Fevre 2001a). Indeed, an Assembly capacity-building fund was instigated (Royles 2007). There were early warnings of the development of a voluntary sector elite (Dicks et al. 2001). Smaller voluntary organisations particularly did not know about the Assembly mechanism and did not have the resources to participate (Dicks et al. 2001; Hodgson 2004). This was seen to create a two-tiered hierarchy in the third sector (Hodgson 2004; Royles 2007). The structures of the Partnership were criticised for creating this inequality (Chaney and Fevre 2001a). There was a difference between those established networks with umbrella bodies and those that had not previously been networks (Royles 2007). There were also disparities between the member organisations of these different networks (Royles 2007). Thus, inequality between the networks that were participating was also evident in this period.

Given this study's overarching research aim of understanding the advancement of equalities through the Partnership, it is worth highlighting early studies concerning equalities. Prominent early studies about the National Assembly's pursuit of inclusive government focussed on gender, disability and ethnic minorities (Betts et al. 2001; Williams and Chaney 2001). Researchers described the level of participation by equalities groups in the Assembly structures as "impressive" (Chaney and Fevre 2001a, p. 145). There was also optimism that the emergence of the National Assembly created new opportunities for equalities groups (Betts et al. 2001; Chaney and Fevre 2001a). However, inequality between equalities group was found to be an obstacle at the outset due to those organisations that lacked resources to participate in the new governance mechanisms (Chaney and Fevre 2001a). From the beginning, smaller representative

groups for women and disabled people were failing to engage and the National Assembly was cautioned that it must engage with grassroots organisations rather than just with an elite minority (Betts et al. 2001). Furthermore, engaged voluntary sector groups for women and disabled people were greater in number than those for ethnic minorities (Chaney and Fevre 2001a). Additionally, the Assembly's association with Welsh identity was found to be an alienating construction for parts of ethnic minority civil society and a failure to understand how different communities mobilise their interests led to the exclusion of these groups in policymaking (Williams and Chaney 2001). It was argued that significant steps were needed to bolster the capacity and willingness of ethnic minority groups to engage in National Assembly structures (Williams and Chaney 2001). The National Assembly was criticised for assuming that there could be homogeneity amongst ethnic minorities when it came to designing mechanisms to engage different communities (Chaney and Fevre 2001a). Less scrutiny was given to other equalities groups in relation to the Partnership structure in the early days. The exception to this was Royles (2007) case study research on the position of a key LGBTQ+ organisation, who found this was successful in achieving position and influence. Yet it was clear there was some uneven representation of equalities strands in the Partnership mechanisms in the first decade of devolution.

This notwithstanding, equalities continued to feature prominently in the Partnership meeting and research showed just over half of the Partnership meetings in the second term featured discussions about equalities issues (Rees and Chaney 2011). Strikingly, a ten-year review of the impact of devolution on equalities revealed that a number of advances had been made in equalities in Wales, including the use of legal instruments to promote equalities, extensive equalities policies and a developed equalities infrastructure (Rees and Chaney 2011). A later review has highlighted how Welsh Government strengthened the legislation of the Equality Act 2010 (Hankivsky et al. 2019). Whilst the Equality Act 2010 was a UK piece of legislation that sought to bring much of the existing equalities legislation together under one act, more stringent measures were introduced in

Wales by the Welsh Government using its devolved powers set out in the Equality Act (2010) and resulting in the Equality Act 2010 (Wales) Regulations (2011a). These studies demonstrate that substantive representation of equalities was being achieved.

Thus far, the key changes in the Partnership structure before 2011 have been detailed. As well as considering how the formal institutional structures of the Partnership evolved, it is important to consider how the informal institutional discourses changed in this period.

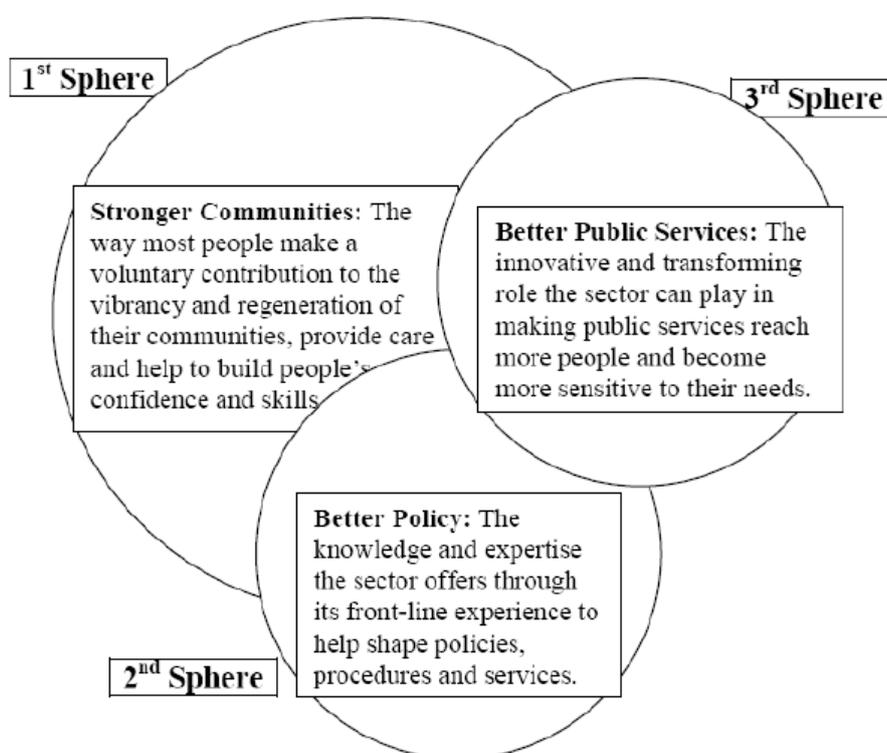
### **3.3.3. Changes in the informal discourses about the Partnership prior to 2011**

According to the 2004 Voluntary Sector Scheme the Partnership activities were still very much defined by the three aims of the founding legislation and particularly ensuring the third sector was consulted about government policy of interest to it (National Assembly for Wales 2004). The term *Policy Proofing* to describe this activity came into use in the 2000 Action Plan (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000c) and was still present in the 2007 Action Plan (Welsh Assembly Government 2007). This was closely tied to, and perceived to be achieved through, the Welsh Assembly Government's consultation procedures (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000c; National Assembly for Wales 2004; Welsh Assembly Government 2007). However, in addition to the aims laid out in legislation, the institutional discourses seen in these early documents attached other purposes to the Partnership. They detailed how the Partnership would stimulate volunteering activity and promote community regeneration to tackle social deprivation (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000c).

Similarly, the Third Dimension reframed the aims of the Partnership again in 2007 describing three spheres that define the Welsh Government's interest in the third sector. Whilst one of these referred to the third sector shaping policies, procedures and services, which accords with the notion of policy proofing, there was a much bigger focus on the third sector contributing to "the vibrancy and regeneration of communities" (Welsh

Assembly Government 2007). The size of the sphere in the diagram that sought to capture the government’s Third Dimension Action Plan reflected this (Figure 3-1). This corresponds with the emergence of promoting citizenship as a driver for New Labour’s third sector policy commitments, and moreover, in Wales community engagement was also promoted by the Communities First programme, which was the Welsh Government’s flagship anti-poverty programme (Alcock 2012b). Thus, Welsh policy discourse about the third sector was more focused on participation, citizenship, community development and volunteering than other UK nations’ policy discourses (Chaney and Wincott 2014).

Figure 3-1 Diagram from the Third Dimension (Welsh Assembly Government 2007:3,14)



The third sphere from the Third Dimension document was concerned with making public services better and had not previously featured in key partnership documents. Alcock (2012) argued that understanding the third sector as a means to deliver public services was seen in every UK nations’ third sector policy discourses. Chaney and Wincott (2014) found that although welfare pluralism was in evidence in Welsh policies, it was given less prominence than its English counterpart. Here, we can see its emergence in the Partnership discourses.

Understanding the aforementioned developments prior to 2011 is useful for interpreting the changes to the Partnership in the time period of interest to this study. The next section considers the nature and extent of change between 2011-2019 as they are documented in key Partnership publications.

#### **3.3.4. How the Partnership has changed between 2011-2019**

Key publications that reflected changes to the Partnership in 2011-2019 include the consultation document called *Continuity and Change* (Welsh Government 2013a) and the subsequent new Third Sector Scheme in 2014 (Welsh Government 2014a). (The full list of 2011-2019 documents analysed for this study is given in the Methodology, Section 4.4.2). As with the above analysis, consideration is given here to both changes in the formal institutional structures and informal institutional discourses.

From the perspective of our feminist institutionalist overarching research question, it is important to note that these were the first documents that described equality as a cross-cutting theme in the Partnership. The consultation document highlighted that the Equalities Act 2010 and the related Welsh regulations (2011a) were instrumental in pushing equalities on the Partnership's agenda (Welsh Government 2013a). It is also worth observing that the thematic networks of older people, sexuality, refugees, and the Welsh language had been added to the formal network structures early in the course of the fourth Assembly (Welsh Government 2013a).

As with earlier documents, the institutional discourses reflected in *Continuity and Change* again sought to redefine the aims of the Partnership (Welsh Government 2013a). It stated that the Welsh Government wanted the Partnership's activities to be more closely tied to the delivery of its Programme for Government. The document also recognised there was now pressure on public funding as a result of austerity, so it encouraged the third sector to consider how it could contribute to service delivery. Thus, the earlier references to the Third Sector's roles in service delivery were now tied to economic pressures of the post-2008 recession and the

austerity agenda of the UK Conservative-led government. A departure from previous approaches was that Continuity and Change (Welsh Government 2013a) rejected using action plans on the grounds that it wanted the focus of the Partnership to be responsive year on year. This reveals a sense that such Action Plans were an administrative burden that were constraining the responsiveness of the Partnership. Continuity and Change (Welsh Government 2013a) also introduced the idea of changing the format of TSPC meetings. It proposed ministers would attend for an hour, and then further engagement would be between the third sector and Welsh Government officials. As the subsequent interview data analysis will show, this was a rather temporary change in the format of TSPC meetings, but it is noteworthy that it was captured in this formal publication. The discussion around it suggests that the original ways of working were being questioned and were making too great a demand on the Ministers' time.

Strikingly, instead of detailing the nature of the engagement mechanisms, the consultation introduced the idea of a Framework for Engagement which was then formally adopted by the Third Sector Scheme (Welsh Government 2013a,2014a). The introduction of this framework would enable the specific mechanisms of the Partnership to be changed without the need to revise the Third Sector Scheme or lay these changes before the Assembly for scrutiny. This Framework for Engagement was drafted in 2014 (WCVA 2014). The draft Framework for Engagement notable sought to tackle difficult issues such as how to ensure policy outcomes were achieved, how to agree which subjects were appropriate to be addressed by the Partnership and how to resolve disagreements between Welsh Government and the third sector. However, there is no evidence that it was formally adopted and certainly by TSPC meetings in 2018 it had been rejected as being out-of-date (WCVA 2018), which left an unaccounted gap in the commitment of the 2014 Third Sector Scheme.

Another significant feature of the consultation document was that it highlighted the distinction between how the Partnership was organised with the TSPC thematic networks and the separately organised

infrastructure of the nineteen geographically organised County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) (Welsh Government 2013a). It also detailed that the funding for these two infrastructures had been separated. Additionally, it specified that it wanted to use the Partnership to promote local neighbourhood and community grassroots organisations. Furthermore, *Continuity and Change* (Welsh Government 2013a) criticised the Partnership for not having better geographical representation but stopped short of telling the third sector how to address this issue, instead encouraging the Third Sector to review it. It also criticised the Partnership for not engaging with the CVCs (Welsh Government 2013a). Collectively, these comments reflect a perception from Welsh Government that the current Partnership structure was neglecting to engage certain groups.

Whilst *Continuity and Change* (Welsh Government 2013a) is useful for understanding the changes in institutional discourses that underpinned the Partnership, the publications of the new Third Sector Scheme (Welsh Government 2014a) formalised these key changes. A comparison of the Third Sector Scheme with its predecessor scheme (National Assembly for Wales 2004) from a decade earlier reveals key shifts in institutional discourses. Whilst the order in which the subjects featured varied between the two documents, there were large sections that contained identical wording, or wording that had been adjusted only slightly to accommodate the shift from the National Assembly to the Welsh Government. The new content within the 2014 Scheme largely reflected the key ideas advanced in the consultation document (discussed above). Yet it is also striking to observe the substantial sections from the 2004 Scheme that have no equivalent in the new Scheme. There was no longer a chapter about the Welsh Government's formal consultation mechanisms which had been detailed at length in the earlier Scheme (National Assembly for Wales 2004:Chapter 4) but reduced to two paragraphs in the new Scheme (Welsh Government 2014a:s3.20-3.21). More significant still was that Community Development which had formed an entire chapter in the earlier scheme (National Assembly for Wales 2004:Chapter 6) did not feature in the new Scheme, except for a brief paragraph imported from the original (Welsh

Government 2014a:s4.3). These omitted sections reveal that Community Development no longer underpinned the discourses of the Partnership and that the mechanisms for policy consultation which still persisted within Welsh Government were now perceived as a distinct from the Partnership.

In summary, the above analysis shows that the second decade of the Partnership was not characterised by many significant changes in its structures and processes. Minor changes included the increase to the full twenty-five thematic networks, the dropping of action plans as a means to plan the agenda of the Partnership and a temporary change to the format of TSPC meetings. However, there were significant changes in the informal institutional discourses of the key policy documents from this period which extended the original purposes of the Partnership from those described in the legislation. This included the separation of Government consultation processes from the Partnership activities and the removal of community development and community regeneration from the Partnership discourses. It also included a growing discourse about the third sector's role in the delivery of services which was associated with the austerity agenda, and a stronger focus on how the third sector should help Welsh Government deliver its programme for government. Both of these show a growing instrumentalization of the sector. In terms of equalities, the formal recognition of the equalities cross-cutting theme of the Partnership could be seen as a strengthening of the advancement of equalities. However, there was a growing criticism of the Partnership by Welsh Government in terms of failing to engage with smaller, grassroots organisations and failing to engage with geographical communities or make use of the geographical-organised CVC structures. Significantly, there was a new discourse that the responsibility for changing the Partnership to address its failings lay not with government but with the third sector itself.

#### **3.4. Discussion concerning the Welsh case study partnership**

The above overview of the Partnership scrutinised the formal institutional discourses, structures and processes and the informal institutional discourses as revealed in the key documents. In this section consideration

will be given to how this overview can contribute to each of the research questions and thereby to the overarching research question. This will lay foundations for the analysis of the findings in relation to the research questions set out in Chapters Five to Eight.

This overview has been particularly useful for understanding more about institutional change, which is the concern of research question four. In particular, the analysis of the documents reveals that although the institutional discourses have tended to evolve, when it comes to the Partnership structures and processes, very little has changed. The most significant change of the Partnership was instigated by the formal shift towards separating the Executive from the Legislature, as was signalled in the GOWA (2006). Even at this juncture, the analysis of the two pieces of legislation (GOWA 1998 and 2006) reveals little change on third sector matters, except for the requirement to lay the annual reports before the Senedd, and a relaxation of the need to instigate periodic revisions to the published Third Sector Scheme. Certainly, in the time period covered by this study (2011-2019), there has been no significant changes in structures and processes according to these documents. However, the documents' discourses have exposed some attempts to adjust the systems with respect to how the agenda is set or the format of the TSPC meetings. These allude to a sense that the efficacy of the Partnership could be improved, which foregrounds the importance of an analysis of policy actors' perception of efficacy. The foregoing document analysis also reveals a shifting understanding of which bodies carry the agency for instigating change. In one sense, the requirement to lay the annual reports before the Senedd places the agency for scrutiny of the Partnership with policy actors external to the Partnership itself. WCVA's earlier position of having representation on the Partnership was no longer the case by the time period covered by this study, shifting their position to one behind the scenes. Welsh Government documents reveal the need for changes but place the onus of responsibility on the third sector to instigate them. This almost suggests an absence of state agency to undertake change, which warrants investigation in the policy actors' accounts that follow. These preliminary findings lay the

foundations for the analysis of research question four, which is concerned with how the perceptions of institutional efficacy, agency and change impacts on the institutional change to advance equalities in the partnership (see Chapter Eight).

The above analysis also contributes useful insights to the other three research questions. When considering the descriptive representation of equalities groups in the Partnership, which is the focus of the first research question, the structure of the formal thematic networks dictates who will take the role of equalities representatives. However, the analysis of the informal discourses found other understandings of representation, including representation of geographical areas, local and neighbourhood grassroots organisations, as well as representation of service users. The changing patterns of how citizenship, participation and consultation are described also raise the question of how these institutional discourses will shape the descriptive representation of equalities in the Partnership. These preliminary findings indicate key areas for investigation in considering how the descriptive representation of equalities groups are shaped by the institution of the partnership (see Chapter Five).

When examining how equalities organisations might use the Partnership to promote substantive representation, which is the focus of research question two, it is useful to note the establishment of equalities as a cross-cutting issue of the Partnership. In understanding how the equalities organisations pursue substantive representation it will be important to scrutinise the use of formal meetings and the presentation of papers as a mechanism alongside the nature of the equalities policy claims that they make. The scrutiny of the key documents has not revealed much about the informal policy influencing methods that might be adopted by equalities organisations to achieve substantive representation. This gap can be met by scrutinising the informal institutional discourses of policy actors in this study's primary interviews, in order to understand how equalities organisations engaged with the institution of the Partnership to promote substantive representation (see Chapter Six).

Research question three aims to understand how the equalities sector is itself shaped by the Partnership. Insights from the above analysis revealed that equalities networks secured their position at different times and that, , there was inequality between the different equalities strands in the early years of the Partnership. This lays the foundations for examining how different equalities strands have been advantaged or disadvantaged by the Partnership's formal structures and informal discourses. However, the absence of any mention of intersectionality in the key documents raises a question about the extent that the Partnership makes space for intersectional practices. This gap will be met by scrutinising the informal institutional discourses of policy actors in order to understand how the equalities sector and its potential for intersectional practices are shaped by the institution of this Partnership (see Chapter Seven).

Each of the research questions contributes to our overarching research question to enable us to consider from a feminist institutionalist perspective, how does this partnership promote and/or frustrate the advancement of equalities.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

Where Chapter Two established the theoretical justification for this study and laid out the analytical framework, this chapter has provided an overview of the sub-state partnership that has been chosen as the case study to which this analytical framework will be applied. This chapter offered justifications for the choice of this case study partnership and for the time period that has been selected. It also provided analysis of the political context that underpins this partnership with respect to Welsh devolution, UK politics and international changes. It drew on pivotal publications concerning this Partnership to trace key changes that have and have not occurred in the Partnership's evolution. The analysis closed by considering the implications of these for the research questions. The following chapter details the research methods that were used in this study and justifies these.

## **4. Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The principal research method employed in this study was semi-structured, interviews with policy actors in the case study Partnership. The analytical framework (Chapter Two) informed the development of both the interview schedule and the coding frame for analysis. Critical discourse analysis was employed to analyse the interview data. Additionally, document analysis of publications concerning the Partnership was undertaken to provide contextual background information, as well as to inform the methodological decisions concerning the elite interviews and the data analysis.

The first part of this chapter provides the epistemological foundations of the methods employed. The chapter progresses to detail the semi-structured interviews and the analysis of the interview data, before the document analysis is summarised. Each section describes and validates the research methodology.

### **4.1. Epistemology**

#### **4.1.1. Social constructionism**

This qualitative research takes a constructionist position. This is important because key decisions concerning methods are underpinned by the central relationship between the study's epistemological position and analytic perspectives (Mason 2002; Silverman 2004). Constructionism, also known as constructivism or interpretivism (Flick et al. 2004; Creswell and Poth 2017), can be understood as both an ontological and epistemological position (Bryman 2012). It views individuals as gaining varied and multiple meanings to understand the world in which they live through their interaction with others (Burr 2015) and through historical and cultural norms (Creswell and Poth 2017). These foundations make it an appropriate basis to the present research that seeks to understand the case study Partnership from participants' perspectives. Constructionist ontology understands reality through constructive processes, not denying an

external reality but recognising that perception itself is an active constructive process (Flick et al. 2004). Therefore, social phenomena are considered to be in a constant state of construction and reconstruction through continual interaction of social actors (Bryman 2012).

This constructionist position informed this study's data collection methods because elite interviews provided policy actors' accounts, and the document analysis provided insights into the government's communicative discourses (Schmidt 2008). Thus, both data sources inform our understanding of how the Partnership was constructed. A constructionist perspective overcomes objections that are typically made about interview data. For example, Jerolmack and Khan (2014) criticise interviews as a method because they claim interviewees do not act consistently in line with their attitudes and nor do they provide accurate accounts of their past actions. This argument is based on the flawed premise that there is an objective reality that can be known by the social scientist (Ezzy 2002; Czarniawska-Joerges 2004). A constructionist position views an interview as part of the communicative practices in society and it does not stand outside of it (Gubrium and Holstein 2001). The social scientist's work is recognised as being as much an interpretive account as all other interpretative accounts (Atkinson and Coffey 2001; Ezzy 2002; Potter 2004). The criticism that semi-structured interviews distort the past is similarly refutable. Interviewees can change their opinion over time and even through the course of an interview (Kvale 2009). Yet, when participants describe the past, it is not the accuracy of these recollections that concerns us (Atkinson and Coffey 2001). The aim is to understand the past as it exists in the perspectives and experiences of narrators (Mason 2002). Thus, semi-structured interviews are an appropriate research method in keeping with our constructionist position.

Constructionism was also central to the formulation of the research questions and the overarching research question to ensure they were framed appropriately for discourse analysis (Potter 2004). They needed to capture policy actors' accounts and institutional perspectives on the

Partnership. Constructionism also shaped the data analysis. Discourse analysis is constructionist in nature, whereby discourses are understood to “build up” the depiction of reality constructed by language (Bryman 2012, pp. 531, 534). Constructionism is useful to the feminist institutionalist analytical framework of this study because it enables an examination of the informal norms and discourses of the institution (Lowndes 2014) (see Section 2.1.1). Furthermore, a fundamental premise of discursive institutionalism, which underpins this study’s feminist institutionalism, is that the key actors bring ideas to the institution and also adopt the discourses of the institution (Peters 2012). Thus, it is this discursive interplay that our analysis seeks to address. This allows the researcher to understand the interview data through an analysis of how discourses are constructed in institutions as well as how they construct social institutions (Wodak and Meyer 2001).

Constructionism was fundamental to the relationship between this study’s research methods and social theory, since the research methods were underpinned by the extant literature as set out in the analytical framework (Chapter Two). A constructionist position recognises that it is not possible to perceive data without theory influencing this perception (Ezzy 2002). Thus, this study rejects the original supposition of grounded theory that data should not be collected or initially viewed through a theoretical lens (Glaser 2002). Such mistrust of the influence of theory on our understanding of data assumes an objective reality is accessible to the social scientist (Lather 2013:637) so is not in keeping with our constructionist position. Instead, this study’s approach recognises that extant theory sensitises the researcher to the data (Ezzy 2002; Willig 2013). Moreover, this approach acknowledges that there is an interactional relationship between interviews and theory, since constructionism recognises that the researcher shapes their own interpretation (Creswell and Poth 2017). Discourse analysis presupposes the interaction between researcher and participant whereby “social categories are refined and reworked” jointly by this interaction (Potter 2004:206). Thus it is appropriate to recognise the researcher’s discourse is imbued with extant

theory, but, allows for this to be shaped by the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher freedom in the sequencing and style when asking the pre-determined questions, which enables a natural conversational style (Sanders 2010). Therefore, the benefits of a semi-structured interview, are that although the interview schedule acts as a guide, departure from this is not problematic, and allows the interviewee an active role in the co-construction of the discourse (Silverman 2013). Hence, the analytical framework that underpins the interview schedule enables the researcher to explore policy actors' accounts in the context of the feminist institutionalist lens, and, furthermore, ties this in with the other key strands of theory.

This study rejects a radical constructionist position, which maintains that since no knowledge of an independent reality exists, and since the interviewer and participants create and construct their reality, then this reality is context-specific so cannot be seen to be representative of anything more than this (Miller and Glassner 2004). A similar argument is that a case study cannot be generalizable to other cases (Bryman 2012; Silverman 2013; Flyvbjerg 2016). Willig (2013:146) described a continuum from naïve realist to radical relativist, and Ezzy (2002:2) simplified this as “a choice between absolute truth and no truth at all”. The position adopted in this study is in line with Miller and Glassner (2004:126), who proposed that it is possible to step outside of the objectivist-constructivist continuum and reject the dualistic imperative to classify interviews as either purely local events or expressing underlying external realities. Their argument is summed up by the philosophical aim identified by Wittgenstein (1953) to “show the fly the way out of the fly bottle”. The literature concerning the different social scientific turns recognises how one philosophical position would develop as a response to another (for example, Lather 2013; Henwood et al. 2017), and this goes to show the more nuanced, multifaceted interplay beyond the simple empirical-constructionists positions. It is, therefore, possible to achieve a degree of nomothetic knowledge beyond the interview context. Some of the issues, progress and

challenges of the present case study may resonate with other examples of third sector-government relations.

#### **4.1.2. Mixed methods approach**

Interviews and document analysis are regarded as the leading qualitative methods undertaken in political science (Garnett and Lynch 2012). As noted, this study makes use of both semi-structured interviews and document analysis. It is therefore a mixed methods study. Research must be viewed as having ontological integration (Mason 2002; Carter and Little 2007), so here this mixed methods approach will be justified. The incompatibility argument refers to the claim that different methods cannot be combined when they have conflicting, underlying, paradigm assumptions. This is a mixed methods study in that it uses two types of qualitative data (Silverman 2013) rather than a more traditional understanding of mixed methods where both qualitative and quantitative data are integrated (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). Thus, the incompatibility argument does not apply here in the same way.

Denzin and Lincoln (2013: 3, 15) advocate mixed methods to achieve triangulation. However, this study does not rely on the concept of triangulation to justify its approach. Certainly, where documents have been used in research it is commonly to triangulate results from other sources (Atkinson and Coffey 2004). Case study theorists often view triangulation as desirable to ensure findings are robust (Yin 2014). Similarly, early literature on document analysis tended to presume the purpose of documentary analysis is to reach the “real world” and identify objective truth (for example, Scott 1990). However, documents are situated products (Prior 2003) and should not be conceived as representations of the world as it really is (Yanow 2000; Prior 2003). According to constructionism, different representations cannot be verified for their correctness to arrive at the overall “truth” (Flick et al. 2004; Silverman 2013). For this reason, it is unhelpful to use documents to triangulate research (Atkinson and Coffey 2004). Therefore, this study is premised on recognising that both the discourse of the documents and the interviews provide complementary

insights into the Partnership, which allows for a comparison but not a triangulation to achieve one world view.

Additionally, documents are essential for providing the context and accessing local knowledge in a particular policy context (Yanow 2000). This has been evidenced in the previous chapter about the case study Partnership. A further justification for undertaking a document analysis is that it can inform the interview strategy. Odendahl and Shaw (2001) argue that an elite interview researcher should access all available documents concerning the elite organisation to develop an instant rapport with the participants. In addition, the documents can be used to make key decisions about the purposive sampling from the data. This is in line with Yanow (2000:22) who proposed that one of the early steps of a policy analyst is to identify the “policy relevant actors and interpretive communities’. As is shown, these were used to construct the purposive sample of interviewees (see Section 4.2.1) and inform the interview style (see Section 4.2.5). Further information about how the documents were used is provided below (Section 4.4.1). The documents used in this study are also detailed below (Section 4.4.2).

## **4.2. Semi-structured interviews**

### **4.2.1. Purposive sampling**

Data were collected through semi-structured, one-to-one, elite interviews with policy actors in the Partnership. The participants were identified through purposive sampling, which is a process that allows for the selection of participants to illustrate a feature that is of interest, so it requires critical thought about the parameters of the population (Silverman 2013). Purposive sampling places a duty on the researcher to speculate on the probable factors that will impact on respondents’ perspectives and experiences (Barbour and Barbour 2003). It should be viewed as a sequential process (Silverman 2013). How this study drew on information gained through the document analysis and the interviews themselves to identify the participants is explained below.

Interviewees were drawn from three key groups comprising WCVA, Welsh Government and Equalities Third Sector Organisations. A scoping exercise was undertaken to identify the potential interview participants from these groups. This included collating and cross referencing the following individuals and organisations in a spreadsheet: the named representatives of the Third Sector Partnership Council according to WCVA publications; the attendees of the TSPC meetings according to Welsh Government records between 2011-2019; the attendees of the Ministerial Meetings according to Welsh Government records between 2011-2019; those Third Sector Organisations that specifically represented a protected characteristic (as defined by the Equalities Act 2010) involved in these meetings; Third Sector Organisations that were registered as members of the Equalities and Human Rights Coalition, which was the equalities network managed by the WCVA; and staff involved in these mechanisms according to WCVA and Welsh Government.

A typology to establish the matrix of types within the three key groups was developed. Saturation refers to interviewing the whole sample of respondents. In some cases, with elite interviews it is possible to have full saturation when the total number is small (Burnham et al. 2004). However, meeting every category in a typology is also constrained by resources and time (Mason 2002; Silverman 2013). In this study this was neither practical nor necessary. The categories of this typology are detailed below along with the discussion about where full saturation was achievable and desirable and where there were constraints.

#### Welsh Government:

The key policy actors within Welsh Government included:

1. Those officials with responsibility for the TSPC Partnership or the ministerial meetings during the period of 2011-2019.
2. The officials across the Welsh Government departments involved in one of the ministerial meetings during the period of 2011-2019.

Both of the above were confined to officials currently in this role since records of staff who had left were not available.

3. Welsh Government cabinet secretaries and ministers. These were selected for their responsibility for equality issues or their high-level involvement in the formal engagement meetings with the third sector. Interviews with ministers were constrained by the reluctance that many politicians have to participate in research due to the potential political implications of expressing views (Garnett and Lynch 2012).

#### WCVA:

Since WCVA is contracted by Welsh Government to manage the Partnership, the key policy actors within WCVA included the WCVA staff involved in the TSPC Partnership directly, the ministerial meetings or networks during the period 2011-2019. The sample was limited to current staff since records of staff who had left were not available.

#### Equalities Third Sector Organisations:

The focus of this research is equalities third sector organisations' engagement with the Partnership. Therefore, the policy actor interviews needed to be drawn from the pool of equalities third sector organisations in Wales, but it is important to define what is meant by "equalities third sector organisations" since the concept of equality has many diverse and contested interpretations (detailed in Section 1.4). The term "equalities" can be used to recognise the diverse social groups and their many varied experiences of discrimination (Chaney 2011:10). For the purpose of clarity with the sampling, the strands of equalities chosen here are restricted to those associated with protected characteristics as defined by the Equalities Act 2010. These primarily include the following characteristics: age; disability; gender; 'race'; religion or (non-)belief; sexual orientation and gender reassignment. The legislation includes some limited protection for marriage and civil partnership; and pregnancy and maternity, but these were not used as selection criteria, because they did not feature as representative categories in the Partnership and were grouped within the concerns of the seven strands above. Similarly, gender reassignment did not feature as a distinct category, but was grouped

with sexual orientation and referred to collectively as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus).

In the Equality Act 2010, there was originally provision made for socio-economic inequalities, but this socio-economic duty has not been enacted in secondary legislation (UK Government, 2010). Welsh policy and legislation concerned with protected characteristics has emerged as distinct from that concerned with socio-economic inequality. For example, the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, is distinct from the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Child Poverty Strategy, and Tackling Poverty programmes which included Flying Start, Families First, Communities First, Supporting People, Vibrant and Viable Places. The decision was made to include socio-economic disadvantage as a selection criterion because early interview data indicated it had particular significance as an equalities category that was constrained by the institutional structures of the Partnership. Notably, in Wales, policy and legislation have diverged from the other UK countries, and the socio-economic duty is due to be enacted in Wales in March 2021.

Here in Wales, there could also be a case for including such groups as Welsh language organisations, given that the Welsh language is subject to dedicated equality legislation in the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 (National Assembly for Wales 2011) and has corresponding enforcement institutions (Chaney 2011), (i.e., Welsh Language Commissioner). Also, the use of Welsh as a minority language is a right as laid out in Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (United Nations 1992; Izsák 2012:7). Furthermore, Welsh language organisations were instrumental in campaigning for equality at the outset of devolved government (Rees and Chaney 2011). However, these organisations were not included in the sample. This is because the Welsh language is such a major policy imperative that it is deserving of its own discreet study. The policy and legislation concerned with Welsh Language is substantial (for example, Cymraeg 2050: Welsh Language Strategy,

Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, Welsh Language Standards Regulations, Welsh Language Act 1993). Limitations of time and resources would not do justice to its inclusion alongside the other equalities categories listed above.

The different criteria for purposive sampling of equalities third sector organisations sought to identify both the extreme or deviant cases, the typical cases and the politically sensitive cases (Patton 2002; Flick 2009). How these criteria are applied is laid out in Table 4-1 below. Some of the equalities third sector organisations met more than one of the criteria.

Table 4-1 The purposive sample selection criteria for equalities third sector organisations

<b>Selection criteria</b>
1. <b>Attendance:</b> Equalities organisations that attend the most or frequently attend and those that do not attend the TSPC and/or Cabinet Secretary meetings (extreme case criteria)
2. <b>Position:</b> Equalities third sector organisations that hold a position in the three tiers of the engagement mechanisms (i) the TSPC representatives (ii) those participating in cabinet secretary or ministerial meetings, and (iii) those named in the 25 thematic networks (typical case criteria) OR leading national equalities organisations that do not hold a position in the Partnership (politically sensitive case criteria)
3. <b>Contentious involvement:</b> Equalities organisations whose involvement in the Partnership has been contentious (i.e. where they have been a representative in the Partnership but are not currently or they have sought to be (deviant case criteria)
4. <b>Organisation type:</b> Equalities organisations that correspond to one protected characteristics (typical case criteria)
5. <b>Organisation type:</b> Equalities organisations that represent more than one protected characteristic or represent socio-economic deprivation – neither of which directly fit the thematic networks of the Partnership (politically sensitive case criteria)

Other:

A *Senedd Cymru* Commission staff member took part in the pilot interviews and the decision was made to include this interview in the purposive sample due to their knowledge of equalities third sector engagement in *Senedd Cymru* and the related scrutiny of Welsh Government.

In total, 41 interviews were conducted. Some guidance recommends 20-30 interviews as a reasonable target for an elite interview study (Burnham et al. 2004), but the interviews continued until the saturation point had been achieved, which refers to the point when little is added to the stock of information or understanding with additional interviews (Burnham et al. 2004; Silverman 2013). In Table 4-2 below there is a summary of the number of interviews that took place according to the sampling typology. Table 4-3 and Table 4-4 summarise how the purposive sampling typology for equalities organisations was met. (For further information see Appendix 4 for a schedule of interviews and interviewee list, which has been suitably anonymised.)

*Table 4-2 Number of interviews conducted*

	<b>Sample</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>WCVA</b>	Staff who coordinate the Partnership	4	
	Staff who coordinate the third sector's engagement in one of the ministerial meetings	4	One was a pilot interview
<b>Welsh Government</b>	Officials who coordinate the TSPC and Ministerial Meetings	7	
	Officials across Welsh Government Departments who coordinate one set of ministerial meetings	5	One was a pilot interview
	Ministers / Cabinet Secretaries	1	
<b>Equalities Third Sector Organisations</b>	<i>See Figure 3.1 for a breakdown of the criteria from the purposive sample.</i>	19	
<b>Other</b>	Welsh Parliament Commission staff members	1	One was a pilot interview
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>41</b>	

Table 4-3 Purposive sample typology for equalities third sector organisations

Interviewee ref:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S
<b>1. Attendance of equalities third sector organisations</b>																			
Frequent attender	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y		Y	Y		*	*		
Did not attend/infrequent								Y	Y			*			Y	*	*	*	Y
<b>2. Position of equalities third sector organisations</b>																			
(i) named as TSPC representatives	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	*	-	Y	Y	*	Y	Y	-	*	*	-	-
(ii) participated in ministerial meetings	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	-	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	-	Y	-	Y	*
(iii) participated only in 1 of 25 thematic networks												Y							Y
leading equalities organisation but not in TSPC								Y							Y	Y			Y
<b>3. Equalities third sector organisations with contentious involvement in Partnership</b>																			
					Y	Y	Y			Y				Y					

\* The answer is complicated. It varied over time.

Table 4-4 Purposive sample typology for equalities third sector organisations (continued)

<b>4. Equalities organisations who represented one protected characteristic</b>	<b>No.</b>
Gender	2
Religion and belief	1
Age – children and young people	2
Age – older people	1
“Race”	3
Disability	3
LGBTQ+	1
<b>5. Equalities organisations who represented equality categories that do not directly correspond with the Partnership’s thematic networks</b>	
Two protected characteristics	2
Multiple protected characteristics	4
Socio-economic disadvantage	2

NOTE: This information is presented separately from Figure 3.3 to preserve anonymity.

#### 4.2.2. Recruitment of participants

Elite interviews with a semi-structured format are a commonly used method in political research (Garnett and Lynch 2012). It is important to

clarify what is meant by 'elite'. There is potential confusion in its use because it was used in the literature review of this thesis with a different meaning (see Section 2.2.4). By 'elite' in the context of an elite interview, we are referring to the position of the individual rather than the organisation. Even with this clarification, the definition of 'elite' is still contentious as Smith (2006:645) explains, because it may refer variously to the people who influence important decisions, who have an elite form of knowledge, who work in prestigious organisations, who control resources or who have political authority. Also, Smith (2006) acknowledges seniority of position in authority as a criterion (Smith 2006:646). Elites, defined by seniority of position in authority (i.e., chief executive, director, senior manager or policy officer), is the criterion by which this study's interviewees from the equalities third sector were identified. The majority were chief executives or directors of these equalities organisations (15 interviewees). Senior managers or policy officers (4 interviewees) were interviewed in cases where they had the greater knowledge of the Partnership within their organisation or simply due to availability (see Appendix 4 Schedule of interviews). The reasons elite interviews are appropriate for this study is because the research questions are concerned with the accounts of key policy actors involved in the deliberations of the statutory Partnership.

Much of what is written about elite interviews implies that these groups are difficult to access (Flick 2009), especially in political arenas (Garnett and Lynch 2012). This is in part due to obstacles presented by gatekeepers, such as personal assistants, but also potentially due to their unwillingness to be subjects of scrutiny (Odendahl and Shaw 2001). Smith (2006:643) offers a robust challenge to this presumption that 'elite' interviewees are harder to access. This study found that the elites identified in the above sampling strategy are busy senior professionals. Therefore, access to them required "a mixture of ingenuity, social skills, contacts, careful negotiation, and circumstances" (Odendahl and Shaw 2001:305). Odendahl and Shaw (2001:307) recommend developing relationships and "considerable rapport" with key individuals who can provide a picture on the institutional

culture since they are often best placed to provide the best entrée to the individuals whom the researcher wishes to access.

Odendahl and Shaw (2001) suggest that, in the case of elite interviews, it can be useful to offer something in exchange for participant's time which will be of practical use to their organisation. Therefore, the researcher employed appropriate incentives to encourage participation, though it is important to stress that there was no financial incentive offered. It was made clear that research interviewees would receive a report on the emergent findings. However, reviewing this reflexively post-interview, these incentives rarely seemed to feature in the participants' motivation. Participants tended to respond well to being given an opportunity to be helpful with the research, seemingly motivated more by what they could give rather than what they could get out of participating.

#### **4.2.3. Interview data collection**

The interview schedule (see Appendix 1) was based on the analytical framework described in Chapter Two. The question order was selected to minimise impact of earlier questions on later one. For example, questions pertaining to representation preceded specific questions about equalities matters. The interview schedule was also adapted to be appropriate to the different groups of participants to ensure the relevance of the questions. Three pilot interviews, selected across the typology, were conducted to ensure the efficacy of the interview schedule. This identified more accessible terminology and some important introductory questions. The interview schedule was adapted accordingly.

Interviews with elites are expected to be more time pressured, where access is limited and shorter than desired (Odendahl and Shaw 2001; Flick 2009; Yin 2014). Participants often initially proposed a thirty-minute interview but were gently encouraged by the researcher to allow between one and two hours. Participants tended to prefer longer interviews, once they were underway. The average interview duration was 1 hour 30 minutes. The chosen environment for elite interviews can impact on the

richness of the data and a location of convenience to the elite plays some part in countering the obstacles of securing their involvement (Odendahl and Shaw 2001). Therefore, interviews tended to take place either in the participant's place of work, or in a quiet establishment nearby, though the former was preferred for privacy and noise considerations.

The interviews were digitally recorded. A total of 61 hours and 16 minutes of interview data were collected. To ensure good practice in data management, the audio recordings were only linked to the interviewee by name on a password protected computer on the university's network. All procedures were compliant with both data protection legislation and the Cardiff University policy on data management.

#### **4.2.4. Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval was secured from the Ethics Committee of Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences prior to undertaking the research (see Appendix 2). It is an ethical requirement to ensure participants are informed of the purpose of the research and how their contributions will be used. During the recruitment process participants were sent background information about the research (see Appendix 3) and this was followed up with a phone call or direct conversation. This was done in a timely manner to enable the person an opportunity to consider their participation. Before the interview took place, participants were given a consent form (see Appendix 3) that again explained this information. It emphasised that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent to participate at any time without giving a reason. Each participant was also given a verbal explanation of the content of the consent form and plenty of opportunity to read the form before they signed.

A key ethical consideration was the anonymity of participants. When conducting elite interviews anonymity is harder to preserve because respondents are more easily identified (Odendahl and Shaw 2001). As well as the usual steps in research for protecting anonymity in terms of

removing names, the researcher also reviewed any data excerpts to ensure that they do not contain identifying features. This research is exploring institutions of equalities third sector organisations, institutions of devolved government and the Welsh national third sector body. The decision was made to not reveal which equalities organisations participated in order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees. This was an essential step to ensure the research data and their sources remain confidential, in line with ethical research (Silverman 2013). All researchers must be mindful of the best interests of their participants in participating in the research. Where a participant represents their organisation, researchers must also be concerned about the organisation's best interests (Flick 2009). Therefore, consideration of the participants' organisational interests also needed to be made. If findings were considered to be highly critical of the work of any of the organisations or revealing sensitive information concerning them then it has the potential to damage these organisations or institutions (Smith 2006). Accordingly, the researcher was careful to tread the fine balance between being an independent researcher, whilst at the same time being mindful of the impact on any of the organisations involved in the research. During interview, if participants exhibited a reluctance to reveal any specific information, then the researcher was respectful of this choice. The researcher framed all communication with all institutions in a positive perspective, framing any research findings in the context of how they can be used to positively impact on practitioners' work in the future.

#### **4.2.5. Interview style with elites**

An interviewer's decision about whether to take a neutral stance that probes for answers in a non-biased way or whether to aim for an informal, conversational approach depends on their epistemological position (Czarniawska-Joerges 2004; Flick 2009; Kvale 2009). This study's constructionist foundations recognise that neutrality is neither desirable nor possible, but the researcher also acknowledges the benefits of adopting a style that is commensurate with elite participants' normative expectations of research (Flick 2009). In the context of elite interviews, having a professional demeanour with a balance of courtesy and

friendliness are considered prerequisites (Odendahl and Shaw 2001). They are also the most effective approach to achieve a successful interaction which involves two people both actively and subjectively co-constructing knowledge (Gubrium and Holstein 2001).

It is commonly understood that the researcher is generally in a more powerful position than their participant (e.g. Czarniawska-Joerges 2004). However, much of the literature concerning elite interviews claims that, in contrast to other types of interviews, issues of control or power and the interactional dynamics are different because elites are accustomed to exercising power (Yin 2014). There are extensive accounts from theorists who claim interviewees use strategies to assert their power. Examples include reluctance to reveal useful information (Garnett and Lynch 2012), questioning the researcher, rejecting interpretations or even withdrawing from an interview (Kvale 2009). Elites in particular might give lectures instead of responding to questions or engage the interviewer in other subjects (Flick 2009). They have also been known to use such strategies as changing the timing allocated to the interview, identifying other demands on their schedule at the outset, or interrupting the interview to conduct business (Odendahl and Shaw 2001; Yin 2014). Some of these behaviours were exhibited by some participants during this study. However, it is a flawed assumption that elite participants have the greater power in interview, since the interview creates a different space with different power interactions to those experienced in the workplace (Smith 2006). Individuals often do not wield the presumed authority that is attached to their position in an interview setting. Any interviewees are susceptible to feeling exposed and vulnerable. Researchers can occupy both powerful and subjugated positions that criss-cross during the micro-politics of narration in interview (Morison and Macleod 2014) and can be impacted by other factors such as gender or age (Odendahl and Shaw 2001). Smith (2006) strongly refutes the claim that the pre-existing power of elite participants means empowering research approaches are not required. She argues that power is a nuanced, complex and constantly renegotiated interaction. The researcher concurs with this both on the grounds of ethics and efficacy.

The researcher prioritised the empowerment and well-being of the participants as the driving mechanism for how the interviews were conducted. This was achieved through reassurance and regular recognition of their expertise and the value of their perception. The researcher also drew on her prior experience and internship experiences in the third sector, WCVA and Welsh Government to frame the questions always in the context of a shared positionality with the interview participant, to avoid any sense of othering.

#### **4.2.6. Reflexivity and positionality**

Reflexivity is widely acknowledged as an essential component of qualitative research (Seale 2007). The meaning of “reflexivity” can vary widely (Atkinson and Coffey 2001). Bryman (2012) defines it as the social researcher reflecting on the implications of their values, biases, methods and decisions on their research. In this study, I achieved this through making a record of reflexive considerations throughout. (Reflexivity is referenced here in the first person.) I kept this record during the literature review, in the research methods development, throughout the data collection, during the data analysis. A researcher should record such factors as impressions of the communication, behaviour and the environment (Flick 2009), the researcher’s own activities, circumstances, and emotional responses (Emerson 1995), as well as details of access, trust, rapport, problems or surprises (Seale 2007). Our constructionist foundation requires us to recognise the perspective that the researcher imposes on the data (Creed et al. 2002), not as a “contaminant” (Pelias 2013:555), but rather to explore the researcher’s part in the construction of knowledge (Bryman 2012). There are limits to the scope of reflexivity and a researcher can never be fully cognisant of all their underlying assumptions with which they interpret the data (Mason 2002; Smith 2006). This notwithstanding, there is still value in reflecting openly to unpick our own research assumptions (Smith 2006).

If the researcher can evidence that they are sensitive to their own positionality, then it offers reassurance that their analysis is tempered with

this in mind (Pelias 2013). Therefore, throughout the reflexivity process I was mindful of my own positionality. Formerly, I had worked in a small equalities third sector organisation in Wales which had not participated in the Partnership. However, the organisation did work in partnership with WCVA, so I had an understanding of the role of WCVA. In the middle of the study, I completed two Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded internships with Welsh Government and WCVA respectively. Through the internships, I had the opportunity to gain some insider perspectives with the staff from both of these key institutions of the Partnership. Caution is needed when making a claim to insider status, because the insider position can obscure perception of the cultural logics and the researcher is always an outside to an extent (Pelias 2013). However, the proximity that the internships afforded me to undertake this research should be recognised. A researcher must be immersed in highly participatory roles to understand what they are studying (Emerson 1995) and understanding the significance of a discourse comes from situational familiarity (Yanow 2000) and immersion in the political frames of the participants (Saward 2010). Elite interviews require a solid level of expertise from the interviewer, to ask about complex processes using appropriate questioning (Flick, 2009). The internships enabled me to build on my existing grasp of third sector language and adapt technical language according to common institutional usage. The internships provided information about the Partnership policy actors, which were useful for interview sampling decisions. It also enabled me to develop relationships with policy actors, which proved helpful for interview recruitment. Finally, the internship laid foundations for impact to be achieved at the end of the research. Submitting policy recommendations to key policy actors requires the researcher to frame such recommendations in accessible language for a non-sociological audience (Bloor et al. 2015). Therefore, the internships were a useful tool by which the framing of recommendations could be achieved using appropriate language and in terms that reflected key policy actors' concerns.

#### **4.2.7. Ethics of interviewing participants previously known to researcher**

As noted above, my prior employment in the third sector and my internships with Welsh Government and WCVA were useful for the research in terms of recruitment, appropriate language and establishing rapport with interviewees. However, the internship experience particularly raises important ethical considerations that must be made around independence and impartiality, as well as recruitment and consent.

It is part of the research ethics framework of the ESRC (2005) that researchers must be independent and impartial, and moreover that any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit (Silverman 2013).

Therefore, it was important that I was transparent with the interviewees that the research was independent of both internship host organisations, and they would not have access to the research data. I clearly delineated the difference between my role within the internships from my role as a researcher with Cardiff University. Ethnographers have recognised that in the case of fieldwork, even where research participants have been informed appropriately about the researcher's role, the researcher can over-identify with the research participants which can dilute the participant's awareness of being an object of research (Hopf 2004).

Although the internships did not take the form of an ethnography, this insight is also applicable to the dual roles of internee and researcher. The onus was thus on me to reinforce the research interview setting, not only with gaining interviewees' signed consent, but also with frequent reference to the research and the academic theories that underpinned it, and clear adherence to the interview schedule and the use of audio recorder. These all contributed towards raising the interviewees' awareness of the independence of the research.

Amongst the forty-one interviewees, one participant previously knew me in the capacity of my previous employment in the equalities third sector. This person served as the first pilot interviewee. I was careful to emphasise to this interviewee that it was their choice of whether to participate and

that they should not feel unduly obliged by the previous working relationship.

My internships played a significant role in the recruitment of participants since this recruitment was partly enabled through opportunities that arose from the internships in three specific ways. First, I developed working relationships with policy actors within both WCVA and Welsh Government through my internships. Secondly, through the internships, I had the opportunity to attend the annual national third sector conference, and also, each of the different levels of the Partnership engagement mechanism meetings (i.e., a third sector network meeting, a planning meeting prior to a Ministerial Meetings, a Ministerial Meeting, a Cabinet Secretary visit to a third sector event and a TSPC members' meeting). Attending events or meetings to access subjects is a strategy endorsed by Odendahl and Shaw (2001). This enabled me to network and form relationships with many of the equalities third sector organisations that participate in the engagement mechanisms. It laid the foundations by which I was then able to contact these organisations after the internships and request an interview. Thirdly, in both internships, my role required one to one meetings with key policy actors within the organisation to undertake an internship task for the host organisations. In both internships, the host organisations agreed that I could also use these meetings, if the participants consented, to conduct interviews for the research. The ethical considerations of this overlap between the internships and research recruitment are duly considered below.

One ethical consideration is whether the internship work could be conceived as an incentive to take part by those staff members of the host organisations. There was a danger that my internship duties could be misconstrued as a form of incentive for some of the policy actors to participate in the research, particularly those that gained from that work. This would be ethically dubious if the interviewee perceived this as offering a reward for participating since it could be tempting people to participate contrary to their initial judgement (Silverman 2013). However, the

internship tasks were established and well underway before data collection. Consequently, it was very clear that the tasks that were carried out as part of the internships were unrelated to securing research participation from relevant policy actors.

Another ethical consideration is the principle of informed consent, which is a basic premise of ethical research (Hopf 2004; Sanders 2010; Silverman 2013). In addition to the steps described above to achieve informed consent, in the case of interviews done during the internships, it was essential for me to be transparent about the distinction between tasks for the internship and participation in the research. Although, as noted, this was not an ethnographic study, the literature concerned with ethnographic interviews is helpful here. It recognises the ethical imperative to ensure that the researcher distinguishes between an interview and any other conversation in that setting (Flick 2009). Key elements to establish this include giving a specific request to hold an interview and a clear explanation of the research project in accessible language (Flick 2009; Silverman 2013). In this case, as well as the usual ethical practices of ensuring informed consent before an audio recording was made of the interview, participants were also informed of the distinction between providing information for the internship tasks and participating in the PhD research interview. Furthermore, it was made clear to all participants that although permission had been granted by their organisation to conduct research interviews, that the decision to take part in the research was entirely their own choice, and they were under no obligation to take part. They were also reassured that whether they chose to take part would be confidential. This is important because autonomy is an underlying principle of ethical judgements (Sanders 2010). Voluntary participation is a fundamental tenet of ethical research and so it must be free from any coercion, (Silverman 2013), including undue pressure from an employer. Three potential interviewees opted out and their choice was respected. It was also important to distinguish ownership of the data. It was made clear that internship tasks were achieved through my handwritten notetaking, and, where individuals were happy to consent to take part in the research,

the research interviews were audio-recorded, and these audio data were the property of Cardiff University. Therefore, every appropriate ethical consideration was made to ensure a clear delineation between the internships and the research.

The foregoing sections have detailed the methodological and ethical deliberations that pertained to the interview data collection. Attention is now turned to consider how these data were utilised.

### **4.3. Interview data analysis**

#### **4.3.1. Data management**

The interviews were transcribed. The Jeffersonian convention of transcribing, which is based on conversational analysis, is held up as the ideal form which aims to capture how talk is accomplished (Goodman 2017). However, where conversational analysis is concerned with the nuance of interaction (Heritage 2004), discourse analysis is more concerned with rhetorical organisation (Potter 2004), so the micro-analysis of speech is not always appropriate (Chadwick 2017). The full Jeffersonian approach is time consuming to produce, captures more detail than was required and can be difficult to read (Goodman 2017). Therefore, this study chose a simplified, middle-ground version to ensure accessibility. The transcripts were verbatim but emphases, pauses or non-verbal communication were not recorded. The transcripts were analysed using discourse analysis. The present study is not a quantitative analysis, so the aim was not to quantify instances between the different codes as is used in content analysis. In contrast to the use of a “coding schedule” employed by quantitative content analysts (Bryman 2012:565), this study made use of NVivo software and a coding frame that was derived from the analytical framework, detailed in Chapter Two. This coding frame provided the initial categories of analysis that were then expanded and developed through an iterative process, to achieve a rich, in-depth qualitative analysis. The original 39 codes that had been derived from the literature review were developed iteratively to arrive at 2053 sub-codes, that sought to capture the detail within the discourses. Of course, the coding itself is not the

entire analysis but is the vital phase that prefigures analysis. The nature of the analysis is detailed below.

#### **4.3.2. Discourse analysis approach**

The premise of discourse analysis is that language is interconnected with social life so social analysis must take account of language (Fairclough 2003). This position has its roots in the philosophy of Wittgenstein (1953) who raised awareness of language-use, arguing for analysis from the inside, since language is shared and so meaning should be grasped through its interwoven nature. However, there are a number of different ways that discourse analysis is approached by different disciplines (Wodak 2001; Potter 2004), so it is important to identify the chosen approach.

Some discourse analysts offer a very precise set of prescribed analytical steps, which are underpinned with a strong linguistic background (for example, Fairclough 2003). Such a linguistic approach aims to understand either how sentences and utterances cohere or the nature of typical interaction patterns (Potter 2004:201). This approach was not suitable for this study since this mechanistic understanding of how interaction occurs is outside of the research aims. Wodak and Meyer (2001:69) reject specific linguistic analysis in preference for a problem-orientated approach. Thus, it is useful to return to the specific research questions to identify how these discursive devices and rhetorical and interactional strategies are relevant to the research questions (Goodman 2017). This is the strategy adopted in this study.

With research questions 1, 2 and 3, the feminist institutionalist lens requires an examination of both the formal institutional structures and the informal institutional norms and discourses, and these are both understood in terms of how they are discursively constructed by the policy actors. The discourse analysis in research question 1 is concerned with the construction of representation in the Partnership and explores the implications for descriptive representation of equalities groups. For this, the discourse analysis approach is analysing how the speaker constructs or

positions themselves and others within the discourse (Goodman 2017) and how participants use narrative resources to construct their respective roles and voices (Garfinkel 1967). This is then related back to understand the implication for equalities by analysing how these institutional discourses promote or obstruct equalities. Research question 2 is concerned with substantive representation and therefore the nature of equalities claims and claims-making. There is a relationship between discursive institutionalism and the concept of “framing”, where the way in which a policy problem is framed will determine how it is said to be resolved (Peters 2012). Frame analysis has also been used to understand institutional forces that shape policy debate (Goffman 1975; Creed et al. 2002). Here, the aim of the discourse analysis is to identify how substantive representation in the Partnership is framed. In contrast, the discourse analysis for research question 3 is concerned with the construction of the equalities third sector and how the institution of the Partnership impacts on these organisations and their intersectional practices. There are countless voices at play in participants’ responses and “the subjectivity and variable voices” emerge as a result of the interview interaction (Gubrium and Holstein 2001, pp. 22-24). The key then is to scrutinise the different discourses of identity revealed in Partnership discourses and use these to understand the organisational interrelationships. The aim of research question 4 is to understand the concepts of institutional efficacy and agency through the lens of policy actors’ perceptions and relate this back to their accounts of the achievement of institutional change to advance equalities, so this is a different task again. Here, the discourse analysis aims to contribute to these key debates in contemporary institutionalism by taking a feminist institutionalist approach.

Even having detailed the problem orientated approach, the rejection of adopting a prescribed series of steps for discourse analysis in favour of being problem-orientated can make the process seem rather mysterious (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Goodman 2017). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:163) explain the analyst should identify interesting patterns, anything surprising and puzzling, as well as considering whether

there are inconsistencies between different groups' accounts. They should also focus on the difference between what the researcher expects to find and what they do find (Yanow 2000). The researcher used the analytical framework described in Chapter Two to undertake this task and achieve this distinction between what was expected and what was found. The nature of the analysis lay in relating the significance of these responses back to the literature discussed in the Literature Review (Chapter Two). This not only exposed where responses were different from what was expected, but also revealed new connections between the different sets of theoretical ideas. In turn, this shaped how the new contributions to knowledge could be presented within the findings chapters.

Attention was paid to the collection of responses to recognise the trends and recurring themes that were made by multiple respondents. Consideration was also given to which groups in the sample voiced these different responses and whether there were similarities between policy actors' discourses from Welsh Government, WCVA or the equalities third sector. In the case of research question 3, attention was also given to the differences in the discourses between and about different equalities organisations to understand the interrelationships between them.

In the presentation of the findings (Chapters Five – Eight) in this thesis, it is made clear if these discourses belong to a small minority or are prevalent amongst a particular group of interviewees or even across the entire sample. In these cases, one or two quotes have been selected to epitomise the wider discourses. It is always made clear where these discourses represent a small minority or only one group of interviewees or whether they could be viewed as a dominant discourse shared across the sample. Occasionally, a single interviewee would make a noteworthy point, which has been quoted in order to discuss its relevance. Whenever such a quote is offered in the findings chapters, it is made clear that this is a single viewpoint before explaining its significance.

This study takes a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. CDA requires the analysis of transparent and opaque forms of power, structural relationships of dominance, discrimination and control as it is manifested in language (Wodak and Meyer 2001). This critical component of CDA enables the researcher to focus on social change, and to be motivated by the critical questioning in political and moral terms of social life (Fairclough 2003). Therefore, influencing practice should be the end game and the goal is to change certain discursive and social practices (Wodak and Meyer 2001). In such an approach, some theorists warn of the tendency in social science to accept the instrumentalism of the audit culture that requires researchers to provide evidence for practice (Atkinson and Coffey 2004; Lather 2013). However, in this research, the author holds that a distinction should be made between having a healthy scepticism towards the audit culture, without losing, as Miller and Glassner (2004) describe it, the hope of the social scientist to contribute knowledge about the social world that can be beneficial in expanding understanding and be useful for fostering social change. The implications for policy and practices are therefore explored in the Conclusion (see Section 9.4).

This concludes the explanation of how the interview data were analysed and consideration is now given to how this study made use of documents as a research method.

#### **4.4. Documents**

##### **4.4.1. The different uses of primary documentation in this study**

Publications concerning the Partnership were used to support the principal research method of semi-structured interviews. Above, the epistemological case was made for this mixed methods approach (Section 4.1.2). Here, the details are presented of how the documents were used since they were utilised in a number of ways in this study. The first use was to provide contextual detail about the Partnership. This was helpful for informing the interview process, since documents can provide the knowledge foundation appropriate for elite interviews (Flick 2009). Thus, alongside the researcher's prior experience, the analysis of these documents was useful

for adopting language about the Partnership that was in keeping with the policy actors' understanding of the Partnership. As discussed in the previous chapter, these documents provided the researcher with the understanding of the Partnership structure (see Section 3.3.1), key developments in the Partnership prior to the period of interest in this study (see Sections 3.3.2 – 3.3.3) and during the time period that is the focus of this study (see Section 3.3.4).

The second use of the primary documents associated with the Partnership was to inform the purposive sample of interviewees. Documents can be used to confirm the appropriate individuals to be interviewed (Yanow 2000). As noted above, a spreadsheet was developed that documented every participant (N=468) and their associated organisations that were recorded within the published minutes of all the relevant meetings during the time period of interest and the frequency with which they attended the meetings. These were cross-referenced with the accounts of third sector representatives detailed in the official partnership publications. This information was pivotal for identifying the relevant participants in line with the selection criteria detailed (see Section 4.2.1, including Table 4.2.1 above).

The third use of primary documents was the document analysis to consider how these publications could contribute to each of the research questions. However, it is important to emphasise that documents cannot be used to answer the research questions in the same way as the interview data. Discursive institutionalism is useful here for understanding the distinction between coordinative and communicative discourses (Schmidt 2008). Coordinative discourses shape and justify the institutional positions and communicative discourses concern ideas that need to be communicated to others policy actors in other institutions (Peters 2012). Where interviews allow us to explore the coordinative discourses of the institution, in contrast, the publications that are concerned with the Partnership allows us to explore the communicative discourses contained in the legislation, and Welsh Government's and WCVA's publications about the Partnership.

This analysis was useful for comparing the documents' communicative discourses with the coordinative discourses found in the interview data. Thus, it was possible to compare the accounts of the formal institutional processes of the Partnership contained within the policy actors' accounts with the publications associated with the Partnership. In order to do this a spreadsheet that compared the accounts of the formal processes between key documents was developed. This allowed consideration of which of the perceived formal processes have origins in the formal publications (for example, Section 8.2.3). In addition, it revealed any differences between the content of formal publications and policy actors accounts (for example, Section 5.1.3). It was also used to compare how the intended formal mechanisms of institutional learning detailed in the documents have been applied according to policy actors (For example, Section 8.3.1).

Furthermore, there are other analytical considerations to be made with document analysis such as an awareness of the influences on the content of documents. In the case of the Third Sector Scheme itself and the subsequent annual reports the legal requirements on Welsh Government partly dictate what must be included. So, for example, the Government of Wales Act, 2006 (s.74, Points 4 and 9) requires that the scheme must specify how the legislation will be implemented and what the annual reports will evidence. Besides these requirements, we should understand how the documents' performativity can contribute to the research questions. One function that extends to all the Welsh Government documents is to enable Welsh Government to (re)define "what counts" (Atkinson and Coffey 2004:63) in constructing the picture of the relationship between Welsh Government and the third sector, so this is the communicative discourse that our analysis must capture. Documents are not just describing systems because "they are active in creating and shaping them" (Atkinson and Coffey 2004:61). A document can serve to define identity and shape reality (Prior 2003; Atkinson and Coffey 2004). An institution's record, such as meeting minutes, can supersede the reality contained in other records and override individual perspectives (Atkinson and Coffey 2004; Mason 2006). Thus, the process of analysis of the

documents must view the documents through their performative role, in analysing against the research questions and the analytical framework. This justifies an examination of how the informal institutional discourses have changed over time through a comparison of successive publications, such as the annual report. Thus, a spreadsheet compared content between annual reports from 2011-2019. Furthermore, the changes in the Government of Wales Acts (1998; 2006) or the changes in Schemes between 2004 and 2014 and their associated texts can reveal shifts in informal institutional discourses (For example, see the analysis in Section 6.3.1). This was useful not only for the analysis of the research questions, but it has also been used to lay the contextual background of the Partnership in the previous chapter (see Sections 3.3.2 - 3.3.4). Additionally, it is valuable to explore the differences between the informal institutional discourses as they are presented within the Partnership publications and within the policy actors' accounts. For example, these can be compared to understand who has control of the Partnership agenda (see the analysis of Section 8.2.1).

The foregoing sets out the multiple ways that a document analysis can support the analysis of interview data, provided the researcher is cognisant of the limitations described above about how documents can be used. This final section details which documents were used for the purposes detailed above.

#### **4.4.2. Data sample**

The documents chosen for analysis included Welsh Government's publications concerning the Partnership between 2011-2019. These were (1) The Third Sector Scheme (Welsh Government 2014a); (2) Third Sector Scheme Annual Reports that were laid before *Senedd Cymru* (Welsh Assembly Government 2011; Welsh Government 2012; 2013b ; 2014b ; 2015 ; 2016c ; 2017 ; 2018 ; 2019b ; 2020); (3) Continuity and Change, the consultation document that preceded the second Third Sector Scheme (Welsh Government 2013a) and (4) the Welsh Government website pages that detailed the Partnership (Welsh Government 2016b). In addition,

documents chosen from the WCVA included (5) the Framework for Engagement (WCVA 2014) (6) the publication that detailed the nature of the Partnership (WCVA 2015) (7) the WCVA website pages that detailed the Partnership (WCVA 2016). The other documents used included (8) the minutes of the formal engagement meetings between third sector organisations and the ministers and cabinet secretaries, and (9) the minutes of the third sector equalities network called Equalities and Human Rights Coalition.

Additionally, the documents that were used to develop an understanding of the Partnership and the key developments that had taken place prior to the period of study included: (10) the sections of the legislation that created the Partnership in the Government of Wales Acts (1998; 2006); (11) The earliest VSPC records (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000a); (12) Breaking New Ground Report about the first round of VSPC meetings (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000b); (13) The first Voluntary Sector Scheme Action Plan (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000c); (14) the earliest account of the proposed structure of the Partnership (Bryant and Hutt 1998); (15) the Voluntary Sector Scheme (National Assembly for Wales 2004); (16) The Third Dimension, which was the revised Voluntary Sector Scheme Action Plan (Welsh Assembly Government 2007); (17) the revised Code of Practice for Fundings (Welsh Assembly Government 2009).

The primary data collection method of this study was the elite interviews with policy actors, and this generated 61 hours of interview data and 504,934 words in the transcripts. Given the thorough analysis required for this volume of interview data, time and resource limitations precluded doing an exhaustive study of all the policy documents linked to the Partnership. Instead, a robust purposive sampling approach was utilised. There were three criteria used in the decisions to include the documents in the data sampling. The first criterion was to inform the purposive sample of interviewees (Section 4.2.1). The second criterion for the decisions on document data sampling was the extent the documents could contribute

to the research questions (Section 4.4.1). The third criterion was to develop a base understanding of the Partnership and key developments that preceded the period of study (Sections 3.3.2 - 3.3.3).

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter a detailed explanation of how the constructionist position shaped every stage of the research has been given. The qualitative mixed methods of semi-structured interviews and document analysis were justified accordingly. This chapter then detailed how the interviews were conducted, including specifying how the nature of elite interviews impacted on the purposive sampling, participants recruitment, interview location, content and style as well as detailing the appropriate measures for ethical considerations and data management. The section on interview data described how the data were transcribed and analysed. There was also an examination of the process of discourse analysis and the approach was located in the school of critical discourse analysis. The discussion of the data sampling of the document analysis was related back to their triple purpose of providing a contextual foundation of the Partnership, informing the interview process and also responding to the research questions. This discussion included an explanation of how the document analysis differed from interview data analysis and concluded by detailing the data sample of the documents used.

The following chapter is the first of four findings chapters that address each of the four research questions.

## 5. Descriptive representation in the Partnership: An institutionalist analysis of equalities groups' representation

### Introduction

The research question that this chapter addresses is: *How is the descriptive representation of equalities groups shaped by the institution of the third sector-government partnership?* Descriptive representation, though often conceived in the context of electoral democracy, applies to any setting where representative claims are made (Saward 2010:166), so it is appropriate to apply it to equalities representation in the Partnership. According to Pitkin (1967:11), descriptive representation is “the making present of something absent by resemblance or reflection”. Celis et al. (2014:150) simply define it as “representation by representatives who belong to the same societal group”. Saward (2010) develops this by drawing attention to how the constituency of the representative is constructed and created. Accordingly, for this study, a feminist institutionalist lens is applied to interpret how representatives and their constituencies are constructed by the informal institutional discourses as well as the formal institutional structures. The analysis of the formal institutional structures of the Partnership allows an examination of its network structures to understand the nature of these constituencies. The relationship between Partnership representatives and their constituencies is also shaped by different models of democracy, from representative to participatory democracy. Therefore, a discursive institutionalist analysis is made to explore how equalities groups' representation is shaped by the application of different understandings of democracy to the Partnership. Exploring how participatory democracy impacts on descriptive representation also requires an examination of the Partnership's institutional discourses on direct participation of equalities groups. Examining how representative democracy impacts on descriptive representation also necessitates consideration of how equalities groups' representatives play a more functional role in enabling the policy-making goals of elected political representatives. In the following feminist institutionalist analysis, the literature on descriptive representation, as well

as cognate work on democracy and interest group representation, are taken from our analytical framework (see Chapter Two Section 2.2) and applied to the data.

This chapter has three parts. It begins with an analysis of how the equalities representatives' constituencies are constructed by both informal institutional discourses and the formal institutional structures of the networks. It then explores how discourses on participatory democracy impact on equalities representatives and their relationship with their constituencies. It concludes by considering the extent to which institutional discourses interpret equalities representatives as instrumental tools for elected political representatives. This allows consideration of the impact of representative democracy on the descriptive representation of equalities groups. In all three parts, this analysis is feminist institutionalist in nature, because it seeks to explore how equalities representation is constrained or enabled by the institution (Krook and Mackay 2011; Mackay 2011). Thus, this analysis of the descriptive representation of equalities groups contributes to the overarching research question by examining key facets of how the partnership promotes and/or frustrates the advancement of equalities. As the following discussion reveals, amongst the key findings of this chapter are the markedly different conceptions of representation in the Partnership, which are shown to threaten the descriptive representation of equalities groups, and the contrasting modes of democracy that underpin these. Another key finding is the nature and complexity of network types which are used to understand variation in representatives' constituencies.

## **5.1. The nature of the equalities representatives' constituencies**

### **5.1.1. The constituencies according to informal institutional discourses**

Policy actors were asked who is represented by the Partnership's third sector representatives in order to examine their understanding of representation. Interviewees from the equalities third sector often related representation to their respective equalities groups. So, examples of their responses ranged from *'we're advocating for women'* to *'we're speaking on*

*behalf of older people*’ or they described representation *‘for ethnic minority people’* or *‘for children and young people’*. They also described giving *‘an LGBT lens’* or *‘represent[ing] the voice of disabled people’* (Selection of Participants, Equalities Organisations<sup>1</sup>). The justification for using the Partnership as a means to achieve the representation of equalities groups was made by one Welsh Government official, who offered the following view:

*Just look at the representation within [Welsh Government]; we haven’t got one BME senior civil servant... We’ve only got one gay, out-gay, SCS [Senior Civil Servant] person as well... You can quite see... why they wouldn’t feel they were getting a good hearing or that people had a good understanding of their experiences when they’re not properly represented within an organisation or amongst AMs... That’s why I think [third sector] representation is so important. That you do actually reflect your population.* (Participant 19, Welsh Government)

This official justified equalities representation in the Partnership on the grounds that equalities groups’ representation is not adequately achieved through elected politicians or senior management in Welsh Government. This is a common justification for equalities representation in such governance models. For example, Klijn and Skelcher (2007:594) explained how identity groups underrepresented in traditional representative democracy models are enabled to influence policy through governance networks.

However, the interviewee above was the only one from Welsh Government to describe Partnership representation in this way. Instead, discourses on representation from Welsh Government and WCVA tended to be more concerned with the representation of ‘communities’. For example: *‘If we go back to first principles, what gives the third sector the mandate to be in the room? We go back to them representing the communities of Wales’* (Participant 20, Welsh Government). Seemingly, Welsh Government and WCVA policy actors viewed the Partnership as a means to achieve descriptive representation of communities in a broader sense than simply equalities groups’ representation. This is unsurprising

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in this way to preserve anonymity

given that equalities formed just a third of the thematic networks from which the Partnership representatives were drawn (as detailed in Chapter One).

However, the institutional discourses revealed a different interpretation of the constituencies represented in the Partnership than those described above, and this conception of representation was most commonly found in all three groups of the interview sample. Accounts were dominated with representation of organisations rather than constituencies of people or communities. For example, policy actors described how representatives were expected *'to have engaged with... all the other organisations that they're supposed to be representing'* (Participant 3, WCVA). As this official illuminated: *'If they're there representing the children's network then... you'd expect them to be linked with all them third sector organisations that are working with children'* (Participant 18, Welsh Government). Thus, institutional discourses revealed Partnership representatives were perceived to advocate for organisations. These two forms of representation for people with protected characteristics or equalities organisations are not wholly discrete, since the equalities organisations being represented should themselves be concerned with the needs of the equalities groups alongside their organisational needs. Yet the distinction in these different understandings of constituency has an important impact, as shall be shown. First, we will further explore the nature of the representatives' constituencies as it is revealed in the formal institutional structures.

### **5.1.2. The constituencies according to formal institutional structures**

The formal institutional structures of the Partnership consisted of representatives being drawn from the twenty-five thematic networks. Of these networks, eight were directly concerned with one protected characteristics (e.g., the religion network) and other thematic networks were concerned with a range of equalities matters (e.g., the asylum seekers and refugees network) (as detailed in Section 1.3). When policy actors from Welsh Government and WCVA were explicitly asked to reflect

on how equality featured in the Partnership, many recognised that it featured in so far as *'a lot of the organisations that are involved in the third sector partnership council are equality, equality-type organisations'* (Participant 1, Welsh Government). Their responses consistently pointed to the formal Partnership representational structures, as this official explained:

*Well, the networks represented on the TSPC include gender, sexual preference, age, race, religion, all the protected characteristics, disability. So, in terms of equality, if that's what you're referring to, in that respect then, all of those networks have an opportunity to participate.* (Participant 21, Welsh Government)

This shows these equalities networks sent representatives to the TSPC and furthermore, the networks were also *'represented at the cabinet secretary meetings'* [also known as *ministerial meetings* and *portfolio meetings*] (Participant 15, Welsh Government). As these excerpts demonstrate, when pressed on equality matters, policy actors from Welsh Government and WCVA recognised equalities representation in the Partnership as operating through the equality-themed networks and was thus part of the formal institutional structure of the Partnership. This suggests that these networks were how descriptive representation of equalities groups was achieved in the view of Welsh Government and WCVA.

Further analysis of the Partnership's institutional network structures offers an insight which, in part, explains interviewees' mixed account of representation. Interviews with equalities participants revealed a diversity of network structures. These are detailed below and summarised in Figure 5-1. In some networks, the membership consisted of individuals with the corresponding protected characteristic (*Type 2*). For example, here, one network-lead described only representing *'[our beneficiary people]: that is mainly why we are here anyway. We can't advocate for any other... not on behalf of any other organisation'* (Participant 26, Equalities Third Sector). Other networks' membership consisted of equalities organisations (*Type 1 and Type 4*). For example, here, a WCVA interviewee described one of the

Figure 5-1 Different third sector network structures



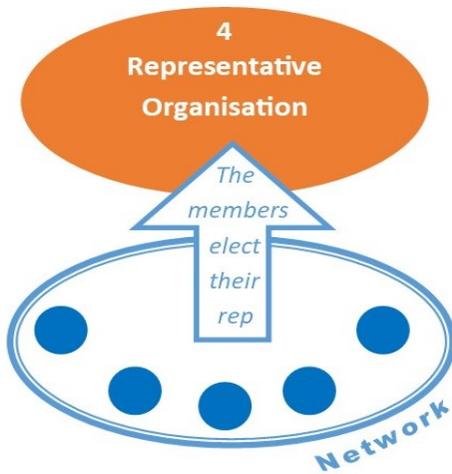
The representative organisation is the network and its members are organisations.



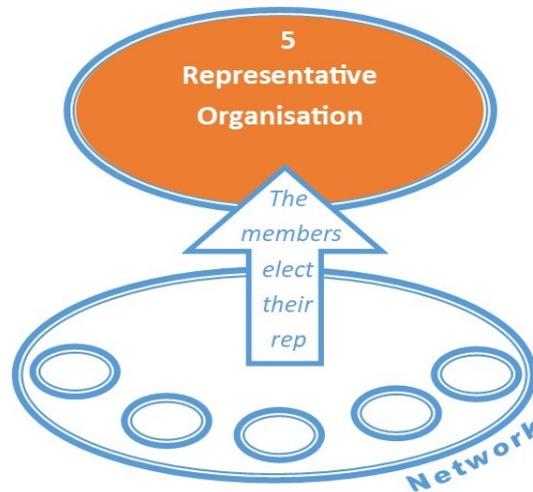
The representative organisation is the network and its members are individuals.



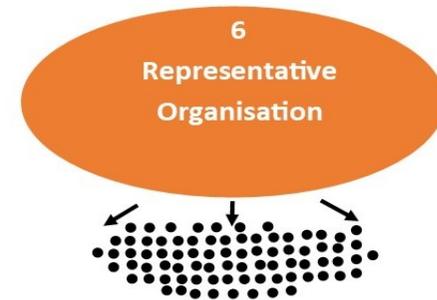
The representative organisation is the network and its members include both organisations and individuals.



The representative organisation is elected by the network members. These members are organisations.



The representative organisation is elected by the network members. These members are networks themselves. Therefore, this is a network of networks.



This is an anomaly because the representative organisation does not have members but does consult individuals to whom it provides services.

KEY:

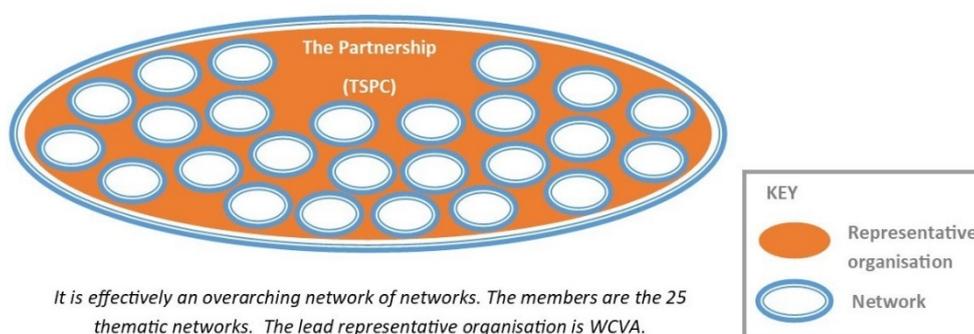
-  Representative organisation
-  Network
-  Member organisation
-  Individual member

networks: *'They've got lots of small BME groups you know, with a very wide spectrum... [of] small groups that are very community-focussed'* (Participant 6, WCVA). A few networks were hybrid in nature and had both individuals and organisations (*Type 3*), as this interviewee described: *'We've got a thousand members: two hundred organisational and about 800 individual'* (Participant 32, Equalities Organisation). Some were actually networks of networks (*Type 5*), which collectively represented a large number of organisations, as described here: *'We are part... of the disability [network] and that includes... the five umbrella bodies representing disability interests... representing the interests of... different organisations... I think we worked out at one point we had about 800 member groups... between all of us'* (Participant 39, Equalities Organisation). In other Partnership networks, the representative organisation was simply a leading organisation in that equalities field, which consulted with individuals who had that protected characteristic to whom they provided services (*Type 6*). Although these were called 'networks' in the Partnership, such organisations did not view themselves as membership organisations. For example, one interviewee noted: *'We're not a representative body... We're not that type of organisation... We don't have formal mechanisms of membership or representation... We engage directly... with thousands of people every year'* (Participant 29, Equalities Organisation). This form of third sector representative is rarely acknowledged in the literature, but it was recognised by Kotzian and Steffek (2011:9) who found there was an additional legitimacy burden on such organisations that engaged beneficiaries rather than members. However, in the present case study, the lack of understanding of these different network types amongst policy actors meant that *Type 6* representatives did not report facing this additional scrutiny for not having members.

As well as distinguishing between membership types, the interview data revealed another distinction between those lead organisations that were the networks (*Types 1, 2 and 3*) and those that were not. In the latter case, the organisations were elected by their network to be the representative lead organisation, and the networks were organisationally distinct from

them (*Types 4, and 5*). How this variation in network election practices impacted on the Partnership’s efficacy is discussed further in Chapter Eight (Section 8.1.1). It is detailed here because the different relationships between members and network-leads had an impact on the network structures, and in turn, on their understanding of representatives’ constituencies. It should be noted that the TSPC itself, with its twenty-five networks, can also be conceptualised as a large network of networks. Its structure was different from that represented in Type 5 (Figure 5-1), because it was not elected by its members but was created to be the overarching network. This structure can be seen in Figure 5-2 below.

Figure 5-2 The TSPC structure



Given that some of the Partnership’s twenty-five member-networks were also networks of networks, it is clear this institutional structure had a multi-layered complexity. Furthermore, it was apparent from some of the interviews that some organisations served as the lead representative organisation in one network, whilst simultaneously constituted a member of another network. Thus, there was an interwoven nature to the institutional structures.

Theorists commonly point to the “complexity”, “variation” or “organisational diversity” in organisational structures of third sector representative bodies (Chaney and Fevre 2001a:152; Greenwood 2007:355; Chapman et al. 2010:625). It is claimed this complexity makes it difficult to understand organisations’ structures (Baggetta and Madsen 2019). However, this complexity should not prevent us from seeking to understand institutional structures that link the third sector with

government. Marsh and Rhodes (1992) (and also Rhodes and Marsh 1992) put forward a policy network typology, in which they identified 'policy communities' and 'issue networks' as endpoints on a network continuum containing many intermediary cases. However, their conception of a continuum masks the key distinctions that have been revealed in the typology presented above.

Crucial to understanding these different network types within the institution of the Partnership was that interviewees described a lack of communication, and in consequence a lack of awareness amongst policy actors about the different forms of networks, as this equalities interviewee explained:

*I think one of the problems is that each network or sector which is supposedly representative, works in very, completely different ways. There's no consistency... So, it just seems there aren't very clear parameters for what's expected... and we, as lead representative groups, don't currently have much information about what the others do. (Participant 33, Equalities Organisation)*

The lack of knowledge within the Partnership about the network structures of other networks meant there was a general failure to understand the distinction between a membership of specific people, a membership of organisations, a membership of networks or not having a membership at all (as illustrated in Figure 5-1). These structures were also not scrutinised by WCVA or Welsh Government, whose policy actors described only requesting networks to identify '*the numbers of groups that they are reaching*' (Participant 6, WCVA). Sørensen and Torfing (2005b) point to 'network design' as a key focus of the management of networks. Yet a principal finding of this study is that attention to the network design was largely absent from the Partnership's management by Welsh Government and WCVA. The implication of this for the institutional efficacy of the Partnership is discussed further in Chapter Eight. Here, the lack of scrutiny and oversight of network membership offers an insight as to why there were contrasting understandings of representatives' constituencies in institutional discourses.

Therefore, both the formal institutional structure of the Partnership networks and the informal institutional discourses about representation revealed that the constituencies being represented might refer to third sector organisations or populations. How this impacts on the descriptive representation of equalities groups is now addressed.

### **5.1.3. How these institutional factors shaped equalities representation**

Officials' loss of focus on the Partnership's network themes in preference to a concern with securing third sector organisational representation (as revealed in Section 5.1.2), led to an expectation in the institutional discourses for Partnership representatives to be '*advocating for the sector as a whole*' (Participant 19, Welsh Government). This was instead of simply representing the organisations in their own network. Such accounts were even given by some equalities organisations. For example, this interviewee explained '*In the Third Sector Partnership Council I would say that I'm there to represent the sector... [In Ministerial Meetings] I'm very clear that I'm there to represent the third sector voice*' (Participant 27, Equalities Organisation). Relatedly, interviewees spoke of how Partnership representation of the third sector was related to presenting '*cross-cutting issues that affect all of the third sector*' (Participant 7, WCVA) and '*issues that impact on, if not all, than significant parts of the sector*' (Participant 4, WCVA). Such accounts are in keeping with the meta-governance approach advocated by Sørensen and Torfing (2005a). They argued it is the government's responsibility to ensure particular interests do not dominate third sector-state relations, and government's should only allow broad, inclusive agendas.

The corollary of requiring only cross-cutting issues is that the third sector were expected to present 'a unified voice' as this official explained: '*We want to change the stuff that will have maximum impact for maximum organisations... Because... we could never listen to every single voice*' (Participant 18, Welsh Government). These twin notions of '*cross-cutting issues*' and having a '*unified voice*' were found across the interview sample. The expectation for the third sector to only voice issues that are relevant

across the third sector was also seen in the WCVA's contemporary publications about the Partnership (WCVA 2015;2016). For example,

*WCVA... ensures that the issues raised from the third sector are of broad relevance across the sector in order to maximise the effectiveness of the meetings (WCVA 2016:5)*

The ubiquity of this discourse about a “unified voice” shows that it was considered “normatively appropriate behaviour” in the institution (March and Olsen 1984:744).

Such an expectation for the third sector to present a unified consensus has also been recognised across the span of policymaking and governance literature (Parsons 1995; Lowndes and Skelcher 1998; Mansbridge 1999:634; Chaney and Fevre 2001b; Tilly 2005; Sinclair 2011; Peters 2014; Dean 2017). However, this study reveals how this expectation impacted on representation of equalities groups, as this excerpt from a WCVA interviewee demonstrates:

*Ideally, they'd be cross-cutting, strategic issues, for the sector ...I suppose, this is about how they're advocating on behalf of the third sector... It's about those sorts of issues, rather than [names a children's organisation], for example, coming and saying, these are the issues affecting children... This is about the generic issues in the sector, rather than if you're worried about children's issues. (Participant 11, WCVA)*

It is clear that some interpretations of this call for “cross-cutting issues” relevant to the whole third sector therefore excluded specific equalities issues. The exclusion of equalities matters from cross-cutting issues is explicitly stated by this WCVA interviewee:

*Achieving equality? ...I think we fall foul of [that]. We silo equality into the cabinet secretary with responsibility for equality... I don't think we see it as a cross-cutting thing in terms of how the scheme is run. (Participant 6, WCVA)*

This evidences that some WCVA representatives actively rejected equalities as being one of the cross-cutting issues of the Partnership, and when this occurred, it obstructed the substantive representation of equalities matters from all Partnership meetings, except the one with the minister responsible for equality. This is contrary to the formal account of the Partnership in the Welsh Government's Third Sector Scheme. As the

document analysis revealed, the Scheme cites “equality and diversity” as one of four explicit cross-cutting themes, which was intended to “feature prominently” in the relationship between Welsh Government and the third sector (Welsh Welsh Government 2014a:9).

Notably, when policy actors were asked explicitly to reflect on how equality featured in the Partnership, although some had identified the networks (discussed in Section 5.1.2), other interviewees rejected equality as an institutional goal entirely, as this official explained: *‘There’s never been a specific focus on equality, that I can recall’* (Participant 17, Welsh Government). This view was echoed by some equalities interviewees, who stated *‘the TSPC isn’t focussing on equalities per se’* (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation) and *‘I didn’t get the impression that there was a burning desire or talk about equality’* (Participant 32, Equalities Organisation). Instead, interviewees from WCVA and Welsh Government commonly signposted to *‘the Equalities Unit within Welsh Government’* (Participant 4, WCVA) as the principal body in government concerned with equality. This was expanded upon by one official:

*There is always this kind of debate about where the right place is to discuss equality issues. The equalities team have also got structures where a number of equality organisations engage with ministers. (Participant 22, Welsh Government)*

As this official’s response reveals, the Equalities Unit’s separate engagement mechanism further enabled equalities to be side-lined in the Partnership. Equalities groups were not given direct representation through the institution of the Partnership, as was elucidated by this equalities interviewee. When questioned about how equalities featured in the Partnership, they said: *‘Probably not directly... I suppose it’s kind of indirectly really... Equality is there in, you know, just around the table’* (Participant 31, Equalities Organisation). This suggests that descriptive representation of equalities groups was an end in itself.

Yet, as Mansbridge (1999:630) maintains, the primary purpose of descriptive representation is to achieve substantive representation. Substantive representation refers to “the substance” of the policy claims

when equalities representatives are “acting for others” (Pitkin 1967:12). The next chapter addresses how equalities organisations pursued substantive representation of equalities through the Partnership (Chapter Six). However, it is noted here because the two forms of representation are interrelated. The inhibition of the substantive representation of equalities, described above, negated the very asset of representing disadvantaged groups upon which their descriptive representation was based in the network structures. This is an example of institutional decoupling, described by Chaney (2006:31), in which there is a disjunction between the formal institutional rules that promote equalities representation and the informal institutional practices which therefore side-lines the commitments espoused by Welsh Government. Further analysis of how the ‘unified voice’ imperative impacted on the equalities third sector will be addressed in Chapter Seven (Section 7.1.2). Here, it is highlighted because it demonstrates that the representation of third sector organisations in the Partnership can inadvertently lead to the suppression of claims grounded in the descriptive representation of equalities groups. This was predicted by Chaney and Fevre (2001b:39) who warned that a practices requiring consensus in Welsh Government would exclude and marginalise groups, thus failing to reflect the diversity of equalities representatives’ concerns. This study evidences that these fears have been realised.

Feminist theorists have described the systemic marginalisation of women’s issues as minority issues, which has led to them being pushed to the political periphery (Celis and Lovenduski 2018). Similarly, this finding shows the consignment of equalities matters to the periphery of Partnership business on the grounds of not being a cross-cutting issue of the third sector majority. Third sector theorists have argued that the consensus imperative drives out diverse voices (Taylor 2001; Bristow et al. 2008; Milbourne and Cushman 2013; Jacklin-Jarvis 2015). The present study supports this, but it also demonstrates how the equalities third sector were disadvantaged by the institutional norm for the third sector to speak with a unified voice.

Next, a discursive institutionalist account of participatory democracy in the Partnership is considered to understand how this has also shaped the descriptive representation of equalities groups.

## **5.2. Participatory democracy in the Partnership**

### **5.2.1. Institutional discourses on participatory democracy**

When the policy actors were asked about the *raison d'être* of the Partnership their responses fitted into two conceptual ideas: participatory democracy and making use of the third sector as an instrument for improving public policymaking. The former is addressed in this section. Thus, many of the responses about the Partnership's *raison d'être* were concerned with giving people a voice. This set of responses described the institution as connecting government with the people, as this WCVA interviewee explained: *'It's to hear the concerns of the third sector and through that, hear the concerns of communities and people'* (Participant 3, WCVA). Another expression of the Partnership's aims came from this interviewee who described the purpose as *'[engaging] the real people with experience of things'* (Participant 4, WCVA). This was elaborated by a government minister, who explicitly stated:

*We want a more participatory democracy where there's interest and engagement in politics ... From the word go in setting up the Assembly we wanted a more participatory democracy.* (Participant 25, A Welsh Government Minister)

This excerpt is unequivocal in identifying that participatory democracy underpinned the institution of the Partnership.

As was shown in Chapter Two, there is extensive literature that addresses this notion of participatory democracy (Section 2.2.1). Yet interest group theorists have recognised there is a tension between representation of the wider population and special interest groups (Beyers et al. 2008) or between the impartial "public interest" and "partial interests" (Dryzek 2000:169). Similarly, Phillips (1999:19) describes the "critique of the unequal society", which argues that if we do not divide society into contesting interest groups we can concentrate on "matters of common concern". Attention is now turned to how these differing conceptions of

participatory democracy impacted on the Partnership's institutional discourses of representation.

As noted, Welsh Government and WCVA accounts envisaged the role of third sector representation to identify the *'needs of the community'* (Participant 18, Welsh Government). Although 'community' could be interpreted as *'a geographical community or a community of interest'* (Participant 20, Welsh Government), Welsh Government and WCVA accounts tended to allude to geographical communities. As this WCVA representative explained: *'an inherent danger... is you're almost just thinking about communities in places'* (Participant 11, WCVA). A focus on regional communities can also be seen in this official's account: *'The thing that makes being in Wales difficult and challenging, is that our solutions are so specific, geographically specific, that you cannot pick it up from Tredegar and move it to rural Powys, because it won't work'* (Participant 12, Welsh Government). The key point emerging here is that officials tended to conceive of representation in terms of geographical communities from across all parts of Wales.

The underlying principle of participatory democracy explains this tendency. The principle of subsidiarity is essential to participatory democracy and refers to where "decision-making should take place at the lowest appropriate (usually geographically defined) level and cascade up" (Dean 2017:220). Thus, participatory democracy implies territorial representation.

The notion of territorial representation was reinforced by the institutional discourses about *'place-based policymaking'* (Participant 11, WCVA). The third sector were seen as the vehicle to enable government to do this, as this official described:

*That idea of place-making, of understanding place, these are things that government can't do... Who's left to be the voice, to be the advocate for those communities... We need to have the third sector to help us do this with communities, because the third sector are very good at that.* (Participant 20, Welsh Government)

Some theorists might relate this place-specific representation discourse to 'localism'. Localism was a dimension of the "Big Society" policy agenda of the UK Conservative-led coalition government from 2010 (Alcock 2016; Aiken and Taylor 2019). It referred to the promotion of local community engagement to meet local needs by taking control of their local services (Alcock 2016). However, localism was largely English-focussed and was associated with the Conservative party, which is not in power in Wales. Instead, this 'place-based' trope might instead be related to the sixteen-year Welsh Labour Government Communities First programme. This programme, originally conceived as a community development initiative, came to be known as an anti-poverty programme which ceased in 2018 (Pearce et al. 2020). As this WCVA interviewee explained: *'This work... on resilient communities... or building community wellbeing... that's kind of comes from post-Communities First stuff'* (Participant 11, WCVA). Pearce et al. (2020) found that the underlying ideologies of Communities First originally embodied a singularly Welsh policy rhetoric of devolving power to place-based communities. Pearce et al. (2020) found that although the underlying logics eroded over time with the reframing of the programme, there were some who held onto this underlying place-based community logic. This interviewee's response suggests the Communities First programme's legacy was to reinforce this place-based principle which was seeking a new policy-host following the programme's demise.

The emphasis on regionalised representation by Welsh Government and WCVA was also bolstered by confusion from some officials between the Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC), and the separate, geographically-organised mechanisms of the Third Sector Support Wales (TSSW). This was a distinct institutional structure comprised of WCVA and the 19 Welsh County Voluntary Councils (CVCs). Such confusion is illustrated here:

*The third sector has to organise itself into some kind of representative structure... which is the county voluntary councils and the WCVA.* (Participant 1, Welsh Government)

This participant was discussing the TSPC but conflated it with the geographically-organised TSSW. This confusion, found in some officials'

accounts, reinforced the concept of third sector geographical representation.

The emphasis on place in representation should also be understood with respect to a recurring criticism in policy actors' accounts of the Partnership's configuration. These frequently claimed that smaller third sector organisations were not participating, particularly those '*grassroots*' organisations with a '*geographical remit*' (Participant 16, Welsh Government). Other interviewees described how '*medium to large charities*' '*dominated*' (Participant 38, Equalities Organisation) and there was a '*bias towards national, strategic organisations*' making it '*difficult for really local community organisations to be involved*' (Participant 33, Equalities Organisation). As this official explained: '*I'm told that some people feel squeezed out... so people just feel there's a bit of a pecking order and they don't necessarily get the air space, particularly if they're smaller, more local*' (Participant 19, Welsh Government).

These accounts mirror findings across the third sector literature. They recognise larger third sector organisations are well positioned, politically articulate and have the resources to participate in state partnerships, thus excluding smaller organisations with less resources (For example, Chaney and Fevre 2001a; Dicks et al. 2001; Taylor 2001; Casey 2004; Hodgson 2004; Day 2006; Royles 2007; Bristow et al. 2008; Chaney 2011). Yet, a particular feature of this critique about smaller organisations' exclusion was that policy actors called for the Partnership to focus on regional representation, so that '*issues that are being raised reflect the sort of experience of the smaller, medium-sized organisations right across the length and breadth of Wales*' (Participant 11, WCVA). This excerpt shows this was even voiced by participants from WCVA, the body responsible for the Partnership's configuration. Similarly, an official with direct Partnership responsibility expressed an opinion that its structure should be changed to have regional representation:

*I think that if you're looking at the Partnership Council specifically, we should have regional representation... My ideal Partnership Council would be regional representation made up*

*of organisations from the super big ones right down to the tiny, little ones. I think that the thematic set up at the moment misses out on these super-local community organisations.*  
(Participant 12, Welsh Government)

This excerpt demonstrates not only a preference for regionalised representation, but also its relationship to the concern about excluding smaller local organisations. Here, these discourses reflect a shift in the balance between geographical representation and identity representation in the institutional discourses. Additionally, the institutional discourse on the resource-poverty of smaller organisations has resonance with the anti-poverty strategies associated with place-based programmes discussed above.

These differing interpretations of descriptive representation should be understood in the context of Mansbridge's (1999) analysis of selective representation. She compared selecting representatives to achieve a microcosm of the electorate through a model of proportionality with selecting them from disadvantaged groups to compensate for factors that interfere with proportionality. In the Partnership's case, the use of equalities-themed networks suggests that representatives were selected on this latter criterion. Yet these critical discourses also represent a growing pressure from Government officials to move towards a geographical representative structure of proportionality more in keeping with Mansbridge's former criterion. Territorial representation is usually associated with political representation (Knodt et al. 2011), but here it is being applied to the third sector.

The tension between equalities representation and geographical representation is a manifestation of the tension between special interest groups and wider interests. Special interest group representation has been criticised for providing a narrow focus that does not concern the wider population (Greenwood 2007). This notion of sectional interests excluding others was expressed by one official: *'the situation that we can't have is that most of the sector feel that this is a closed shop and only certain people get in the room with certain agendas'* (Participant 20, Welsh

Government). There are different conceptions of exclusion tied in with these institutional discourses, which are less concerned with the exclusion of people with protected characteristics, and more concerned with exclusion according to locality and socio-economic disadvantage. Previously, Chaney and Fevre (2001b) recognised different meanings of inclusion in Wales, so relatedly, this analysis is recognising different conceptions of exclusion. Describing representatives whose selection was based on protected characteristics as exclusive neglects to recognise an argument made by Chaney (2011) that the majority of any population has one or more protected characteristic. Yet when equalities representation is associated with excluding third sector organisations, it is important to consider how this impacted on the institutional discourses of representation. Thus, we will now attend to how the institutional discourses associated with this understanding shaped the key concept of equalities groups' representation.

### **5.2.2. How these discourses shaped equalities representation**

Some officials expressed doubt that the current Partnership representatives were capable of representing the whole Welsh third sector, such as this interviewee:

*TSPC is a small number of networks which, in theory, should be reaching out to... 32,000 [third sector organisations] And I think to myself, how on earth is that meant to work? <laughs>... Are they getting the messages to them small third sector organisations that are doing vital work but on a very small level? (Participant 18, Welsh Government)*

The doubt about the ability of the current representatives to represent the wider third sector, seen here, was accompanied by a call for a change in approach. This can be seen in this Government Minister's account:

*[It is about] not just having the same people always being the representatives. Being able to make sure that it was opening-up wider participation from the third sector, from small organisations not just the big players and the big voices... There's... a whole range of people doing very valiant and valuable work with very small organisations and that perhaps even not having paid staff, and so the focus really had to be on us on the Welsh Government trying to enable this wider participation. (Participant 25, Welsh Government Minister)*

This suggests that Government was keen to distance itself from the incumbent representatives in favour of 'small organisations'. Similar intentions were raised by senior members of WCVA who said: *'One of the goals for the next stage of the Partnership Council will be 'Open up the gates', 'get more people in', or 'increase those networks and contacts'* (Participant 4, WCVA). This makes it clear that the position of the existing representatives was under threat by this discourse that called for wider participation of smaller, local organisations.

Associated with this position, there was a recurring trope about the *'usual suspects'* of the third sector (Participant 8, Equalities Organisation) in policy actor accounts. Interviewees explained that *'at these meetings you see the same people and hear the same voices'* (Participant 3, WCVA). Their dominance was seen as inappropriate, as this description reveals: *'because it's a small place and most people are involved in lots of different things... it's quite incestuous really'* (Participant 24, Equalities Organisation). 'Usual suspects' therefore builds on the concept of the elite inner-circle of third sector organisations described in Royles' (2007:151) research on the Welsh third sector. She argued the elites' privileged position inherently threatened third sector representation by creating a two-tier system. The 'usual suspects' trope thus refers to the elites in the higher tier with access to the policy-influencing positions.

Equalities organisations interviewees recognised themselves by this term, as demonstrated below:

*Well, it's the same old faces: the usual suspects... and all these phrases that are sometimes used to describe us from the outside. And I couldn't disagree... We are the usual suspects: the third sector establishment.* (Participant 29, Equalities Organisation)

As seen here, the 'usual suspects' trope was as commonly found in the accounts of equalities organisations as it was from WCVA or Welsh Government officials. This notion of being the establishment implied an elite group. It might be reasonable to assume this notion of the elite 'usual suspects' referred to any of the twenty-five representative lead

organisations, rather than just the equalities organisations. However, the analysis suggests that it was the equalities third sector who were particularly viewed as the 'usual suspects'. For example, there was a perception that it was the equalities organisations that attended most Partnership meetings, as this official described: *'TSPC is always good at sending equalities reps to each of the portfolio meetings... They'll try and... cover as many as they can'* (Participant 22, Welsh Government). The equalities organisations were also perceived to have strong voices, as they themselves recognised:

*Some of the equality strand reps are quite strong. And you do hear their voices pretty well... There are definitely some good strong equalities voices around the table.* (Participant 36, Equalities Organisation)

This excerpt implies equalities organisations had some dominance. The application of 'usual suspects' to them was also explicitly stated by this official: *'What I might describe as 'Usual Suspects': that is to say those umbrella bodies with a particular focus on one aspect of equality'* (Participant 16, Welsh Government). The significance of this is that representatives, whose role on the Partnership was to counter the underrepresentation of people with protected characteristics in policymaking, were being identified as the usual suspects dominating the Partnership.

As shown, the equalities organisations themselves self-identified with this label. This is noteworthy because the equalities third sector were using a phrase that inherently negated the validity of their participation in the Partnership. They were complicit in this undermining of their position. This 'usual suspects' trope worked together with the increasing call for 'place-based', localised representation from under-resourced communities in a pincer movement against the position of equalities groups in the state-third sector relations. Dryzek (2000:93) argues that ensuring the inclusion of disadvantaged groups is not a "government imperative", so the nature of interests that a government includes can change. Therefore, equalities groups should be mindful of the implication of this threat to their position.

The notion of third sector elites has been discussed in many facets of theory of which just a few examples were offered in the literature review, yet this concept of 'the elites' is not usually associated with equalities representation in the literature. On the contrary, rejecting the 'policymaking elite' in favour of the equalities populations underpins the justification for the participative-democratic model of mainstreaming in equalities literature (Squires 2005:375). The association of equalities representatives with elite dominance, as revealed in the institutional discourses about the Partnership, is therefore a key finding of this study. Part of the aim of feminist institutionalism is to understand how institutional norms interrupt and undermine equality goals (Krook and Mackay 2011:6). It recognises that informal institutional mechanism can inhibit the advancement of equalities (Mackay 2011:184; Celis and Lovenduski 2018). This 'usual suspects' trope is an example of what feminist institutionalists refer to as institutional resistance to equalities (Mackay 2011:184). Such institutional discourses about representation in the policy actor accounts thereby threatens the descriptive representation of equality groups in the Partnership.

The above analysis reveals one interpretation of participative democracy that threatens the descriptive representation of equalities groups. However, analysis of participatory democracy also requires consideration of the nature of the participation. This is addressed next.

### **5.2.3. Institutional discourses on direct democracy**

It was shown above, in the words of a government minister interviewed for this study, that the principle of participatory democracy underpinned the creation of the Partnership at the outset of devolution (Section 5.2.1). It has been illustrated that this is reflected in the institutional discourses of the Partnership (Section 5.2.1). A foundational ideal of participatory democracy is the principle of direct participation of all (Dean 2017). However, the dominant discourse across the interviews was that direct participation in the Partnership meetings was neither expected nor appropriate. As can be seen here:

*No. They [Welsh Government] have never asked for them [our equalities constituents]. They don't want them around the table because that's a formal business meeting... at the actual formal meetings where we are feeding back on the policy issues or the consultations or any reports or anything like that, they're not normally present. They're not invited to be there either, but they ask us to be present to be the representative voice for them.* (Participant 30, Equalities Organisation)

This illustrates how equalities representation superseded direct participation of individual beneficiaries of the equalities organisations. As this official explained, *'I don't think a ministerial meeting is really the right place for that'* (Participant 13, Welsh Government). Policy actors' justification for this was *'because the meetings then become unmanageable'* (Participant 15, Welsh Government).

Similarly, interviewees rejected the participation of networks' member organisations, as this WCVA interviewee stated: *'those organisations, they don't want to engage on some of these dry issues and they don't want to spend time on it'* (Participant 11, WCVA). Notably, smaller organisations were considered to lack interest. Interviewees from equalities organisations also recognised that *'a lot of charities... wouldn't be able to devote time to this [Partnership]... they haven't got the capacity to operate strategically'* (Participant 40, Equalities Organisation). A lack of resources was commonly cited, and this brings us back to the criticism that low-resource organisations were excluded from participating in the Partnership (as stated in Section 5.2.1). Such network members were also perceived to lack the necessary policy skills, as shown in this WCVA interviewee's account:

*I think Welsh Government are really pushing to, and WCVA to an extent, to have smaller, community organisations involved in things and while I agree with that, I do think when you go to meetings with Ministers and you've got to talk about papers and things, you've got to have somebody who's pretty confident and is used to being in that sort of scenario to carry that off.* (Participant 7, WCVA)

This interviewee was casting doubt on whether the smaller third sector member organisations would have the necessary policy skills. The expectation of skills is examined further in Chapter Six (Section 6.3.2) and

the institutional mechanisms examining how this exclusion occurs is explored further in Chapter Eight (Section 8.1.1). It is raised here because it reveals the prevailing institutional norm in which descriptive representation was expected to be carried out by professional, skilled experts.

Some equalities organisations did make a case for direct participation of equalities constituencies in the Partnership meetings, as can be seen here:

*It's an uncomfortable move, to be in that uncomfortable position to give over your space... your seat on the bus to other voices without control on what they might say. But I think it's really important that we do give those genuine, on the ground voices [a say] ...We need to be amplifying voices a lot more, amplifying community voice... That's really hard to do... To work for years to open certain doors and then stand by holding the door open to usher someone else in. It's not easy but it's vital that we do more of that. (Participant 29, Equalities Third Sector)*

This answer was typical of a small group of equalities interviewees who felt their constituencies' voices should be present. Another example was given by this interviewee: *'I think we have to find a way to physically face-to-face engage... encourage representatives to bring... grassroots people'* (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation). This is akin to the empowerment argument found in the equalities literature which supports giving marginalised groups a voice to empower individuals (Hahn 2002). Mainstreaming theorists have described such an approach as the participative-democratic model which involves a range of individuals and organisations in policymaking (Nott 2000; Donaghy 2004; Walby 2005; Chaney 2015a). As discussed, it is also justified by the 'situated knowledge' of feminist epistemology.

Notwithstanding this undercurrent from some factions of the equalities third sector, the overall institutional discourse from equalities organisations, WCVA and Welsh Government, was the preference for equalities groups to *'represent themselves professionally'* (Participant 17, Welsh Government). This notion of a professional representative is tied up with the concept of expertise. As this equalities interviewee explained, *'the*

*fact is the third sector's got a lot of expertise and cabinet secretaries and officials who get that can get a lot of good advice'* (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation). It therefore corresponds with the expert-bureaucratic model described by mainstreaming theorists, which assumes the experts are skilled professionals able to negotiate the bureaucratic expectation for evidence-based knowledge (Squires 2005:371). Those third sector organisations that did not have expert professionals, such as '*policy officers*', were excluded (Participant 3, WCVA). This expectation that representatives should be expert professionals thus contributes to accusations that the Partnership was dominated by the elite usual suspects (see Section 5.2.2).

However, the institutional discourses made clear that the expertise is derived from the representatives' engagement with their network. It is a case that was made by this equalities interviewee, who stated:

*Members of [our network], most of whom are service delivery organisations... there is no capacity... to use their knowledge to try and influence positive change... [Our network] came in to try to... gather that information in whatever way is easiest for those groups... because that's where that expertise is. It's right at the front line... the onus on the network [is] to make sure that there is some kind of engagement with the members... and ensure that their expertise is heard'* (Participant 41, Equalities Organisation).

This participant made clear that the representatives' expertise is derived from their members. As Walby (2005:331) notes, the notion of expertise is often conflated with belonging to 'the dominant order' and therefore, she argues, it is seen as being contrary to democracy. As Saward (2010:162) maintains, direct forms of democracy are not more democratic than representative democracy. In the participatory democracy literature, there is a tendency to presume citizen involvement is normatively desirable (Batory and Svensson 2019). A counterargument is that direct participation in all decision-making is neither desirable nor practical (Fung 2006; Prosser et al. 2017). In Dryzak's (2000:85) account of deliberative democracy, he maintains that some exclusions are necessary and warns against advocating as many groups as possible being included in such governance mechanisms. Saward (2010:167) also claims that representative democracy

is “not the opposite of direct democracy” but incorporates it. Similarly, Walby (2005:333) proposes that we reject the polarising of expertise and democracy, and we instead bring the two together, so an expert can make use of the technical knowledge, whilst also drawing on their democratic accountability. Kotzian and Steffek (2011:4) describe this quality as an organisation’s “representativity”. Therefore, it is necessary to scrutinise institutional practices concerned with membership engagement and evidencing representativity.

Policy actors cited a variety of ways membership engagement in the networks can be evidenced. These are detailed below and summarised in Table 5-1. They ranged from measuring ‘*the number of groups that they’re reaching*’ (Participant 6, WCVA), to evidencing the frequency with which the network lead would meet with the members or establishing the extent that the members are engaged in the Partnership decision-making. This is in line with Rhodes and Marsh’s (1992:187) analysis of policy networks in which they identified a range of policy network characteristics, and the

Table 5-1 Matrix of network membership engagement

Quantitative	Numbers engaged	Number of membership organisations	
	Frequency of engagement	Number of individuals engaged	
Qualitative	The means members are engaged	Formal Meetings	Network meetings
			Regional meetings or events
			Standing agenda item in the organisation’s meetings
			Telephone conferences
		Written	E-mails
		Online surveys	
	Informal conversations	Ad hoc issues raised	
	The purpose of engagement	To contribute to agenda of Partnership meeting	
		To be informed of Partnership meetings and provide feedback	
		Both of the above	

ones concerned with membership included membership numbers and frequency and consistency of interaction. However, the interviewees' accounts revealed there was considerable variety in how our policy actors described representatives engaging with their network members. Some actively consulted with members before Partnership meetings, as this interviewee described: *'there is that mechanism to collect information [to ask] what are the key issues that you'd like us to put on that agenda?* (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation). Others were more concerned with how representatives *'cascade the information that's come from TSPC into their networks'* (Participant 18, Welsh Government). However, some representatives made it clear that both were important, as seen here: *'[It is] a two-way process in terms of supporting those organisations, gathering their thoughts and comments and feeding back to them from strategic discussions and getting their input'* (Participant 24, Equalities Organisation). Ways of engaging members ranged from *'face-to-face' 'network meetings' or 'e-mails'* (Participant 32, Equalities Organisation), *'regular telephone conferences'* (Participant 36, Equalities Organisation) or through *'on-line surveys'* (Participant 31, Equalities Organisation). Notably, a few sought to achieve regional representation, including one interviewee who held *'regional meetings'* to collect membership contributions (Participant 33, Equalities Organisation), and another who described doing *'regional events'* (Transcript 31, Equalities Third Sector). Others described the Partnership as simply *'a standing agenda item'* on their organisations' routine meetings (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation). Kotzian and Steffek (2011:9) recognise that less formal engagement gives the representative greater leeway. In line with this, some had fewer formal systems describing *'the informal conversations... to ground what they're talking about when they speak in the meetings'* (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation) and raising items *'ad hoc in conversations'* (Participant 24 Equalities Organisation). This analysis offers a matrix of institutional practices for network membership engagement (Figure 5-1). Both civil society scholars and network theorists have argued organisations and networks need to evidence their own democratic processes (Sørensen and

Torring 2005a; Justice and Skelcher 2009; Rocha Valencia et al. 2015), so this matrix describes the many ways that this could be achieved.

However, the extent this evidencing of membership engagement was taking place within the Partnership is a pertinent question. Thus, we next turn attention to the informal institutional discourse about constituency engagement within the networks and consider what this meant for the descriptive representation of equalities groups in the Partnership.

#### **5.2.4. How these discourses shaped equalities representation**

The document analysis revealed the emergence of an institutional discourse from 2013 onwards that emphasised the duty on the third sector representatives to consult with and feedback to their network members (Welsh Government 2013; 2016b; WCVA 2014; 2015). This had not previously been mentioned in other key documents about the Partnership. Its emergence may have been related to the growing tendency for Welsh Government to doubt how well the networks succeeded in engaging their constituencies (discussed in Section 5.2.2).

Notwithstanding this, analysis of the institutional discourses from the interviewees around participation revealed that the networks institutional practices, with their broad range of mechanisms for achieving membership engagement, had limited value in evidencing the representativity of the equalities organisations. Policy actors were asked to what extent the third sector network leads were expected to evidence how they achieved member engagement in the Partnership. Welsh Government and WCVA's interviewees were clear there was not much expectation on the third sector representatives to evidence their constituencies' participation, as this interviewee explained: *'To what extent would we think those groups, say children's groups, would go off and speak to children... I don't think there is an expectation that they do that for this mechanism'* (Participant 11, WCVA). This excerpt shows evidencing participation was not required.

Similarly, other policy actors argued they would expect a representative to already have a strong understanding of issues relevant to their constituency, as seen here: *'You'd expect a third sector organisation to have that knowledge'* (Participant 8, Equalities Organisation). Equalities representatives explained this came about as a result of other aspects of their work beyond their role in the Partnership since *'we have other mechanisms and we consult with our members all the time, [in] all different ways and on different issues'* (Participant 32, Equalities Organisation) and *'we constantly ask our client group... we're in constant dialogue with them'* (Participant 40, Equalities Organisation). In summary, the interview data reveals there was little institutional scrutiny of these mechanisms. The implication of this for the Partnership is further discussed in Chapter Eight (Section 8.3.1).

However, the institutional discourses also revealed third sector representatives were critical of others' mechanisms for engaging their constituencies, as seen here: *'we've had many in the past who've claimed to do stuff for [particular equalities] groups, but they don't... [The representatives] they tick the box, take a few pictures, send off and no one's the wiser'* (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation). This led a few of them to call for *'quite robust mechanisms for making sure that the representatives are actually genuinely feeding in the views from their networks'* (Participant 8, Equalities Organisation). As we saw above (Section 5.2.2) the officials from Welsh Government also cast doubt on third sector organisations' representativity. This finding reveals that it is not the institutional practices of membership engagement that matter in the assessment of direct participation. Instead, it is the informal institutional discourses by both officials and equalities organisations that undermines the relationship between representatives and their constituencies. This challenges the established view that representatives need to evidence their democratic accountability. This study reveals that the institutional discourses shape the perception of the equalities sector's representativity whilst evidencing democratic accountability is neglected in the Partnership.

There was another way that informal institutional discourses shaped interviewees' perception of equalities representation in the Partnership. This was the consequence of the institutional norm for expert professionals to take the role of representatives who were then criticised as the usual suspects. There is a subtle inference to the criticism of elite experts that has particular resonance in the field of the equalities representation which must be addressed. The principle of descriptive representation is, as Mansbridge (1999:629) described, based on the premise that: "representatives are in their own persons and lives in some sense typical of the larger class of persons whom they represent". Many of the third sector representatives on the Partnership identified themselves as belonging to the identity category they represented. Several interviewees from disability organisations particularly focussed on this, as can be seen here:

*Because we are a disabled people's organisation, basically our whole credibility is around the voice of our members and the fact that we directly represent our members... and then we also have a policy of employing disabled people on our staff in terms of front-facing roles where we are directly voiced, again directly representing disabled people's interests. (Participant 31, Equalities Organisation)*

In this case, the organisation's credibility to serve as a representative was directly linked to its professional staff belonging to the same identity category as those they represented. When a professional representative shares their constituency's identity characteristic they can serve as both examples of direct participation and descriptive representation. Being critical of expert representation fails to recognise the principle of descriptive representation, whereby the representative "belongs to the same societal group" as those they represent (Celis et al. 2014:140). Institutional discourses that criticised current representatives in the Partnership as elite professionals therefore inherently undermined the principle of descriptive representation of equalities groups.

Having considered these different ways that discourses associated with participatory democracy undermined equalities representation, the focus

now shifts to how institutional discourses on representative democracy impacted on equalities representation.

### **5.3. Representative democracy and descriptive representation**

#### **5.3.1. 'Instrumentalising' the third sector**

It has been shown above that there are conflicting understandings of the descriptive representation of equalities groups in the Partnership. A further one is presented here. When the policy actors were asked about the *raison d'être* of the Partnership, as well as their responses concerning participatory democracy, the second collection of responses focussed on the achievement of policymaking. They described the Partnership's purpose as to '*ensure that the government is listening to the third sector in its policy development*' (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation), so that the third sector '*informs Cabinet Secretaries prioritisation, [and] policy decisions*' (Participant 19, Welsh Government). One interviewee described the aim of this was to ensure Welsh Government '*make policy as good as it can*' (Participant 40, Equalities Organisation). In a similar vein, this official said '*[Welsh Government Ministers] know there is a lot of expertise out there that we could tap into*' (Participant 13, Welsh Government). Dean (2017, pp. 218-219) categorises this approach as the "knowledge transfer" mode of participatory processes which prioritises getting knowledge to the decision-makers. Klijn and Skelcher (2007:598) describe this type of account as the "instrumental conjecture" in which such governance mechanisms enable government to use civil society to shape public policymaking. Similarly, King and Griffin (2019:924) termed this as the "instrumentalist-consequentialist position". Thus, the instrumentalising of the third sector seen here refers to making use of the third sector as a tool for governance.

This instrumentalist account of the third sector should be related to democracy theory. Thus far, we have applied the concept of representation to third sector representatives. However, the way representative democracy applies to such governance mechanisms is complex. Axiomatically, democracy theory applies to political representatives as

well. One equalities interviewee put forward an argument that recognised the primacy of the Government ministers as the agents of representative democracy in the Partnership. They stated:

*Well, I think governments should be held to account by democratically elected institutions and we're not democratically elected... There will be occasions when we can represent the views perhaps more effectively of particular groups of people or particular circumstances of people, but, ultimately, government is held to account by those who elected them for that purpose. That's what democracy is about so that's not our role. No. And if we think it is, we're usurping democracy. (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation)*

This excerpt showed that this participant had put some thought into the relationship between their Partnership role and the principles of representative democracy that underpin government. This observation can be related to the tensions in the underlying logics of representative democracy and participatory governance mechanisms (Baker and Eckerberg 2008). An important connection should be made between democracy theory and the third sector's instrumentalisation. This is premised on it being in the interests of society as a whole for participants to provide information that political leaders use to make the best decisions for the general interests of the public (Dean 2017:218). Where the focus is on the achievement of the common good, interests groups are perceived to enhance the policy outputs by providing decision makers with expertise (Dür and Mateo 2016). Therefore, this instrumentalist understanding is premised on the primacy of representative democracy, where the interests of governmental actors are immutable, and it is reasonable for them to make use of governance networks as one of their tools (Klijn and Skelcher 2007:599). This implies that when policy actors identified the *raison d'être* of the Partnership as a means to make good policy, the underlying paradigm is representative democracy. Given that many policy actors across the spectrum of the sample expressed this instrumentalist account of the third sector's role as the *raison d'être* of the Partnership, it was a clear institutional norm for them to accept the primacy that representative democracy gives to government in policymaking.

However, this was not the only way that the third sector was instrumentalised in institutional discourses. When the policy actors discussed the Partnership there was a tendency to instrumentalise the third sector in a different sense, and it is this which we now address. This introduces a different discourse on representation. As this equalities interviewee explained *'The third sector is really important in the delivery of services in Wales'* (Participant 40, Equalities Organisation). Therefore, one common perception of Partnership representation was that *'the purpose is to hear from the people delivering services within the sector: what is going on? What are the issues?'* (Participant 12, Welsh Government). Here, this notion of representation was still concerned with representing people rather than organisations, but with a focus on improving services. An example is seen in this official's account: *I think they should be advocating for their volunteers and their service users... [and discussing] what they want... Your volunteers and your service users are the people that you should be representing at that meeting* (Participant 12, Welsh Government). Implicit within this is the presumption of the third sector as a service provider. This concept is closely tied to the original idea of engaging service-users in the design of public services, proposed by Beresford and Croft (1986). A contemporary version of this is presented by Martin (2011), who describes the third sector as a vehicle through which service-users can be involved in the management of public services. However, the official above was describing the service-users voicing views about the third sector's services, rather than those provided by the public sector. One official stated: *'let's put the focus on the third sector and see what they've got to contribute... Otherwise there is a real risk... that it all becomes about the public sector, Or... the private sector'* (Participant 16, Welsh Government). It is clear that the third sector are perceived in the above excerpt as service providers contributing services alongside the public and private sectors. The following excerpt from an official's interview shows this service provider representation is associated with the localised representation: *'They should be advocating for the sort of local organisations... I would say, their ultimate representational ideology should be for the end users that benefit from their services'* (Participant 21, Welsh

Government). It appears that notions of third sector service delivery compete within the other institutional discourses about representation. This notion of representing third sector service delivery has previously been observed by Ketola and Hughes (2018:206). They described an increasing tendency for officials in such partnerships to view the third sector as an “interchangeable part” of service delivery. Ketola and Hughes (2018) also described this shift as an instrumentalisation of the third sector, but it is clear that this is a different notion of instrumentalisation from that described above, which sees the third sector as an instrument of improving policymaking.

Furthermore, for some Welsh Government interviewees, the increasing interpretation of the third sector as a service provider was due to austerity, as described here:

*If you had asked me three, four years ago, I probably would have given a different answer... It's changing. As financial constraints have hit absolutely every sector... unfortunately it is down to a money issue... We're working within different boundaries... Everyone is doing what they do best with less money. (Participant 18, Welsh Government)*

Thus, austerity impacted on how third sector representation was understood. This discourse about how austerity impacted on Welsh Government's expectations was also found in a key Welsh Government publication about the Partnership, “Continuity and Change” and the Third Sector Scheme (Welsh Government 2013a; 2014). These stated that the pressure on public funding as a result of austerity meant that Welsh Government wanted the third sector to consider how it could contribute to service delivery to address gaps in state provision. The third sector literature has pointed to the association between austerity and the increasing portrayal of the third sector as a service provider (Aiken and Taylor 2019). This study's finding supports the account by Ketola and Hughes (2018:209) that an increasingly instrumental view of the sector was creating a new third sector culture.

The final consideration made below is to once again relate this finding back to how it impacted on the descriptive representation of equalities groups.

### 5.3.2. How these discourses shaped equalities representation

Hemmings (2017) found that the increasing emphasis on third sector service provision, combined with the impact of austerity, led to the stifling of third sector political advocacy. A senior member of WCVA revealed how this particularly affected equalities representation:

*When WCVA did its strategic review looking at what are the big issues coming up for the sector, ...almost all the organisations that are working with the more marginalised groups, we could well see get weaker... Potentially there is a weakening of that voice... [They are] constantly under-resourced, a lot of these equality organisations... There's a danger that the third sector organisations that are working with more marginalised groups... are those organisation that are... more likely to be underfunded in the future... Those groups are potentially vulnerable, and they might shrink. (Participant 11, Equalities Organisation)*

This reveals that WCVA recognised that the third sector funding crisis will disadvantage the representation of equalities groups. Acheson and Laforest (2013:2) argue that when organisations' legitimacy to participate in third sector-government partnerships shifts from representing the voice of people to being based on service provision it becomes "easier to supplant them and treat them as tools", thus rendering them "expendable". Our findings support this account that the third sector is threatened by austerity, but also highlight that it is the equalities organisations that are most in danger of being rendered expendable by loss of funds. Acheson and Laforest (2013:613) were describing a case where the transition from representative of "identity-based politics" to claims-making on "organizational terms" was a *fait-accomplis*, but our data suggest the Welsh Partnership is just showing signs of moving towards this wider trend. This notwithstanding, from a feminist institutionalist perspective, the way this instrumentalisation disproportionately threatens to disadvantage equalities representation should be recognised as an institutional threat to the descriptive representation of equalities groups.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

In line with the overarching research question, the feminist institutionalist-orientated approach in this chapter sought to explore how equalities representation is constrained or enabled by the institution of the Partnership. The overwhelming findings of this chapter is that descriptive representation of equalities groups was largely constrained. The institutionalist approach employed in the analysis shows how the formal configuration of the Partnership alongside its informal norms and discourses shaped descriptive representation in complex ways. The analysis revealed a widespread lack of understanding amongst policy actors about the variation in the formal, institutional, network structures. Furthermore, the data revealed contrasting accounts of the constituencies served by the Partnership's equalities representatives. These were variously conceived of as people with protected characteristics, geographical communities, third sector organisations or service users. Moreover, this analysis revealed the complex inter-relationship between ideas of representation and democracy theory. Consequently, the core contribution this analysis makes to the overarching research question is in showing how equalities representation was constrained by the informal institutional discourses. Thus, the descriptive representation of equalities groups was revealed to be threatened by the institutional imperative for a third sector 'unified voice'. Additionally, the labelling of representatives as professional experts and 'usual suspects' was perceived to exclude both the under-privileged, localised, smaller organisations and the participation of constituencies. Finally, the instrumentalisation of the third sector was shown to threaten equalities organisations' survival, given their low financial resources, which consequently also jeopardises their ability to sustain their representation. This analysis therefore illuminates the importance of examining the multiple, conflicting conceptions of descriptive representation of equalities groups in third sector-government partnerships.

Whilst this chapter was concerned with descriptive representation and touched on substantive representation only in so far as it demonstrated the nature of constituencies represented, the next chapter focuses on how

equalities organisations sought to achieve substantive representation through the Partnership.

## **6. Substantive representation in the Partnership: Institutionalist perspectives on equalities organisations' policy-influencing**

### **Introduction**

The last chapter was concerned with descriptive representation. This chapter turns attention to substantive representation by addressing research question two: *How have equalities organisations engaged with the institution of the third sector-government partnership to promote substantive representation?* Pitkin (1967) coined the latter term, describing it as linking representation with “the substance of the activity” and an “acting for others” (Pitkin 1967:12). Saward (2010, pp. 4-5) distinguished his approach from Pitkin’s by focussing on “the representative claim”. Thus, the claim is distinct from the claims-making. Here we aim to explore substantive representation by analysing both equalities organisations’ claims and their claims-making. The core contribution this analysis makes to the overarching research question is to examine how the equalities organisations seek to achieve substantive representation in order to advance equalities through the Partnership.

In accordance with our analytical framework, here we use feminist institutionalism in order to examine formal processes and informal norms and discourses (Mackay et al. 2010; Krook and Mackay 2011) to consider how equalities organisations promote substantive representation through the Partnership. Insights about formal policy-influencing will be drawn from the mainstreaming literature (Rees and Parken 2003; Rees 2005; Parken et al. 2019). This chapter also draws on appropriate aspects of the social movements literature (Tilly 2005; Ruzza 2011; Pettincchio 2012) particularly how it engages with insider-outsider theory. Insider-outsider theory recognises that interest groups can exert pressure on policy makers from different positions in relation to government (Grant 2000,2014). Thus, this chapter draws on both mainstreaming and social movements literature to consider the positioning of equalities organisations across the insider-

outsider spectrum, and it relates this to the formal and informal policy-influencing tools they use. In addition, this analysis applies feminist institutionalism adapted to a pan-equalities perspective to understand how institutional informal norms and discourses of the Partnership shape the substantive representation of the equalities third sector (Krook and Mackay 2011; Mackay 2011). This also contributes to the overarching research question by considering how the advancement of equalities is facilitated or frustrated by the Partnership. The above literature was detailed in Chapter Two (Section 2.3).

The first part of this chapter begins by examining policy actors' accounts of formal policy-influencing in the Partnership as a means of promoting substantive representation using the lens of the mainstreaming literature. The second part addresses the nature of informal claims-making of the equalities third sector. It considers what this tells us about their insider-outsider positioning and the implications in terms of the sector's ability to take a critical role and hold government to account. The third part considers how the informal institutional norms and discourses of the Partnership shape the equalities third sector's substantive representation, both in the substance of their claims and the nature of their claims-making. The following discussion will reveal how some aspects of equalities organisations' formal policy-influencing accord with, but also differ from, that seen in mainstreaming accounts. Furthermore, it will also detail the extensive use of informal tools in conjunction with formal ones to achieve policy influence both within and beyond the Partnership. A third key finding that will be discussed is how the third sector maintains its critical voice but is constrained in other ways by the Partnership's institutional norms.

## **6.1. Substantive representation in the formal Partnership**

### **6.1.1. Equalities organisations' claims through a mainstreaming lens**

Welsh Government and WCVA accounts of the third sector's equalities claims in the Partnership frequently described how they sought to advance

equalities across a breadth of policy areas. It is typified by this official's account:

*The agenda is quite generic. It has to be... But they will provide a perspective on any agenda item that is coloured by their particular area that they are representing... Whatever is being discussed more generically, they will say, 'and then there's... a racial equality aspect to this... doing the same thing for different equality areas. (Participant 1, Welsh Government)*

This epitomises the way the equalities third sector is seen to bring equalities matters to all policy areas. Interviewees from equalities organisations supported this and gave specific examples of it occurring, such as this disability organisation, who sought to influence the contents of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014:

*Our particular interests were around advocacy, direct payments and charging and then also ... what we were lobbying for was for the UNCRPD [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities] to be on the face of the bill (Participant 31, Equalities Organisation)*

Evidently, the Act itself was not specifically a piece of equalities legislation, but this excerpt reveals how the disability sector sought to influence it to benefit disabled people. A second example is the development of the new Welsh Education Curriculum, which, again, was not exclusively an equalities policy. Interviewees revealed how religious organisations had campaigned to secure a place for religious education in the new curriculum (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation). Similarly, 'race' equality organisations argued that the new curriculum should be '*more diverse and representative of different ethnic minority groups*' and also address '*levels of racism in schools*' (Participants 33 & 34, Equalities Organisation). Again, this demonstrates that equalities organisations made representative claims on a policy that is not exclusively an equalities matter.

In recognising this, it is important to address the "rhetorical entrapment" criticism made by some mainstreaming theorists. Drawing on Goffman's notion of framing, which refers to the language of political ideas (Goffman 1975; Chaney 2017), frame-bridging and frame-extension describes how the dominant frame of existing policy processes can be modified to include an equalities perspective (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Squires 2005;

Walby 2005; Celis and Lovenduski 2018). Dryzek (2000:83) maintains that interest groups must be prepared to assimilate “an established or emerging state imperative”. However, the criticism here is that this approach is less transformative in its promotion of equality because the equalities issues are subsumed by other agendas (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Rees 2005; Walby 2005). Yet, this criticism would only apply if this was the only way equalities claims were made. In the present research, interviews showed the third sector equalities claims were not limited to the adding of an equalities lens to non-equalities policy. Rather, interviewees also described claims made by equalities organisations that sought to influence equalities policy directly. One example of this was the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act (2015) which was attributed to ‘*a strong women’s campaign*’ (Participant 25, Welsh Government).

Moreover, as well as influencing legislation directly, claims were described at a range of different stages of equalities policy development and implementation. This can be seen with the claims for ‘*LGBT inclusive sex and relationships education*’ (Participant 29, Equalities Organisation), which interviewees felt led to the Welsh Government’s new “Relationships and Sexuality Education in Schools Guidance” (Welsh Government 2019a). Other accounts alluded to how equalities representatives influenced strategic policy implementation documents. For example, the Welsh Government’s “Tackling Hate Crimes and Incidents: Framework for Action” (Welsh Government 2016a) was linked to hate crime campaigns from equality organisations associated with ‘race’, religion, disability and older people (Participant 30 & 31, Equalities Organisation). Furthermore, there were accounts of equalities organisations seeking to shape policy implementation directly. For example, the sector sought to influence the nature of health service provision for the trans-community:

*We were lobbying for a gender identity clinic in Wales. We’ve changed the language... We talk about a gender identity service now... After the government had already committed to a clinic... our stakeholder engagement... said to us... ‘We need more than just a clinic somewhere in Wales. We need to talk about GP-*

*centred services, ...travel expenses or mental health services.*  
(Participant 29, Equalities Organisation)

Thus, in the present study, equalities organisations' claims were described as targeting policy implementation directly, as well as the breadth of policy development stages illustrated above. Existing work tells us that complex policy processes open up multiple points for policy influence (Franceschet 2011; Jones 2011; Engeli and Mazur 2018). This is supported by the foregoing finding that equalities claims were made in relation to legislation, legislative guidance, strategic implementation publications and policy implementation more generally. Collectively these examples evidence claims made at multiple stages of policy development and implementation, both with respect to equalities policies and bringing an equalities perspective to other policies. From the perspective of the overarching research question, these empirical data suggest equalities organisations are able to promote equalities claims in a broad range of claims and at multiple points of policymaking.

This is significant because Verloo (1998, cited in Walby 2005:327) defines mainstreaming as when equality perspectives are "incorporated in all policies at all levels at all stages". Similarly, Rees (2005:560) argues that it is promoting equality through "systematic integration into all systems and structures, into all policies, processes and procedures". The above examples of claims made by equalities organisations fit with these mainstreaming definitions. They also accord with Squires (2005) account of transformative mainstreaming, which requires the "systematic integration of diverse perspectives into the policymaking process". These claims are therefore evidence of mainstreaming being implemented through the Partnership. This approach accords with the mainstreaming tool of 'Visioning'. 'Visioning' involves recognising how 'rules and practices need to be changed' to promote equality (Rees 2005, pp. 568-569). The approach could also be seen as a form of the mainstreaming tool, "Auditing", in so far as the non-equalities policies were being assessed for their equalities implications, as described above.

There are a number of other mainstreaming tools that are germane to understanding the interview data. Accounts of mainstreaming tools include “Monitoring, Evaluating, and Auditing”, use of “Disaggregated Data” and “Equality Indicators”, Equalities “Budgeting” and “Impact Assessments” (Rees and Parken 2003; Rees 2005; Parken et al. 2019). Thus far, the claims of equalities organisations have been examined. We shall now compare the formal claims-making activities of equalities organisations in the Partnership with these other mainstreaming tools.

### **6.1.2. Accounts of formal claims-making by equalities organisations**

Interviewees consistently agreed that the formal policy-influencing activities used in the Partnership straightforwardly consisted of attending the Partnership meetings, as well as participating in the two planning meetings which preceded them. The planning meetings aimed to set agenda items and develop policy briefing papers to present in Partnership meetings. These accounts of formal claims-making differ from formal mainstreaming tools because the former simply document their involvement in the Partnership’s formal processes whereas mainstreaming accounts specify a range of equalities assessments tools.

Some equalities sector interviewees did touch on mechanisms that align with some mainstreaming tools, but not with respect to the Partnership. For example, Equalities Budgeting was raised by some equalities interviewees who described being a member of the Budget Advisory Group on Equality (BAGE) as seen here: ‘*We go to the BAGE meeting... because we think it’s really important*’ (Participant 32, Equalities Organisation). However, even though the interview questions concerned Partnership policy-influencing, BAGE did not form part of the formal Partnership, and was managed by a different government department. A similar case is found with respect to Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs), to which many Welsh Government officials made reference. For example:

*Every single policy that is developed across the organisation [Welsh Government] has to include an Equality Impact [Assessment]... It doesn’t really need to be brought out as a subject. If it was raised at a Cabinet Secretary [Partnership] meeting [by the third sector saying] ‘Oh we’re concerned that*

*equality was not taken into account.' All we'd do is say 'Well, effectively every policy has to have an Equality Impact.'*  
(Participant 15, Welsh Government)

Thus, many officials made it clear that Welsh Government undertook EIAs. However, this was not considered to be relevant to the Partnership meetings. Similarly, other mainstreaming tools featured in policy actors' accounts, such as when they described the '*Strategic Equality Plan Board*' (SEP Board) (Participant 31, Equalities Organisation). The role of the SEP Board, according to The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, is for equalities representatives to assess Government policies and practices against its equalities duties and review the equalities statistics and indicators. Thus, the SEP Board ensured Government served a Monitoring, Auditing and Evaluating function as well as drawing on Data and Equality Indicators. However, the SEP Board was also external to the Partnership. Evidently, such mainstreaming tools are in place in Welsh Government, but do not form part of the Partnership.

Thus, the mainstreaming tool that can most closely be linked with the Partnership was visioning and, to some degree, auditing of non-equalities policies for their equalities implications. According to Rees and Parken (2003:12), "Visioning" is a "vital element" of the mainstreaming tools and "at the heart of mainstreaming", which suggests that the substantive representation in the formal Partnership could indeed be conceived as contributing to mainstreaming equalities. Consideration needs to be made into whether policy actors perceived the Partnership to be a mainstreaming mechanism.

When study participants were asked whether equalities mainstreaming was achieved through the Partnership interviewees were overwhelmingly critical of the concept, seeing it as detrimental to promoting equality. This was expressed across equalities organisations, WCVA and Welsh Government. Many stated a concern about the term itself, as seen here: '*I really worry about the word 'mainstreaming'*' (Participant 19, Welsh Government). It was viewed as a policy from the past by this equalities participant: '*The danger of mainstreaming is that it gets shoved under a*

*carpet until an official comes along and finds it... you've got people in the third sector tearing their hair out and saying 'No. We talked about this twenty-five years ago'* (Participant 24, Equalities Organisation). The history of mainstreaming in Welsh Government has been well documented. It includes its emergence in 1999, the formal government commitment to mainstreaming in 2004, and the publication of a revised Welsh Government Mainstreaming Strategy in 2006 (Rees and Chaney 2011). The commitment to equality of opportunity for all people in GOWA (1998 s.120) was often referred to as the "equality mainstreaming duty" (Minto and Parken 2020:5). Recently, it was discussed in the Welsh Government commissioned Gender Rapid Review publications (Davies et al. 2018; Davies and Furlong 2019). These publications explain that the Gender Rapid Review was announced by the First Minister on International Women's Day 2018 as part of his commitment to making Welsh Government a "feminist government". Academic expertise to inform this review about international policy and practice led to a "mainstreaming" resurgence in policy discourses (Parken 2018). Despite its re-emergence, the majority of interviewees wholly resisted the term. In terms of the overarching research question, mainstreaming was seen to frustrate the advancement of equalities, so their rejection of it needs to be examined.

Mainstreaming was commonly criticised for being '*a bit tick-box*' (Participant 31, Equalities Organisation). This is similar to the mainstreaming critique made by McRobbie (2009:155) who referred to it as "a technocratic-managerial strategy". This is explained by the tendency for some government interviewees to conflate '*Equality Impact Assessments*' (EIAs) with mainstreaming (Participant 12, Welsh Government). Mainstreaming theorists have explained that mainstreaming is often confused with one or more of its component tools (Rees 2005), especially EIAs (Beveridge and Nott 2001; Rees 2005). EIAs are just one mainstreaming tool. Some equalities organisations made this case, as this interviewee explained: '*Whilst equality impact assessments are a really good tool... Mainstreaming could be a little more nuanced than making sure everyone does the same tick-box form*' (Participant 29, Equalities

Organisation). They were describing the limited technical version of mainstreaming which focusses on tools, rather than the political version, which is ultimately concerned with the promotion of equality in all policies (Rees 2005; Walby 2005). The dominance of the technocratic model was therefore one of the reasons that interviewees rejected mainstreaming as a strategy.

Another concern was raised even more frequently which was that *'Mainstreaming is a code for doing nothing'* (Participant 16, Welsh Government). This was explained by this equalities representative:

*When people say they are mainstreaming equality... it's like a thread through the tapestry and very soon that thread is lost, and no one can see it when you hold up the tapestry.*  
(Participant 34, Equalities Organisation)

This interviewee saw mainstreaming as removing the equalities focus from equalities issues. Other interviewees from both Welsh Government and equalities organisations offered a similar criticism, as can be seen in this official's account: *'We've said it is a cross-cutting issue. It's embedded in everything we do... it's so deeply buried in what we do that we never actually think about it'* (Participant 16, Welsh Government). Analysis of how 'mainstreaming' was constructed in these accounts revealed it had become synonymous with everyone in government being responsible for achieving equality. This was perceived by policy actors to remove Welsh Government's focus from equalities matters because *'making something the responsibility of all sometimes makes it the responsibility of no-one'* (Participant 29, Equalities Organisation). This analysis shows how there is a shift in the meaning of mainstreaming in the interview data away from how it is generally understood in feminist political science. This is "conversion" whereby an equalities strategy is co-opted and reinterpreted by institutional processes to a new goal (Mackay 2011; Celis and Lovenduski 2018). In this regard, Minto and Mergaert (2018) insightfully describe how institutions may resist mainstreaming being institutionalised. Here, interviewees' reflections on the Partnership offer a further example of this. When mainstreaming is redefined to mean *equality is everyone's responsibility* it leads to equalities being side-lined. As this participant

noted: *'There is a danger of thinking... we've done equalities... we can move on and do something else'* (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation).

Feminist scholars argue that believing equality has been achieved is one form of resistance to the implementation of equalities strategies (McRobbie 2009; Celis and Lovenduski 2018). The significance of this to our research question is as follows. Policy actors resisted any suggestion that the substantive representation of equalities interests achieved in the Partnership is associated with a mainstreaming strategy. This was because interviewees' understanding of "mainstreaming" had distorted in practice from how equalities scholars understand the term. In turn, this obfuscated the use of Visioning in the Partnership as a formal mainstreaming tool of equalities organisations to influence policy and achieve substantive representation.

Thus far, we have considered the formal claims (Section 6.1.1) and claims-making (Section 6.1.2) of the equalities organisations. In order to extend our understanding of substantive representation of equalities interests in the Partnership, attention now turns to informal policy-influencing.

## **6.2. Informal policy-influencing by equalities organisations**

### **6.2.1. Accounts of equalities organisations' informal claims-making**

Feminist institutionalists describe informal claims-making as unwritten practices that are created and communicated "outside of officially sanctioned channels" (Franceschet 2011, pp. 61-62). To understand it, we need to understand third sector positioning. "Positioning" refers to the decisions organisations make to position themselves in relation to their target (Ries and Trout 2001:3). Chew and Osborne (2009) apply the concept to third sector organisations to understand their strategic decisions in how they position themselves.

Policy actors' accounts from both Welsh Government and the third sector detailed the importance of informal relationships to third sector-government relations. As this official explained: *'100%-98% of our relationships are informal'* (Participant 12, Welsh Government). Lowndes

and Skelcher's (1998) work on partnerships recognised that informal relationships could be maintained alongside formal ones, and these findings support their claim. Thus, interviewees frequently cited them as an effective way to advance equalities policy interests, as seen here:

*Not at the meetings, not at the formal thing, the real work should be done in between [with] people on both sides working together to make things happen... The [Partnership] meetings then are kind of a formal overlay, where smoothing is done, people are thanked for their contribution and things are signed... but the real hard work should be done outside of the meetings... There is a perception... that, in order to get anything done, you've got to talk with the Minister to change things. To a certain extent that's true, but that misses out the role of the civil servants. (Participant 1, Welsh Government)*

Therefore, not only are the equalities third sector relationships with both officials and ministers perceived as important, but also informal relationships are more significant than formal actions.

Furthermore, policy actors spoke of how these informal relationships were sustained. For example, the sector needed to show understanding of officials' work and 'the priorities that they're facing' and be 'sympathetic and helpful' (Participant 4, WCVA) because 'a civil servant doesn't always have a comfortable ride in a third sector meeting' (Participant 40, Equalities Organisation). One interviewee explained 'otherwise their life can be quite depressing and quite soul destroying [when] they only hear from people if they're unhappy' (Participant 27, Equalities Organisation). Thus, understanding the morale of officials was seen as a key part of informal engagement with government. As this official described:

*We're all part of the same jigsaw... I think you need people who accept that they are part of delivering for the people of Wales... We're all part of the same team... doing slightly different bits of the job. (Participant 12, Welsh Government)*

This is typical of the consistent message from officials, WCVA staff and some equalities organisations. Officials wanted the sector to acknowledge 'whether we're government or whether we're the third sector' there was a 'common goal' (Participant 20 Welsh Government). Therefore, commonality of aims is an important quality for equalities representatives to show in order to develop their informal relationships with government.

Carmel and Harlock (2008:167) warn that the notion of “a shared moral purpose and vision” has a cost, in that it precludes political difference, thereby is a tool for making the third sector “a governable terrain”. However, Macmillan and Ellis Paine (2020) suggest the third sector should not always be seen as passive in their relationship with the state. Where the third sector choose to use “the common goal” as a strategy to build informal relationships, this questions the notion of the passive third sector, and recognises a more active role. The lobbying literature suggests that rather than trying to “change attitudes” of policymakers, an effective strategy is to harness “the policy maker’s resolve to pursue his or her existing preferences” (Harris and McGrath 2012:86). Our present finding suggests this is also effective for building organisations’ relationships with officials.

The nature of this common goal was variously described as to ‘*support the most vulnerable people in society*’ (Participant 12, Welsh Government) or to secure ‘*the health and wellbeing of our communities*’ (Participant 20 Welsh Government). In a similar vein, another official observed:

*Fundamentally the Government... is made up of people who do really... care about inequality, poverty and are committed to trying to do something about it... so it’s about trying to... facilitate them looking through... the equalities lens.*  
(Participant 19 Welsh Government)

Therefore, some officials saw equality and fairness as part of the government’s motive for engaging with the Partnership. This should be related to the literature on moral legitimacy. Moral legitimacy refers to the “collectively approved values, purposes, means and goals” (Meyer et al. 2013:170) and Suchman (1995:579) maintained it was conferred on an institution when it did “the right thing”. Here the officials can gain this moral legitimacy, through their informal relationships with equalities organisations. Moreover, mainstreaming theorists claim one of the key principles that underpins mainstreaming is “justice, fairness and equity” (Rees and Parken 2003; Rees 2005). This is often defined in terms of “promoting equality” or “combating poverty” (Rees 2005:568). Here, the claim that officials hold the same social values as equalities organisations

suggests this mainstreaming principle is embedded in the Partnership, but it should be noted it is maintained through informal means.

Another way equalities interviewees said they built informal relationships with government officials was to have regular, reciprocal contact, as described here: *'We have brilliant relationships with the civil servants... we'll consult with them... seek their advice... use them as critical friends for reports or consultations'* (Participant 39, Equalities Organisation). This conveys the use of regular informal contact to build the relationship and demonstrate valuing the civil servants' views. Once informal relationships with officials are secured the third sector could then become the contact that the official will call on for help. For example, they might be asked to help write government publications, as this equalities interviewee explained: *'We've worked directly with the civil servants producing the... [named policy]'* (Participant 41, Equalities Organisation). This process was also described by another equalities representative when a civil servant asked for their help with a government document: *'We drafted it and they then put it in more or less as we asked'* (Participant 40, Equalities Organisation). They also might be consulted at an even earlier stage, as this official elucidated:

*As a civil servant, I used to have no qualms at all about picking the phone up... and saying 'this is something that's going to be happening, I wondered how you thought that would go down?... And it's quite handy to have that knowledge, before you irrevocably commit to do something. (Participant 1, Welsh Government)*

Thus, according to interviewees, being consulted on policy ideas and authoring sections of government documents is a direct result of these informal relationships. These are themselves important policy-influencing activities, but they also secure future leverage with officials. As these equalities interviewee explained, it is *'mutually beneficial'* and *'about the reciprocity'* (Participant 27, Equalities Organisation). One interviewee described how requests for help are *'welcomed and returned'* (Participant 39, Equalities Organisation). This 'reciprocity' is central to reinforcing their positioning. Harnessing the "mutual benefit" as key to developing informal relationships is a familiar trope in third sector literature (for example,

Lowndes and Skelcher 1998:322). It is underpinned by information being exchanged “for access to policy makers” (Harris and McGrath 2012:79). However, here we see a more complex exchange of advice and editorial influence on each other’s documents. Suchman (1995:574) would describe this as “pragmatic legitimacy” which is the legitimacy conferred on an institution by the self-interests being achieved. Thus, a key aspect of understanding how equalities organisations achieve substantive representation is through informal relationships with ministers but also, crucially, officials, underpinned by moral and pragmatic legitimacy.

The third sector literature has recognised informal relationships between organisational representatives and politicians, but it is commonly seen as covert, involving “lurking in corridors” (Betsill and Corell 2001:70). For example, Chaney (2015b:1480) described such informal communication as a “pathology” because it potentially represents a “democratic ill” which is “neither transparent nor accountable” due to it being outside of “the formal political channels”. Much of the literature on informal politics assumes it can “weaken” or “impede” governments (Radnitz 2011, pp. 352-353) and hence is “condemned as arbitrary, unfair or corrupt” (Fukui 2000:3). Yet the accounts above demonstrate that these informal strategies were openly cited by interviewees from Welsh Government, WCVA and the equalities third sector. They portray informal claims-making as expected and acceptable rather than underhand. An institutionalist perspective recognises that formal and informal norms and processes are always present in institutions. Thus, the literature on influencing strategies resonates with the present case study and recognises informal relationships as a legitimate strategy where the combination of informal channels and formal meetings are viewed as the two halves of lobbying (Jones 2011).

We now consider what these accounts of claims-making to achieve substantive representation reveal about the positioning of equalities organisations on the insider-outsider spectrum (see Section 2.3.2 for detailed analysis of insider-outsider literature). As a formally designed

nexus between civil society and government, the Partnership might be seen as offering an insider position to participants. We now turn to consider to what extent this was reflected in policy actors' accounts of the third sector's positioning.

### **6.2.2. Positioning and policy-influencing strategies**

When asked about claims-making in the Partnership, many policy actors reinterpreted the question to describe their influencing strategies outside of the Partnership. For example:

*Can I just say that we, as [a particular equalities strand], have also a separate engagement mechanism with government... If this is all going to be about TSPC it won't be covered.*  
(Participant 23, Equalities Organisation)

This interviewee drew attention to a non-Partnership mechanism. Other policy actors' accounts of claims-making also went beyond the Partnership's scope despite the question's specific focus. Interviewees referenced any influencing activities organisations employed with devolved government. An example of this was in developing informal relationships, equalities interviewees described issuing invitations to either ministers or officials to *'get them out of their government building... for day trips'* (Participant 27, Equalities Organisation). Such activities were outside of the Partnership, as was having informal conversation with ministers at events, described here: *I said [to the Minister] we're working on this and when it's at a point in time, I want to be able to bring [it] to you'* (Participant 27, Equalities Organisation). This interviewee described later raising this agenda item at a formal meeting, which shows how informal influencing stretched beyond the Partnership but tied in with it. Tilly (2005:308) described policy-influencing actions as 'repertoires', which is an appropriate term because it conjures up a 'stock' of activities from which the key actors could choose (Alimi 2015:2). In this study, equalities organisations identified other action repertoires, such as producing *'detailed reports'* with clear recommendations to government on *'what actions need to be taken'* (Participant 30, Equalities Organisation). These were not restricted to the Partnership. They were used in multiple venues across government and devolved governance more widely, in which

equalities organisations would present their publications' findings in meetings (Participant 40, Equalities Organisation). Alternatively, formal 'letters' might be a Partnership agenda-raising tactic (Participant 1, Welsh Government) but also used externally as direct communication 'to ministers' or 'officials' (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation) or even to a 'committee' in *Senedd Cymru* (Participant 2, *Senedd Cymru*). This explains why the equalities third sector struggled to identify claims or claims-making used solely within the Partnership, as distinct from those undertaken in other policy-influencing venues. The construction of the question did not accord with how they understood policy-influencing activities.

The difficulty key actors had in confining their accounts of substantive representation to the Partnership tells us that the workings of the Partnership need to be understood in their wider governance context. This offers a more comprehensive, sophisticated understanding than is possible from a discrete examination of the Partnership without reference to the wider governance context. It is in keeping with the argument made by Macmillan and Ellis Paine (2020:19) that a "plural conception of context" can inform our understanding of third sector strategies in their relations with the state. It led to a significant finding of this study, which is the recognition of the multiple positions that the equalities third sector held and adopted simultaneously to influence government. Their extensive accounts made it possible to map out the policy-influencing venues used by equalities organisations, as seen in Figure 6-1. This locates the Partnership (*left column, yellow box*) within the context of the extensive mechanisms through which the sector engaged with the executive and legislative branches of devolved government. As Figure 6-1 reveals, the other influencing venues in Welsh Government included its Equalities Division, the sector's direct meetings with ministers, Welsh Government policy consultation exercises, the funded programmes from across Government in which equalities organisations delivered services, and a wide array of working groups or task groups that provided opportunities for other meetings with ministers or officials. All of these were distinct from

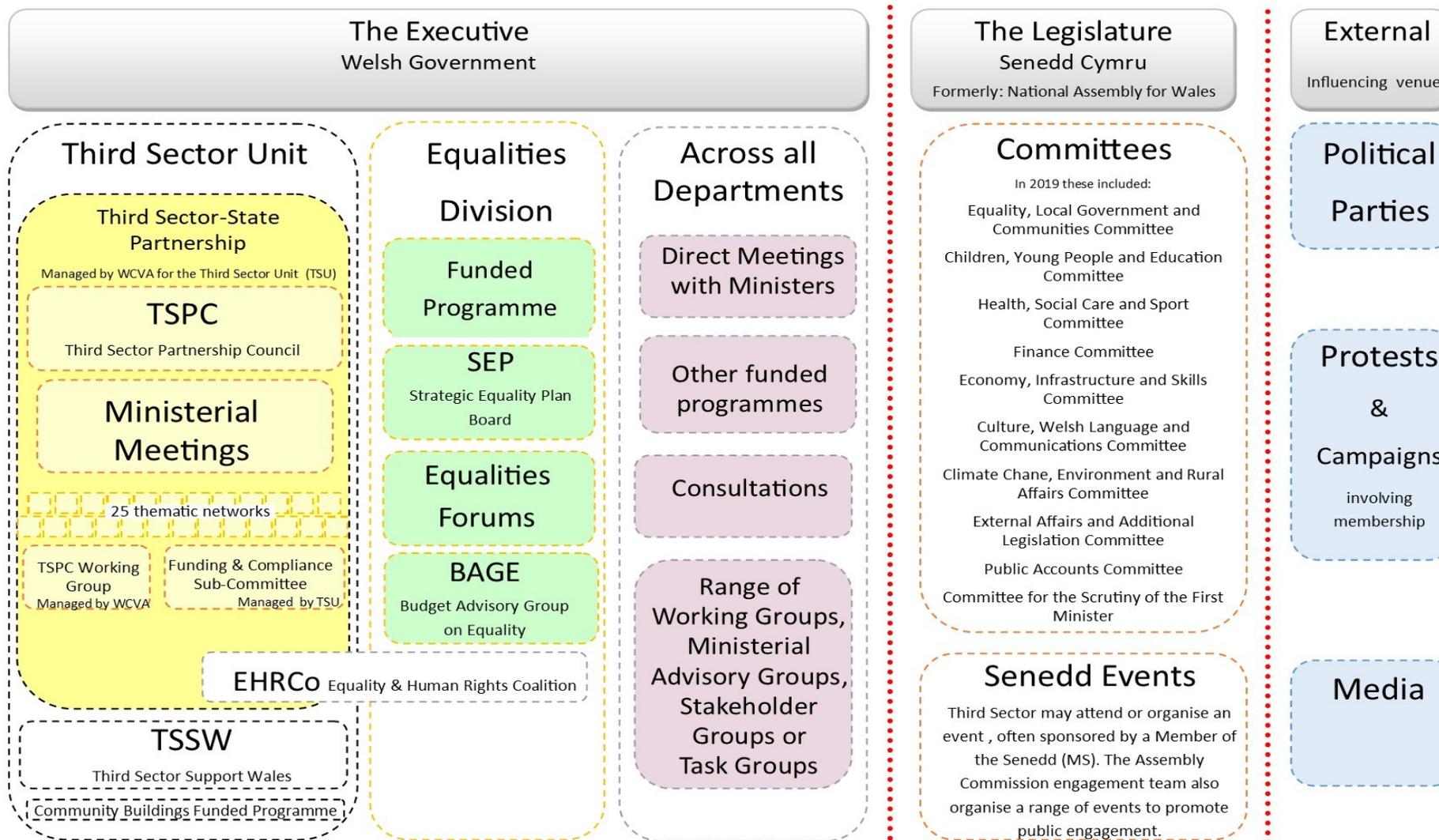


Figure 6-1 Policy-influencing venues in devolved governance accessed by equalities third sector organisations

engaging with the legislature, *Senedd Cymru*, where equalities interviewees also undertook influencing activities through the various scrutiny ‘committees’ (Participant 37, Equalities Organisation) or ‘events’ in the Senedd (Participant 38, Equalities Organisation).

Beyond these formal mechanisms the equalities organisations also detailed other action repertoires (right column). For example, they cited producing their ‘own manifesto’ to coincide with national elections (Participant 36, Equalities Organisation). They also described lobbying across political parties and attending ‘party conferences’ to influence political party manifestos (Participant 36, Equalities Organisation). Furthermore, outsider strategies such as mobilising members to protest ‘on the steps of the Senedd’ (Participant 41, Equalities Organisation) featured in interviewees’ accounts. Additionally, they spoke of how they used the media, as is described here: ‘If we think there is no other route that is going to effect change, then we use the media to try and push for change, which can be quite effective’ (Participant 40, Equalities Organisation). Again, such a strategy, was used alongside other insider tactics as this interviewee explained: ‘I think that media pressure does help move politicians’ (Participant 32, Equalities Organisations). This reveals the breadth of the multiple positions on the insider-outsider spectrum used by equalities organisations.

The extant literature tends to view the third sector’s position to either be on “the inside track” or “the outside track” and the subsequent policy-influencing approaches to be shaped by whichever position an organisation takes (Jones 2011:2). Such a binary understanding of position is misleading. Craig et al. (2004) rejected the binary notion of insider-outsider organisations and instead described third sector use of insider and outsider strategies. This sits well with these findings because it allows for organisations to use both types of strategies. However, the mapping out of venues of third sector-government engagement (Figure 6.1) reveals how they span multiple positions on the insider-outsider spectrum. Substantive

representation theorists acknowledge that there are “multiple sites of representation” (Childs et al. 2010:199), and this study details these. It is not suggested that any individual equalities organisation accessed all of these, but collectively the equalities third sector made use of the full range of venues detailed. Thus, our findings accord with Hemmings (2017), who proposed organisations use a nuanced combination of strategies beyond the insider-outsider binary. We now consider how these multiple venues are used in order to understand the part the Partnership plays in this.

A useful description of how substantive representation by equalities organisations should be understood was offered by this interviewee, who stated *‘It’s about chipping away at those policy developments’* (Participant 24, Equalities Organisation). As this interviewee explained, policy changes *‘come about, just by years and years of lobbying, engagement, speaking’* (Participant 31, Equalities Organisation). One participant recalled *‘I lobbied and lobbied and raised it until people were sick of me’* (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation). The lobbying literature recognises the need for relationships to be sustained over time (Harris and McGrath 2012), but this finding shows that these multiple venues are fundamental to this process. This notion of *‘chipping away’* through multiple policy-influencing venues is a meta-action repertoire of the equalities third sector. It is central to addressing the overarching research question and understanding how equalities organisations use the Partnership to advance equalities. This accords with literature on substantive representation which recognises it as “a process” that occurs both “inside and outside formal institutions” (Childs et al. 2010:151). Political change requires “sustained dialogue” (Acheson and Milofsky 2011; Hemmings 2017) and repeated claims allows the claims-makers to refine and target their claims as well as increase their visibility (Saward 2010). This accords with Kingdon’s (2011) explanation of the policy primeval soup in which policy ideas float around the policy community until the policy window is opened (see Section 2.5.2). It is also in keeping with feminist institutionalist accounts of how incremental

change can be used to introduce an equalities agenda, through institutional layering (Mackay 2011).

Given our research question is concerned with how equalities organisations engaged with the Partnership to promote substantive representation, it is important to explain how the above finding about multiple venues contributes to this. An equalities interviewee described the Partnership as *'one tool in the toolbox'* (Participant 32, Equalities Organisation). One aspect of this *'tool'* of the Partnership is that it enables equalities organisations to position themselves. Positioning strategies underpin interviewees' accounts of their action repertoires in the Partnership. Positioning techniques identified included taking part in one of the Partnership's sub-committees. As this equalities representative explained: *'I guess everyone on the working group probably had quite a lot of influence... They are setting the agenda and shaping the mechanisms'* (Participant 8, Equalities Organisation). So, in addition to BAGE and the SEP Board which were sub-groups outside of the Partnership (Section 6.1.2), there were two sub-committees within the Partnership. One was the working group of the Third Sector Partnership Committee (TSPC), which was managed by WCVA and aimed to ensure progress *'between meetings'* of the TSPC (Participant 7, WCVA). There was also the Funding and Compliance Sub-Committee, which was managed by Welsh Government and aimed to monitor whether the Partnership was complying with the legislation (GOWA, 2006 s74). (Its purpose is discussed further in Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.1). These are seen in figure 6.1 (left column). However, some accounts reveal the access to government the Partnership provided to the third sector stretched beyond the Partnership itself. Thus, the Partnership was useful for equalities organisations to secure positions in other governance settings, as this interviewee described: *'I often find myself invited to things, where Government have mini Task and Finish groups ... and they'll think 'Quick we need a third sector person'* (Participant 27, Equalities Organisation). This illustrates how being a Partnership member automatically provides access to other policy-influencing venues.

Other equalities interviewees revealed they actively used the Partnership to campaign for the third sector to access positions in other settings. For example, this equalities interviewee stated:

*We tried a number of times to try and get onto the Curriculum Strategic Forum... It took two years through the TSPC... We got onto it... So, through the TSPC... that was successful. (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation)*

The above illustrates the TSPC element of the Partnership being used in a claim to participate in the wider policymaking machinery of government.

This finding answers the call made by Chew and Osborne (2009, pp. 93, 101) for a more extensive picture of the “strategic positioning” that the third sector adopts. It provides an example of what Celis and Lovenduski (2018) described as “positional power” being used to achieve engagement in decision-making processes, in order to achieve substantive representation. This positioning of equalities organisations throughout government might be equated with a mainstreaming tool identified by Parken et al. (2019:6), which is to institute the machinery of government to “set a vision for equality which informs policymaking”. In this case, equalities organisations use the Partnership to ensure they are embedded in the machinery of government. From the perspective of the overarching feminist institutionalist analysis, this reveals a key way that the partnership enables the promotion of equalities.

Furthermore, these results show how the Partnership enabled multiple venues to be accessed simultaneously by equalities organisations. In this respect, we are drawing on venue-shopping theory which proposes organisations are able to strategically switch institutional venues to achieve policy outcomes (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Zahariadis 2016). When this theory is applied to the insider-outsider spectrum it underlines the choice of venues available to equalities organisations which range across the insider-outsider spectrum (as identified in Figure 6-1). One example of how this strategic switching of venues can be understood was described by this WCVA interviewee:

*So, at the last meeting... we did the paper [about disability concerns related to taxi licensing]. Actually, then three days later it was an item on the BBC Wales news at 6 o'clock. Which was great because the Minister got up and said exactly the same as he had said in the meeting. I think the Minister was comfortable because we had raised it directly with him three days before, so he had had the chance [to develop his response]... That to me is clever work. Rather than just going straight to the public and getting the Minister's back up... actually doing it directly... and then... doing the public bit, just to make sure the extra bit of pressure is on. (Participant 5, WCVA)*

This participant's account of the third sector raising the issue in the Partnership meeting prior to it reaching the national media illustrates how the equalities organisation deployed their multiple influencing positions. The example above shows the third sector leveraging the external media against the executive, whilst maintaining their insider position through the formal mechanism of the Partnership. In turn this enabled them to be critical whilst sustaining their informal good relations with government.

This is notable because there is a substantial body of literature identifying how the third sector's critical voice can be compromised by close relationships with government (Chaney and Fevre 2001a; Evans et al. 2005; Rhodes 2007; Royles 2007; Taylor 2011; Buckingham 2012; Milbourne and Cushman 2013; Edwards 2014; Archambault 2015; Jacklin-Jarvis 2015; Salamon and Toepler 2015; Alcock 2016; Egdell et al. 2016; Hemmings 2017; Milbourne and Murray 2017; Aiken and Taylor 2019). Yet the equalities organisations interviewed in this study reported '*I don't feel restricted in any way at these meetings*' (Participant 29 Equalities Organisation). They consistently made statement such as: '*if I feel I have to say something I will say it*' (Participant 26, Equalities Organisation) and '*I think that's what we're there for*' (Participant 33, Equalities Organisation). Young (2000:170) suggested government-third sector relations could be a composite of adversarial engagement set alongside other roles, but he proposed there was "temporal cycle" between these roles. On the contrary, these accounts show it occurs simultaneously. Some third sector theorists have recognised that organisations can collaborate and manage

conflict simultaneously (Craig et al. 2004; Ospina and Saz-Carranza 2010; Jacklin-Jarvis 2015). The present findings offer an account of how this can be achieved. As Eschle and Maiguashca (2018) argue, feminist accounts should move beyond the dichotomous understanding of feminism as either “co-opted or resistant” or “inside or outside”. Here it has been shown that equalities organisations can position themselves beyond this binary, occupying many positions simultaneously on the insider-outsider spectrum and using informal relations in order to offer criticism of government.

Feminist institutionalism argues that institutions are sites of both equalities engagement and constraint (Mackay et al. 2010; Krook and Mackay 2011; Mackay and Krook 2011; Eschle and Maiguashca 2018). Until now, this chapter has explored the formal and informal ways that equalities organisations are engaged in substantive representation to advance equalities through the Partnership. In keeping with the overarching research question, attention now turns to consider how the institution of the Partnership may constrain the substantive representation of equalities groups.

### **6.3. Informal institutional norms shaping substantive representation**

#### **6.3.1. How claims are shaped by informal institutional norms**

To understand how informal norms shape substantive representation in the institutional setting of the Partnership, this section starts by exploring how equalities organisations’ claims are shaped. The claims examined earlier (Section 6.1.1) were concerned with the substantive representation of equalities groups. Here we consider claims concerned with policies about third sector organisations. The previous chapter on descriptive representation explored the difference between representing either equalities groups or third sector organisations (Section 5.1.3). This distinction is also important in substantive representation, because “constituencies are constituted through representation” (Saward 2010:120). So, where the third sector make claims concerned with an equalities issue their constituency is the equalities group. Where their

claims concern third sector organisational interests their constituency is the third sector. Organisational claims commonly identified by policy actors were those around ‘*commissioning*’ (Participant 8, Equalities Organisation) and those aimed at improving ‘*procurement*’ practices (Participant 15, Welsh Government) , so were concerned with how government contracted third sector services. Other organisational claims targeted the state ‘*funding*’ programmes available to third sector organisations (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation). Moreover, some funding or procurement claims addressed procedures concerning the whole third sector, but other claims were concerned with financing the representative organisation itself. Such an account can be seen below:

*We put in a bid which wasn't successful which then meant the organisation was at risk [of closure]... We're a campaigning organisation, so we thought, okay well we have to campaign for our own survival. So, we did kick up a big fuss, both externally and lobbying within ... and we did get an alternative package of funding.* (Participant 31, Equalities Organisation)

This example illustrates a claim concerned with the representative’s own organisational survival. As mentioned in Chapter Five, equalities organisations’ interests are related to, and not distinct from, equalities groups’ interests. This is because organisations’ survival is essential for both advocating and providing services for their equalities groups. However, as shall be shown, the institutional norms concerning claims based on organisational interests were different from other claims.

Examination of informal institutional norms revealed that, generally, discussion of third sector funding claims were not considered acceptable topics for Partnership meetings. As this official explained: ‘*They have to be really careful... otherwise they can be seen as whinging... if everyone is just saying “You’re not funding us enough”*’ (Participant 19, Welsh Government). The use of ‘*whinging*’ in this context conjures an adult-child dynamic, revealing the power differential at play between government and the third sector. Complaining about funding decisions was considered inappropriate. Another example came from this official, who stated ‘*Don’t*

*come to the table and say 'You cut our funding in this organisation'... You can say it until the cows come home... you're not going to reverse the decision by having a go at the politician'* (Participant 12, Welsh Government). As seen here, such claims were often portrayed as irritating to Welsh Government rather than a legitimate agenda item. Notably, officials described funding-based claims as a past blight on Partnership business, which had been eradicated, as is revealed here:

*There's been a lot of meetings in the past ...whereby the sector is basically asking for more money... Fortunately, we're not there anymore... We don't want them to say things in a meeting that's going to damage them, like 'Just give us more money'.  
(Participant 18, Welsh Government)*

This notion that funding-based claims would '*damage*' the third sector is significant, because it exposes how such claims were discouraged. As this equalities interviewee stated, '*asking for money...I think kind of got banned in the end*' (Participant 8, Equalities Organisation). Extant literature has found the third sector's dependency on statutory third sector funding might constrain their advocacy role (Salamon & Toepler, 2015; Casey, 2004; Archambault, 2015). However, here we see the specific constraint imposed by the institutional norm is on their ability to discuss their own sector's financial needs in the Partnership. This informal norm that funding-based claims are inappropriate in this setting is an example of institutional rules of appropriateness being used to shape substantive representation.

The inappropriateness of organisational claims was not restricted to funding issues. Third sector representatives who were '*not prepared to say anything*' in the Partnership meetings were also rejected (Participant 7, WCVA). Officials interpreted this as '*people wanted to come along just to be in a meeting with the Minister*' (Participant 16, Welsh Government) or '*be seen to be meeting the Minister*' (Participant 15, Welsh Government). Distaste for third sector organisations attending to promote their organisation without contributing was also cited by equalities interviewees, as described below:

*Get rid of glory trophy hunters... Because there are those people in every walk of life, even in our sector where... they like to be in the room, to shake the hand... This is not for you just to stand there and go look at me with our shiny organisation.*  
(Participant 27, Equalities Organisation)

This demonstrates the informal norm against organisational self-promotion was accepted by the third sector. In the above cases of funding campaigns or attending simply to be seen, the commonality is the third sector was perceived to pursue its own organisational interests. As this equalities representative explained, *'We're not there to make special pleading on behalf of those organisations that we're employed by'* (Participant 24, Equalities Organisation). Pursuing individual organisational needs was seen as *'feathering their own nests and protecting their own interests'* (Participant 11, WCVA). The condemnation of self-interests is an operating condition for those in office in governance (Dean 2017). Here, there is a conflation of organisational interests with self-interests. Suchman (1995:351) argues that "all groups have some degree of organisational prosperity as a built-in feature". However, organisational *'survival'* might be a more accurate built-in drive for organisations facing today's financial challenges, as one equalities interviewee described (Participant 31, Equalities Organisation). Ketola and Hughes (2018:209) observe that decision-makers have less patience for claims based on financial concerns or organisational survival. The present findings support this. Yet the institutional discourses revealed policy actors failed to recognise that expressing organisational needs is not an act of self-interest, since meeting their own organisational needs underpinned the equalities organisations' ability to play any other role to benefit their equalities groups, be that providing services or advocating on their behalf.

The third sector's acceptance of this informal norm enabled it to be communicated across the Partnership. For example, how this norm was enforced for new members was described by this equalities representative:

*I remember going to my first [Partnership meeting] and being shot down for talking about something specific and I think that it's an important lesson because you're there as a collective,*

*you know. Special pleading isn't allowed. (Participant 24, Equalities Organisation)*

The internalised acceptance from this participant that their claim had been out-of-line demonstrates the fundamental way such organisational claims were constrained. The wider literature shows government's rejection of organisational interests in the context of a contractual relationship to deliver services (Acheson and Laforest 2013), but here we see it even in a Partnership intended for third sector representation.

This certainly stands at odds with the commitment found in both the Government of Wales Acts (1998, s114.4; 2006, s74.4,) to provide and monitor 'assistance' to the sector and 'consult' them on 'matters affecting or of concern to' them. As Table 6-1 shows, it is also contrary to the words of the first Welsh Government Scheme which committed to "recognise that its policies... must include measures for financial support of the sector" (Welsh Government 2004:5 s2.12). The revised, successor Scheme dropped

*Table 6-1 Comparison of legislation and schemes in relation to funding and resources*

<b>Government of Wales Act 1998</b>	<b>Government of Wales Act 2006</b>
(4) <i>The Scheme shall specify</i> (a) <i>how the Assembly Government proposes to provide assistance to relevant voluntary organisations (whether by grants, loans, guarantees or by other means).</i>	(4) <i>The voluntary sector scheme must specify –</i> (a) <i>how the Welsh Ministers propose to provide assistance to relevant voluntary organisations (whether by grants, loans, guarantees or any other means).</i>
<b>The Voluntary Sector Scheme (In place prior to January 2014)</b>	<b>The Third Sector Scheme (Published January 2014)</b>
2.12 The National Assembly recognises that its policies on the voluntary sector, must include measures for financial support of the sector. The level of resources available will determine the extent of such measures and funds will need to be targeted according to Assembly Government priorities. The National Assembly also recognises its role in seeking to ensure that the voluntary sector has fair and reasonable access to public funds.	1.5. The Welsh Government recognises that its Third Sector policy framework must include measures for assistance for the sector as set out in sub-section (4) (a) of the legislation above. The level of financial resources available will determine the extent of such assistance which is provided by way of grants etc., and funds will need to be targeted according to Welsh Government priorities. The Welsh Government also recognises its role in seeking to ensure that the Third Sector has fair and reasonable access to public funds.

*Note: Words that are the same in both texts have been highlighted*

“financial” and changed this to “include measures for assistance of the sector” (Welsh Government 2014a:4 s.1.5), which indicates a gradual shift in policy discourses away from the acceptability of financial concerns. Similarly, the document analysis of the successive annual reports published by Welsh Government about the Scheme showed a marked decrease in the detail about the financial assistance offered to the sector. Whilst the 2010-2011 annual report gave a detailed breakdown of expenditure in a table and a pie chart, the subsequent two reports only contained a pie chart which broke down the expenditure between different government departments and this was removed altogether in 2013-2014, leaving just a brief statement of the overall sum spent by Welsh Government. This indicates a decreasing acceptance of third sector finances in the institutional discourses, despite the legislative requirement to scrutinise financial assistance of the third sector (GOWA 1998;2006). Thus, the decreasing permissibility of raising third sector finances is reflected in the institutional discourses not only in the policy actors’ accounts, but also across a number of formal Welsh Government publications.

Phillips (1999:126) describes a decoupling of political from economic equality which she explains shows that governments see it as easier to act on political inequality than economic inequality. The institutional norm of inhibiting financial concerns of the sector described above supports this decoupling account. The unacceptability of financial claims has been exacerbated by the pressure of austerity, as this official explained: *‘We are still deep, deep in the austerity measures of the UK Government which means our budget is reducing over time constantly in real terms. As money reduces, we have less and less to spend it on’* (Participant 15, Welsh Government). Substantive representation is contingent on socio-economic developments (Chaney 2016). This suggests such an institutional norm against funding-based claims can, in part, be traced back to economic considerations. Moreover, third sector literature recognises that with increased financial pressure comes an increasing threat to third sector organisations (Hemmings 2017; Enjolras 2018). Thus, austerity reinforces

the institutional norm prohibiting organisational interest claims. As the previous chapter has shown, equalities organisations are most at threat from these increased financial pressures (Section 5.3.2).

The previous chapter found descriptive representation of third sector organisations dominated policy actors' accounts of representation. Conversely, in the case of substantive representation in the Partnership, claims based on organisational needs are discouraged by institutional norms. The implications of this seeming contradiction are discussed further in Chapter Nine.

Above we have considered how the claims of the equalities third sector are shaped by the Partnership's informal institutional norms. We will now address how informal institutional norms also shape their claims-making, to broaden our understanding of how substantive representation is enabled and constrained by the institution of the Partnership.

### **6.3.2. How claims-making is shaped by informal institutional norms**

Tilly (2005:308) identified three components of policy-influencing strategies, namely: claims, action repertoires, and the qualities that are needed to be displayed by organisations. Thus far, we have examined claims (Section 6.1.1) and considered action repertoires (Sections 6.1.2 and 6.2.1). Therefore, attention now turns to consider the qualities interviewees reported such organisations need to display in order to successfully influence policy via the Partnership. Whereas repertoires indicate choice in the selection of the actions organisations take, these qualities reflect the institutional norms about '*behaviour that is appropriate*' (Participant 6, WCVA). Their examination further reveals the institutional norms of the Partnership that shape the nature of substantive representation.

The quality that dominated the policy actors' responses to these questions was the necessity to portray professionalism. Thus, there were direct

references to how organisations must *'represent themselves professionally'* (Participant 17, Welsh Government), and additionally, many of the other qualities that policy actors identified also reflected professionalism. For example, several interviewees spoke of a need for clarity of communication, where *'presentation skills are really important'* and *'being able to present an argument'* is key (Participant 6, WCVA). They also described organisations needing to *'put across a reasoned argument'* (Participant 5, WCVA). For example, when developing a policy briefing paper for the formal meetings, they should be *'evidence-based [with a] mix between actual empirical evidence and some stories that bring it to life'* and they should draw *'on stats and reports that [they or] others have produced'* (Participant 5, WCVA). This supports Grant's (2000:20) finding that insider groups should have a reputation for providing accurate information and communicating well. This emphasis on the reasoned argument and presenting evidence suggests they should offer neutral objectivity. The latter has often been labelled by feminist theorists as the male norm, which is an informal institutional norm that excludes women (Celis and Lovenduski 2018:157). Here, it is proposed this standard signifies a professional norm which excludes the personal, impassioned stories of community members. Interviewees also stated: *'you want the most articulate, persuasive person'* (Participant 20, Welsh Government). Part of being persuasive, as this equalities representative explained, is you need to have *'the strongest voices. You have to be able to fight your corner really'* (Participant 37, Equalities Organisation). The benefit of having a stronger voice is described by this WCVA interviewee: *'There's definitely more vocal members... and because... they're more vocal, they tend to get their items pushed on the agenda a little bit'* (Participant 10, WCVA). Thus, this notion of good communication is multi-faceted requiring both a reasoned argument but also a persuasive and strong voice. The idea of being persuasive is often viewed as "unsavoury" but essential to lobbying (Harris and McGrath 2012:86). These notions of strong, persuasive voices that are also able to present a reasoned argument and have access to quantitative

and qualitative evidence all imply the necessity of the third sector Partnership representatives to be skilled professionals.

This assumption is also implicit in another quality identified by interviewees, which was being '*knowledgeable*' (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation). This was not just in terms of their own equalities expertise area and '*the sector they represent*' (Participant 22, Welsh Government). They also needed to be '*strategic thinkers*' (Participant 12, Welsh Government) and '*politically astute*' so that they could keep on top of the political agenda '*in terms of Welsh Government policy, what's going on in terms of debate in the Senedd, what's going on in terms of the committee process in the Assembly*' (Participant 1, Welsh Government). This political astuteness is further described here:

*It is actually a skill ... Somebody can be brilliant at the diplomacy in these kind of meetings.... There's a knack to playing the sides, [and] understanding the politics, with a small p, of Government, and what they are trying to achieve and the egos within that world, and the necessities to get things done.*  
(Participant 27, Equalities Organisation)

The diplomacy skills described in this excerpt, in addition to the political knowledge alluded to earlier, is in keeping with Alinsky's philosophy that one must understand political power in order to shift the balance of power (Alinsky 1971; Taylor 2011). It also emphasises the need for a skilled professional representative in the Partnership.

The reference to 'egos' in the above excerpt is also significant because it exposes that political knowledge is not only about the political agenda but understanding the temperament of ministers. As this official explained, '*Politicians and our cabinet secretaries are their own people. They are a law unto themselves*' (Participant 20, Welsh Government). This demonstrates that the language interviewees associated with ministers portrayed them as wilful, whereby '*Cabinet Secretary interest in things can switch*' (Participant 9, WCVA) and the third sector need to know how not to '*turn off a Minister's attention*' (Participant 21, Welsh Government). This evidences that responsibility lies with the third sector representatives to

manage the limited attention-span of some government ministers. Thus, equalities organisations needed to display the qualities of brevity and making clear demands. This expectation was neatly summarised by this WCVA interviewee, when describing how a policy briefing paper should be developed:

*'The Cabinet Secretary is not going to sit there and read ten pages of waffle.... It should be brief and to the point. 'This is the problem. This is our evidence. And this is what we would do about it'.... and to have a clear 'ask'... so that we can have something from the meeting'* (Participant 5, WCVA).

Alongside brevity, there is a need to be *'clear and concise and very brief'* (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation). Thus, Partnership representatives should express clear policy claims (which were commonly termed 'asks'). As this equalities interviewee explained it: *'It's about offering those solutions, offering a way forward'* (Participant 29, Equalities Organisation). The implications of this understanding of ministers' tolerances and dispositions are discussed further in Chapter Eight (Section 8.2.2). However, the ability to be concise and present solutions forms part of this larger discourse on the informal Partnership norm of the "professional" representative.

The professionalisation of the third sector is associated with the impact of New Public Management (Martin 2011). Carmel and Harlock (2008:166) describe it as an indication of the state making the third sector a "governable terrain". Network forms of governance were anticipated to counter the rise of professionalised technical experts in the third sector by de-emphasising the market and instead promoting beneficiaries as equal partners (Martin 2011; Salamon and Toepler 2015). However, the present empirical data show the governance model of this Partnership instead acts to reinforce professionalisation, as can be seen from the findings above. This would be no surprise to McRobbie (2009), who argued that the vocabulary of professionalisation was part of the managerial, neo-liberal criticism that underpins her rejection of mainstreaming. Following her argument, this Partnership might be accused of imposing neo-liberal

professionalism on the third sector. Similarly, Grant (2000:20) describes how the insider position leads pressure groups to accept patterns of behaviour that the government finds acceptable, and the rewards of insider position are used to tame them. This is explored further in Chapter Eight (Section 8.2). Whilst this may be the case, given that WCVA and Welsh Government interviewees identified the above as effective qualities to achieve policy change, it might be concluded that it would be pragmatic for the third sector to adopt these in order to achieve substantive representation. Yet these accounts conflate 'effective' and 'expected', and conformity to these norms of appropriateness are not necessarily an effective route to substantive representation, as shall be demonstrated.

The emphasis on professionalisation that emerges from the interviews stands at odds with the policy actors' own accounts of the most effective actions equalities organisations can take to achieve substantive representation. When interviewees were asked to identify effective ways to influence policy, using the beneficiaries or service-users of equalities organisations was most commonly identified as '*powerful and influential*' (Participant 1, Welsh Government). This was often referred to as using a '*real life person*' (Participant 4, WCVA). An explanation was offered by this official:

*When [beneficiaries] speak for themselves it's real and you feel it and civil servants have hearts and they are people themselves. And if they were to hear some of those stories from people... they might listen a bit more than if the organisation itself talked about them...Inevitably, when you translate things into organisation-speak from people-speak, you lose some of the immediacy.* (Participant 1, Welsh Government)

Here the official recognises the power of the personal story by contrasting '*people-speak*' with '*organisation-speak*'. Notably, this quality of being '*people*' is attributed to beneficiaries, officials and ministers, but not to third sector representatives. This is demonstrated by this equalities interviewee: '*People respond to people...in terms of trying to influence or change government policy*' (Participant 29, Equalities Organisation). This has implications for the professional representatives of equalities

organisations, since their contribution is undermined by this use of language. Consequently, they are not heard as well as their beneficiaries, as this interviewee explained: *'When I've taken... people to meet Ministers, they have had a much better hearing'* (Participant 37, Equalities Organisation). Similarly, this WCVA interviewee compared the power of beneficiaries to the professional representatives of the TSPC:

*I think the greatest impact that I saw... in a Partnership Council meeting was when a service user... from a particular BME support project, spoke... Suits don't talk to people. Real people talk to people... In a formal meeting, when you have these so-called 'lead people' and 'alternate people' you don't get the chance... to have real people come into the room.'* (Participant 4, WCVA)

This is a clear example of a senior WCVA manager recognising the inadequacy of third sector professionalised representatives presenting their claims. However, there is an inherent contradiction here with the expectation of a display of professionalism in the representatives. This contradiction mirrors the discussion in Chapter Five, in which the analysis of descriptive representation explored the tension in conceptions of representation between 'the professional' and 'the community member'. Underpinning that tension is the conflict between participative democracy and representative democracy (explored in Sections 5.2 and 5.3). Here it can be seen to also have implications for achieving substantive representation as well. This finding is in keeping with earlier feminist institutionalist analysis in seeking to identify how formal and informal institutions interact in "contradictory" ways (Mackay 2011:182). Third sector researchers have identified how professionalisation can lead to the side-lining of beneficiaries and members (Fyfe et al. 2006; Buckingham 2012). As the excerpts above show, the corollary to this is that the quality of being a professional is undermined. Acheson and Laforest (2013) warned against allowing organisational worth to shift from an organisation's representative role to being based on its actions. They cogently argued this neo-liberal, managerialist shift ultimately makes the third sector organisations "expendable".

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

To explore how equalities organisations promoted substantive representation through the Partnership, this chapter distinguished between the nature of the claims and claims-making process, whereby the former refers to the policy changes that are pursued and the latter refers to how these are pursued. The comparison of the substantive representation by equalities organisations with accounts of formal policy-influencing through mainstreaming strategies showed a mixed picture. Although analysis of equalities organisations' claims accorded with definitions of mainstreaming and the mainstreaming tool of "visioning", much of the Welsh Government's measures to achieve mainstreaming existed outside of the Partnership mechanism. Moreover, there was a wholesale rejection of the concept of mainstreaming by Partnership policy actors. The benefit of this feminist institutionalist analysis is that it reveals the significant element of equalities organisations' substantive representation that stemmed from informal processes. This is relevant for the focus of our overarching research question on how equalities matters are advanced through the institution of the Partnership. Namely, equalities organisations used informal relationships, and this was an accepted influencing strategy across the Partnership. The other key finding that contributes to our overarching research question is that the equalities organisations used positioning strategies in multiple policy-influencing venues across the insider-outsider spectrum. Relatedly, Partnership membership was a useful tool to enable equalities organisations to pursue this positioning and also maintain informal relationships across government whilst taking a critical position. Much of this chapter's findings have addressed how equalities are advanced through the Partnership. However, this feminist institutionalist analysis has also been utilised to recognise how institutional norms constrained the equalities third sector's substantive representation. Thus, the institution of the Partnership inhibited their ability to make claims concerning organisational needs. It also required professionalism, whilst simultaneously undermining the validity of their professional contributions. From the perspective of the

overarching research question, this illuminates two ways that the advancement of equalities was frustrated through the institutional processes of the Partnership.

Against this backdrop, the following chapter addresses how the equalities third sector is itself shaped by the institution of the Partnership. It uses this analysis to explore intersectionality in the sector, and to consider potential inequalities between different equalities strands.

## 7. How the equalities third sector and its potential for intersectional practices are shaped by the Partnership

### Introduction

Whereas the last chapter was concerned with the nature of substantive representation of the equalities third sector within the Partnership, this chapter addresses how the Partnership has shaped the equalities third sector itself. Specifically, we examine its organisational interrelationships and their implications for intersectionality in practice. Therefore, this chapter answers the research question: *How is the equalities sector and its potential for intersectional practices shaped by the institution of the third sector-government partnership?*

This is apposite because it recognises the dynamic, iterative relationship between equalities organisations and the institution of the Partnership, and it avoids viewing the former as a static unchanging set of civil society actors. In examining how the Partnership shapes inter-relationships in the equalities sector, this study is able to inform our understanding of applied intersectionality. As noted in Chapter Two (Section 2.4.1), intersectionality was advanced by Crenshaw (1991) and it examines how multiple identity categories intersect in ways that are cross-cutting and mutually reinforcing. The relationship within and between equality strands within the Partnership shapes the potential for intersectional practices adopted by equalities organisations and can be used to explore the nature of their intersectional strategies (Lombardo and Verloo 2009; Krizsan et al. 2012a). This analysis looks at how the inter-organisational relations are shaped by the formal institutional structures of the Partnership. It then draws on the interest group and civil society literature to examine the informal institutional discourses about collaboration and competition between organisations within the Partnership. Where feminist institutionalists have scrutinised how gendered power relations are constructed or maintained by institutions (Mackay et al. 2010; Mackay and Krook 2011), this chapter broadens this analysis. Thus, it makes an original scholarly contribution by

scrutinising how equalities relations are constructed and maintained by the institution of the Partnership. In so doing, it contributes to the overarching research question by examining the potential for intersectionality, which is another important facet of how the advancement of equalities is shaped by the Partnership. It also reveals the extent third sector organisations representing different equalities strands hold differing positions in relationship to the Partnership. To do this we draw on the extant equalities literature and earlier work on the hierarchy of (in)equalities (Nott 2005; Squires 2005; Verloo 2006; Hancock 2007). This recognises that the advancement of equalities can be uneven between different equalities strands, depending on how they are differently promoted or frustrated, which contributes towards the overarching research question.

In accordance with our feminist institutionalist approach, the discussion begins with a consideration of how both formal structures and informal norms and discourses shape the interrelationships of the equalities organisations and thus their potential for intersectional practices. The chapter then explores notions of hierarchy within the equalities third sector and whether certain equalities identities are advantaged or disadvantaged by the informal institutional discourses of the Partnership. This chapter will reveal the key findings that certain equalities categories are prevented from participating in the Partnership which inhibits intersectionality, and furthermore, that both the formal structure and the informal discourses constrict different forms of intersectionality from being pursued by equalities organisations. Moreover, it will show how 'race' equality organisations face structural disadvantage when compared to other equalities organisations.

## **7.1. How institutional structures shape intersectional practices**

### **7.1.1. Formal structures shaping equalities third sector representation**

The way the Partnership is organised has implications for achieving intersectionality because it is comprised of thematic networks which are segregated into particular identity categories. One equalities interviewee

suggested that this structure with discrete equalities strand representatives reflected that Welsh Government '*really haven't got their head around intersectional work yet*' (Participant 28, Equalities Organisation). The consequences of this were captured by this equalities interviewee:

*We [the equality strands] often don't [work together]. That's the sad thing. The protected characteristics are nine under the Act [Equalities Act 2010]. But we tend to silo off. Once in a while, you find that we remind ourselves that the same woman can be black, female, disabled, LGBT, civil-partnered, pregnant... We should be able to come together as equality experts ... [Instead, equality organisations] run off and do their thing ... and often our worlds don't mix. So, there has to be more thought given to how can we actually see the world more as a melting pot of a diverse group of people who are not neatly packed into tiny little boxes and our lives actually flow like water.* (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation)

As illuminated here, it was recognised by a few equalities interviewees that organisations representing different equality categories were working in 'silos', separate from one another. This has previously been recognised as an obstacle to intersectionality (Hankivsky et al. 2019). It is not enough just to have multiple equalities categories involved in the Partnership to enable intersectionality to be achieved. Multiple civil society groups can be mobilised but have little contact with each other (Krizsan et al. 2012b). Thus, the Partnership's strand-based structure demonstrates the '*logic of separation*', which has previously been observed in the way the UK Equality Act 2010 is constructed; regarding protected characteristics as largely being separate rather than relational (Bassel and Emejulu 2010). In consequence, Verloo (2006) argues that there needs to be a rethinking of representation and participation in an era of post-identity politics. In a similar vein, the equalities literature has recognised the danger of one organisation serving to represent an entire equality strand, warning of "essentialism" and the "fragmentation" of equalities (Mansbridge 1999; Squires 2005; Walby 2005; Celis et al. 2014). Applied to the case of the Partnership, it also risked isolating the strand representatives, as revealed below:

*I'm the only one that comes through from a children's perspective... sometimes I'm the only one against a whole cohort of people who are talking about adults really.*  
(Participant 37, Equalities Organisation)

It is clear that this equalities representative felt isolated. Mansbridge (1999:636) recognised the drawback of having one representative per category and proposed disadvantaged groups may require “a critical mass” of representatives to be present in order to feel able to advance their positions. The foregoing excerpt reveals an interviewees’ views that this critical mass was not achieved by the institutional configuration of equalities representation in the Partnership. This signals another disadvantage of the siloed way of working caused by the formal institutional structures.

Some intersectionality theorists would argue that a fundamental premise is that you cannot presume which categories have importance *a priori* (Hankivsky and Christoffersen 2008; Winker and Degele 2011). This would mean that the requirement to have a network representative from each equalities strand, as in the Partnership, already undermined an intersectional approach, because it failed to capture anti-categorical complexity. ‘Anti-categorical’ intersectionality is where the identity categories are deconstructed, and attention is instead focussed on the way concepts and terms are constructed (McCall 2005; Hancock 2007; Winker and Degele 2011) (detailed in Section 2.4.1). Thus, the network structures of the Partnership did not accord with an anti-categorical approach. That said, this is not the only way to understand intersectionality. Crenshaw (1991:1241) herself argued against the anti-categorical position because she perceived rejecting categories as a version of anti-essentialism, that “misreads the meaning of social construction”. Given the structural barriers to anti-categorical intersectionality, the application of alternative models of intersectionality in the Partnership are considered in Section 7.1.2.

Beyond this anti-categorical criticism, another structural failing of the Partnership was identified by the equalities interviewee below. This

interviewee's intersectionality-focused organisation was on the Partnership's periphery; meaning that it only had access through the Equality and Human Rights Coalition (EHRCo) without direct access to the TSPC or Ministerial Meetings. They stated:

*I think it's also people understanding that you don't have to be a strand-specific organisation and that intersectional issues are just as important as the strand specific work. So, we often feel that the kind of structures that we want to influence want us to be there for a specific group of people... It's the fact that, even though, years ago, there was a move away from the strand-specific work, they still want the strand-specific organisations there externally as their experts. And the concept of someone being able to be an expert and an influencer that isn't strand-specific hasn't actually made it through yet... Actually, someone who is there to look at the intersectional issues or who's there to look across the equalities spectrum, isn't something that they've ever really built into any of their structures. (Participant 28, Equalities Organisation)*

This participant's account supports the idea there is a distinction in the campaigning issues between single-protected characteristic and intersectionality-based organisations (Cho et al. 2013). Certainly, the case has been made that devolved governments need to bring in intersectionality experts to ensure they move beyond siloed working (Hankivsky et al. 2019). Yet intersectionality third sector organisations have been shown to be marginalised and given low status in third sector-state relations (Christoffersen 2020). The absence of an intersectionality representative could explain this senior government official's observation about intersectionality; they stated '*I would expect it to be raised more than it is*' (Participant 19, Welsh Government). This suggests that intersectionality was neglected by the equalities third sector. This absence of a cross-equalities representative in the Partnership was a structural failing. It was revealed in the way that the EHRCo, though managed by WCVA, was not seen as one of the "legitimate" twenty-five thematic networks of the Partnership. Instead, it sat as an anomaly outside of the formal Partnership mechanisms (as discussed in Section 5.3.3). If this network had been included in the Partnership structures, it would have provided the Partnership with an intersectionality representative. This

criticism of Welsh Government failing to embrace an intersectional approach to policymaking has previously been identified (Chaney 2006), but here, a simple institutional adjustment could overcome this structural obstacle.

A further failing in the Partnership structure identified by some interviewees was the separation of protected characteristics from socio-economic disadvantage or class. For example, this equalities interviewee stated:

*But it's more equality, in the sense of making sure that different protected characteristic groups have the same access [to Welsh Government policymaking]: Gender inequality, 'race' inequality and so on. But I think what's missed out a lot is, social class inequality. (Participant 33, Equalities Organisation)*

This excerpt reveals how 'class inequality' did not have the representation that other equalities categories had in the Partnership. There was not a theme relating to class or socio-economic disadvantage in the twenty-five thematic networks from which representatives were drawn for the Partnership. The closest to this were the networks for "employment", "Housing" and "Community".

This structural failing is supported by the literature. Intersectionality studies have shown how 'class' tends to be excluded from the list of inequalities (McCall 2005; Lombardo and Verloo 2009; Krizsan et al. 2012b). The impact was explained by this senior government official: '*We skirt around class and talk about socio-economic disadvantage... but in terms of the barriers that BME people, disabled people, LGBT [people face] I think that's probably only surfaced when equalities organisations are there*' (Participant 19, Welsh Government). Here, this official revealed that socio-economic disadvantage was part of Welsh Government policy discourses, but in different settings from those where equalities organisations were present. Furthermore, by referring to '*skirt[ing] around class*', the interviewee also drew attention to the discomfort that they felt Welsh Government had towards the notion of class. This discomfort has been

recognised in literature. Theorists have described the ‘paradox of class’ which has led to people’s reluctance to place themselves within class identities (Bottero 2004; Savage 2016). They argue this failure of the subjective identification of class leads to an avoidance of class analysis. This may have played a part in the removal of class from the Partnership equalities discourses, but as the interviewee indicates, Welsh Government do accept ‘socio-economic disadvantage’. Indeed, evidence of this was the Welsh Government’s plan to introduce a socio-economic duty under the Equality Act 2010 on 31st March 2021.

However, as revealed in the above excerpts, the separation of identity categories from any form of a socio-economic disadvantage in the institutional structures of the Partnership was highlighted by some interviewees. This separation is recognised in both the equalities literature and the literature on class. Much of the equalities literature recognises that equalities policies focus on the political and cultural disadvantages of identity categories, rather than focussing on economic differences or the inequalities of distributional goods and poverty (Squires 2005). Phillips (1999:42) describes this as the “hegemonic status of difference” where the focus on identity groups makes it difficult to talk about class. Despite the focus on class in the work of Crenshaw (1991), much of the intersectionality literature has focussed less on class than categories such as ‘race’ and ‘gender’ (McCall 2005:1788). Similarly, class theorists also recognise the segregation of traditionalist class analysis from other social identity categories (Bottero 2004; Savage et al. 2015; Savage 2016). Their explanation is that traditional class-based analysis was premised on “a model of the white, male worker” which neglected identity categories, such as ‘race’ or gender (Savage 2016:62). Furthermore, Savage (2016) also argued the tendency for class analysis to be reduced to a simple economic measurement neglected other intersectional issues. This combination of reasons why both literatures largely fail to engage with each other, is therefore reflected in our finding concerning this segregation of these spheres of equality in the formal government institutional structures.

Phillips (1999:14) describes a shift of attention from economic equality to political equality which is concerned with the right to participate. She maintains this has led to a focus on politics of difference, concerned with identity categories, but at the cost of economic equality. The present findings certainly support Phillips' (1999) argument.

This is not to say that these equalities representatives did not make socio-economic claims on behalf of their constituencies. According to equalities representatives' accounts, they made a range of socio-economic claims in the Partnership. Examples included 'race' equality organisations presenting evidence on *'experiences of discrimination in employment'* (Participant 33, Equalities Organisations) and similarly, gender representatives campaigned about *'the pay gap'* (Participant 8, Equalities Organisations) and *'Women's Economic Empowerment in Wales'* (Participant 41, Equalities Organisations). Employment was also raised by disability representatives, who identified the *'huge gap'* for disabled people in employment (Participant 39, Equalities Organisations). However, disability organisations were also concerned with income-related to welfare benefits, identifying *'welfare reform cuts'* as a *'human catastrophe on disabled people in Wales'* (Participant 31, Equalities Organisations). Thus, they campaigned for *'making sure that people have the correct benefits'* (Participant 41, Equalities Organisations). Alongside financial poverty claims around access poverty were also made. These ranged from 'race' equality organisations campaigning about *'problems with accessing health services'* (Participant 33, Equalities Organisations) to older people's organisations' claims regarding: *'broader access and eligibility for... social care'* (Participant 36, Equalities Organisations). So, it is clear a range of claims on socio-economic deprivation were being made, but only where it intersected with their specific identity category. The exception to this was the Partnership representative for religion, as they explained here:

*As religious people we also... believe that God has particular concern for the poor... which is religiously motivated and hence our interest in advocating in those issues, even though that might not benefit any of our member organisations. (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation)*

Advocacy for people experiencing social-economic deprivation by religious representatives was a special case unique to faith-based representation; it was not grounded on their constituency, but in their constituency's care for addressing poverty.

In contrast, this interviewee spoke about their own organisation's socio-economic priority:

*We have a very broad view of what equality is so that, not only does it include protected characteristics but income and class inequality, which is always the elephant in the room ... and the one group that hasn't got that representation are people with low incomes. (Participant 38, Equalities Organisation)*

Tellingly, this organisation's access to the Partnership was limited to attendance of the EHRCo. Although they were aware of the TSPC, the interviewee expressed frustration that they had not even known about the Ministerial Meetings, stating *'It would be nice to know about them'* (Participant 38, Equalities Organisation). This participant rejected Welsh Government mechanisms, stating; *'I would say we achieve more through the Assembly than we do with Welsh Government'* (Participant 38, Equalities Organisation). Here it has been shown that representation of socio-economic disadvantage or class are not only segregated by subject matter, but also by the arenas at which their representation takes place. Poverty claims are often made to the Legislature (*Senedd Cymru*, formerly the National Assembly of Wales) where other equality claims have more direct access to the Executive.

Another intersection that was rejected by the Partnership was raised by just one participant, who cited the example of employment policies to overcome low income.

*If you're talking about BME people in Pembrokeshire, you're talking about families and individuals who are not going to be using the same mechanisms to make sure those people have jobs as you would in Cardiff... so you're talking about very different approaches... The intersections with different equality characteristics, for example, in other areas aren't taken into account in that way. (Participant 28, Equalities Organisation)*

In discussing an intersectionality policy area, this interviewee identified the characteristics of 'race', socio-economic deprivation and geographical region. This latter category is often forgotten in the intersectionality literature. Furthermore, it was neglected from the formal institutional structures of the Partnership by the WCVA's requirement of third sector representative organisations to be national organisations.

Our institutionalist analysis has therefore revealed how the formal institutional structures overlooked intersectionality representatives as well as socio-economic and geographical representatives. A notable finding from the document analysis is that early Partnership documents described how the Partnership must scrutinise whether there were any third sector networks that were being excluded by its formal structure (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000c; Welsh Assembly Government 2007), but this discourse was not present in the later publications from the time period of interest to this study. This apparent loss of scrutiny of whether certain thematic networks are excluded can be seen as a key explanatory factor in the failure of the Partnership to address these gaps in representation.

In keeping with our institutionalist analysis, attention now turns from the impact of formal structures to informal norms and discourses.

### **7.1.2. Informal collaborative norms shaping the equalities third sector**

In contrast to the segregation engendered by the formal structures, in interviewees' accounts of the Partnership's informal norms, the equalities organisations more commonly described themselves as working well together, as this excerpt typifies:

*Thinking about ... all the different interactions I've had with other equalities organisations, I feel like, obviously we all fight our corner for our cohort of people we're representing... but I feel that we're quite united in what we want to see... I think we're all united and we're all fighting for equality. (Participant 32, Equalities Organisation)*

The sense of unity across the equalities third sector demonstrated here was also found in WCVA interviewees' accounts, where they described equalities organisations as *'very good at working with each other'* (Participant 3, WCVA) and *'supporting each other'* (Participant 7, WCVA). The notion of a 'united' equalities third sector was frequently associated with working *'collaboratively and co-productively and [having] a united voice on the big issues'* (Participant 27, Equalities Organisation). These accounts of collaboration are in line with the description Mansbridge (1999:634) gave of the deliberative function of representative democracy, which aims for "creating commonality, when that commonality can be genuinely good for all". Similarly, Dean (2017:217) described this orientation towards collective ends as "unitary democracy". This resonates with calls from intersectionality theorists for oppressed or marginalised people to form alliances and coalitions (Crenshaw 1991:1299; Cho et al. 2013). Thus, accounts of joint working are seen as a precondition for an intersectional approach, though it is important to distinguish between preconditions of intersectionality, and the evidence of intersectional practices actually being achieved (Krizsan et al. 2012a).

Much of the literature that discusses the 'unified voice' of the third sector describes the external expectation for consensus as constraining the third sector (Milbourne and Cushman 2015) and driving out diverse voices (Taylor 2001; Bristow et al. 2008; Milbourne and Cushman 2013; Jacklin-Jarvis 2015). However, a very different discourse on 'the unified voice' emerged from the equalities organisations' interviews. They recognised *'the importance of having unified voices'* but did not *'necessarily see that as a restriction'* (Participant 36, Equalities Organisation). Here, having a unified voice was an informal institutional norm, but the equalities policy actors were also making a choice to work collaboratively with each other to effectively influence government. They considered this to be *'a lot more powerful and will influence Welsh Government in a different way'* (Participant 39, Equalities Organisation). The choice to aim for a 'unified voice' was also captured by this interviewee:

*The reasons we work so much in coalition, or alliances or networks is because, you know, many voices saying the same thing are much stronger than just one voice, saying the same thing...it's not in [our organisation's] name that we're doing it. It's through alliances, who have a bigger voice then, don't they? And a broader breadth of expertise, I suppose. (Participant 41, Equalities Organisation)*

This excerpt reflects the practice of the equalities sector to combine their voices in Partnership meetings to achieve greater influence with government. It reveals collaboration was perceived as part of the repertoires deployed out of choice by the sector and contributed to their arsenal of tools to influence policy. It should therefore be added to the action repertoires detailed in the previous chapter (Section 6.2). It also supports the case put forward by Chew and Osborne (2009) that collaboration between charitable organisations forms part of their strategic positioning. Thus, it should be understood as related to the institutional positioning adopted by equalities organisations in the Partnership. Moreover, other intersectionality scholars have found that coalitions across inequality groups “are the exception rather than the rule... rarely appearing to perceive a common interest in their struggle with the state” (Krizsan et al. 2012b:226). This suggests the case here in Wales is a significant exception.

Given that the Partnership's informal norm was for equalities organisations to have a unified voice, it is important to consider how this shaped the nature of the claims they made. Focussing on issues that are relevant to the whole of the equalities third sector limited their claims, as was raised by this equalities representative: *'If you've got this unified voice, then the things that make a big difference to different people get lost... The intersections with different equality characteristics... aren't taken into account'* (Participant 28, Equalities Organisation). Consequently, the accounts of the Partnership meetings indicated specific equalities concerns were being suppressed. An example of this is seen here, where this equalities representative described the informal institutional norm of unanimity preventing specific equalities issues from being raised:

*I can think of one or two occasions where other organisations have pushed their agenda and it's not been entirely clear that it was something that we were all agreed on. But of course, the ethos of the Ministerial Meetings is that we only take things on which we are all agreed, so, of course, there is a filter-out mechanism in the way that it is set up in the pre-meetings. If it is clear that we're not agreed, then it won't get on the Ministerial Meeting's agenda, and someone would find another way of pushing it. (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation)*

This excerpt is telling because it indicates the exclusion of specific equality strand issues from the Partnership agenda. Crucially, the interviewee also recognised equalities organisations would find '*another way*' to raise such issues. Chapter Six has already explored these alternative routes when it identified the multiple settings beyond the Partnership where the third sector could influence policy (see *Figure 6.1*). Yet the implications for the Partnership's agenda-setting were significant. The informal requirement that agenda items were agreed by all participants in the pre-meetings was seen by some as flawed because '*it assumes the commonality of interest which isn't necessarily there*' (Participant 38, Equalities Organisation). The challenge of finding appropriate issues for inclusion on the Partnership agenda was recognised by both WCVA and Welsh Government; as this WCVA representative explained: '*that's been quite difficult because there aren't that many issues that apply to a number of organisations*' (Participant 6, WCVA). Likewise, this official questioned: '*Because there's such a disparate range of voices, how do you then pick issues that actually reflect the third sector as opposed to the specific interests of [a Disability Organisation]?*' (Participant 1, Welsh Government). This is a clear loss of the specificity of equalities issues.

Saward (2010:148) makes the distinction between the intended and actual constituency behind substantive claims. Applying this to our case study, the intended constituency encompassed anyone belonging to any of the identity categories, but the actual constituency only consisted of those who belonged to all the categories. This placed some restrictions on acceptable agenda items. The danger of expecting the third sector to have a unified voice was raised in Chapter Five (see Section 5.1.3). There, it was shown

that WCVA staff excluded equalities matters because they fell outside of the scope of the third sector's unified voice, given that some representatives were not equalities organisations. Here, the expectation for a unified voice worked in a similar way, but it threatened the distinctive voice of different facets of the equalities sector. Thus, we see a collaborative paradox, in which equalities organisations are condemned for silo working if they do not collaborate, as seen above (Section 7.1.1.), or they are condemned for compromising individual strand interests if they do.

Neglecting specificity is discussed in the third sector and intersectionality literatures separately. For example, Jacklin-Jarvis (2015:289) argued that although collaborations point to what third sector organisations have in common, the collaborative advantage lies in drawing on the distinctive contribution of each organisation. However, this concern about the loss of a distinctive voice is also fundamental to intersectionality theory. For example, Hancock (2007:65) argues that a flaw that emerges from the "logic of unitary identity politics" is that "policy problems are more than the sum of mutually exclusive parts". Furthermore, the unified voice expectation does not just constrain specificity to individual equalities strands. This Partnership norm also fails to recognise the 'inter-categorical intersectionality' between just two or three categories. This term refers to drawing on existing categories to understand the relations between the socially constructed groups (McCall 2005; Winker and Degele 2011).

The impact of the unified voice norm on the nature of intersectionality can be seen in the policy actors' accounts. For example: One equalities interviewee claimed intersectionality was important to the equalities third sector and was evidenced by collaboration, as seen here:

*We've got an ambitious, under-resourced third sector in Wales who are passionate about equality, who are passionate about intersectionality, so there is no conflict with having faith, sexual orientation, disability, gender, and all the others, homelessness, and mental health all around the table. It feels like a unified agenda. (Participant 29, Equalities Organisation)*

This participant's account of an intersectional approach is qualified by referring to the absence of 'conflict' between strands and the presence of a 'unified agenda'. Interviewees evidenced the spirit of this collaboration with responses such as: *'if someone challenges, someone else will come in with a different element of why that particular thing needs challenging'* (Participant 29, Equalities Organisation). They also described presenting *'joint paper[s]'* at meetings (Participant 40, Equalities Organisation). This captured the nature of the collaboration between equalities organisations, which involved adding different equalities nuances to a policy debate or policy paper. However, such an interpretation stretches the notion of intersectional practices. Intersectionality does not involve simply adding social categories to one another, but "seeks to uncover the convergence of experiences" (Hankivsky and Christoffersen 2008:276), in which one disadvantage interacts with another to create a different dimension of disempowerment (Crenshaw 1991:1249). Theorists have distinguished between the additive assumption of the multiple approach versus the interaction of intersecting identities (Hancock 2007; Krizsan et al. 2012a; Cho et al. 2013). These account of collaborative working in the Partnership point to the former. Where intersectionality is reinterpreted towards such an additive account of equalities categories, it can be seen as an example of what feminist institutionalists refer to as 'conversion' of an equalities strategy (Mackay 2011; Celis and Lovenduski 2018). In this case the conversion refers to how intersectionality was reinterpreted by institutional processes to mean something other than it was intended to mean. Christoffersen (2020:151) warned about the reinterpretation of intersectionality to mean "a 'generic' approach to equalities". This present study's observation of the additive approach to equalities can be related to this reinterpretation of intersectionality.

Moreover, although policy actors from across the sample described good collaboration across the equalities sector, further analysis of their examples of collaboration revealed a tendency to cite instances limited to one or two equalities strands. This exposed distinctive and limited patterns

of collaboration. For example, representatives of gender focussed on collaborating with other gender organisations. This was also the case with religious representatives and, children and young people's representatives (with the small exception of recognising disabled children's issues). Representatives of older people and disabled people recognised their evident shared interests in claims-making, given the incidence of disability experienced by older people. As this interviewee explained, *'because whilst the audience doesn't mirror exactly, there's a big chunk of them where it comes together'* (Participant 36, Equalities Organisations). Notwithstanding their exception, much of the collaboration that was described was between organisations within one equalities strand.

Collaboration may be an informal norm of the Partnership, but this tendency for intra-category collaboration was reinforced by the formal institutional structures of the network (as seen in Section 7.1.1). Hence collaboration was taking place within thematic networks, not across them. Justification for such an approach is made by some feminist institutionalists who argue factors contributing to gender inequality are distinct and so bringing together a number of inequality problems ignores their differentiated character and assumes an equivalence (Donaghy 2004; Verloo 2006). Feminist theorists particularly have raised the concern of gender equality being subsumed by other equality agendas (Rees 2005; Walby 2005). Such a concern could also be extended beyond the scope of gender, to apply to each of the equalities categories, which provides justification for this intra-category collaboration, rather than inter-category collaboration.

Let us consider whether this collaboration enabled a form of intersectionality claims. In this case study, such intra-category collaboration was particularly notable in accounts from disability organisations, because their collaborations not only tended to be with other disability organisations, but sometimes only with those in one

specific field of disability. Again, there was a perception of suppressed agenda items but this time concerning particular fields, as described below:

*With the TSPC we always feel, particularly with [our specific field] within disability that our voice is very, very quiet, or very small, because the third sector is so vast... I think, partly because coordinating or having a voice across the disability sector is difficult enough as it is... I think we struggle to know how we can best influence it. There's such a vast area of third sector. There are so many themes... Sometimes the TSPC agenda is large... It's too large for us to focus down. (Participant 39, Equalities Organisation)*

Here the expectation for a unified voice misses the nuanced issues for specific equalities organisations. This is a fundamental concern of intersectionality theory, whereby there is an “enforced silence” of a marginalised sub-group (Hancock 2007:65). Intersectionality theorists have recognised how representative organisations tend to focus on their median members’ issues, aiming for those they perceive to have the broadest impact (Crenshaw 1991:1265; Strolovitch 2006; Hancock 2007). It is argued that this results in an advantaged sub-group and consequently neglecting issues of less-advantaged sub-groups. This is a failing to recognise ‘intra-categorical’ intersectionality, which refers to an intersectional analysis concerned with intersections in a single dimension on a micro-level (McCall 2005; Winker and Degele 2011). The participant above insisted they would succeed in raising these matters in other venues beyond the scope of the Partnership, as described previously (see *Figure 6.1*). So, specific intra-categorical claims could be taken forward in other settings, but, according to the above participant, the formal Partnership was failing to be a useful mechanism through which to achieve this. Instead, the imperative for a unified voice and a collaborative approach took precedence. Thus, we have seen how the unified voice imperative can suppress both inter-categorical and intra-categorical intersectionality. This is an example of what feminist institutionalists have termed ‘mission drift’, in which institutional strategies are either neglected or co-opted, thus inhibiting equality strategies (Mackay 2011). Here the informal normative expectation in the institution towards a unified voice has co-opted this notion of intersectional practices.

Above we have examined the impact of collaboration in the Partnership on intersectional practises. The next section investigates the issue of competition between equalities organisations.

### **7.1.3. Competition shaping the equalities third sector**

In addition to references to the informal norm of collaboration within policy actors' accounts of the Partnership, there was also considerable discourse about competition between equalities representatives. Some participants described competing to get an item on the agenda, as seen here:

*Our role was knowing what the children's sector are concerned about and presenting that, and fighting for our bit of air space... Where everybody is trying to represent their bit... you're trying to wrestle with somebody who wants to talk for fifteen minutes about old people... that's actually not the most relevant to me.*  
(Participant 37, Equalities Organisation)

The terms '*fighting*' and '*wrestling*' reveal a very different equalities sector to the one portrayed as a collaborative project, as discussed above. One equalities interviewee saw the competition as an inevitable consequence of '*a pluralistic model*' in which '*you've got government at the centre and you've got all these different influences trying to get their say*' (Participant 40, Equalities Organisation). Here the informal discourses around equalities organisations competing were about influencing the agenda. This is allied to agenda-setting theory which maintains issues far exceed decision-makers' capability to process them, so they must compete (Cobb et al. 1976). The assumption of an inevitable "battle for power" where plural actors seek to influence policy is a feature of pluralism (Dahl and Lindblom 1953). It is recognised in the equalities literature (e.g. Engeli and Mazur 2018:116) and has been described as "adversary" democracy (Dean 2017). Similarly, Dryzek (2000:168) maintains "contestation" in discourses is central to deliberative democracy.

Collaboration and conflict are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In her study of collaboration between the voluntary and public sectors, Jacklin-Jarvis (2015) claims that tensions are an inherent phenomenon of inter-

organisational collaboration, and she argues that part of managing collaborations involves managing tensions. She points to “backstage negotiations” rather than public challenges, thus avoiding the risk of damaging the relationship with the public sector (Jacklin-Jarvis 2015:297). Certainly, our data support this notion of backstage negotiations, as this interviewee described: *‘[there is a] need to present a unified voice when we go and meet the [Welsh Government] Cab Secs [Cabinet Secretaries] and the Ministers... but equally any kind of deviation from that or discussions can be had at the planning meetings’* (Participant 24, Equalities Organisation). As discussed in Chapter Six (Section 6.1.2), the institutional structure involved planning meetings which preceded the formal Partnership meetings and served the purpose of agreeing their formal agenda. Therefore, the backstage negotiations were enabled by the nature of the formal institutional structure of the Partnership. Consequently, the informal norm of competition for agenda items can be compatible with the informal norm of collaboration and unity. This is in keeping with accounts of deliberative democracy in which the aim is described as allowing marginal voices or partial interests to be heard in order to arrive at policy decisions in keeping with the “common interests” (Dryzek 2000:170). Where accounts of intersectionality practices in other countries have found either “intense competition” between strands or “clear collaboration” (Krizsan et al. 2012b:232), this study is notable for recognising that both collaboration and competition co-existed. The implication of this is it was used to enable a unified sector voice to emerge in negotiations with government.

However, the nature of competition between equalities organisations within the Partnership was not limited to the agenda. This equalities interviewee cited an example of competition for issue ownership, where issues to do with faith were seemingly co-opted by ‘race’ equality organisations:

*I hear people referring to attacks on Muslims ... as ‘race’ hate attacks. And of course, they’re not. They are religious hate. And indeed, some of the ‘race’ equality organisations do take it*

*upon themselves to speak for and on this... and they sort of want to appropriate it as their agenda. And it's great that they want to be against it, of course... [but it is] mis-categorisation... Religion in itself is a protected characteristic. (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation)*

This extract shows competition over issues between equalities strands. This suggests that the formal Partnership's institutional structures having distinct category representatives might play a part in encouraging a sense of competition and issue protectiveness to be fostered between the strands.

Such competition may be an obstacle to equalities organisations achieving collaboration, but it is not necessarily in conflict with intersectional practices. Bassel and Emejulu (2010:520) argue intersectionality can "inadvertently" promote competition between different groups vying for power in institutional spaces. Similarly, Krizsan et al. (2012b) maintain that competition is likely when some equalities strands are trying to level-up with more dominant strands. Both of these accounts suggest competition is a by-product of intersectionality, but an alternative perspective is that it is evidence of a particular form of intersectionality. Competition is not contrary to the theory of political intersectionality, which is often neglected in intersectional accounts (Verloo 2006). Crenshaw (1991); (Verloo 2006) made the distinction between structural intersectionality and political intersectionality. The former recognises when one identity category amplifies the disadvantage experienced by another category. The latter is concerned with political strategies and recognises where one identity category can obfuscate or marginalise the disadvantage experienced by another. Crenshaw (1991:1252) described an example of political intersectionality as when some feminist writings' fail "to interrogate 'race' [which] means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of colour". Similarly, the case made by the representative above is an example, in which 'race' equality organisations' failure to acknowledge religion leads to the subordination of religious representation. This can be understood as

political intersectionality in practice. Therefore, as Verloo (2006:224) argues, “power struggles between various inequalities will always be present, as this is part of (political) intersectionality”. However, it stood out as the only example in the policy actors’ accounts of an equalities organisation making a political intersectionality argument.

Thus far, we have explored two forms of competition, but funding-competition was a third form and notably, the majority of policy actors’ accounts of competition between equalities organisations were overwhelmingly attributed to this. For example, this WCVA interviewee stated: *‘In funding, they [equalities organisations] might compete but in terms of getting their message across, they do work together’* (Participant 10, WCVA). It is well-documented in the third sector literature that funding leads to competition between organisations (Davies 2011; Milbourne and Cushman 2013). Although Partnership representatives do get a small stipend, known as the Partnership Capacity Fund, organisations representing the same identity category did not tend to compete for this. Interviewees’ accounts revealed it was not seen as a sum worthy of competition between organisations, since *‘the funding pot isn’t big enough to make it worth fighting for’* (Participant 8, WCVA). In any case, the Partnership representatives were supposed to be selected through an ‘election’ (Participant 7, WCVA). (The election process is explored further in Chapter Eight Section 8.1.1). Thus, any tendency for funding-competition between equalities organisations was external to the Partnership and this small stipend.

However, it should be noted that the relationship between funding-competition and competition to be a representative organisation cannot easily be disaggregated. Although the Partnership Capacity Fund was seen as inconsequential by interviewees, their accounts revealed there are many other funds allocated by Welsh Government which are not directly associated with the Partnership. (These were referenced in the previous chapter, because they constitute other policy-influencing venues for

equalities organisations. See Figure 6-1). For example, some Partnership representatives were recipients of the Equalities and Inclusion Fund administered by the Welsh Government's Equalities Unit. Other Partnership representatives referenced funding from the Health and Social Services division of Welsh Government, and to a lesser extent the Housing Department and Education Department. Besides funding, there were also references made to contracts to deliver services issued by a range of Welsh Government departments. These sources of Welsh Government funds fuelled the discourse around competing equalities organisations because they were allocated via a competitive process. For example:

*They [Welsh Government] try to develop various mechanisms through funding, where they've ... said one organisation to represent all race, one organisation to represent all disability, one organisation to represent all women... [They could have said] 'We want you to come together... as a third sector and work in a joined way'. But instead, they have pitted everyone [against each other] because of that money, and because they want one person to represent... Everyone is becoming extremely resentful towards each other ... I can't work with [different organisations] because [Welsh Government have] created that between us. (Participant 30, Equalities Organisation)*

This excerpt reveals the funding and contracts administered by other departments in Welsh Government was seen to have caused animosity between equalities organisations. The above excerpt also makes clear that there was a perception that Welsh Government expected equalities organisations to compete to be the one lead organisation for their identity category. Such expectations are associated with the Welsh Government funds external to the Partnership, but the Partnership ethos, of one representative for each identity category, provided the foundation of this perception. As this participant explained; *'the concept of being a national representative organisation for even just a protected characteristic is flawed... That loses the plurality that is actually really important, and the minority voices will get lost'* (Participant 28, Equalities Organisation). The premise of one representative per equalities strand causes competition between equalities organisations. Squires (2005:375) argued against single representatives for an equalities strand, because it can essentialise or reify

the identity, thereby “obscuring intra-group divisions and inter-group commonalities”. Similarly, Mansbridge (1999:636) maintained that a variety of representatives are needed to provide the heterogeneous, “complex and internally contested perspectives”. Here, the interview data show the failure to recognise the selection of representative is tied with funding allocation, and this is how inter-organisational animosity is created, as seen here:

*Well, I think, the way that Welsh Government has almost acted as a kind of kingmaker and the way that they appoint so-called lead bodies for ‘race’ or gender or so on, is, in itself, divisive. I don’t really think they need to do that... I think they are kind of acting as the crowning people and then obviously that’s not going to go down well with other groups. (Participant 33, Equalities Organisation)*

This notion of the ‘kingmaker’ is crucial to understanding the conflicts between equalities organisations. In the earlier account, there was competition between equalities ‘strands’ over agenda items. However, here, in competing to be known as the one representative for their identity category, the competition is between organisations within an equalities strand, but the arena is external to the Partnership. Other researchers have called for the elimination of funding structures that create competition between equalities strands (Hankivsky et al. 2019), but these findings reveal how funding creates complex relationships between organisations within strands. As this study shows, for equalities organisations, the competition between strands to get items on the agenda is justified as an expected consequence of a pluralist model of governance. However, the competition within strands to be seen as the one representative is perceived by interviewees as much more divisive. The divisive nature is illustrated by this quote: *‘It’s basically Game of Thrones, but with the TSPC’* (Participant 8, Equalities Organisation). From an institutionalist perspective, the latter form of competition is a consequence of the formal institutional structure of the Partnership, which laid the foundation for one equalities organisation per identity category, and this was then perceived to underpin the Welsh Government funding criteria. Furthermore, the consequence of organisations within one strand being unable to work

together was that it constrained collaboration for the promotion of intra-categorical intersectionality.

Thus far, we have examined how formal and informal institutional factors shaped the interrelationships of the equalities third sector and therefore their potential for intersectional practices. However, in order to fully explore how the equalities sector was shaped by the Partnership, it is important to also consider how the institution of the Partnership impacted on different equalities categories in different ways. Attention is now turned to this.

## **7.2. Exploring the hierarchy of (in)equalities in the Partnership**

### **7.2.1. Formal institutional structures shaping an equalities hierarchy**

Recognising how the institutional structures of the Partnership shape inter-organisational relationships requires consideration of the equalities literature on the hierarchy of (in)equalities. In this, certain equalities groups “fare better than others” in the allocation of resources (Nott 2005:124), or in the attention and support they garner from politicians (Verloo 2006; Hancock 2007). Thus, it is important to ask who has “ownership” over the equalities policy agenda and which equality demands are rejected (Engeli and Mazur 2018:119). Where feminist institutionalists seek to identify how gendered power relations are constructed or maintained by institutions (Mackay et al. 2010; Mackay and Krook 2011), this broader analysis of equalities allows an examination of the power relations between equalities categories by institutions.

Notwithstanding this aim, interviewees tended to shy away from identifying the most influential equalities organisations within the Partnership, replying with answers like *‘It’s difficult to say’* (Participant 37, Equalities Organisation) and *‘You will probably get a different answers from whoever you ask’* (Participant 22, Welsh Government). Krizsan et al. (2012b) claim gender and ‘race’ are typically privileged in the hierarchy of (in)equalities across Europe. Certainly, the most recent equalities policy to

emerge from Welsh Government during the time of data collection was the commitment towards becoming a Feminist Government, which then precipitated the current Welsh Gender Rapid Review (Davies et al. 2018; Davies and Furlong 2019) (see Section 6.1.2). This policy development was external to the Partnership. Yet, there may be potential for this to filter through to the Partnership and fuel the perception of gender as being privileged by government in the hierarchy of (in)equalities. However, there was no evidence of this at the time of the interviews. Given the constructionist nature of this study, interviewees' failure to identify equalities organisations in an advantaged position in the Partnership makes it difficult to consider whether any equalities identity strands do have a privileged position. However, one equalities strand was clearly identified as disadvantaged in the discourses about the Partnership, as shall be shown.

The above analysis demonstrated how the formal Partnership structure was perceived to underpin the Welsh Government funding decisions, thereby generating animosity between organisations (Section 7.1.3). According to the policy actors' interviews, the equalities organisations that were impacted most directly by this were the 'race' equality organisations. As this official described: *'there has been quite a lot of disharmony between BME organisations'* (Participant 19, Welsh Government). There are *'historical reasons'* why 'race' representation has been particularly contentious (Participant 21, Welsh Government) and, although pre-dating the period of study, this historical context refers to when the mantle of representation had passed from *'the Black Voluntary Sector Network Wales'*, to a *'Communities First... umbrella body'* And then *'the All Wales Ethnic Minorities Association' (AWEMA)* (Participant 6, WCVA). The latter organisation became discredited for management impropriety, which led to a vacuum that needed to be filled. However, subsequently, Welsh Government funding for a lead 'race' representative is cited by multiple policy actors as the cause of considerable tension between 'race' equality organisations. This triggered some resentment from other equalities organisations towards them, as described here: *'Some of the equality*

*meetings will get over-dominated by BME issues... BME groups want everything to be funded for BME'* (Participant 40, Equalities Organisation). This excerpt reveals the resentment from other equalities organisations towards the way 'race' equality organisations' funding dominated the agenda. Thus, the hierarchy of (in)equalities is inextricably linked to the allocation of resources. In the early days of devolution, research had shown the need for ethnic minorities organisations in Wales to collaborate and identify as a community of interest (Williams and Chaney 2001). Here, the challenge to present a unified voice of the 'race' equality organisations was made so much greater because they also needed to overcome these inter-organisational tensions, born out of two decades of competing for this role.

Despite these discourses on 'race' equality organisations' position, there was a tendency amongst WCVA interviewees to maintain there was equality between equality representatives. This is evidenced here: *'I don't think anybody feels that they deserve or need to try and have a louder voice... I think there is just that overall understanding that, there isn't a first among equals in that space'* (Participant 4, WCVA). This participant invokes the equal opportunity principle in collective decision-making, which can be traced back to Rousseau's notion of liberty (Dean 2017). However, inherent in this claim is the assumption of equal treatment, whereby all identity categories are treated neutrally. This neglects the potential structural inequality between the identity categories. Krizsan et al. (2012b:210) identified how the failure to level out inequality across strands has resulted in "the creation, recreation or maintenance of hierarchies between inequalities". Here, we can see how this led to 'race' equality organisations' being disadvantaged. This opens up the institution to the criticism of reinforcing power asymmetry (Jacklin-Jarvis 2015), where even institutional structures designed to be inclusive and empowering will "reproduce the inequalities they seek to overcome" (Davies 2007:796). Feminist institutionalists have similarly highlighted that institutions that purport to be "neutral" perpetuate inequalities (Minto and Mergaert 2018:208). The norm of neutrality is recognised as entrenched in certain institutional

settings (Minto and Mergaert 2018). It can result in “colour-blind intersectionality”, where the claim of neutrality serves to give attention to the privileged intersectionalities (Cho et al. 2013:802). Intersectionality theorists argue a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate (Verloo 2006; Hankivsky and Cormier 2011). Applied to the Partnership this assumption of equality between strands reflects a failure to address structural inequality stemming from the institutional design of the Partnership.

Thus, its formal structures have led to competition to become the recognised representative for Welsh Government, not only in the Partnership but in the wider sphere of Welsh Government-funded programmes too and this has particularly disadvantaged ‘race’ equality organisations. The final analysis of this chapter moves from the formal structures to examining how informal institutional norms and discourses of the Partnership impact on the equalities third sector.

### **7.2.2. Informal institutional factors shaping the equalities hierarchy**

As shall be shown, ‘race’ equality organisations were also disadvantaged by the informal institutional norms and discourses of the Partnership. Policy actors across Welsh Government, WCVA and other equalities third sector organisations repeatedly alluded to the tensions amongst ‘race’ equality organisations. Some felt that this made them far from ideal as collaborative partners, as this quote reveals: *‘Race organisations, you get involved with at your peril to be honest’* (Participant 38, Equalities Organisation).

Chapman et al. (2010) have previously described how certain third sector representatives might be seen as ‘troublesome’ by public sector officials but here we see this labelling of ‘troublesome’ ‘race’ equality organisations could be reinforced by other equalities organisations as well. Where feminist institutionalism recognises discourses can marginalise or exclude gender representatives (Mackay and Krook 2011), here discourses of other Partnership actors, including the other equalities organisations, can marginalise or exclude ‘race’ equality organisations. This supports earlier findings by Krizsan et al. (2012b) that, in Britain particularly, ‘race’ equality

organisations have been in tension with other equality strands. Similarly, Hankivsky et al. (2019) found that in Wales, 'race' was not as strong as other equalities strands. As shown earlier, across the Partnership there is an informal institutional norm towards collaboration (Section 7.1.2.), but this finding suggests 'race' equality organisations were excluded from such collaborations, which could lead to further disadvantage.

There were other informal institutional norms of the Partnership that acted to disadvantage 'race' equality organisations. In Chapter Six, it was shown how the third sector has a developed set of informal tools for influencing Welsh Government policy which included both action repertoires (Section 6.2.1) and a display of qualities (Section 6.3.2). It has been shown that a display of professionalism dominated the account of the qualities that organisations should display. One interviewee observed how this expectation has been imposed on 'race' equality organisations by the Partnership, as seen below:

*There has always been excuses as to why it's not working from the Welsh Government perspective. They've even made excuses like 'oh, people leave their mobile phones on' and 'we don't really think that this is being done professionally'... You know, silly feedback... They probably don't think that they (race equality representatives) are professional enough to be able to engage at that level. It is snobbery really. "We only want the professional organisations that know how to sit around a table and conduct themselves in front of very important people."*  
(Participant 30, Equalities Organisation)

This account reveals a conflation of accounts of professionalism with good behaviour. The association of professionalism and good behaviour was consistently made, whereby representatives were required to be '*polite and reasonable*' (Participant 32, Equalities Organisation), whilst making reference to behaviour to be avoided. Examples included, '*Don't be rude to the Minister*' (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation) and avoid '*colouring your reputation in ministerial eyes*' (Participant 21, Welsh Government). Officials expanded on this with accounts of inappropriate behaviour from the past such as '*Halfway through the meeting one of the third sector people came into the room... pulled up a seat at the table, brought out a*

*laptop... and just busily started typing'* (Participant 15, Welsh Government). Another official described *'anecdotes about people not just having their phone ringing during a ministerial meeting, but actually answering the phone and having a chat with somebody'* (Participant 16, Welsh Government). These officials' accounts did not identify a particular group of organisations but attributed such behaviours to the third sector more generally. However, the account from the 'race' equality organisation above indicates the impact on an organisation who interpreted such criticisms of their behaviour as being specifically directed at 'race' equality organisations. It exposes the damage that this expectation has done to the 'race' equality organisations' perception of Welsh Government.

One organisation from within the 'race' equality sector felt that this scrutiny of 'race' equality organisations' behaviour stretched back to the historic scandal of management impropriety (discussed in Section 7.2.1), as explained here:

*The sadness for many people was that organisations pulled back from a lot of 'race' equality. And we sensed that we were punished for being BME-led... Everywhere we went, people were like 'You've got to see [good] governance.' 'You've got to check accountability.' ... and you just get this patronising sense of 'Prove you're trustworthy'... It's shocking. And I think it's institutional racism actually.* (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation)

This interviewee relates scrutiny of professional practices to charitable scandals and a loss of trust in the sector. According to Zimmer and Pahl (2018), the questioning of professionalism within the third sector is a contemporary feature of the UK media. Notably, charity scandals were dominating the headlines at the time of the interviews. As this participant stated: *'One organisation that hits the press for the wrong reason can impact on so many other organisations... The most recent of all is obviously the Oxfam issue... As a government, that then reflects [on] future policy... We need reassurance that that's not going to happen again'* (Participant 18, Welsh Government). The third sector literature has previously identified discourses about a faltering trust in the sector (Milbourne and

Cushman 2013; Milbourne and Murray 2017; Aiken and Taylor 2019), and it has been suggested it must therefore be “policed” by the government (Young 2000:156). Scholars’ accounts of this faltering trust in the third sector and its professionalism generally attribute it to the third sector as a whole. However, the above interviewee demonstrates some ‘race’ equality organisations perceived this lack of trust in organisational management was directed at them and was evidence of institutional racism.

Another set of qualities that third sector representatives should display, which WCVA interviewees identified, was the importance of showing brevity and clarity, and ensuring all claims are evidenced-based (Section 6.3.2). This expectation was deemed problematic by this ‘race’ equality representative:

*[Welsh Government] don't tend to want to know about how passionate you are about a topic. <laughs> They just want a bog-standard presentation that is clean cut and is very clinical in a sense. Not too much effusive, passionate, sweating, and preaching. They just want to hit the nail on the head... When you're dealing with people from diverse backgrounds, we express ourselves differently and I think there has to be a freshness in the way that Welsh Government come to the table with ethnic minority groups. Not to impose their style of working but to open their doors and hear grassroots voices.*  
(Participant 34, Equalities Organisation)

Again, this account demonstrates Welsh Government’s expectation on third sector organisations to adopt specific qualities has the potential to structurally discriminate against ‘race’ equality organisations. Notably, this interviewee linked this to grassroots voices. (How this links with Chapter Five’s analysis of participatory democracy will be addressed in Chapter Nine.) This finding should be compared with feminist theorists’ accounts of the tendency to see male behaviour and interests as the norm (Celis and Lovenduski 2018), which thereby shape the way behaviours are valued (Krook and Mackay 2011). Squires (2005:369) calls for an analysis of the ways institutions privilege these particular norms. This finding exposes a related obstacle for ‘race’ equality organisations, in which the way they

were expected to communicate and evidence their claims has cultural discrimination underpinning it.

Turning attention from informal qualities displayed to informal actions, as we saw in Chapter Six, an action adopted by the equalities organisations to influence policy was to develop informal relationships with Welsh Government ministers and officials (Section 6.2.1). However, there was one interviewee from a 'race' equality organisation who expressed great discomfort at the notion of developing such informal relationships:

*I don't like this highly personalised approach where it's all about just getting that minister to agree with you... You can see that people are playing that game. And sometimes I think we should be playing that game, but I don't really want to. It's not something that we do naturally. But people do cosy up to ministers and politicians a lot... It all seems a very elitist exercise... and all this positioning and posturing... It just seems very anti-democratic to me. You're not meant to be just sucking up to powerful people. (Participant 33, Equalities Organisation)*

This participant's discomfort with developing informal relationships as part of its action repertoire is echoed in literature about informal politics that assumes such practices are unfair, corrupt (Fukui 2000) or undemocratic (Chaney 2015b). However, as has been shown, other policy actors across Welsh Government, WCVA and equality organisations all viewed it as an acceptable influencing tool (see Section 6.2.1). Therefore, yet again, this 'race' equality organisation was disadvantaged because it was not adopting claims-making tools that other equality organisations were successfully deploying. Feminist theorists referred to the homosocial capital that is born out of interpersonal relationships (Celis and Lovenduski 2018). Though they were describing gender inequality, these concepts apply here to other equality organisations ability to build informal relationships. Here, it is the 'race' equality organisations that lacked the opportunity to build these informal interpersonal relations. Celis and Lovenduski (2018:158) warn against the "demonization" of these interpersonal relationships as a conspiracy to exclude because exclusion is not "intentional". The interviewee above revealed it was her own discomfort with informal relationships that prevented her from pursuing them, rather than exclusion

being imposed on them. Although, it may not be intentional, those that did use informal relationships would have an advantage in influencing policy.

There has been an indication of inequalities between different equalities organisations, particularly those that had informal relationships in devolved government in the early days of devolution (Chaney and Fevre 2001a; Chaney 2007). These instances of exclusion from informal claims-making against the 'race' equality organisations, evidence that this disadvantage still continues. This can be seen as a form of political intersectionality, in that 'race' equality organisations are seen to be marginalised by other equalities organisations' political strategies. Political intersectionality is frequently neglected in accounts of intersectionality (Verloo 2006), so this example is a valuable contribution to intersectionality theory. Mansbridge (1999:638) described how institutional norms and expectations can lead to those who do not conform being "perceived as deviant or lesser beings" so that they "cannot function as well in the structures designed for the members of the dominant group". This notion of deviant representatives explains the connection between how these informal institutional norms disadvantage 'race' equality organisations, and the earlier account of how 'race' equality organisations were perceived by government officials and other equalities organisations.

### **7.3. Conclusion**

In the foregoing discussion we have used a feminist institutionalist lens to explore how the formal institutional structure and informal institutional discourses of the Partnership have shaped the equalities third sector with respect to their inter-organisational relations and the promotion and/or frustration of equalities. The focus on intersectionality practices revealed that representatives for intersectionality, class and geographical territories were neglected. Formal structures and informal discourses of the institution were shown to inhibit all three of McCall's forms of intersectionality (anti-categorical, inter-categorical and intra-categorical).

Institutional discourses revealed failings across the interviewees in the understanding of structural and political intersectionality. Collectively, these findings contribute to answering the overarching research question by revealing how the advancement of intersectionality is frustrated by the Partnership. Although collaboration was identified as a chosen part of the action repertoire of equalities organisations, the drive for a unified voice imposed institutional restrictions on the sector. Furthermore, the within-strand competition to be the sole representative for an equalities category embedded in formal and informal institutional expectations, was found to be much more damaging for inter-organisational relationships than the accounts of pluralist competition for agenda items between strands. The one strand demonstrably disadvantaged in the Partnership was that representing 'race' equality. Institutional factors led to intra-strand tensions which resulted in the tarnishing of their reputation as the deviant case in the equalities portfolio and undermined their trust in Partnering with Welsh Government. Furthermore, 'race' equality organisations have not adopted the claims-making strategies that other equalities organisations have applied in their policy-influencing. Thus, informal institutional practices adopted within the institution of the Partnership by other equalities organisations have disadvantaged 'race' equality organisations, which should be recognised as a form of political intersectionality. Here, the feminist institutionalist analysis has been broadened to this wider perspective to identify how the institutional structures of the Partnership disadvantaged 'race' equality organisations. The recognition that one equalities strand can be disadvantaged and therefore, that the advancement of equalities can be markedly uneven also contributes towards the overarching research question.

Where this chapter was concerned with the impact of the Partnership on the equalities third sector, this institutionalist lens is now turned back on the Partnership itself to explore issues of efficacy, agency and change.

## 8. Perspectives on efficacy, agency and change in the Partnership

### Introduction

This chapter answers the research question: *What are policy actors' perspectives on efficacy, agency and change in the third sector-government partnership?* The chapter examines efficacy in the first part and agency in the second. There are several ways it seeks to understand efficacy. It begins by considering Partnership efficacy in achieving equalities policy change and is therefore concerned with advancing equalities beyond the Partnership. It then examines efficacy of institutional processes for third sector participation and thereby, it addresses the equality of opportunity for organisations to participate within the Partnership. In both cases, the constructionist approach of this study requires an analysis of discursive accounts of efficacy (Schmidt 2008). This emphasises interpretation over empirical certainty (Suchman 1995; McConnell 2010). It then addresses the Partnership's ability to change in response to any perceived efficacy failings. In doing so, this chapter draws on endogenous accounts of institutional change, whereby the impetus for change originates internally within the institution. Thus, it builds on Hay's (1999) account to consider the extent endogenous change was perceived to take place. It also makes use of incremental accounts of change, often found in feminist institutionalism (Mackay et al. 2010; Mackay 2011; Mackay and Krook 2011; Celis and Lovenduski 2018; Minto and Mergaert 2018), to explore the degree institutional change took place in the Partnership during the period studied. The focus on agency in this chapter is a response to theorists' calls for institutionalism to address the role agency plays in institutional change (Hay and Wincott 1998; Wincott 2004b; Bogason 2008; Peters 2008; Pierre et al. 2008; Schmidt 2008; Mackay and Krook 2011). The chapter's second part analyses agency and begins by drawing on agenda-setting theory to scrutinise the extent policy actors in the state and the third sector played a part in setting the Partnership's policy agenda. It continues by applying the agency lens to notions of institutional learning

(March and Olsen 1984; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Hay and Wincott 1998), to understand policy actors' roles in instigating or inhibiting institutional change. The relevant literature of the above was detailed fully in Chapter Two (Section 2.5).

The contribution this chapter makes to the overarching research question is as follows: the analysis of the efficacy of the Partnership to achieve equalities policy change allows detailed consideration of the advancement of equalities through the Partnership to exert change beyond it. The analysis of the Partnership's efficacy to have fair and equal participation of the third sector within it allows scrutiny of the achievement of equality within the Partnership's mechanisms. The examination of the locus of agency in setting the policy agenda of the partnership leads to an assessment of how this agency promotes or constrains equality matters through the institutions of the Partnership. Moreover, it is the analysis of the Partnership's ability to change and the role of agency within this where the feminist institutionalist perspective reveals its strength fully as an analytical tool: the feminist institutionalist understanding of resistance to change allows scrutiny of how agency figures in the prevention of institutional change, which in turn reveals how the advancement of equalities can be frustrated.

Thus, this chapter starts by analysing policy actors' accounts of Partnership efficacy in achieving equalities policy change, institutional processes and the ability of the Partnership to adopt change in order to improve efficacy. It then relates this to an analysis of agency in the Partnership in the context of the agenda-setting processes. It progresses to apply an agency perspective on the formal and informal institutional learning mechanisms. It concludes with a scrutiny of the informal institutional factors inhibiting change, again relating this back to agency. This chapter will reveal interviewees' perceptions of failings in the Partnership, both as a vehicle of equalities policy change and in the equality of its processes, and how these factors are countered by institutional discourses about the Partnership's

value. It will also demonstrate how attempts to adapt the Partnership have faltered. This chapter also provides new insights on factors that inhibit institutional change through its examination of agency with respect to the third sector, WCVA and Welsh Government.

## **8.1. Efficacy in the institution of the Partnership**

### **8.1.1. Efficacy in policy change and processes**

When participants were asked to describe the overall impact of the Partnership on policymaking they tended to question *'whether it's as effective as it could be'* (Participant 20, Welsh Government). Both WCVA and the third sector interviewees commonly stated it did not *'seem to have much impact or make much difference'* (Participant 33, Equalities Organisation) or *'have any demonstrable outcomes'* (Participant 6, WCVA). Accounts of Partnership meetings described the efficacy failure in equalities policy change, as seen here: *'I'm not sure how effective they are to be honest'* (Participant 31, Equalities Organisation) and *'I'm really not sure what it achieves'* (Participant 32, Equalities Organisation). Generally, third sector equalities representatives felt the Partnership did not create *'a huge amount of change'* (Participant 37, Equalities Organisation).

Applying our feminist institutionalist lens, this finding reveals a perceived failing in the Partnership's efficacy to achieve policy change that advances equalities beyond the Partnership setting. McConnell's (2010:354) account of efficacy of policy programmes provides a scale from success to failure, where failure is characterised by a *'failure to achieve desired outcomes'*. On first reading, interviewees' accounts of the Partnership resonate with this account of the failure end of the scale. However, these findings seem contrary to the extensive examples of equalities policy outcomes described in Chapter Six (Section 6.1.1). The apparent dissonance can be explained by use of multiple venues by the equalities organisations, in which the Partnership was just one of the policy-influencing venues (detailed in Section 6.2.2, Figure 6-1). The use of these multiple governance venues to press equalities claims made it hard to ascertain the extent to which policy

changes could be credited to the Partnership. Moreover, the Partnership was used by the equalities third sector not just to make policy claims but also to achieve positioning and sustain both formal and informal relations with government (as shown in Section 6.2.2). These informal activities would have more nuanced outputs that sit outside of demonstrable policy outputs. This underlines that the Partnership needs to be understood in terms of the multiplicity of functions that it performs. For both these reasons, direct policy outputs attributable to the Partnership had limited value as a means to assess the Partnership's efficacy.

Furthermore, both Welsh Government and third sector interviewees attributed an intrinsic symbolic value of the '*formalised relationship*' (Participant 4, WCVA), which forms the '*official engagement*' of the third sector by Welsh Government (Participant 18, Welsh Government). This was irrespective of evidencing its policymaking efficacy, as seen in the excerpt below:

*'There is always going to be a mixture of symbolic value and practical value... it's important always to recognise and respect the value of both parts of the equation... It will always have a bit of a symbolic role, quite aside from what good it does or what it achieves... So, it's always important with things that have that symbolic value to have a practical value as well... I think Wales is looked on in admiration.'* (Participant 16, Welsh Government)

Thus, the symbolic value of the Partnership was viewed by some policy actors to be as important as any demonstrable measures of efficacy in policy outputs, when assessing the Partnership's value. Furthermore, the intrinsic value was centred on how the Partnership is '*unique to Wales*' (Participant 6, WCVA), as is illustrated here:

*'We do have a huge advantage in Wales compared certainly to the UK level. But my colleagues in Scotland say, even at Scottish level where they have pretty good access, we are really really lucky.'* (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation)

These accounts are typical of the cherishing of the statutory Partnership that affords the third sector a close relationship with Welsh Government. This appreciation of the Partnership was voiced across the spectrum of the

sample. It served as a counterweight to any criticisms directed at the Partnership's efficacy and calls into question this binary notion of efficacy success and failure in policymaking.

Having considered perceptions of efficacy in policy change, attention now turns to interviewees' accounts of efficacy of the institutional processes in the Partnership. This shift in focus responds to the work of McConnell (2010). He argues efficacy of governance networks, focussing on their processes and capacity to engage stakeholders, is as valid a measure of successful policymaking as achieving policy change outcomes. Accordingly, the efficacy of the Partnership processes for third sector participation is considered, and from a feminist institutionalist perspective, particular attention is given to equality of opportunity to participate. As was shown in Chapter Five (see Section 5.2.1), policy actors' accounts of third sector participation revealed that they felt smaller, grassroots organisations were disadvantaged in accessing the Partnership. However, this feminist institutionalist approach is taken further here by scrutinising the institution's formal structures and informal processes. This scrutiny can be used to understand how these inequalities arise in the third sector organisations' ability to participate.

We start with considering how organisations came to be the lead representative organisation on the Partnership. Policy actors' accounts of the Partnership consistently claimed representation was achieved through 'elections'. For example, Welsh Government interviewees described the necessity of '*a healthy democratic, representative process*' (Participant 20, Welsh Government). Such a call for a democratic procedure was also alluded to by Avritzer (2008:460), who claimed legitimacy of a civil society organisation to represent other civil society organisations is founded on being chosen by civil society actors. Two WCVA accounts detailed the elections:

*It's basically any WCVA member can vote... Elections are every two years... there has only been one where it has been contested... there are only a few categories that have ever*

*changed networks... None of [the organisations] have changed, or very little since I've been doing it. (Participant 7, WCVA)*

*The level of engagement [turnout] that we get in the elections... is very, very low... All you need is probably a handful of nominations from your peers... We hold up that these are elected representatives but not many people elect them. (Participant 6, WCVA)*

These excerpts expose a flawed election process, in which representatives rarely changed and participation rates were low. WCVA interviewees claimed that their formal process involved nominations, whereby any competition would be resolved with a vote. However, the vast majority of elections appear to be uncontested. Accounts of the one scenario when a competition took place, revealed that the WCVA informally intervened to *'broker a mutually agreeable solution'* and led to an *'alliance'* between two organisations, which then *'split up the portfolios between them'* (Participant 6, WCVA). Consequently, WCVA did not invoke any formal voting process to resolve this case of competition. Moreover, as has already been shown, our analysis of the types of networks found in the Partnership (summarised in Figure 5.1) revealed an inconsistency in the election practices between the networks. Some networks would have their own election process to select their Partnership representative, which is described below:

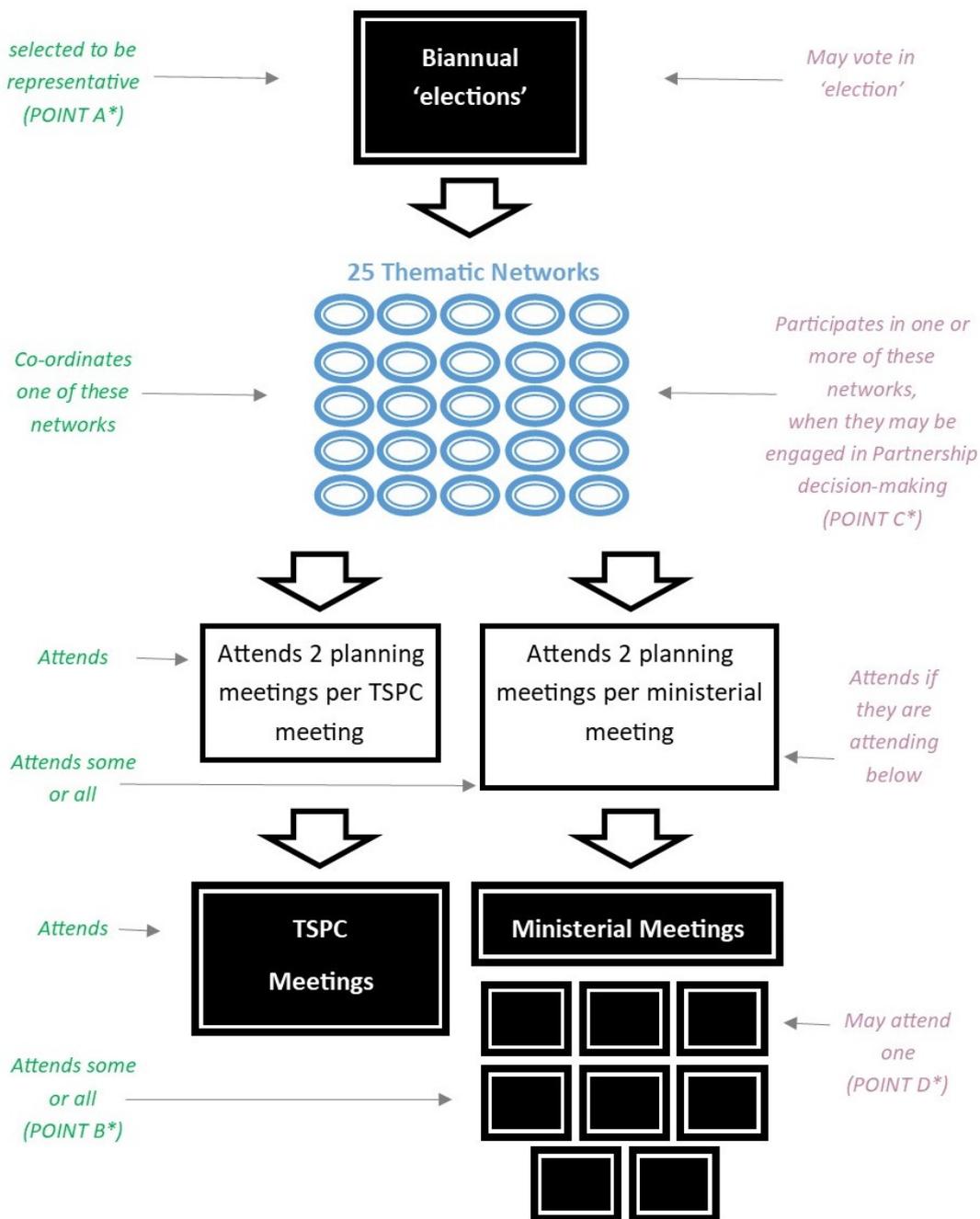
*To be the lead representative on TSPC forum for [our network], every two years there is a reselection process, so of course that's a matter for the [network], not a matter for us to decide whether they re-elect us each time. (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation)*

This reflects networks that elected their representatives. However, other Partnership networks did not use elections because the lead organisation was the network, as discussed earlier (Section 5.1.2). Viewing these inconsistencies collectively highlights a failure in equality of opportunity for third sector organisations to become a representative organisation on the Partnership.

However, scrutiny of third sector organisations' opportunity for participation in the Partnership extends beyond the election procedures. Policy actors' accounts also revealed variations in third sector organisations' participation in the Partnership. These are shown in Figure 8-1, which illustrates the different stages of the Partnership processes (central column). This shows that the opportunity to engage ranged from participation as a TSPC representative (left column) to being a network member (right column). Interviewees' accounts revealed the opportunity to participate varied at multiple points in these different levels of engagement (Points A-D, detailed below).

As shown, the Partnership election procedures were inconsistent. Additionally, WCVA's institutional rules created inequality of opportunities for participation (Figure 8-1, Point A). Examples included requiring organisations to have a national rather than a regional remit; and requiring attendance at planning meetings which had the effect of limiting participation to those organisations with sufficient capacity to do so. It also tended to render representation as '*Cardiff-centric*' (Participant 8, Equalities organisation), although WCVA did allow for video conference attendees to participate through their North Wales office.

Furthermore, even where an organisation was a representative body, some informal aspects of the Partnership processes would restrict their participation (Figure 8-1, Point B). For example, the number of ministerial meetings that equalities representatives attended also depended on their resources, so some organisations lacked '*capacity*' (Participant 26, Equalities Organisation). There were also inconsistencies in the networks access to ministers, as explained by this participant: '*There's only 6 or 7 planning groups and sometimes that will be one network and sometimes that will be a whole collection of networks*' (Participant 3, WCVA). Thus, some ministerial portfolios only related to the work of one Partnership network (e.g., the '*Health Social Care and Wellbeing*' themed network met the Minister for Health and Social Services). Yet, other ministerial portfolios



\* denotes where opportunity to engage can vary for third sector organisations

Figure 8-1 How third sector organisations engage with Partnership processes

were relevant to many networks, (e.g., interviewees reported that the networks themed 'Children and Families', 'Disability', 'Religion', 'Ethnic Minorities', and 'Sexuality' all met the Education Minister). These factors

played a significant part in the variability of opportunities for Partnership representatives to participate.

There were also inconsistent opportunities for network members to engage in the Partnership's decision-making via the networks (Figure 8-1, Point C). As this participant described, *'It seems to be that [the networks] all do different things... There doesn't seem to be a lot of consistency'* (Participant 8, Equalities Organisation). Some network members were not given the opportunity to contribute through their network, and some third sector organisations did not *'even know that they can influence'* by joining a network' (Participant 28, Equalities Organisation). Interviewees' accounts described network leads not having enough resources to recruit the organisations entitled to be network members. Moreover, some lead organisations ceased to exist due to funding crises, as described here: *'These networks are disappearing unfortunately'* (Participant 11, WCVA). Other organisations chose to stop serving as a representative body on the Partnership, because, as they explained *'We find a direct relationship with government more fruitful'* (Participant 35, Equalities Organisation). Third sector organisations choosing not to engage or withdrawing from governance mechanisms has been recognised by other authors (Grant 2000; Newman 2001; Casey 2004; Buckingham 2012; Jacklin-Jarvis 2015). However, this present analysis recognises this also removes the opportunity the network's members had to participate in the Partnership.

A different inconsistency was also evident in the accounts of who could attend Ministerial Meetings, as this participant explained: *'We've always just said it doesn't have to be networks; it can be organisations'* (Participant 7, WCVA). WCVA's own publications about the Partnership also stated that it was acceptable for other third sector organisations to attend Ministerial Meetings besides the TSPC representatives (WCVA 2015;2016). Thus, some non-lead organisations could attend Ministerial Meetings, but this informal backdoor access to the Partnership was only possible if they were invited to attend by WCVA (Figure 8-1, Point D). Comparison of WCVA accounts

revealed that this occurred sporadically. Collectively this shows a plethora of inequalities in the opportunity for third sector organisations to participate in the Partnership, either as direct representatives or network members. These inefficacies represent a failure to advance equalities through the Partnership from a feminist institutionalist perspective.

This efficacy failure in institutional processes should be related to extant literature. As was discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.2.3) there is a substantial body of work concerning whether organisations are succeeding in engaging their beneficiaries in a democratic manner (Taylor 2001; Casey 2004; Sørensen and Torfing 2005a; Royles 2007; Justice and Skelcher 2009; Martin 2011; Buckingham 2012; Rocha Valencia et al. 2015). Moreover, some studies discuss this in the context of third sector legitimacy to represent their members (for example, Kotzian and Steffek 2011). Yet such accounts tend to be applied to one third sector organisation, as opposed to wider reflection on membership engagement of partnerships consisting of a number of networks. The present analysis offers original scrutiny of a Partnership with multiple networks, and it recognises the complexity in the levels of third sector involvement to achieve efficacy in such representational processes.

Allied to this, McConnell's (2010:352) account of policy process efficacy provides a scale from success to failure, in which he describes 'precarious success', which is one step away from failure, whereby engagement mechanisms are on the cusp of failure. This resonates with the present study where interviewees' accounts of inequality of opportunity to participate in the Partnership align with such precarious assessments of institutional processes. Against this backdrop, attention now turns to how the efficacy of these processes relates to interviewee's accounts of institutional change.

### 8.1.2. Efficacy of institutional change

The literature on institutional learning is useful for understanding how failures in Partnership efficacy can be used to instigate institutional change. Dunlop (2017) describes the importance of learning from failure and learning to limit failure. Similarly, the present discussion now considers the extent to which the Partnership is perceived to learn and thus change in response to the efficacy failures identified above (as detailed in Section 8.1.1).

Interviewees cited many instances of institutional adaptations which provide clear evidence of incremental change in the Partnership. To better understand this, we can map such changes against March and Olsen's (1984:746) three types of institutional adaptation, that detail when an institution modifies its competencies, its strategy, or its aspirations.

In terms of modifying the Partnership's competencies, interviewees gave examples of adaptations. They referred to the formal '*induction training*' (Participant 8, Equalities Organisation) provided by WCVA to new representatives, which was seen to have '*minimised that embarrassment factor a bit because they told people how to behave to some extent*' (Participant 16, Welsh Government). Other interviewees referenced when WCVA provided '*influencing skills training*' (Participant 6, WCVA) to teach third sector representatives '*how to engage with Welsh Ministers*' (Participant 21, Welsh Government). This is an example of the Partnership providing third sector organisations with training in order to participate in governance structures. Moreover, beyond this formal training, Chapter Six has shown how third sector representatives developed sophisticated policy-influencing action repertoires. Interviewees' accounts also described planning meetings as creating an environment for peer learning, where third sector representatives learnt the rules of appropriateness about adhering to the institutional rules from their contemporaries, as described here: '*If anyone new joins that group, I think you learn by osmosis really... You kind of learn the ropes as you go*' (Participant 24, Equalities

Organisation). The cumulative impact of these formal and informal processes to improve institutional competency is a clear case of layering. Layering refers to the insertion of new rules and processes on top of existing rules and processes (Mackay 2011). Thus, through the Partnership the third sector developed their skills for influencing government, which accords with March and Olsen's (1984) account of adaptation in institutional competencies.

However, it should be noted that such adaptations to competencies were limited to *'[raising] the literacy of the sector on how they campaign'* (Participant 11, WCVA). As another interviewee explained: *'There's no training per se for Welsh officials in how to engage with the third sector'* (Participant 21, Welsh Government). Although there was some peer learning through the link officials' meetings, in which civil servants from different departments shared third sector updates, neither WCVA nor Welsh Government interviewees recognised the need for civil servants to develop their competencies. For example, one official stated: *'I don't know about officials. I suppose what I'm saying is I don't think formal training is it'* (Participant 19, Welsh Government). Furthermore, the notion of competency training for ministers was seen as preposterous by officials, as this participant showed: *'You wouldn't get ministers and cab secs [Cabinet Secretaries] going to that, I don't think... to be fair, they're very experienced politicians'* (Participant 19, Welsh Government). This illuminates how state protagonists in the Partnership, particularly ministers, could be afforded an infallible quality by interviewees which placed limitations on the Partnership's ability to modify their competencies. Training and education of state policy actors has long been recognised as an important tool in the arsenal of ensuring the adoption of equalities strategies by both feminist institutionalists (Minto and Mergaert 2018) and intersectionality theorists (Hankivsky et al. 2019). Their absence in the Partnership points to a key limitation in the likelihood of institutional change to secure greater efficacy. Ketola and Hughes (2018:208) observe that governments that used to promise to address power "asymmetries" are now more accepting

that they will exist between government and the third sector. The present study is further evidence of this acceptance.

March and Olsen's (1984:746) second adaptation was the concept of institutions 'modifying their strategy'. The most frequently cited example of this was the changes made to TSPC meeting formats. These used to be held as a *'big square meeting... with Ministers on one side of the room, officials along the back of it and ... the third sector element of it in a horseshoe'* (participant 21, Welsh Government). These were seen as flawed because they *'turned into these horrific set pieces'* (Participant 12 Welsh Government) where *'it was very staged'* (Participant 7, WCVA) *'with a very dry agenda and lots of people around the table wondering why they were there'* (Participant 29, Equalities Organisation). In response, the Partnership adapted by introducing *'event meetings'* for the TSPC, in which they had speakers and the third sector then sat *'around tables with Welsh Government officials and discuss[ed] a range of topics'* (Participant 7, WCVA). This could be viewed as another example of layering of new institutional processes, thus evidence of further incremental change. However, policy actors' interviews revealed they had *'two or three meetings [in this new format] at most, after which everybody becomes disillusioned'* (Participant 12, Welsh Government). These events were not seen to offer any *'actual outcomes'* (Participant 8, Equalities Organisation). Thus, the events-style meetings were rejected, and they reverted back to formal round-table meetings. This reveals an instance of institutional change introduced to address a failure in institutional process efficacy that did not address failures in policy change efficacy.

The inability to sustain this institutional change can be understood with respect to Hay's account of change (Hay 1999:328/329). He distinguished between 'reactive', 'unreflexive' adaptations within pre-existing unmodified structures and fundamental transformations in institutional forms that resolved systemic failures. This temporary change in TSPC

meeting formats can be viewed as an example of the former. Evidence for this is also provided in this participant's account:

*Probably we are chasing the wrong rabbit... We are all 'oh the structure doesn't work, so how can we make the structure better?' It's like, we can reinvent the structure, the format of the meetings, [but if] no-one values them, then we're not getting to the underlying issue. If no-one is resourced to do them justice, it doesn't matter. If no-one has the political will to challenge it and hold people to account, it doesn't matter.*

(Participant 9, WCVA)

This participant identified the fundamental change that was needed was in the Welsh Government's attitudes towards the Partnership. This relates to March and Olsen's (1984:746) third instance of institutional adaptation; namely modifying institutional aspirations.

If the institution of the Partnership were able to instigate change in the government's attitudes towards the Partnership, then it might achieve Hay's (1999) threshold for institutional change. Since it did not, then Hay (1999:330) offered us an account of the implication: he recognised that a series of unreflexive modifications could lead to the accumulation of unresolved issues forming a 'meta-narration' that eventually would lead to crisis. Such a crisis has yet to occur in the Partnership, but it is useful to consider evidence of this meta-narrative. Notwithstanding the foregoing accounts of institutional incremental adaptations, the interview data revealed the Partnership was not considered able to change, as seen here: *'In terms of the third sector Partnership stuff, that feels like it's not really changed over time'* (Participant 37, Equalities Organisation). The Partnership's processes were perceived to be the same as when they were set up. This account sits well with the literature on historical institutionalism, whereby processes developed at the outset are sustained by paths of dependency (Schmidt 2008; Krook and Mackay 2011; Peters 2012).

Historical institutionalists suggest that conditions under which institutional change can occur require 'a critical juncture' created by an event (Hill

1997). However, as one participant described *'we've never really had that catalyst for change'* (Participant 6, WCVA), so the critical juncture had not occurred. Nevertheless, interviewees described a catalogue of efficacy failures, akin to Hay's (1999) conception of accumulation of systemic failure. Hay (1999:324) recognised that failure in a system was not sufficient, and that change required the perception of failure, so that it had *'become politically and ideationally mediated'*. This WCVA participant was hopeful that a threshold for change had been met: *'the mood music is we have to do something... there is a groundswell... this could be the time to do something differently'* (Participant 6, WCVA). This account suggested a tipping point was being approached. It should be noted that the term *'tipping point'* used here is different from that identified by Hay (1999:325). He envisaged a tipping point as the decisive moment that a minor intervention in a series of incremental changes leads to transformation. However, the tipping point suggested by this case study is the decisive moment of transformation being reached as a result of an accumulation of failures. Insights from historical institutionalism have largely described the *'critical juncture'* resulting from an exogenous historical event that precipitated change. However, the notion of an accumulation of systemic failures here instead implies change precipitated endogenously within the institution. Notably, this case study does not present evidence that such a tipping point has been reached, but simply that policy actors hope it will be.

Thus far, we have considered efficacy with respect to policy change, institutional processes and institutional change. We now revisit these to explore the agency that underpins this.

## **8.2. Agency in policy change**

### **8.2.1. Third sector agency in the Partnership policy agenda**

The link between agency and the perception that the Partnership could do more to achieve policy change is captured in this excerpt: *'I don't think it's as successful as it could be. I'm not entirely convinced who's driving it'*

(Participant 27, Equalities Organisation). Thus, according to study participants, policy change is integrally linked to who drives the Partnership's agenda. We now explore this further with attention to how agency plays out in setting the Partnership's policy agenda. Agenda-setting theory does not refer to the literal agenda but is instead concerned with the priorities of government and other interests that form the policy discourse (Zahariadis 2016). This notwithstanding, the process of setting the Partnership meeting agendas can inform our understanding of how these priorities were established. This process is described in this excerpt below:

*We used to have a TSPC meeting. We'd have a date. We would have two planning meetings before that and the first planning meeting we'd agree what we wanted to raise and ... they'd come up with a paper. That would go out to the Minister. We'd have another meeting to discuss it, decide who was going to talk, and then it was very staged. We'd all sit around the table.*  
(Participant 7, WCVA)

Thus, the two planning meetings, which preceded Partnership meetings with Welsh Government ministers, gave the third sector the chance to set the agenda. Interviewees' accounts revealed that this process was used for all the TSPC and ministerial meetings of the Partnership. They described the agenda as coming '*more from the Third Sector*' (Participant 3, WCVA). This is consistent with the portrayal of the third sector-government relationship seen in the Third Sector Scheme, which emphasised how the Welsh Government "valued" the third sector and recognised their "crucial relationship" encapsulated in the Partnership (Welsh Government 2014a, s.2.4-2.5:8). Importantly, study participants tended to reject any suggestion that third sector agenda items were suppressed by Welsh Government, as evidenced here: '*I don't feel that if I wanted something on the agenda, I couldn't put it on the agenda*' (Participant 29, Equalities Organisation). Although, some interviewees recognised Welsh Government would add their: '*own agenda items*' (Participant 21, Welsh Government) or alternatively they could veto specific issues, as this participant described: '*We could come up with things but at the end of the day it could be dropped*' (Participant 8 Equalities Sector). However, Welsh Government

accounts presented such agenda controls as being in the third sector's interest, as this official stated: *'I don't want to curb their enthusiasm, but I've got to try and channel it for them'* (Participant 15, Welsh Government). Also, most Welsh Government interviewees claimed they seldom interfered with agenda items. For example, *'The third sector set the agenda and we just discuss what they want to discuss'* (Participant 13, Welsh Government) and *'in fairness I don't think I've ever seen a Cabinet Secretary or Minister come back and not want to discuss what the sector wants to discuss'* (Participant 18, Welsh Government). Thus, the majority of interviewees felt the third sector had relatively unfettered agenda-setting agency in the Partnership.

Such a view contrasts with the literature that describes state-steering of the third sector in such partnerships (Newman 2001; Davies 2007; Bristow et al. 2008; Chaney 2011; Acheson and Laforest 2013; Chaney 2015b). The state is commonly described as making the third sector a 'governable terrain' (Carmel and Harlock 2008; Chapman et al. 2010; Milbourne and Cushman 2013:491; Alcock 2016:99; Milbourne and Murray 2017). This stems back to the idea that the insider position is used to tame interest groups (Grant 2000:20). So, it is important to scrutinise this apparent anomaly in our findings.

Notably, notwithstanding these policy actors' accounts, there was a recurrent discourse that the Partnership was indeed unequal, and the third sector had less power, as is illustrated in these excerpts:

So, it is an unequal relationship.' (Participant 24, Equalities Organisation)

*'It's an unfortunate oxymoron in the Third Sector Partnership Council because although it's a Partnership it's not an equal Partnership.* (Participants 21, Welsh Government)

The third sector was perceived to not have parity with Welsh Government in the Partnership. This account of inequality can be better understood with scrutiny of policy actors' accounts of Welsh Government's agency in agenda-setting, which is now addressed.

### 8.2.2. Government agency in Partnership agenda-setting

Interviewees described Welsh Government as generally not participating actively in the agenda-setting, as seen here: *'The third sector has got lots of agenda items to present and we'll deal with all of those and we won't present any of our own'* (Participant 21, Welsh Government). Yet, the interviews revealed many facets to the Welsh Government's subtle non-participation in agenda-setting which applied both to ministers and civil servants.

WCVA interviewees described ministers in this way: *'Sometimes you get a Cabinet Secretary who isn't that interested in the sector'* (Participant 6, WCVA). They described ministers who *'saw it [the Partnership]... as a waste of their time'* (Participant 5, WCVA). Furthermore, others described how the time allowed for Partnership meetings by Ministers had diminished, as explained here: *'We used to have 1 ½ hours with ministers or cab secs [cabinet secretaries]. That has been squeezed and now we have an hour. Once we had Carl Sargent [former minister] offering us 30 minutes'* (Participant 9, WCVA). The shortness of time was cited as the reason for a limit on the number of agenda items and also why limits were put on third sector representative numbers at meetings. Additionally, there were accounts of ministers *'actively avoiding the meeting'* (Participant 5, WCVA) or saying upon arrival *'I've got to go'* (Participant 24, Equalities Organisation). Collectively, these accounts reflect a subtle level of some ministerial disengagement in the Partnership's agenda.

Of the civil servants, a regular criticism was that they were hard to engage between Partnership meetings, as seen here: *'Officials are really stand-offish. You may not hear from them for months'* (Participant 6, WCVA), and they have *'a lack of urgency. Sometimes, you just never get a response'* (Participant 9, WCVA). Furthermore, officials changed roles [i.e., moved departments within Welsh Government] frequently and this was a problem because *'you spend a good deal of time reintroducing the same things [to*

*their successors]*' (Participant 24, Equalities Organisation). There was also a perception that the officials involved were not senior enough to implement decisions on policy because *'it relies on quality officials with the right level of influence being able to get involved and that doesn't really happen'* (Participant 6, WCVA). Officials described how Partnership meetings were a very small part of the responsibilities of the ministers and officials, as described here: *'These [Partnership] roles are invariably fairly low down the job description of whoever's doing them'* (Participant 16, Welsh Government). Furthermore, policy actors described *'difficulties within Welsh Government of one department [not] talking to other departments'* (Participant 33, Equalities Organisation). This was also recognised by this official: *'they're not sharing across Welsh Government'* (Participant 18, Welsh Government). One example of this silo-working was the way that the Partnership was regarded as *'totally separate'* from the policy consultation process of any department (Participant 17, Welsh Government). As this WCVA interviewee noted: *'Welsh Government could do consultations a lot better... I'd love to see them coming to us with things that are particularly interesting for the sector'* (Participant 6, WCVA). To summarise, these accounts of both ministers and civil servant relationships with Partnership agenda-setting generally indicate insufficient interest, enthusiasm and personnel resources dedicated to the Partnership from some parts of government, as well as a lack of connection to wider Welsh Government activity.

When viewed collectively, these many facets of both ministerial and civil servant non-participation in the Partnership's agenda-setting process should be related to the earlier finding that Welsh Government tend to passively accept the agenda put forward by the third sector. Although the third sector had relative freedom to set the Partnership's policy priorities, this degree of state's non-participation could be viewed as an act of state-agency which devalues the Partnership itself. This view is supported by these interviewees' comments:

*I think the Ministers and the officials are there on sufferance and I think, if they could, they would knock these on the head.*  
(Participant 31, Equalities Organisation)

*I think some of the ministers over the years don't feel that the meetings are worth it, and that they're not getting enough out of it.* (Participant 7, WCVA)

*I'm not sure the extent to which the sector is valued. I've had conversations with [civil servants]... who've said to me, pretty much verbatim, 'what the hell do the third sector do for us?'*  
(Participant 20, Welsh Government)

These excerpts show how some government actors were perceived not to value the Partnership. This finding should be compared with extant theory on agenda-setting. It has identified inertia and apathy being used to control an agenda (Cobb et al. 1976), but in the present case its impact is greatest on the Partnership itself rather than the policy agenda. Thus, what we see is not the theory of non-decision-making being used to control an agenda (Bachrach and Baratz 1962), but rather a degree of government non-participation in agenda-setting devaluing the Partnership as a policymaking instrument. Bachrach and Baratz (1962:948) argued institutional practices were used to limit the scope of issues open to decision-making. In contrast, here, the many facets of subtle government non-participation found in the informal institutional discourses limited the Partnership's efficacy. Much of the literature would lead us to expect the state, as the more powerful partner, would be steering the agenda of this Partnership (Davies 2007; Carmel and Harlock 2008; Chapman et al. 2010; Milbourne and Cushman 2013; Alcock 2016; Milbourne and Murray 2017), but actually the absence of steering is itself an act of agency that exercises control over the Partnership. Such an analysis is comparable with similar accounts made by feminist institutionalists, who described how equalities strategies were undermined by making them the responsibility of policy actors who lacked expertise and resources and did not prioritise the strategy (Celis and Lovenduski 2018:151). Here, a similar resistance strategy was being used to undermine the Partnership. Klijn and Skelcher (2007:597) identified a

tendency for the state, even when it had initiated a governance structure, such as this Partnership, to be reluctant to implement policy changes proposed through these structures because they resist losing power to other actors. The present findings support this and offer an example of how such state resistance is enacted.

Although the foregoing suggests Welsh Government were not perceived to steer the Partnership agenda, consideration should be made of whether agency in agenda-setting is exercised by other policy actors. A different role in agenda-setting is considered below.

### **8.2.3. Gatekeepers and veto-players in the Partnership**

As this WCVA representative surmised, *'We are the gatekeepers too'* (Participant 9, WCVA). Therefore, agency in agenda-setting should also examine WCVA's role. WCVA policy actors frequently portrayed themselves as neutral enablers who brought Welsh Government and the third sector together, as seen here: *'I think a good meeting includes WCVA not saying anything... because our role is to facilitate... It's just about WCVA providing a platform and helping them shape an argument'* (Participant 5, WCVA). However, describing WCVA as helping the third sector to 'shape an argument' hints at a more significant steering role. We explore this in more depth below.

Interviewees' accounts revealed the criteria WCVA imposed on the agenda-setting process. These were extensively referenced but are well summarised by the following quotes:

*[We] always aim for two papers [policy briefing papers]... three, an absolute max.* (Participant 5, WCVA)

*The rep [TSPC representative] is there to communicate the views of their network's members on that topic, it's not for it to go: 'This is what my organisation thinks.* (Participant 3, WCVA)

*I work very much... on the principle of no surprises. (Participant 4, WCVA)*

*There is etiquette around rules that we apply strictly. If people haven't been involved in the planning group process, they're not allowed to attend the meetings with the minister. (Participants 6, WCVA)*

These four excerpts indicate the nature of WCVA's steering of the Partnership agenda. This steering included that the third sector were expected to present a "unified voice"; to limit the agenda to two or three priorities; these priorities had to be "cross-cutting" issues of relevance to all third sector organisations; these priorities had to be agreed in planning meetings and therefore contained "no surprises"; and third sector representatives had to have attended the planning meetings in order to attend the Partnership meeting with a minister. Interviewees consistently identified these as WCVA's 'formal' rules.

Revealingly, however, WCVA applied this final rule intermittently, as described here:

*I'm not applying the rule across the board and I'm the first to admit it because there are people who could come to a cab sec [Cabinet Secretary] meeting and aren't going to just bring up their own issues at the drop of a hat and are going to be able to contribute, and then there are other people who won't have attended the planning meeting but will want to come along at the last minute and stick a spanner in the works. (Participant 7, WCVA)*

This is an acknowledgement that the rule was selectively applied to weed out organisations not conforming with behavioural expectations of WCVA officials on adhering to the agreed agenda. The document analysis revealed these rules were neither contained in the original legislation (GOWA 1998, 2006) nor the subsequent Third Sector Schemes (Welsh Government 2004, 2014). However, policy actors' accounts showed little understanding of this, and consistently spoke of them as immutable 'formal' rules. From an institutionalist perspective, these are classic examples of layering in which an informal rule is layered on top of the 'formal' rules (Mackay 2011;

Peters 2012; Celis and Lovenduski 2018; Minto and Mergaert 2018). However, the degree of formality of any of these rules can be contested. This layering imposed by WCVA is evidence of its agency in institutional agenda-setting.

This is not to say Welsh Government were not also playing a part in this layering of rules. Similar accounts were given by Welsh Government interviewees that called for a *'united voice'* on *'sector-wide'* issues (Participant 20, Welsh Government) and ensuring *'there shouldn't be many surprises'* (Participant 21, Welsh Government). These mirror the earlier excerpts from WCVA interviewees above, but though these were expressed by Government officials, it was WCVA who enforced them, as a government minister explained:

*It was important that the third sector prepared well for these meetings and didn't just come up with the same old issues or complaints and so a lot of effort was put in by WCVA, who would support the third sector ... they were doing a lot of work to prepare the sector.* (Participant 25, Welsh Government Minister)

Thus, the responsibility for managing the sector's compliance with these expectations lay with WCVA. Furthermore, WCVA's control of the agenda-setting process was a response to a steer from Welsh Government, as is explained by this WCVA interviewee: *'It has to run smoothly because Welsh Government have complained about that in the past'* (Participant 7, WCVA). This notion of a government steer was also expressed by another WCVA representative: *'there was quite a strong steer from the Third Sector Unit ... And [that] steer was...: 'we need to be bringing issues, a small number of issues to the Cab Sec and Ministers that have relevance across a range of organisations and not just one', so we've really followed that closely'* (Participant 6, WCVA). This exposes how WCVA were the agents enacting state-steering from Welsh Government.

This example of how the national third sector body acted as a surrogate for state-steering must be understood with respect to theory. It reveals Welsh Government were the underlying *'institutional architects'* of these layered

rules: a term coined by Hay and Wincott (1998). Although the state had overall control of the mechanisms, thereby maintaining their role as 'meta-governors', they employed managers to undertake the implementation (Klijn and Skelcher 2007:604). In this present case study, these managers were WCVA staff who therefore carried the agency for both institutional processes and consequently also the policy agenda. It is therefore proposed that WCVA plays a proxy role in imposing governmentality. The theory of governmentality postulates that policy development processes may seem neutral and founded on rationality but are highly political acts that embed hegemonic powers, where the hegemonic state powers are masked as managerialist strategies (Milbourne and Cushman 2015). The present findings reveal WCVA's role as an agent of such governmentality.

Against this backdrop, WCVA policy actors expressed concern about the negative consequences that this steering role had on their organisation. Additionally, WCVA interviewees viewed the extensive meeting planning process as a burden, as this excerpt describes: *'all we see is a massive drain on our resources from making the wheels of bureaucracy turn, to no end'* (Participant 6, WCVA). WCVA interviewees recognised agenda-setting processes were compromised when resources were stretched, as stated here, when this interviewee described an imminent Partnership meeting: *'The problem is... really we should have nailed the agenda... and I haven't had time... It's just the sheer volume of it all'* (Participant 11, WCVA). This was explained further by this WCVA employee: *'Each of the cabinet secretary meetings was run by dedicated policy officer within WCVA. Now they're not... Because we've had the best part of approaching 40%, in real terms, of our budget disappear'* (Participant 5, WCVA).

In addition to the resource cost, there was the added concern about the cost to WCVA's reputation. Welsh Government participants frequently described the meeting's value was diminished by this management, as seen here: *'I think, TSPC, we know, doesn't particularly work... They tend to be set piece meetings'* (Participant 19, Welsh Government). This accusation

that the meetings are *'very structured'* (Participant 37, Equalities Organisation), was a recurrent theme across the spectrum of interviews. Partnership meetings were also criticised for being *'too rigid, it's almost scripted'* (Participant 6, WCVA), rather than offering *'a useful discussion'* (Participant 22, Welsh Government). Policy actors partly attributed this to the two planning meetings and a pre-meeting which occurred on the same day as ministerial meeting to decide *'who is going to say this and who is going to do that'* (Participant 37, Equalities Organisation).

WCVA managers were concerned that these factors combined to damage WCVA, as is explained here: *'Personally I think there's risks to our reputation because we're ... having to turn up on the hoof a bit for so many of these things, not having done, the work you'd want... These meetings are seen as a bit of a waste of time and that's damaging for our reputation'* (Participant 11, WCVA). This raises the question of whether WCVA were paying a price for their role. However, despite the concerns raised by WCVA staff, the interviews showed WCVA was generally regarded in a favourable light by both Welsh Government and the equalities third sector. A recurring theme was that *'WCVA's role is absolutely key'* (Participant 23, Equalities Organisation) and *'they do some really good work'* (Participant 36, Equalities Organisation). Furthermore, *'they are doing it to the best of their abilities... I don't envy them'* (Participant 26, Equalities Organisation), because *'that's a really hard task for them to pull off'* (Participant 20, Welsh Government).

In contrast to this high estimation of WCVA, interviewees tended to speak about the third sector quite differently. For example:

*I think there have been times in the past where there has been... bad conduct at meetings ... where they have just got themselves into the room with the Minister with no papers on the agenda but have then brought their issue up under AOB. (Participants 6, WCVA)*

Therefore, WCVA's measures to steer Partnership meetings were designed in part to prevent poor behaviour by third sector organisations. This notion

of poor behaviour is an inherently negative portrayal of the third sector. Frequently, policy actors from Welsh Government and the third sector referred to managing the third sector as *'like herding cats'* (Participant 26, Equalities Organisation). Such descriptions of certain voluntary organisations as problem organisations have been noted by other researchers (Sinclair 2011). This 'herding cats' metaphor lends support to an argument put forward by Chapman et al. (2010) that labelling the third sector as 'troublesome' is a device that is sometimes used to retain control by government and its agents. One participant in the equalities sector recognised this trade-off was being made.

*I've heard this directly from Ministers in the past, [WCVA] doesn't represent the third sector well and that leads to [Ministers] being slightly dismissive of the third sector and seeing it as a little bit more shambolic than it really is.*  
(Participant 35, Equalities Organisation)

The foregoing excerpt illustrates this point. Although WCVA retained its high esteem, the third sector organisations themselves carried the culpability for the Partnership's failings. Dunlop (2017) calls for more analysis to understand the impact of policy failure on interest groups. The foregoing insights about the impact of process failure on WCVA and the third sector contributes new understanding in this area. Below, consideration is given to the impact on equalities organisations and equalities policy.

#### **8.2.4. Agenda steering & equalities policy change**

In keeping with the feminist institutionalist overarching research question, attention is now given to the implications of these accounts of agency in agenda-setting for the achievement of equalities policy change through the Partnership. One example of the damage done to equalities policy change has already been presented in Chapter Five, which highlighted WCVA's adherence to third sector cross-cutting themes, and this was shown to squeeze equality out of the agenda (Section 5.1.3). A second example is presented here, where even when equalities matters were accepted as a

cross-cutting issue, WCVA still pushed equality off the Partnership agenda, as this interviewee explains:

*You know, we've tried to say equalities is a cross-cutting issue... but we've also had this Coalition who's been looking at the sort of generic equalities issues... We have sort of siloed it off in terms of having a generic equalities meeting...*

*With the Equalities and Human Rights Coalition, when there hasn't been a minister with responsibility for equalities high up in their portfolio, we've really discouraged the Coalition from requesting a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary or Minister because it's a subsidiary issue in their portfolio ... We discouraged that because it was so low down in his list of priorities. Maybe we shouldn't have done that. (Participant 6, WCVA)*

Therefore, when WCVA excluded equality from the Partnership agenda they justified this by the perceived low status of equalities matters in the government at that time. This justification centred on the extent to which attention on equality was diluted by a range of other responsibilities within the minister's portfolio. This can be viewed as an institutional "conversion", where an institutional process is adapted to a new goal, and the old arrangements are re-interpreted (Mackay 2011; Celis and Lovenduski 2018). Celis and Lovenduski (2018:160) called for research into patterns of resistance that impede equalities strategies. The present account of WCVA's role in suppressing the equalities agenda responds to this call. Specifically, the above reference to the Equality and Human Rights Coalition (EHRCo) is pertinent here, since this was the only third sector network WCVA coordinated, but yet, it did not play a formal part in the twenty-five networks that made up the Partnership (discussed in Section 7.1.1). The extract above demonstrates WCVA has suppressed the EHRCo's reach. The following quote reveals the extent to which this is understood by an equalities policy actor:

*There is a thing about [our] network as well that it doesn't feed specifically into the meeting with the Minister. So, the mechanism is that we then take what we've gathered from [our] network and we take it to the EHRCo... which is also very confusing. We don't know why they're different... We asked for clarification because it didn't seem right, but the other organisations can just go direct [to Ministerial Meetings], so that seems an anomaly... Why they don't have to go via EHRCo?*

*We don't know. We didn't discover that.* (Participant 32, Equalities Organisation)

It is apparent that there was some frustration at the side-lining of the equalities third sector through EHRCo which prevented certain equalities organisations from having direct access to ministers. This frustration was expressed by a limited number of equalities networks, because other equalities representatives cited mechanisms outside of the Partnership as their alternative routes for influencing Welsh Government (see Chapter Six, Figure 6.1). However, the equalities organisations that relied on this Partnership as their primary route of influencing, though frustrated, did not understand how they were being impeded. The suppression of EHRCo's access to the Partnership, along with the earlier cited evidence of equalities policies being rejected as not crosscutting for third sector as a whole (in Section 5.1.3), are offered here as an explanation for why equalities policy change was not generally perceived by interviewees to be achieved through the Partnership.

The implications of this for theoretical accounts of institutional change and agency needs to be explored. It has been shown equalities policy change is constrained by institutional processes of agenda-setting. This was led by WCVA, playing a proxy state-steering role. Tsebelis (1999) introduced the notion of veto players shaping decisions, and here the national third sector body can be seen as a particular form of veto player which constrained equalities policy change. Feminist institutionalists have given accounts of how "mission drift" can be used to inhibit equality reform (Mackay 2011). Here WCVA's layering of formal and informal rules and their conversion of institutional processes was used to exclude equalities policy from the Partnership agenda.

### **8.3. Agency in processes and institutional change**

#### **8.3.1. Agency and factors enabling internal reform**

In the foregoing analysis of institutional change (Section 8.1.2), it was shown that interviewees perceived the institution of the Partnership to be

unable to adapt to address any failures in efficacy. To understand the role of agency within this, we first need to explore the concept of institutional learning, which March and Olsen (1984), highlighted in their seminal work on institutionalism. An associated concept is that of accountability mechanisms which, Minto and Mergaert (2018:209) identified as one of the dimensions that enables a practice to be institutionalized, and thereby be a “normalised and stable part of the decision-making processes”. Thus, consideration is now made of the nature of Partnership accountability mechanisms.

Certainly, there were Partnership accountability mechanisms built into legislation, (GOWA 1998 s.114, GOWA 2006 s.74). This required government to publish annual reports that must be laid before *Senedd Cymru* and required ministers to monitor the assistance the government provided to the third sector. The Third Sector Scheme’s (2014) appendix identified the ‘Funding and Compliance Sub-Committee’ as the vehicle through which this latter requirement would be met. These mechanisms of review had been anticipated to be ‘an important test’ of the Partnership (Chaney and Fevre 2001a:153). They represent potential key aspects of formal learning processes which could enable institutional change to occur.

The document analysis of the successive annual reports found that they contained much more content than the legislation required. The annual reports published details of the Scheme, the mechanisms by which the third sector engaged in the Partnership (i.e., the TSPC and Ministerial Meetings), some details of infrastructure support provided by Welsh Government, made reference to the Code of Practice for Funding and detailed the Welsh Government’s financial contribution to the third sector. This all falls within the remit of the legislative requirements. However, as revealed earlier, the level of financial detail diminished over time, notwithstanding that it is a legislative requirement (Section 6.3.1). In addition to this, each annual report also offered its own definition of the third sector, detailed how Welsh Government supported volunteering,

promoted the third sector's value (including an increasing number of case study organisations) and offered a variety of other contributions that they felt the sector made to Welsh Government's work. The performative role of similar discourses in other government publications has already been considered (Sections 3.3.3 and 3.3.4). It is mentioned here because the extent that the annual report served as a mechanism of scrutiny was diluted by this additional content.

Policy actors' accounts of the annual reports system and the sub-committee reveal much about how agency has shaped the Partnership's formal mechanisms of institutional learning. One official's account of the statutory annual reporting procedure was particularly revealing:

*When we were initially publishing the Annual Report... it was far more accountable... Assembly Members were able to question the content of the report... That changed. And now ...it goes through the WCVA... There was a time... when there was an annual Plenary debate... [in Senedd Cymru.] We sought advice in terms of what's in the [Third Sector] Scheme and what's in the legislation... and nowhere does it say that we have to have a Plenary debate. So... we could reasonably get away with not doing it, provided that we published the annual report.*  
(Participant 21, Welsh Government)

The above excerpt exposes the role Welsh Government played in curtailing plenary debates on the Annual Report. Laying the Annual Report before plenary simply became a matter of it being recorded and it ceased to be scrutinised in *Senedd Cymru*. This meant that it was 'never looked at' and was 'drastically under-scrutinised' (Participant 2, *Senedd Cymru*).

The excerpt above implied the scrutinising of the Annual Report shifted from Members of the *Senedd* to WCVA. However, this study's document analysis that compared each of these annual reports found that, rather than WCVA scrutinising the reports, instead the reports were consistently written as if they had been co-authored by the WCVA. For example, they always included two forewords, one from the minister with responsibility for the third sector and one by the chair and/or the Chief Executive of WCVA. Moreover, up until 2013-14 the WCVA foreword used to introduce

the contents of the report, implying their authorship. The 2013-14 report signalled another change because the WCVA statement ceased to refer to holding the Welsh Government to account under the Third Sector Scheme. Instead, it would focus on promoting the sector, the Partnership, WCVA and other infrastructure organisations. From this point onwards the reports contained much more prominent case studies selected by WCVA that promoted the work of a few third sector organisations but no longer corresponded to the main content of the report. Interviewees from WCVA also rejected the idea that they scrutinised the annual reports, as seen in this senior manager's words: *'I don't really pay that much heed to it to be honest. I think I've only seen one copy. They [Welsh Government] don't really do anything with it. It seems like a report they produce and then they file somewhere'* (Participant 6, WCVA). Thus, both *Senedd Cymru* and WCVA no longer had agency in applying these accountability processes that were key to achieving institutional learning.

The document analysis again supports this finding. Early documents (Voluntary Sector Partnership Council 2000b;c) had described the annual reports as the means through which Welsh Government would monitor, review and report to the third sector about the ministerial meetings. This discourse was reiterated in the 2007 Action Plan (Welsh Assembly Government 2007). However, this acknowledgement was absent in the most recently published Third Sector Scheme (Welsh Government 2014a), the consultation document that preceded it (Welsh Government 2013a), and both the Welsh Government's and WCVA's Partnership webpages (Welsh Government 2016; WCVA 2016). The requirement to lay the annual report before *Senedd Cymru*, which was stated in legislation (GOWA 2006), was only mentioned in the Third Sector Scheme (Welsh Government 2014a) and again was absent from the webpages (Welsh Government 2016; WCVA 2016). This shift in discourses shows how Welsh Government no longer sought to promote the annual report as an accountability mechanism.

In a similar vein, interviewees' accounts of the Funding and Compliance Sub-Committee revealed how this process was also similarly weakened. They described how *'it doesn't actually meet that often'* (Participant 31, Equalities Organisation) and, as this WCVA participant questioned, *'Who's challenging that [failure of the sub-committee to meet]? We've kind of lost sight of that'* (Participant 11, WCVA). This sub-committee was the only part of the Partnership mechanism managed by Welsh Government rather than WCVA, (see Figure 6-1) thus it was outside of WCVA's control.

Furthermore, even when it did meet, interviewees claimed that it had lost its focus on holding Welsh Government to account, as this Welsh Government interviewee explained: *'It's mostly about funding, if I'm honest, because that's the easiest thing to be able to monitor, even though it was also meant to be 'about the wider compliance with the [Third Sector] Scheme'* (Participant 21, Welsh Government). The Sub-Committee's failure to meet and to undertake much scrutiny beyond finances, and the way its management sat outside of WCVA scrutiny structures, shows its limitations as an accountability mechanism to enable institutional learning. As with the annual reports system, the failures of the sub-committee point to the agency of Welsh Government in undermining these accountability processes. In fact, WCVA policy actors showed a lack of awareness of the formal mechanisms altogether, as this account reveals:

*Who should be holding them [Welsh Government] to account? ... Should that be us? Or should that [be]... the Wales Audit Office?... the National Assembly? I don't know... I don't know how we would hold them to account. (Participant 6, WCVA)*

The effect of these scrutiny failings was that institutional learning was arrested and these mechanisms failed to enable institutional change to promote a more effective Partnership.

Given WCVA's role in the Partnership, attention now turns to consider their agency in institutional learning. This WCVA participant considered the need for it:

*we're all very busy doing, doing, doing, but not very good at looking at the impact of that further down the line... we're not very good at, checking with our partners, and people that come*

*to these meetings... I think it would be good if we did that, but then, everybody's busy and it sort of slips under the radar* (Participant 7, WCVA).

This account illuminates how institutional learning was hampered by WCVA's limited resources. Notwithstanding this, the imperative to evaluate and develop the Partnership did exist within WCVA and this was substantiated by senior WCVA managers. One example of their own accountability mechanisms were those measures intended to assess the Partnership's processes. Many equalities sector interviewees made reference to the WCVA *'six-monthly reports'* (Participant 34, Equalities Organisation) in which Partnership representatives were required to state how they had engaged their network members. However, only a few WCVA staff showed knowledge of these monitoring mechanisms. Those that were aware of them acknowledged they were designed to *'keep the monitoring as light as possible'* (Participant 6, WCVA). One WCVA interviewee explained they were aware representatives were *'copying and pasting exactly the same [responses] from one year to the next'* (Participant 7, WCVA). Thus, WCVA actor accounts revealed WCVA's institutional learning processes were seemingly as unsuccessful as the formal accountability mechanisms written into legislation.

These opportunities for institutional learning must be viewed in the context of the extant literature. A key tenet of social policy evaluation is the importance of the independence of the evaluator (Moore et al. 2015). In this last example, WCVA were evaluating the mechanism for which they themselves were responsible. Allied to this, Rhodes and Marsh (1992:198) describe how resistance to change occurs where *'the status-quo'* is favoured by those involved in policymaking mechanisms. In this case, those managing the policymaking mechanisms had vested interests in maintaining the *status quo*. These processes were not scrutinised by Welsh Government because they had informally delegated responsibility to WCVA, as this participant stated: *'[It] is for WCVA to manage those networks'* (Participant 21, Welsh Government). Welsh Government showed little interest in WCVA's monitoring, as evidenced here: *'the only detail that*

*[Welsh Government] seem to want to know is... how many people the TSPC is ultimately engaging with'* (Participant 7, WCVA). This is another facet of the state's non-participation in the Partnership processes. As Engeli and Mazur (2018:117) recognised, evaluation processes are compromised when there is a lack of political will. However, when Welsh Government's failure to scrutinise this monitoring is considered alongside their role in undermining the statutory Partnership accountability mechanisms, this indicates Welsh Government's agency in arresting institutional change.

This inhibiting agency role is notable because it is the antithesis of the "elite advocacy" of "norm entrepreneurs", which refers to key actors who provide agency for advancing institutional change, in feminist institutionalist literature (Chaney 2007; Minto and Parken 2020:2).

McConnell's (2010:356) account of efficacy offers an explanation why the government would come to play this inhibiting role. He describes political success as distinct from policy success or process success (Section 8.1.1). In this, he recognises that part of political success is for the government to maintain 'political reputation' and there can be a 'trade-off' between these three realms of efficacy. In this present case study, perceived failures in both policy change and processes resulted in the government managing the accountability mechanisms to at least maintain political success. An indirect consequence of this drive to ensure the Partnership's political success was for the institutional learning mechanisms to be actively neglected. This offers an explanation of why government tended to inhibit scrutiny, which has been shown here to hinder the Partnership's ability to change. Other agency factors inhibiting institutional change are explored below.

### **8.3.2. Agency and factors inhibiting internal reform**

Consideration of the role of agency in instigating change in the Partnership is revealing. Welsh Government participants argued that *'the sector as a whole needs to really push for that relationship to change... We're not interested in imposing it'* (Participant 12, Welsh Government). From this,

we can see that Welsh Government seemed to give the third sector the lead in instigating institutional change in the Partnership. This can be compared with Dean's (2017:217) account of 'negotiated participatory spaces', in which the participation conditions are negotiated by the participants, as opposed to them being imposed upon participants. Such an empowerment model is implied by Welsh Government expectation that change should be initiated by the third sector. Yet, the third sector did not instigate substantial change during the period of study. Some civil servants offered an explanation for this: *'There is a fear that if there are excessive amounts of scrutiny of the Partnership that it won't exist anymore'* (Participant 12, Welsh Government). The suggestion here is that the third sector are concerned their *'hard earned rights...might be jeopardised'* (Participant 20, Welsh Government) and this prevented them from pursuing change. This might be the case given the symbolic value attributed to the Partnership and the recognition that it is unique to Wales (discussed in Section 8.1.1). In addition, the third sector representatives offered a more pragmatic explanation, which was that they felt their involvement in change was a drain on their own resources, as this participant described:

*[The last meeting] was about talking about how the TSPC needs to change going forward and what concerned me was there was a lot about the process... I was thinking surely what the TSPC should be about was what policies do we want to change... It should not be about how often we meet and how we engage and what the systems are.* (Participant 32, Equalities Organisation)

This excerpt reveals how what Dean (2017) dubs a 'negotiated participatory space' cannot be established if the participants neither have the resources nor interest to take part. Equalities sector representatives saw this change instigation as Welsh Government's responsibility, as this participant explained: *'All these expectations on [the sector] and the sector is like 'but this is being imposed on us. We didn't ask for this. This is something the Welsh Government has to do... The sector didn't set it up'* (Participant 8, Equalities Organisation). The sector representatives' rejection of responsibility for changing the Partnership structures, mirrored

Welsh Government's refusal to instigate change. Heley and Moles (2012:143) recognise that policy actors within such partnerships often do not have the capacity or the desire to instigate alternative ways of working, and this appeared to be the case here. Furthermore, as has been shown, WCVA's resources were also stretched so they too did not have the capacity to initiate change. Additionally, as this excerpt reveals, WCVA were afraid of the consequences of holding their Welsh Government counterparts to account: *'You don't really get anywhere by pissing off the people that are the gatekeepers to the change you want to see'* (Participant 9, WCVA). This response reveals their powerlessness to instigate change. Welsh Government's officials shared this sense of powerlessness to change the Partnership, as is seen here: *'Me and [my manager] talked about [the meeting] afterwards and we were just in despair'* (Participant 20, Welsh Government.) Collectively, this is a case, of what Hay (1999:327) described as 'catastrophic equilibria', in which failure is 'readily apparent and widely perceived', but no decisive intervention is made to remedy it. Moreover, this study suggests that the failure to allocate responsibility to instigate change and the lack of will to do so were two factors that contributed to catastrophic equilibria. This would suggest that willingness to change and allocation of responsibility for instigating change are prerequisites for the 'tipping point' (discussed in Section 8.1.2) to be achieved to secure endogenous change.

#### **8.4. Conclusion**

The analysis at the beginning of this chapter revealed policy actors' perceptions of the Partnership's efficacy failures both with respect to wider Welsh Government policy change to advance equalities and equality of opportunity in the institutional processes of the Partnership itself. Both of these findings are significant in terms of recognising how institutional aspects of a partnership can frustrate the advancement of equalities. The examination of the Partnership's ability to adapt to improve efficacy and thereby achieve endogenous change was also perceived to ultimately fail, despite some evidence of incremental change. The scrutiny of agency

within the Partnership provided a tool to explore this further. An apparent absence of agency was exposed and scrutinised. The multiple facets of Welsh Government's subtle lack of engagement were shown to undermine the Partnership as a policy-influencing mechanism. The loss of efficacy in the formal mechanisms of institutional learning showed an apparent lack of engagement from both the third sector and *Senedd Cymru*. Yet this was attributed to Welsh Government's role in managing and undermining these learning mechanisms. In considering the overarching research question, here the feminist institutionalist lens has thus enabled us to recognise how agency can play a part in inhibiting institutional change. Furthermore, WCVA were shown to have a proxy government-steering role on the third sector, whose incremental layering of rules in the institutional processes was shown to be a drain on third sector and WCVA's resources. The subsequent failings in efficacy were attributed to the third sector as a whole, who were perceived as inherently difficult to organise. WCVA's proxy role in governmentality was shown to inhibit equalities organisations' ability to advance an equalities policy agenda. Again, this finding makes an important contribution to addressing the overarching research question by exploring another aspect of how the advancement of equalities was frustrated by the Partnership. However, many equalities organisations had alternative routes to advance policy claims on government. Thus, the potential cost of these failures in institutional efficacy and change was more likely to threaten the Partnership and therefore state-third sector relations.

The following chapter is the Discussion and Conclusion, which will revisit the overarching research question and consider how this chapter's findings can be understood with respect to the three preceding findings chapters.

## 9. Discussion and Conclusion

### Introduction

The overarching research aim of this thesis is to examine from a feminist institutionalist perspective how a sub-state partnership between government and the third sector promotes and/or frustrates the advancement of equalities. This study explores this theoretical aim by examining how equalities third sector organisations engaged with the Welsh statutory third sector-government partnership between 2011 and 2019. This final chapter will review the many facets of how such a sub-state partnership can promote equalities, but it will also reveal the array of institutional qualities that can frustrate their advancement. It will then consider the theoretical and practical implications of the empirical findings.

The following discussion has four parts. The first provides an overview of the research questions (Section 9.1). This begins with the overarching research question by reviewing the key empirical findings that address it (Section 9.1.1). This is followed by a summary of both the empirical contribution of each individual research question and their key theoretical contributions. Thus, it summarises the analysis from Chapters Five-Eight and presents how this study supports or challenges extant theory on representation (research question one - Section 9.1.2), how policy influence is achieved (research question two - Section 9.1.3), intersectionality and equalities inter-organisational relations (research question three - Section 9.1.4) and the relationship between institutional efficacy, agency and change (research question four - Section 9.1.5). The second part of this chapter builds on this by pulling these threads together and revisiting the overarching research question to consider the present study's wider theoretical contribution (Section 9.2). In so doing, it details how this thesis contributes new knowledge to descriptive and substantive representation (Section 9.2.1), the democratic processes of governance (Section 9.2.2) equalities strategies (Section 9.2.3) and theorising partnerships (Section 9.2.4). The third part acknowledges the limitations of this study (Section 9.3.1) and considers the implications of the present

research for further study in the fields of feminist institutionalism, wider institutionalist literature, equalities and third sector-government relations (Section 9.3.2). The fourth part addresses recommendations for policy and practice (Section 9.4). These include the wider transferable lessons concerning the significance of statutory equality partnerships (Section 9.4.1) followed by some specific recommendations for the Welsh sub-state case study (Section 9.4.2). The chapter closes with an overview of the contribution of this research.

## **9.1. Overview of the research questions**

### **9.1.1. The empirical contribution to the overarching research question**

This section provides an overview of how the empirical analysis addresses the overarching research question of this thesis:

*From a feminist institutionalist perspective, how does a sub-state partnership between government and the third sector promote and/or frustrate the advancement of equalities?*

A key original contribution of the present study is that it is the first application of feminist institutionalism to a sub-state third sector government partnership. The present case study reveals that an institution of a sub-state third sector-government partnership can promote the advancement of equalities in the following ways: First, the use of thematic networks can ensure equalities organisations have a formal position and therefore ‘a voice’ within such a partnership (Section 5.1.2). A third sector-government partnership can also serve a key symbolic role that is valued by the third sector and government which embeds a principle of third sector engagement in governance (Section 8.1.1). This can generate a culture of third sector engagement in government more broadly, which in turn enables equalities claims and claims-making activities to be pursued through a range of sub-state policy-influencing venues, including the partnership (Section 6.2.2). This can facilitate the incorporation of equalities claims into both equalities policy and broader public policy at multiple stages of policy development (Section 6.1.1). Additionally, equalities organisations can develop policy-influencing strategies which

include a sophisticated range of informal practices complementing those adopted in a formal partnership (Section 6.2.1). Whilst the equalities claims and claims-making may not be attributable directly to equalities organisations' engagement in a sub-state partnership (Section 8.1.1), such a partnership can serve other institutional roles that enable wider policy influence. For example, a partnership can enable third sector positioning across the multiple policy influencing venues (Section 6.2.2) and furthermore, it can help equalities organisations to maintain their insider informal relations with government, whilst simultaneously adopting a more critical role externally (Section 6.2.2). Additionally, where a norm of collaboration is embedded in the institutional norms of such a partnership, this can have wider beneficial effects, including encouraging collaboration between organisations across and within equalities strands (Section 7.1.2).

Conversely, this study also found a numbers of cases where the advancement of equalities might be constrained or threatened by the institution of the third sector-government partnership: First, the representation of equalities groups can be threatened by the institutional discourses about other forms of representation (e.g., third sector organisational representation, "grassroots" or community representation, geographical representation) (Chapter Five). Second, institutional discourses can develop that constrain equalities claims making by pejoratively labelling equalities representatives as elite professionals (Sections 6.3.2) who dominate the Partnership (Section 5.2.2) and are out of touch with their constituencies (Section 5.2.4). This can undermine the perceived legitimacy of their equalities expertise. Third, such an institution's structures can promote reductive, 'strand-based' approaches for advancing equality which inhibit intersectionality in policymaking. Such formal structures combined with institutional informal discourses can prevent the different forms of applied intersectionality from being achieved (Section 7.1). Fourth, within a sub-state partnership of this nature there can be an inequality of opportunity between different equalities organisations to participate based on a range of access and resource

constraints (Section 8.1.1). Fifth, managers of such a partnership may apply institutional rules that can lead to equalities matters being marginalised on the agenda, if these managers perceive equalities to be low in the government's priorities (Section 8.2.4). All of these factors should be understood in feminist institutionalist terms to be instances of reversal or resistance to the pursuit of equalities. As noted, such resistance strategies are a common feature of feminist theory (Acker 2006; Mackay 2011; Celis and Lovenduski 2018; Engeli and Mazur 2018; Minto and Mergaert 2018), but this study extends this concept by applying it to pan-equalities work in the institutional setting of a sub-state partnership.

In summarising the contribution this study makes towards the overarching research question, there are some clear contradictions evident in the empirical data and two examples are offered here. For example, the document analysis of the Third Sector Scheme identified how the Welsh Government "valued" the third sector and recognised their "crucial relationship" as encapsulated in the Partnership (Welsh Government 2014a s.2.4-2.5:8). It also described "Equality and Diversity" as a cross-cutting theme that should "figure prominently" in the Partnership (Welsh Government 2014a s.2.12:9). Correspondingly, as noted above, policy actors frequently referred to the Partnership's symbolic value in interviews (Section 8.3.2) and saw the number of equalities representatives as evidence of how equalities featured at the heart of the Partnership (Section 5.1.2). Taken together, this portrays the Partnership, and the equalities sector's role within it, in positive terms. Yet, as analysis of policy actors' discourses also revealed, the existing Partnership representatives were often viewed negatively as elite, professional 'usual suspects' and the Partnership was criticised for failing to engage sufficiently with 'local, grassroots' organisations or populations (Section 5.2.2). Furthermore, in the face of these criticisms, the Partnership itself was criticised for failing to sufficiently adapt or change (Section 8.1.2).

An alternative illustration of conflicting institutional discourses was that policy actors' accounts revealed equalities claims were systematically integrated into a broad range of policies at all stages (Section 6.1.1). Also, the analysis showed how the equalities third sector had developed a sophisticated spectrum of informal policy-influencing practices across a variety of venues in the Welsh devolved governance context (Section 6.2.1). However, conversely, the Partnership itself was criticised for failing to achieve policy outcomes either with respect to discrete equalities or public policy in general (Section 8.1.1).

In summary, these overt criticisms of the Partnership and the equalities organisations' roles within it were present in the policy actors' accounts alongside positive recognition of the value of the Partnership and the achievements of the equalities third sector. The constructionist foundations of this study required exploration of how the institution of the Partnership was constructed by policy actors in their accounts and in Partnership documents. Underpinning our feminist institutionalist approach with discursive institutionalism allows us to avoid a reductive approach based on arriving at one coherent unifying account. Instead, a fundamental quality of discursive institutionalism used here is to recognise that conflicting discourses can coexist and compete for dominance in the policy actors' accounts (Schmidt 2008). Such inconsistencies can have a stabilising effect, and the Partnership's developmental history can be understood as a "continuing contest" which does not tend to result in a decisive set of winning ideas (Wincott 2004b:358). The resulting ambivalence in policy actors' accounts can be seen as a strength (Meyerson and Scully 1995). Thus, a theoretical contribution this analysis makes is in revealing these multiple and sometimes opposing accounts can and do coexist in the institutional discourses of sub-state partnerships, and it recognises this provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of their institutional practices.

Having provided an overview of the empirical contribution of this study to the overarching research question, its theoretical contribution will be considered below. The distinctive theoretical contributions related to each of the research questions is offered prior to a broader consideration of how our analysis of the overarching research question either supports or challenges extant theory.

### **9.1.2. How descriptive representation is shaped by the Partnership**

The first research question was: *'How is the descriptive representation of equalities groups shaped by the institution of the third sector-government partnership?'* Consideration was given to whether descriptive representation of equalities was promoted or frustrated by the Partnership in line with the overarching research question and the empirical analysis is summarised here. Chapter Five's feminist institutionalist analysis showed that descriptive representation of equalities groups in the Partnership was largely constrained or threatened by institutional practices. These constraints were identified through the empirical analysis of both the formal Partnership's multi-network structure and the informal institutional discourses. The interviewees' accounts revealed a confused understanding about who the constituencies of the Partnership's equalities representatives were. The dominance of third sector organisational representation in policy actors' understanding of representation and the corresponding norm for a "unified voice" from third sector representatives was shown to undermine the representation of equalities groups on the Partnership. Certain policy actors' perceptions that the Partnership should move towards geographical, localised representation was also shown to threaten the existing representation of equalities groups. Notions of equalities third sector representation were also threatened by the primacy of representative democracy which was associated with elected politicians' goals in institutional discourses. Consequently, equalities third sector organisations were constructed as instruments for government which could be expendable, and this made them vulnerable. Additionally, equalities representation was undermined by conflicting institutional

discourses about whether equalities constituencies should engage directly with the Partnership or through network spokespeople for the third sector.

In terms of social theory, an original contribution to knowledge that the above feminist institutionalist analysis makes is identifying the conflicting notions of representation that can underpin a third sector-government partnership and how these can constrain or threaten the descriptive representation of equalities. Previously, different strands of extant literature have dealt with these different understandings of representation separately. For example, the equalities literature introduced the concepts of descriptive representation (Pitkin 1967), and thus, axiomatically, it has tended to focus on the representation of equalities groups (for example, Celis et al. 2014; Celis and Lovenduski 2018). Although the equalities literature has recognised government-third sector partnerships as providing opportunities for the representation of people with protected characteristics (Chaney and Fevre 2001; Chaney et al. 2001; Williams and Chaney 2001; Chaney 2006; Day 2006; Chaney 2011; Rees and Chaney 2011), it has not yet addressed how this may be undermined or compromised by other forms of representation in partnership settings. The interest group literature recognises the tension between representation of wider populations and special interest groups (Young 2000; Evans et al. 2005; Greenwood 2007; Beyers et al. 2008), but the latter has not generally been framed specifically in terms of equalities representation. Moreover, both sets of literature have yet to recognise how discourses on third sector representation interplay with these. Little has previously been written about government attempts to secure the representation of the “third sector” as an end in itself (i.e., as a homogenous entity, with little cognisance of the sector’s internal diversity). Although, the third sector literature recognises the organisational challenges faced by the third sector, particularly with respect to delivering public services and the implications for state-third sector relations (for example, Milbourne and Cushman 2013), this study extends understanding by focussing on how these concerns are raised with policymakers. Similarly, the governance

literature has particularly focused on the dual third sector roles of advocacy and service delivery (Newman 2001; Davies 2007; Egdell and Dutton 2016; Hemmings 2017) but this study builds on this by applying this notion of advocacy to how organisational challenges of service delivery are represented. Thus, the present feminist institutionalist account not only brings these strands of literature together but, additionally, its original theoretical contribution is to recognise how these different conceptions of representation may interact and undermine the representation of equalities interests. This is in keeping with the overarching aim of this feminist institutionalist analysis to recognise how institutions inhibit or promote the advancement of equalities.

### **9.1.3. How substantive representation is pursued in the Partnership**

The second research question was: *'How have equalities organisations engaged with the institution of the third sector-government partnership to promote substantive representation?'* Our feminist institutionalist approach led to Chapter Six's examination of how substantive representation was pursued both through formal, policy-influencing and informal claims-making by the equalities third sector.

In the empirical analysis, formal policy-influencing through the Partnership was analysed with reference to policy-influencing tools described in the mainstreaming literature. This revealed that the Partnership itself exhibited limited use of mainstreaming tools, although there was evidence of their use in Welsh Government outside of the Partnership (Section 6.1). A further key finding was wide rejection of mainstreaming as a strategy for advancing equalities by a broad spread of study participants. However, scrutiny of the equalities organisations' claims revealed that they were made at multiple stages of policy development and were concerned with both equalities policymaking and bringing equalities considerations to broader policymaking agendas. These institutional discourses were consistent with mainstreaming theory and ensuring equalities are "incorporated in all policies at all levels at all stages" (Walby 2005:327) and

their “systematic integration into all systems and structures, into all policies, processes and procedures” (Rees 2005:560). The theoretical contribution this makes is that it demonstrates it is possible to achieve mainstreaming aims without widespread support from some policy actors nor extensive reliance on formal mainstreaming tools. (The theoretical contribution this makes is considered further in Section 9.2.3).

A further theoretical contribution that this feminist institutionalist analysis makes to knowledge is that it underlines the significance of informal repertoires in policy-influencing and how they complement the formal institutional practices. As alluded to above (Section 9.1.1), an empirical contribution revealed in Chapter Six was that informal claims-making was extensive in and around the institution of the Partnership. Notably, this was acknowledged and accepted by Welsh Government, WCVA and the equalities third sector interviewees. Consequently, policy actors detailed the development and maintenance of informal relationships between the equalities third sector and Welsh Government officials and ministers. Here the mainstreaming literature can help us appreciate this finding’s theoretical significance. Previous work has developed extensive accounts of formal policy-influencing tools (Rees and Parken 2003; Rees 2005; Parken et al. 2019), but there has been less scrutiny of the role of informal strategies. The feminist institutionalist lens of this study enables us to recognise the role of such influencing strategies and informal relationships between the equalities third sector and government in addition to the formal policymaking processes.

The empirical analysis of the relationship between formal and informal policy influencing led to a further key theoretical contribution to knowledge, which is with respect to the insider-outsider theory of policy influence. An empirical contribution from our feminist institutionalist analysis noted above (Section 9.1.1) is that equalities organisations looked beyond the Partnership to adopt a strategy of positioning themselves across a spectrum of policy-influencing venues in devolved governance.

This underlines the need to examine and understand partnerships, such as the present case study, in a wider sub-state governance context. This contextualised view of the Partnership showed how policy-influencing venues ranged across different government departments (The Executive) as well as *Senedd Cymru* (the Legislature), and also through external campaigning sites, such as the mass media. This positioning enabled equalities organisations to pursue a formal and informal “chipping away” strategy of policy influence over time and across multiple venues. This challenges the existing literature that assumes organisations occupy just one position on the insider-outsider spectrum (Buckingham 2012). Third sector theorists have recognised third sector organisations may take both insider and outsider positions (Taylor 2001) and that there are degrees within these categories (Maloney et al. 1994). It has also been argued the insider-outsider concept is too binary (Craig et al. 2004). These findings support these theorists’ claims. However, this study’s original contribution to knowledge is revealing the nature of these formal and informal policy-influencing strategies, their application to the promotion of equalities through third sector-government partnerships and how they are applied in multiple institutional contexts simultaneously.

A further theoretical contribution that this study makes is in revealing other benefits to the third sector of participating in a third sector-government partnership beyond policy influence. As detailed above, (Section 9.1.1) interviewees described the Partnership as being useful for enabling third sector access to many other insider positions in Government. It also enabled them to maintain an informal relationship with Government, whilst simultaneously adopting a more critical role outside of it. This has theoretical significance since there is a considerable literature about how the third sector is constrained by close relationships with the state (Rhodes 2007; Milbourne and Cushman 2013; Archambault 2015; Jacklin-Jarvis 2015; Alcock 2016; Hemmings 2017; Milbourne and Murray 2017). Congruently, in the equalities literature, the concern that equalities representatives can be co-opted and therefore constrained by

the state has featured prominently in feminist theory (Eschle and Manguerra 2018). However, the current study shows that where the equalities third sector occupies multiple positions in policy influencing venues across the insider-outsider spectrum, then the equalities third sector are able to maintain their independence to a degree that enables them to critique government policy whilst simultaneously using informal influencing strategies to sustain their close insider relationships. In so doing, it lends support to Macmillan and Ellis Paine's (2020:16) thesis which challenges the construction of the third sector as passive "takers" meekly accepting state power. Instead, it shows the third sector to be adept in actively and strategically negotiating their relationship with government. Theoretically, this casts the third sector in a very different light; instead of being seen as a victim of state power constrained by its relationship with the state, it can instead be seen to be agile in negotiating its relationship with government.

It should be noted that the feminist institutionalist analysis of research question two did reveal other ways that an equalities third sector's substantive representation can be constrained by the institution of a third sector-government partnership. The empirical analysis revealed constraints on making policy claims concerned with organisations' needs, particularly funding, and also requiring representatives to display certain qualities associated with skilled professionalism. The theoretical implications of both these findings are discussed below (Sections 9.2.1 and 9.2.2).

#### **9.1.4. How the equalities third sector is shaped by the Partnership**

The third research question was designed to understand the dynamic, iterative relationship between the Partnership and the third sector: *'How is the equalities sector and its potential for intersectional practices shaped by the institution of the third sector-government partnership?'* The feminist institutionalist approach used to investigate this was applied in Chapter Seven in order to scrutinise how the institution of the Partnership shaped

the organisational interrelationships between and within equalities strands.

One contribution to knowledge that this analysis makes is concerned with competition and collaboration within the equalities third sector and the implications for organisational interrelationships. The empirical analysis revealed informal institutional norms for collaboration and seeking a third sector unified voice. It also found that despite this institutional norm, pluralist notions of competition between equalities strands were an accepted part of the process of equalities third sector organisations seeking to influence Welsh Government policy. Additionally, institutionalist discourses identified a different interpretation of competition, which was centred around competing to be the lead representative organisation on the Partnership.

The theoretical significance of these findings is that, hitherto, theorists have tended to deal with these topics separately. Notably, third sector unity has been identified as being important for achieving policy influence (for example, Lowndes and Skelcher 1998), and concerns have been raised that this potentially suppresses the sector's diverse voices (for example, Milbourne and Cushman 2013). Contrastingly, competition between organisations has been understood in the arena of pluralism, in which interests compete to shape the policymaking agenda (Cobb et al. 1976; Dahl and Lindblom 1976) and also with respect to competing for contracts or funding to deliver welfare provision (for example, Egdell et al. 2016). An original contribution to knowledge made by the feminist institutionalist approach of this study was to examine informal institutional Partnership norms to expose how these different notions of collaboration and competition can coexist and influence inter-organisational relations. Jacklin-Jarvis (2015), who acknowledged both the unity-diversity tension and also the collaboration-conflict tension, described these factors as inherent phenomena of third sector-government partnerships. This study supports Jacklin-Jarvis' account, showing its applicability at sub-state level

and furthermore demonstrates how institutional mechanisms can be built into a governance structure to enable their co-existence.

A further contribution this study makes to knowledge is in showing that these informal factors alongside formal structures are important for both applied intersectionality and the relative position of different equalities strands. Thus, the empirical findings exposed that the formal institutional structures of the equalities-themed networks tended to exclude the form of intersectionality which rejects *a priori* categories (anti-categorical intersectionality). These structures were also shown to promote silo-working between different equalities strands, thus excluding the intersections between identity categories (inter-categorical intersectionality). This was exacerbated by the informal institutional norm that privileged a third sector unified voice and favoured cross-equalities issues, which not only limited the distinctive voice specific to one identity category, but also the intersections between just two or three categories (also inter-categorical intersectionality). Moreover, the unified voice institutional norm also neglected the divergent voices within each equalities strand (intra-categorical intersectionality). The contribution this study makes to intersectionality theory is to identify institutional factors that restrict applied intersectionality in partnership practices. Thus, the formal institutional structures and informal institutional norms have been shown to restrict realisation of all three of McCall's (2005) forms of intersectionality (anti-categorical, inter-categorical and intra-categorical).

Furthermore, in her original account, Crenshaw (1991) made the distinction between structural intersectionality, which recognises when one identity category amplifies the disadvantage experienced by another, and political intersectionality which recognises where one identity category can obfuscate or marginalise the disadvantage experienced by another. One of this study's empirical findings was that there was little evidence of an awareness in the Partnership of political intersectionality. This supports Verloo's (2006) claim that political intersectionality is the least commonly

recognised form. Moreover, this study also reveals that policy actors may misunderstand structural intersectionality given the tendency in institutional discourses to assume equalities organisations each adding their own distinct perspective on an issue can be viewed as a form of intersectional practice. Intersectionality theorists have identified this failing as the additive assumption, and it contrasts with recognising the interaction of intersecting identities that is the hallmark of true structural intersectionality (Hancock 2007; Krizsan et al. 2012a; Cho et al. 2013). Thus, this study supports scholars' accounts of this additive assumption and affirms its application to sub-state partnerships.

A different contribution to intersectionality theory that this study makes is highlighting how formal institutional structures can neglect to include certain types of equalities representation. In this case study, the absence of a cross-equalities thematic network in the formal Partnership structures underpinned the neglect of intersectional representation. The analysis also revealed the exclusion of class (or economic inequality) from the Partnership's structures. This institutional structure served as an obstacle to capturing intersections between class and other equalities categories. This is notwithstanding class being one of the categories associated with the origins of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991). The formal Partnership structures also neglected geographical representation thereby obscuring the intersection between equality identity categories and geographical areas.

The significance of these findings to intersectionality theory and practice can be summarised in the following way: intersectionality theorists have recognised that intersectional practices are under-theorised (Hancock 2007; Hankivsky and Cormier 2011). Furthermore, Krizsan et al. (2012b) have found there to be very little in the way of intersectional practices in their analysis of the institutionalisation of intersectionality across Europe. Our analysis supports their finding, but, additionally, it details the formal institutional structures and informal institutional norms and discourses

that inhibit intersectional practices from developing in the context of partnerships. Theoretically speaking, this is important, because it offers insights into what institutional factors need to be modified or overcome in order to enable intersectional practices to develop in third sector-government interfaces.

Beyond consideration of intersectional practices, this research question also allowed an empirical examination of other ways the equalities sector is shaped by the institution of the Partnership. As well as the exclusion of certain equalities representatives noted above, this study has shown that some equalities organisations face structural disadvantages borne out of informal norms and discourses, even where they are given representation within the formal institutional structures. Whilst much of the literature around the hierarchy of (in)equalities refers to the 'Oppression Olympics' and tends to focus on which identity categories are leading in securing dominance in the political agenda (Hancock 2007). This study's approach is different in that it identified the institutional factors that disadvantage certain equality identity categories. Therefore, it makes a new contribution to knowledge by drawing attention to the existence of disadvantaged categories in the hierarchy of (in)equalities (Nott 2005; Verloo 2006) in the context of sub-state partnerships. Furthermore, it lays the foundations for recognising that a broad approach to understanding equalities strategies should therefore consider which equalities strands face institutional disadvantage.

In this case study, a key empirical contribution of this research was to reveal that the 'race' equality organisations were disadvantaged in comparison to the other equalities organisations. They were shown to be particularly disadvantaged by the informal institutional discourse on Welsh Government's preference for a single representative organisation within each equalities 'strand'. This was revealed to promote competition and animosity between organisations within the 'race' equality field. This study also revealed 'race' equality organisations were structurally disadvantaged

by not adopting the informal institutional claims-making practices utilised by the other equalities organisations to influence policy. The contribution to knowledge that this makes is to recognise that this is a form of political intersectionality, as originally conceived by Crenshaw (1991), in that one equalities category is disadvantaged by the claims-making of other equalities categories. Hitherto, this form of political intersectionality has been neglected by intersectionality scholars.

#### **9.1.5. Institutional efficacy, agency and change in the Partnership**

The fourth research question was: *'What are policy actors' perspectives on efficacy, agency and change in the third sector-government partnership?'* Chapter Eight approached this question by considering both policy change to advance equalities and change in processes to advance equalities. It first considered study participants' perceptions of efficacy to achieve either form of institutional change. It then examined accounts of agency that underpinned whether the Partnership was able to instigate change in either policies or policymaking processes.

As noted earlier (Section 9.1.1), a key empirical finding related to the focus on efficacy was that the Partnership alone was not perceived by policy actors to be very effective in achieving policy change. Furthermore, institutional discourses revealed efficacy failings in the Partnership's processes, which led to inequality of opportunity for organisations to participate. This included inconsistent opportunities in the Partnership for organisations to become lead representatives, participate once they were representatives, or simply to participate as network members. The theoretical implications of this inequality of opportunity are discussed further below (Section 9.2.3).

However, it is the empirical analysis of the perceptions of agency with respect to both these forms of change that provided some of the richest contributions to knowledge from this research question and makes a contribution to the broader institutionalist literature. Institutional

accounts of agency tend to focus on whether agency can occur within an institution, but the present analysis of multiple policy actors in a government – third sector partnership allows this study to extend this understanding to consider who might have agency. Extant third sector literature has highlighted concern over the government playing a state-steering role in such partnerships (Stoker 1998), thereby rendering the third sector a “governable terrain” (Carmel and Harlock 2008). The current study reveals a more complex picture. On the one hand, a theoretical contribution it makes is to identify a potential new form of agenda-setting control that governments may exercise. For example, in this case study, although there was a perception that the policymaking agenda of the Partnership was set by the third sector, the empirical data revealed the Partnership’s perceived policy output failings were related to multiple micro-failures in the government’s engagement with the Partnership. Thus, policy actors in WCVA and the equalities third sector described various ways that government was seen as failing to engage in the Partnership’s agenda-setting processes through insufficient investment of time, resources, interest and/or engagement in the Partnership’s business. This subtle non-participation of Government in agenda-setting may be unintentional but it served to undermine the Partnership’s efficacy as a nexus between the third sector and Welsh Government. Barach and Baratz (1962) had originally described the non-decision making that can occur when certain items are excluded from the agenda of policymaking. The original theoretical contribution here is to identify a tendency similar to non-decision-making, whereby state control may also be exerted by subtle forms of non-participation in the agenda-setting process, which itself undermines the policymaking powers of such governance institutions.

This study’s contribution to the understanding of gatekeepers’ roles within such governance partnerships is also worth highlighting here. Empirical analysis of the interview data revealed that WCVA, as the facilitator of the Partnership, was found to play a proxy steering role. It did this by imposing rules to decide which policy areas would be appropriate in Partnership

meetings and what representatives needed to do to participate. Interviewees perceived these to be the formal rules of the Partnership. This constitutes a new contribution to knowledge with respect to agency in the institution of a government-third sector partnership. Tsebelis (1999) has previously identified the role of “veto player”, but, in this case, it is played by a national third sector body. Moreover, this study demonstrates that in multi-policy actor settings, it is important to consider who the “institutional architects” might be (Hay and Wincott 1998). Further analytical scrutiny revealed that Welsh Government were driving WCVA’s introduction of these rules. Here the national third sector body took on a proxy state-steering role but was led by Welsh Government policy actors. In the parlance of feminist institutionalism, WCVA’s actions constituted a “layering” of institutional rules which led to increasingly bureaucratic complexity associated with the Partnership over time. The layering of rules is how this agency was enacted. This was shown to be particularly detrimental to equalities matters which were suppressed by WCVA when they perceived equality to be low on the government’s priorities. The layering of rules that resist the advancement of equalities has been recognised by feminist institutionalists (Mackay 2011; Celis and Lovenduski 2018; Minto and Mergaert 2020). Yet the theoretical significance of this feminist institutionalist perspective is to recognise that whereas institutionalist accounts of agency commonly focus on how institutional members can achieve political change, the actions of these institutional actors served to resist equalities policy change.

A further empirical contribution of this analysis was to reveal the impact on the third sector of the bureaucratic burden created by WCVA’s layering of rules. Interview data revealed that it resulted in WCVA’s own staffing resources being stretched. However, despite internal concerns that WCVA’s credibility would be compromised by managing the Partnership in this way, institutional discourses, as relayed by a broad spectrum of study participants, portrayed WCVA very favourably. Yet, to account for failings in the bureaucratic processes, the wider third sector were frequently

negatively portrayed by WCVA and Welsh Government interviewees, notably through use of the 'herding cats' trope. The way this trope was used inadvertently damaged the third sector. This study therefore lends support to Chapman et al.'s (2010) thesis that labelling the third sector as "troublesome" is a convenient device used by state actors. Where Chapman et al. (2010) described it as a device to resist yielding control to the third sector, these findings suggest it can also be a device to mask the institutional process failings of the Partnership's overly bureaucratic systems.

Another contribution towards understanding institutional agency made by the analysis of this research question was with respect to agency in the instigation of endogenous institutional change in processes. The empirical analysis showed no responsibility was attributed to any partner organisation to instigate Partnership change that addressed institutional failings. Equalities interviewees favoured trying to achieve equalities policy change rather than changes to the Partnership's processes, which they attributed to having limited resources. Moreover, both policy actors from the government and the third sector felt that the other set of policy actors was responsible for change. The upshot was a vacuum in monitoring the institutional efficacy of the Partnership and determining who was responsible for effecting change. Further analysis revealed this seeming absence of agency to instigate institutional change in response to efficacy failures was linked to Welsh Government's decision to circumnavigate the institutional learning mechanism of *Senedd Cymru's* scrutiny of the Partnership's efficacy that had previously been taking place.

The theoretical contribution that this institutionalist analysis offers is an explanation of the role agency plays in constraining endogenous institutional change from occurring. It builds on Hay's (1999) account of catastrophic equilibria, whereby institutional failure is widely perceived but intervention to rectify this is not taken. This study provides an explanation of why this is the case. Drawing on McConnell's (2010) account of efficacy,

he suggests that where there are failings in policymaking success or process success then government actors might prioritise political success and thus avoid drawing attention to these failings by inhibiting institutional learning that responds to them. Applying McConnell's account to this case study, government policy actors' tendency towards supporting the Partnership's political success inevitably led to them constraining the opportunities for institutional learning and adaptation in response to any failings in policy outputs or institutional processes. As with the account above, the theoretical contribution this makes to knowledge is in recognising that any analysis of institutional change, whether towards policy change or institutional process change, not only needs to consider agency and the allocation of responsibility for this agency, but also the role that agency might have in inhibiting institutional change.

Thus far, the specific theoretical contributions that relate to each of the four research questions have been reviewed. Attention is now turned to drawing these strands together to focus on the overarching research question with a view of this study's wider theoretical contribution. This begins with scrutiny of the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation, as it exists in a sub-state partnership. This is done to consider the implications for the advancement of equalities, in line with the overarching research question.

## **9.2. The broader theoretical contribution of this thesis**

### **9.2.1. Implications for substantive and descriptive representation**

The understanding of the distinction between third sector organisational representation and equalities representation revealed a disconnect between institutional discourses on descriptive representation and substantive representation. The analysis of research question one revealed institutional discourses concerned with descriptive representation predominantly portrayed the representatives' constituencies as being third sector organisations, rather than individuals from equalities groups or the wider population (Section 5.1.1). However, the analysis of substantive

representation also revealed on whose behalf representatives made policy claims. As was shown in the analysis of research question two, this study found institutional norms of appropriateness which made it unacceptable to make certain types of policy claims, particularly those based on organisational needs or the funding of the third sector (Section 6.3.1). The contradiction between these two findings is now considered.

The equalities literature, particularly feminist political theory, provides a valuable framework for analysis of both descriptive and substantive representation. This study extended these analyses to recognise discourses around third sector organisational representation. It found that, in practice, there was an expectation of third sector organisational needs having representation in the Partnership's institutional discourses, but this did not translate to accepting their substantive representation through policy-making claims. However, third sector organisational challenges, such as maintaining funding sustainability, are of concern to equalities organisations, and where these needs are not met, it threatens their capacity to both provide services to their equalities constituencies and represent equalities groups in governance structures, such as this Partnership. This was evidenced in the empirical finding that WCVA anticipated equalities representation in particular to face future threats due to the impact of austerity on their organisational survival (Section 5.3.2). An original contribution this study is to identify the importance of third sector organisational concerns to the achievement of equalities strategies. Thus, being able to advance organisational needs in policymaking is part of the ability to advance equalities through such a government-third sector partnership. From the perspective of the overarching research question, where institutional norms in a sub-state partnership obstruct organisational claims, this can frustrate the advancement of equalities.

Conversely, the analysis of claims made on behalf of equalities constituencies revealed similar constraints caused by the dissonance

between substantive and descriptive representation in the institutional setting of the Partnership. Therefore, substantive representation of equalities groups was impeded by aspects of the descriptive representation of third sector organisations. These obstacles included the institutional norm imposed on the Partnership by WCVA of only allowing the presentation of issues that were seen as crosscutting for the whole third sector in the ministerial meetings, which erroneously led to equalities issues being rejected (Section 5.1.3). Even where equalities substantive claims were allowed, the institutional norm for a unified voice inhibited claims concerned with equalities issues specific to one protected characteristic and intersectional claims (both inter-categorical and intra-categorical) (Section 7.1.2). Another obstacle to equalities substantive representation was that some policy actors in WCVA, when playing a proxy steering role on behalf of Welsh Government, accepted that they had suppressed equalities substantive representation when they perceived it to be lower order policy priority for Welsh Government (Section 8.2.4). Through the lens of the overarching research question, each of these institutional factors contribute to the frustration of the advancement of equalities in the Partnership's business.

The original contribution to knowledge made here is in recognising that representation of third sector organisational interests can interact with representation of equalities constituencies in a partnership between government and the third sector. One of the primary purposes of descriptive representation is to achieve substantive representation (Mansbridge 1999). However, this analysis reveals that the constituency upon which descriptive representation was based can be different from the constituency for whom representatives make substantive representative claims. Waylen (2011) argues feminist institutionalism can be used to understand how descriptive and substantive representation can be improved in institutional settings, and this study contributes to this. To understand how, it is useful to relate this to the "perceptions of positional power" found in equalities literature (Mackay et al. 2010:579). Celis and

Lovenduski (2018) maintain positional power, which refers to the power gained by a representative holding a seat in a political institution, is dependent on active power, which refers to the ability to act on behalf of those you represent. However, where positional power is drawn from two different understandings of the represented constituency, then the active power to instigate change from one position, can be undermined by the positional power attributed to the other. Thus, representatives may be given their positional power based on their ability to represent third sector organisational interests, but this does not correspond to having the active power to address policies concerned with organisational need. Conversely, equalities organisations may seem to have positional power as equalities representatives, but their active power to achieve equalities substantive representation can also be inhibited.

This study contributes original knowledge on representation in a number of respects. Extant feminist literature has recognised that descriptive representation does not automatically lead to substantive representation of issues on the policy agenda (Childs et al. 2010; Celis and Lovenduski 2018), and our finding supports this conclusion. However, it offers an original feminist institutionalist explanation of why this is the case by identifying the role of different constituencies at play. Furthermore, it shows that more should be done by state policy actors to understand the organisational needs of the equalities third sector and that this should translate into state policy actors accepting substantive representation of these needs. It also shows how equalities substantive representation is suppressed in a number of ways (i.e., through the “unified voice” expectation and by the layering of rules that resist equalities policy aims). This suggests that notions of cross-cutting and unified voices need to be resisted by equalities third sector organisations in order to better enable the advancement of equalities policy claims (including intersectional policy claims).

Another key contribution this study makes to equalities theory is applying the literature on democracy theory to understandings of equalities representation, which opens up a new perspective on exclusion and inclusion in the democratic processes. This also has significance to the advancement of equalities in line with our overarching research question and is addressed below.

### **9.2.2. Exclusion and inclusion in the democratic processes of governance**

One of the key findings that emerged from the analysis of representation was the conflicting institutional discourses about direct participation of equalities constituencies in the Partnership versus expert, professional representation. Direct participation was identified by interviewees as one of the key influencing tools to achieve substantive representation (Section 6.3.2). However, the institutional norms favoured professional representation in the formal Partnership meetings (Section 5.2.3) and sought certain qualities in representatives that aligned with the notion of skilled professionalism for policy-influencing (Section 6.3.2).

Nevertheless, the institutional discourses revealed that the professional expert representatives were undermined by discourses that favoured 'real people', referring to the individuals from equalities groups (Section 6.3.2). Therefore, the third sector representatives found themselves in the paradoxical position of being expected to be a professional expert, but their contribution was devalued on the grounds that they were not grassroots participants from their constituency.

Accordingly, a further key contribution this study makes to knowledge is in recognising the discursive conflation of the concepts: elite, equalities, professional, and expert, which can be encapsulated in the trope of 'the usual suspects'. This tension between expertise and direct participation is well-recognised in the democracy literature (Saward 2010; Makarovič and Rek 2014; Shapiro 2016). It is also found in equalities literature. For example, Nott (2000, pp. 269-270) contrasts the expert-bureaucratic

mainstreaming model with the participative-democratic mainstreaming model. This study builds on these different strands of literature about this tension by considering how these competing ideas discursively impact on the third sector's ability to achieve policy influence in the setting of substate partnerships. Thus, the present findings on the 'real people'-professional paradox provides a new contribution to knowledge.

There is also a tendency in some of the literature to view direct participation of third sector constituencies as the more democratic option (Fung 2006; Saward 2010; Prosser et al. 2017; Batory and Svensson 2019). This preference for direct participation is also found in the mainstreaming literature where theorists have maintained that the participative-democratic model is more contemporary (Donaghy 2004) and is a progression over elite or "expert-bureaucratic" representation (Squires 2005:371). Such an assumption prevents a more nuanced exploration of elite representation and direct participation, which this study has made possible and is further examined below.

The analysis in Chapter Five revealed that the discourses that undermined elite professional representation have an important nuance when applied to the equalities third sector. It fails to recognise the benefit of descriptive representation, given that this refers to representatives who belong to the same societal group as those they represent (Celis et al. 2014). Correspondingly, equalities representatives can be viewed as belonging to the identity group associated with their constituency. Disability representatives were particularly vocal about this attribute in our case study advancing that disabled people should represent disabled people. Therefore, these representatives were both professional experts and an example of direct participation. The former does not preclude the latter, especially when the principle of descriptive representation underpins the selection of the representative.

In addition to this, an empirical contribution that was drawn from the institutional discourses of our case study identified a binary whereby equalities representation was associated with elite, professionalised experts and they were contrasted with deprived, localised, geographically-defined grassroots organisations. This was seen in the analysis of institutional discourses about descriptive representation (Sections 5.2.1-5.2.2). It was also found in the scrutiny of how the formal institutional structures were seen to exclude class, socio-economic deprivation and geographical representation (Section 7.1.1). Welsh Government has a long-established policy concern with addressing socio-economic inequality defined by geographical areas, and thus anti-poverty policy measures have tended to target geographical communities according to a deprivation index (Pearce et al. 2020). Therefore, the joint exclusion from the Partnership of representation defined by geographical communities or socio-economic inequality reflects this conceptual association.

The original contribution to knowledge here can be related to the insights that Phillips (1999) gave about the decoupling of political inequality from economic inequality, in which political inequality is concerned with the right of all citizens to participate and has led to the promotion of identity politics. Her concern was the loss of focus on class and economic inequality. The present findings support this decoupling thesis, but also reveals two further empirical insights that pertain to this case study. First, that notions of class and economic equality can be loosely coupled with geographical, localised representation in institutional discourses. Second, a failure to engage with geographical, local organisations and offer representation in terms of economic inequality undermines the position of other equalities representatives in the institutional discourses of a third sector-government partnership. This is therefore an important contribution to our overarching research question in understanding how the institution of a third sector-government partnership can potentially threaten the advancement of equalities.

The significance of this included-excluded binary should be understood with respect to the interest group literature. This distinguishes between the representation in policymaking of special interest groups or the wider population (Beyers et al. 2008) or as Dryzek (2000:169) describes it, between “partial interests” and the impartial “public interest”. The tension between equalities representation and geographical representation has parallels with this distinction between ‘partial’ special interest groups or the ‘impartial’ wider population. The understanding demonstrated in this case study is in keeping with the participation continuum described by Fung (2006:68), which ranges from exclusive to inclusive, but in his account the inclusive-end is labelled “the public” and the exclusive-end encompasses experts, elected representatives, professional and lay stakeholders. Thus, equalities representatives, irrespective of whether they are lay stakeholders or expert professionals, seemingly occupy the exclusive end of Fung’s continuum. The indirect consequence of these institutional discourses is that they imply geographical representation is inclusive and equalities representation is exclusive. There is a broad literature on the inherent distrust of elites influencing policy (see Section 2.2.4). However, the application of this elite concept to equalities groups loses sight of the very justification for equalities representation, which is to redress the disadvantage they face in many representative democracies (Mansbridge 1999). Therefore, a key contribution this study makes to knowledge is in recognising the role that institutional discourses on elite third sector representation can play in shaping discourses on participation in democracy and undermining the involvement of equalities representation. In so doing, it again contributes to the overarching research question in revealing a further way that a third sector-government partnership can frustrate the advancement of equalities.

The analysis thus far has considered many facets of how an institution of a third sector-government partnership might promote or frustrate the advancement of equalities, however, due consideration should also be given to the implications for the formal equalities strategies that are used

by third sector organisations in such partnerships to achieve the advancement of equalities.

### **9.2.3. The equalities strategies of equalities organisations**

As discussed in the literature review (Section 2.4.2), mainstreaming theorists have sought to document the progression of equalities strategies from equal treatment to positive action to gender mainstreaming (Rees 2005). A further contribution to knowledge that this study makes is with respect to these different equalities strategies' application to a sub-state partnership.

First, it presents a new perspective on how equal treatment as an equalities strategy can be applied in an institutional analysis. Throughout the findings chapters, a key empirical contribution was the notable ongoing discourse about inequality of opportunity to participate in the Partnership. Thus, Chapter Five revealed interviewees' perception that smaller, localised grassroots organisations did not have the same opportunity to participate as the 'elite', national organisations. Similar findings have been found in the extant third sector literature (Chaney and Fevre 2001a; Dicks et al. 2001; Taylor 2001; Casey 2004; Hodgson 2004; Day 2006; Royles 2007; Bristow et al. 2008; Chaney 2011; Engeli and Mazur 2018). This study's original contribution, which builds on this literature, is to elucidate the many ways that there were inconsistencies in equalities organisations' opportunity to participate in the Partnership at multiple stages in the Partnership's work (Chapter Eight). Additionally, as noted earlier, Chapter Seven identified the exclusion of representation from third sector organisations concerned with class, socio-economic disadvantage, regions or intersectionality, as well as the structural disadvantage faced by 'race' equality organisations. Given the breadth of equalities organisations' representation in the Partnership, the extent of this inequality of opportunity for equalities organisations to participate is striking.

The significance of this finding to the literature is manifest. Parken et al. (2019) proposed embedding equality in the machinery of government. However, the present findings reveal a failure to apply scrutiny of structural inequalities to third sector organisations' ability to participate in the institution of the Partnership. This failure should be related to the difference between a constituency of people possessing protected characteristics and a constituency of third sector organisations. Equal treatment as an equalities strategy was originally associated with an individualised rights-based approach (Rees 2005). Its application to individuals' opportunities might explain the failure to apply equality of opportunity to the rights of equalities organisations to participate in the Partnership. An original contribution to knowledge is to highlight that policy actors' failure to consider equality of opportunity with respect to equalities organisations can lead to an absence of equal opportunity scrutiny being adopted within institutional structures concerned with third sector engagement in state policymaking. Therefore, one theoretical insight that this study provides is recognising the value of applying an equal treatment strategy to governance mechanisms and processes in such a partnership. In terms of our feminist institutionalist analysis, it is clear that the failure to apply equal opportunities to the participation of equalities organisations in a third sector-government partnership is one further way that such an institution frustrates the advancement of equalities.

In addition to expanding our understanding of equal treatment as an equalities strategy, this study makes two further important contributions to mainstreaming theory. The first is related to the empirical finding that mainstreaming was largely rejected as an appropriate strategy by interviewees from across government and the third sector, even by equalities organisations themselves (referenced in the earlier analysis in Section 9.1.3). From the perspective of the overarching research question, understanding these attitudes towards mainstreaming is important for understanding how the advancement of equalities might be frustrated within the Partnership. Its rejection was shown to be related to a

reinterpretation of the meaning of ‘mainstreaming’ by policy actors. The empirical analysis of the informal institutional discourses of interviewees showed that the meaning of mainstreaming had erroneously been redefined in two alternative interpretations: either as simply referring to the use of *equality impact assessments (EIAs)*, or to mean *everybody shares the responsibility of pursuing equality*. In the case of the former, the conflation of mainstreaming with EIAs, led to its rejection on the grounds of it having limited impact. The mistaking of mainstreaming for equality impact assessments has previously been recognised by theorists (Beveridge and Nott 2001). In the case of the latter, policy actors across the sample of interviewees saw mainstreaming as losing the equalities focus in policy work. This second reinterpretation of mainstreaming as the diffused responsibility for equalities, is an original contribution to mainstreaming theory which has hitherto largely been overlooked. Feminist political scientists have written extensively about the success or failure of mainstreaming strategies to instigate meaningful advancement of equalities (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Beveridge and Nott 2001; McRobbie 2009; Minto and Mergaert 2018). They have also sought to understand why mainstreaming strategies have fallen short of their transformative potential (Minto and Mergaert 2018). Thus, this reinterpretation of mainstreaming can contribute to contemporary explanations about reported failures in the efficacy of mainstreaming in institutional settings.

This study’s second original contribution to knowledge about mainstreaming is concerned with the relationship between the achievement of mainstreaming and its constituent tools. The interview data evidenced how the goals of mainstreaming can be achieved through equalities organisations’ engagement with government, even where the use of formal mainstreaming tools is limited. Relating this to the overarching research question, this is clear evidence of equalities being advanced. Theorists have argued the analysis of mainstreaming should not be confused with its formal tools (Beveridge and Nott 2001; Rees 2005).

The theoretical significance of this is to draw attention to how the goals of mainstreaming equalities can be achieved even when it is not primarily through the use of formal mainstreaming tools.

Mainstreaming literature also describes mainstreaming principles. It is argued here that the Partnership exhibited two key mainstreaming principles. Rees (2005) identified the principle of “democracy and participation”. This was shown to play a strong part in the Partnership discourses in Chapter Five. Rees (2005) also described the mainstreaming principle of “regarding the individual as a whole person”, which calls for a recognition of the multi-strand approach to equalities, as scrutinised in Chapter Seven. Yet beyond extant accounts of how mainstreaming can be achieved through tools and principles, the present empirical analysis also revealed extensive use of informal influencing strategies (Section 9.1.3). This requires us to build on extant understanding of mainstreaming using our feminist institutionalist lens. Whilst mainstreaming brought formal institutional tools for policy change, this feminist institutionalist approach has also recognised the value of informal strategies for policy change. Thus, a contribution this study makes is to recognise the limitations of mainstreaming and how feminist institutionalist approaches can be used to overcome these.

As noted, this study’s feminist institutionalist-oriented approach to analysing the impact of a third sector-government partnership was concerned with a broader interpretation of equalities than an exclusive focus on gender. There is some resistance amongst feminist theorists to the broadening of feminist strategies to wider notions of equalities (Nott 2005, Donaghy 2004). However, the benefits of doing so are made manifest in this case study. For example, it allowed an analysis of the multiple facets of how institutions shape the potential for applied intersectionality. Given this and also how this approach has allowed us to build theoretically on mainstreaming as an equalities strategy, it is therefore suggested this research lays the foundations for an equalities

institutionalism (or an intersectional institutionalism). This can serve not just as a theoretical paradigm but also as an equalities strategy for policy change and a framework for further empirical work.

This section has detailed the insights into equalities strategies gained by studying partnerships through a feminist institutionalist lens. This reflection on the theoretical contribution of this thesis ends with a consideration of the insights that this study gives to how partnerships are understood in terms of social theory.

#### **9.2.4. Theorising third sector-government partnerships**

A further contribution this study makes to knowledge is to challenge some of the original assumptions about partnerships and networks thus developing a more nuanced understanding of third sector-government partnerships and their relationship with networks. Partnerships are considered distinct from networks because they are formalised structures and procedures, whereas networks are often (though not exclusively) conceived as informal and self-governing (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998). The Welsh case study Partnership fits this understanding in one sense because the Partnership is itself written into legislation (Section 3.1.1) which makes it a particularly formal structure. However, the twenty-five thematic networks that form part of the Partnership's formal structure should also be understood as formal entities. Thus, this traditional distinction between informal networks and formal partnerships needs to be reconceptualised. Feminist institutionalism requires us to consider both the formal and the informal facets of an institution (Krook and Mackay 2011). This can form part of how we conceptualise partnerships. Scholars have conceded that partnerships can involve both loose networks and defined structures (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998; Newman 2001) and whilst this is a valuable observation, this study's contribution is to recognise the existence of formal networks with defined structures that form part of the formal Partnership structure.

This feminist institutionalist analysis offers an alternative view about the nature of networks and thus makes an important contribution to network theory. The original contribution to knowledge of this study is to reveal the intricacies of formal partnership and network structures. Through this empirical analysis a typology was developed of different formal network structures. This can usefully be compared with the network structures described by Marsh and Rhodes (1992) who dealt with network complexity by presenting two ideal types and proposing a continuum to address the multitude of variations between them. In contrast, the theoretical contribution this study makes is identifying key distinctions between network structures in terms of the nature of the membership (individuals, organisations and/or other networks) and how an organisation comes to be recognised as the network lead (detailed in Figure 5-1). Consequently, this empirical analysis puts forward six different network structures and additionally, identifies the Partnership itself as a further network structure which can be conceived as the overall formal network of networks. Thus, there can be networks within networks within this overall network. Moreover, network lead organisations can be members of other networks. This exposes formal institutional networks as complex, multi-layered, interwoven structures. Such formal institutional structures reinforce the multiple, sometimes conflicting understandings of the nature of the constituencies being represented, thereby introducing complexity, contestation and opaqueness. Reconceptualising partnerships as a complex form of network that has both formal and informal facets that can shape the advancement of equalities is a further contribution to knowledge of this study.

Having explored the empirical and theoretical contributions that this study makes to knowledge, this chapter now considers this study's limitations and consider its future implications for research.

### **9.3. Limitations of this study and avenues for future research**

#### **9.3.1. Limitations of this study**

The case for examining a partnership between government and the third sector at sub-state level was advanced in the Literature Review (Section 2.1.5). A limitation of this thesis has been that it has not explored the significance of the sub-state nature of this Partnership more fully in respect to other tiers of governance. This sub-state level of analysis has been useful because it has enabled scrutiny of the relationship between the third sector and state policy actors at a devolved level of government. As noted, it addresses a key gap in the literature and acts as a corrective to previous studies that have examined third sector-government partnerships at the state-wide level. The case study revealed that policy actors from the third sector and government appreciate the advantages that they gain in Wales from having such a sub-state partnership in comparison with their contemporaries in other UK nations (Section 8.1.1). However, when determining the research design, the decision was made that this thesis would not seek to address the Partnership's engagement with other tiers of governance such as local government, UK wide structures emanating from Westminster nor supranational governance in the form of the European Commission or the European Union. Thus, this study has not examined the ways that the third sector might advance its interests through a sub-state partnership to influence policy in these multi-level governance settings, nor has it addressed the ways that other tiers of governance might influence the engagement of the third sector at this sub-state level. The decision to not explore these areas in this thesis was based on constraints of time and resources and keeping the focus on the overarching research question. It was felt that multi-level investigations sat outside of this remit. Thus, this thesis has prioritised its theoretical focus on the feminist institutionalist goal of examining how such a partnership promotes and/or frustrates the advancement of equalities in relation to the sub-state level. This notwithstanding, there is scope for a future study to explore the interrelationship between sub-state governance structures and other scalar modes of governance. Another area ripe for further

examination is a comparative study of how other sub-state institutional structures (for example, in the other devolved nations of the UK and at the meso-level across Europe and beyond) shape the relationship between the third sector and state.

As noted, a more prosaic limitation of this study was time and resources. It was not possible to interview all participants at every level of the Partnership. A purposive sample of policy actors was a robust answer to this, and the protected characteristics identified in the Equalities Act (2010) were used as a basis for selection. Thus, the interviews targeted elites from organisations representative of age, disability, 'race', religion, LGBTQ+ and gender. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that organisations that focused on intersectionality, "class" or socio-economic inequality were in danger of falling outside of this criteria. Steps were taken to remedy this through the purposive sampling. This was to avoid the same failing for which the Partnership's formal institutional structures were criticised in Chapter Seven being applied to this study. Organisations which address the Welsh language also fell outside of this criteria. Future research could consider the case of Welsh Language organisations' engagement in such third sector-government partnerships. Given the finding that policy actors perceived smaller, localised grassroots organisations to be excluded from this Partnership, there is also scope for future research to examine more closely the participation of such organisations in policymaking.

Another limitation of this study was concerned with the interview schedule and the focus of the semi-structured questions on the Partnership. Many of the participants struggled to confine their answers to a Partnership focus. This was particularly the case when they described the steps used to engage network members in the Partnership, the claims and claims-making actions of the equalities third sector and/or the perceived outcomes of these claims. Interviewees from equalities organisations understood their actions as part of a bigger picture rather than attributable to just the Partnership, so, the focus on the Partnership neglected to address their

wider relationship with Welsh Government and Senedd Cymru. This gap between the interviewees' and the schedule's conceptual construction was turned into an advantage in the analysis. The observation led to the recognising the multiple venues the equalities third sector used simultaneously across the executive and the legislature as well as externally to influence policy. This was utilised to better understand the Partnership in its wider governance context and map out the multiple venues of equalities organisations' engagement with government (Figure 6.1).

Moving on from this study's limitations, this chapter now considers the further future avenues of research that could stem from this study's findings.

### **9.3.2. Avenues for future related research**

The implications of this study for future research and theory are now presented, first, in terms of feminist institutionalism and the wider institutionalist literature, second with consideration of the equalities field, and third, with respect to third sector-government relations. This builds on the areas for further research already identified in the discussion on this study's limitations (Section 9.3.1).

A key original contribution of this study is its application of feminist institutionalism to sub-state third sector-government partnerships. In addition, the application of feminist institutionalism to a broader range of equalities categories beyond gender has been fruitful in exploring the formal institutional structures and informal institutional norms and discourses that both promote and inhibit the goals of equalities organisations. These are early steps towards developing a form of equalities (or intersectional) institutionalism, but further work is now needed to explore the theoretical implications of developing feminist institutionalism as a paradigm within the broader equalities field. It was also suggested (in Section 9.2.3) that such a form of equalities

institutionalism might be applied to practice as an equalities strategy that builds on both intersectionality and mainstreaming. This may lay some groundwork for action research into developing equalities organisations' practice with respect to equalities institutionalism. This wider application of feminist institutionalism is at an embryonic stage of development, so is tentatively posited here as an area for further research and consideration.

In terms of the wider institutionalist literature, future avenues for research could be related to this study's contribution towards understanding the relationship between agency and change within institutions both with respect to policy change and endogenous institutional change. This study's examination of institutional factors related to agency that inhibit change could be further explored alongside more established historical institutionalist theories around how path dependency inhibits change. For example, this could be researched with respect to the coronavirus crisis, given that Macmillan (2020:133) identified the pandemic as a 'macroevent' whose destabilising impact has created new discourses on institutional change that may have disrupted third sector path dependencies. There is also potential for further research to explore other settings that might exhibit the multiple micro-acts of non-participation in agenda-setting that were identified in this study which can constitute an absence of agency and can serve to undermine an institution.

Future avenues for research within the equalities field could draw on the present study's analysis of intersectionality. This study has begun to explore how the interrelationships between equalities organisations shape intersectionality, and it also identified different institutional factors that can inhibit different forms of intersectional practices from developing. There is potential for an action research project which looks at introducing institutional mechanisms that might overcome these institutional hurdles to intersectional practices.

Another potential for future investigation within the equalities field could build on this study's contribution to the understanding of the differing conceptions of constituencies tied up with representation. This warrants further examination to consider how institutional discourses about representation differ in varying contexts. This study's finding of the inhibition of equalities third sector claims related to organisational needs also warrants further exploration. For example, coronavirus is anticipated to have a fallout and threaten third sector organisations' survival (Macmillan 2020). Thus, the present study's finding that equalities organisations face greater vulnerability from the dual impacts of instrumentalisation and austerity, could be extended to examine how the coronavirus crisis impacts equalities representation.

The insights on the hierarchy of (in)equalities identified in this study, should open up research into how different equalities categories are disadvantaged and advantaged in relation to other equalities categories. This invites comparisons to be made internationally and/or over time. The particular disadvantage experienced by 'race' equality organisations needs to be scrutinised further, especially with recent political discourses around #BlackLivesMatter to examine variable practices for inclusion of 'race' equality organisation in state-third sector relations.

Further work could be done in relating hierarchies of (in)equalities with political intersectionality, particularly in relation to Covid 19. For example, Covid 19 has created competing equalities agendas because some equalities organisations represent groups that are especially vulnerable to Covid 19, whilst others represent people who are experiencing greater disadvantages as a result of the social distancing policies. Also, progress in civil society towards digital engagement might promote inclusion for some equalities groups whilst disadvantaging others. Additionally, many equalities organisations will be concerned about the economic impact of the pandemic disproportionately disadvantaging their constituencies. All of these competing interests will be playing out in how the equalities third

sector seek to influence government policy responses to the pandemic. The impact on hierarchies between equalities categories and equalities inter-organisational relationships is pivotal to understanding which issues gain political salience. Furthermore, pandemic-related changes in competition and collaboration between equalities organisations may in turn impact on the extent and nature of an intersectional approach being adopted by these equalities organisations in future.

This study's data suggest that equalities representation is increasingly under threat by discourses that pit equalities elite expertise against localised geographical representation of the wider community that are often portrayed as under-resourced grassroots organisations. Future research might utilise longitudinal studies to address how political discourses on representation in this respect have changed over time. This could build on Phillips' (1999) analysis in her study "*Which Equalities Matter?*" to identify contemporaneous shifts in the political salience of differing equalities discourses. It could also be helpful to relate such discourse analysis to how populism can impact on both direct participation of populations and representation.

Having considered the future theoretical and research implications within the fields of institutionalism and equalities, consideration must be given to the implications for future research with respect to third sector-government relations. The feminist institutionalist perspective of this study provided insights into the relationship between formal tools for influencing policy and informal practices, which will be of interest to the wider third sector studies. As noted above, (Section 9.3.1), there is scope for future research to compare the policy-influencing practices of third sector organisations in the four countries of the UK and relate this to their differing third sector-government dynamics. This is important particularly at a time when notions of lobbying have become contentious (Hemmings 2017), as evidenced by the debates around the *Lobbying, Non-Party Campaign and Trade Union Administration Act 2014* (Egdell et al. 2016;

Milbourne and Murray 2017; Aiken and Taylor 2019), but attitudes to lobbying vary between different devolved nations. There is scope to further explore the changing discourses about the third sector in different settings and how these are used to constrain or empower the sector, with respect to policy influence.

Further exploration needs to be given to this study's finding that the third sector deploy policy-influencing across multiple venues inside and outside of the Executive and Legislature, and furthermore, that this can be used to protect their ability to be critical of the state. This case study was confined to interpreting this through the Partnership. Research that does not restrict its focus to one third sector-government mechanism, and targets policy-influencing strategies of third sector organisations across multiple positions on the insider-outsider spectrum could be beneficial. This could also be applied to capture the relationship between these strategies and the rapidly evolving digital campaigning strategies (Aiken and Taylor 2019) and repertoires of contention that are seeing new developments with respect to social movements particularly in environmental campaigning, and 'race', gender, disability and age equality movements (Alimi 2015).

A further area for future research is tied to the insights from this study into the different network structures and the multi-level, overlapping relationships between such structures. Sørensen and Torfing (2005a, 2005b) offered an account of how formal network structures should be managed by Government with their meta-governance account. However, the present results have shown that the governance of such networks is defused between multiple interwoven layers of third sector umbrella organisations. Further consideration of how networks are managed internally within the third sector is a ripe area for research.

Having addressed the implications of this study for future theoretical and empirical development, attention now turns to the implications of this study for practice.

## **9.4. Policy recommendations**

The policy recommendations below are grouped into two parts: those concerning the advancement of equalities through governance mechanisms in general (Section 9.4.1) and those that are specific recommendations for the Welsh case study Partnership (Section 9.4.2).

### **9.4.1. Concerning the advancement of equalities through governance mechanisms**

**Recommendation 1: Policy actors across the UK and the wider international community can draw on this Welsh case study as an example of institutional innovation in interest mediation to achieve engagement of the equalities third sector in policymaking.** In particular, its thematic network structure that provides a route for the third sector to engage with all government ministers through extensive meetings sets an example. This is both in terms of its symbolic and practical value which enables equalities expertise to inform equalities policy and policymaking more broadly at multiple stages of policy development. Moreover, it demonstrates that such a partnership establishes a culture of third sector engagement which can pervade government ways of working more broadly, enabling the third sector wider access to government and promoting the acceptability of formal and informal state-third sector relations.

Challenges faced by this Partnership inform other recommendations below. They set out what more could be done to further advance equalities through such governance mechanisms.

**Recommendation 2: Presenting a third sector ‘unified voice’ should not be the overarching criteria by which the agenda of a governance partnership is decided.** This undermines the value of having diverse expert representation in the first place. Moreover, equalities organisations particularly need to resist an institutional norm for a unified voice given

that it can silence equalities voices as a whole or divergent voices between equalities strands or within them.

**Recommendation 3: The advocacy of equalities voices within governance mechanisms should be protected.** Thus, governments should ensure that equalities representation in policymaking is safeguarded in cases where it might be under threat. When equalities organisations participate in governance mechanisms, policy actors should resist discourses that can threaten this achievement, such as referring to them as the ‘usual suspects’ or ‘elite’ third sector. Equalities organisations’ representatives should also defend the validity of being professional equality experts, particularly resisting discourses that diminishes their position for somehow not being ‘real people’. Relatedly, there should be more recognition amongst government and third sector policy actors of descriptive representation from these equalities groups, where representatives share the qualities of those that they represent, which allows both direct participation and professional representation. This notwithstanding, all policy actors should acknowledge beneficiaries’ direct participation is an effective way to achieve policy influence and build this into governance structures.

**Recommendation 4: Equalities organisations involved in governance mechanisms must apply their expertise to scrutinise equality of opportunity for equalities third sector organisations to participate.** This should include examining whether there any structural disadvantages faced by certain equalities strands. Equal opportunity can be further promoted in such a governance mechanism, by drawing on the policy influencing expertise exhibited amongst equalities organisations in this study to educate other third sector organisations about how informal relationships and formal and informal influencing can be achieved and sustained (as detailed in Section 6.2).

**Recommendation 5: It is important to build in institutional processes to ensure institutional learning and adaptation into governance**

**mechanisms.** This should be written into the formal structures with periodic review, which could coincide with the term of government office. Crucially, such institutional learning mechanisms should ensure institutional changes is expected and instigated in response. It is clear that such structures must identify who carries responsibility to periodically instigate these changes, which must be properly resourced, and this responsibility should sit outside of government.

**Recommendation 6: Equalities interest groups might consider reframing their equalities strategy in policymaking as either *institutionalising equalities* or *institutionalising intersectionality*.** This approach would draw on the strengths of a mainstreaming approach but allow for a sense of progression from mainstreaming. It would recognise the value of formal and informal policy-influencing by equalities organisations. Policy actors should resist discourses that suggest informal relationships with government give equalities organisations undue influence. Instead, they should recognise their influence as appropriate and important for addressing imbalances in power and position. It is therefore a sign of a healthy pluralist democracy. Furthermore, an approach based on *institutionalising intersectionality* would promote intersectional policymaking. This could include developing intersectionality advisory groups which bring academics and equalities organisations together to explore the meaning of intersectionality and its different forms and to ultimately develop applied intersectionality policy.

#### **9.4.2. Concerning the Welsh case study Partnership**

Whilst Welsh policy actors involved in the case study Partnership can draw on recommendations 2-6 above (Section 9.4.1), there are additional insights which apply particularly to this case study.

**Recommendation 1: The Partnership's thematic networks should be protected.** Policy actors could celebrate the Welsh achievement of having thematic representation via the Partnership, which has given people with

disadvantaged voices support to participate in government policymaking. WCVA and the Welsh third sector as a whole should be aware of dangers to equalities organisations of the instrumentalisation of the third sector. Therefore, they need to defend the symbolic value of engaging the different third sector themes in the Partnership.

**Recommendation 2: Welsh Government should recognise that having a third sector-Welsh Government partnership in place has laid foundations for a way of working that has been adopted across its departments.** As part of celebrating this, Welsh Government could do an audit to recognise all the collaborations it has with third sector and reframe it as evidence of their broader achievement of the Partnership. This would also be a step towards greater transparency to promote fair practices in recruiting organisations to government working groups and ministerial advisory groups.

**Recommendation 3: The Welsh Government and WCVA need to find ways to promote equality of access to the Partnership.** The third sector representatives should be reframed as network leads. Greater involvement of network member organisations can then be promoted in the Partnership. This would take pressure off existing representatives and open up access to other organisations. The thematic and geographical third sector partnerships (TSPC and TSSW), should both be recognised as forming part of one partnership between Welsh Government and the third sector. This would overcome concerns about exclusion of smaller, local organisations. It would also be in keeping with Welsh Government's current policy direction on the rationalising and simplifying of the partnership landscape, as described in the recent Review of Strategic Partnerships (Welsh Government and WLGA 2020).

**Recommendation 4: Welsh Government and WCVA should provide additional support for 'race' equality organisations to redress the particular disadvantage these organisations have faced, as shown in this**

study. Training in policy influencing practices should be made available. Due consideration should be given to how Government expectations for brevity, clarity and professionalism can be exclusionary. Instead, innovative mechanisms should be developed that enable equalities organisations to communicate to Welsh Government in alternative ways that celebrate cultural diversity. This could also be tied in with innovative ways to build in direct participation of stakeholders into the Partnership mechanisms. Welsh Government should also avoid structuring future funding allocation in a way that implicitly suggests one organisation has been designated as the leading representative organisation.

**Recommendation 5: Welsh Government are well placed to set an international example for developing applied intersectionality policies,** given the “all people” framing of its equalities duty in legislation. In order to do this, there are a few adjustments that are needed. This would include introducing an intersectionality thematic network in the Partnership structures. The EHRCo network (Equalities and Human Rights Coalition) is already in place, so this would be an easy adjustment to make. More should be done to recognise intersections of economic equality with different strands of equalities to overcome the dichotomous discourses that separate class from other equalities strands. This could start with Welsh Government and WCVA introducing a network for economic equality (anti-poverty). There is currently an employment network and a housing network but there is not currently a focus on poverty.

**Recommendation 6: Welsh Government should improve certain partnership processes.** In particular, it should develop more active participation in partnership agenda-setting than it does presently. Primarily, this can be achieved by involving the Partnership in the consultation processes used by each Welsh Government department to ensure its wider relevance to policymaking across the departments. Additionally, Welsh Government and WCVA should adapt the institutional learning mechanisms so that the Partnership can become more effective.

This can be achieved by introducing a periodic review and allocating responsibility, as described above, but furthermore, the third sector, and particularly WCVA, should make better use of the institutional learning mechanisms that are already written into legislation. This should include WCVA assuming control of the Funding and Compliance Sub-Committee from Welsh Government. Similarly, WCVA and the *Senedd Cymru* Equalities Committee should be encouraged to resume scrutiny of the Annual Report of the Third Sector Scheme.

This concludes our analysis of the empirical and theoretical contributions of this study and its theoretical and practical implications.

## **9.5. Conclusion**

This thesis has addressed the overarching research question by revealing how an institution of a sub-state government-third sector partnership can promote the advancement of equalities but also how it can constrain, inhibit and threaten the advancement of equalities. The case study demonstrates that, as an innovation in sub-state interest mediation that emerged in Wales as part of the UK's devolution programme of 1998-99, a third sector-government partnership certainly can advance equalities in policymaking in multiple ways. These include developing a representative structure with thematic networks that give equalities third sector organisations a formally recognised position, institutionalising them in government's policymaking. This present study has shown this has both symbolic significance and has led to equalities being embedded in a broad spectrum of policies. The promotion of equalities enabled by such a partnership can extend to establishing a culture of third sector engagement within government that stretches beyond such partnerships, thus enabling equalities organisations to gain other positions in sub-state governance, establish both formal and informal relations with state policy actors and develop a sophisticated range of policy influencing activities that can be deployed simultaneously at multiple policy influencing positions on the insider-outsider spectrum.

However, it has also been demonstrated that both the promotion and constraint of equalities may take place concurrently. Revealing the coexistence of sometimes opposing institutional discourses in sub-state partnerships is thus a further contribution of this study. Another contribution is to recognise that differing understandings of representation can inhibit or threaten the descriptive representation of equalities. Additionally, the complex relationship between descriptive and substantive representation has been shown to be one pivotal way that advancement of equalities is constrained. Thus, differing understandings of the constituencies that are represented by the equalities third sector can lead to a disconnect between what is represented through descriptive and substantive representation. This provides one explanation of why descriptive representation does not always lead to substantive representation through governance partnerships. This study has also shown how the advancement of equalities can be threatened by the tension between expert professional representation versus direct participation. One conclusion of this study is that the perception of this tension undermines the essential quality of descriptive representation which allows representatives to also be examples of direct participation. A further threat to the advancement of equalities are institutional discourses that portray equalities organisations as privileged experts in elite positions whose participation is perceived to exclude localised grassroots organisations that represent deprived geographical communities. Another potential barrier to the advancement of equalities in a sub-state partnership that this thesis has identified is the institutional failure to ensure equal opportunities for the equalities third sector to engage in the processes of a sub-state partnership. The analysis has also identified the neglect of the organisational concerns of the equalities third sector as playing a role in frustrating the promotion of equalities in policymaking via the Partnership. Furthermore, this analysis has recognised the limitations of mainstreaming as an approach to advance equalities and has proposed some feminist institutionalist steps to overcome this. Intersectionality in

policymaking has been shown to be constrained both by formal institutional structures and informal discourses concerning collaboration and competition within the context of a sub-state partnership. This study has also revealed how these formal and informal facets of a partnership can reinforce inequality between equalities categories. Moreover, the present research has also developed our understanding of partnerships and networks to expose how failure to understand the complex interwoven multi-level nature of partnerships can also constrain the advancement of equalities. The present study's analysis of agency, the allocation of responsibility for agency, and the role that agency can have in inhibiting institutional change has revealed how different actors within a partnership can inhibit institutional learning. In turn this has been shown to constrain institutional change that could otherwise better promote equalities either through policy or within partnership processes. This comprehensive feminist institutionalist analysis of the constraints on the advancement of equalities should not obfuscate the multiple ways that such a sub-state partnership can promote equalities. As the policy recommendations evidenced (Section 9.4), each of these constraints on advancing equalities detailed here can be used to further understanding of how such a sub-state partnership can be adapted to improve its capacity to advance equalities.

This study makes an original contribution to our understanding of policymaking and inequalities in Wales. In so doing, it has also created a unique dataset consisting of rich situated policy actor accounts complemented by the rich documentary data utilised in the document analysis. Additionally, this feminist institutionalist examination of a formal governance partnership between devolved government and the third sector with a focus on equalities organisations has provided new insights into the benefits of this distinctive form of innovation in governance which emerged from Welsh devolution. Moreover, this study's extension of feminist institutionalism to a broader interpretation of equalities has provided theoretical insights and is offered here as a template or model for future study of the promotion of equalities in policymaking forums. This

study lends credence to March and Olsen's (1984:738) observation that institutions matter: "they are policy actors in their own right". It is hoped that the implications for practice will match the theoretical implications of the present research and do much to promote more effective partnership working between governments and the equalities third sector, in Wales and beyond.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

Appendix 2: Ethics Committee Submission

Appendix 3: Information sent to participants prior to interview

Appendix 4: Schedule of interviews & interviewee list

## Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

<p><b>Introductions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Introduce my PhD.</b></li><li>- <b>What can you tell me about your role?</b></li></ul> <p><i>NOTE: Added after the pilots. Pilot participant suggested it would put interviewees at ease.</i></p>
<p><b>1. For equalities third sector organisations only:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Describe your third sector organisation's priorities.</b></li><li>- <b>What do you think are your main concerns as an equalities third sector organisation in Wales?</b></li></ul>
<p><b>2.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>What is your knowledge of, or involvement in the Welsh Government's engagement mechanisms of the third sector?</b> <i>PROMPT: networks, TSPC meetings, ministerial meetings, consultations, Third Sector Scheme Annual Report?</i></li></ul>
<p><i>EXTRA</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>What is your opinion of the engagement mechanisms? How do you assess the TSPC, Ministerial Meetings and networks?</b></li></ul> <p><i>NOTE: Added after the pilots. Participants demonstrated a need to express their opinion on this before turning their attention to the specific questions being asked.</i></p> <p><i>ALTERNATIVE If their equalities organisation is not participating:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>What are the reasons why your organisation is not involved directly in any of these mechanisms?</b></li></ul>
<p><b>3.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>How would you describe the purpose of the Welsh Government engagement mechanism with third sector organisations?</b> <i>PROMPT: What do the third sector hope to get out of it? What do Welsh Government hope to get out of it?</i></li></ul>

<p><b>4.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Which third sector organisations should be involved in the government-third sector partnership?</b></li> </ul> <p><i>PROMPT: And are they? To what extent does Welsh Government involve the right third sector organisations?</i></p> <p><i>How many third sector organisations should be involved? too many or not enough actively involved? Why?</i></p>
<p><b>5.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>What are the obstacles that might prevent third sector organisations from taking part in the state-third sector partnership?</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>6.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Of the third sector organisations that are not involved, are there any ways that they can contribute to the TSPC, the ministerial meetings or the networks?</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>7.</b></p> <p><i>For Welsh Government or WCVA interviewees</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>If the third sector are there to advocate, for whom should they be advocating?</b></li> </ul> <p><i>ALTERNATIVE For equalities organisations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>If you are there to advocate, for whom should you be advocating?</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>8.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>How much opportunity is there for third sector organisations to engage their own members/service users/ beneficiaries in these engagement mechanisms?</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>9.</b></p>

- **How much expectation is there on representatives who participate to:**

**(a) evidence the extent they give their own members or beneficiaries a say?**

- **(b) collect and present evidence from the third sector organisations they represent from the network?**

**10.**

- **In your experience, which equalities policy areas / subjects have been addressed through these engagement mechanisms? And how has the third sector's engagement impacted on any government equality policies?**

*For Welsh Government or WCVA interviewees*

- **How do the equality third sector push their policy interests?**

*ALTERNATIVE For equalities organisations*

- **How does your third sector organisations push your policy interests?**

*For equalities third sector organisations only*

- **How does your participation in these mechanisms relate to your third sector organisations other activities to influence policy, lobby or campaign?**

*PROMPT: Other Welsh Government mechanisms, influencing other Welsh Government activities or programmes, getting involved in Senedd Cymru, communicating with other levels of government: Local Government, Central UK Government, Europe*

**11.**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>What role do informal relationships between partners play in the partnership?</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>12.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>How much, if at all, does achieving equality feature in the third sector-government partnership and how?</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>13.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>How much, if at all, do you think the TSPC and Ministerial Meetings are about mainstreaming equality?</b></li> </ul> <p><i>PROMPT: Explain Mainstreaming</i></p>
<p><b>14.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>To what extent, if at all, do equalities third sector organisations use their participation to address their organisational needs or interests?</b></li> <li>- <b>How, if at all, has the third sector-government partnership been used to impact on the delivery of services by the third sector?</b></li> </ul> <p><i>PROMPTS: - Grants / contracts for service delivery? For Welsh Government or or other public sector contractors, Considering economic / political climate: e.g., austerity, Brexit. Does it come from Welsh Government or the third sector?</i></p>
<p><b>15.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>How much does the government expect a unified voice of the third sector or how much do they allow for there to be diverse, different voices and opinions expressed by different members of the third sector?</b></li> </ul> <p><i>PROMPT: To what extent is there room for disputes? How are disputes resolved?</i></p>

- **How much do the third sector organisations work together through the partnership or competing to promote their own interests?**

**16.**

- **How much is there an expectation on third sector organisations to play a critical role to hold Welsh Government to account?**
- **How is the Welsh Government held to account – to ensure they are meeting their responsibilities with respect to the third sector?**

*PROMPT: Through the Partnership? Senedd Cymru?*

**17.**

- **What is the process by which TSPC meetings and Ministerial Meetings agendas get decided and who decides? What do you think of this process?**

*PROMPT: To what extent do you think there are subjects that equalities organisations would like to discuss that do not make it on to the agenda?*

**18.**

- **Who are the key organisations or key individuals that shape the engagement mechanism?**

*PROMPT: WCVA staff, Welsh Government civil servants and ministers, some third sector partners more than others?*

**19.**

- **What are the expectations of what the third sector should or should not do at the meetings?**

*PROMPTS: informal rules? What qualities should a third sector organisation have if it is going to play a part in the TSPC and Ministerial Meetings?*

*To what extent is it acceptable for third sector organisations to lobby Government Ministers on issues that concern equalities third sector organisations?*

*How much is there an expectation on third sector organisations that they must sustain their participation in the partnership?*

*Permissible for third sector organisations to express political opinions? political neutrality?*

**20.**

- **What can you tell me about how the engagement mechanisms have evolved OR in what ways do you think the engagement mechanisms could or should develop?**
  
- **What different meeting formats have been used in the partnership meetings and how are the meetings facilitated or managed?**
  
- **To what extent has any training or education been given to any parties (Welsh Government, WCVA staff, third sector organisations) to make the partnership work?**

*PROMPT: Preparing the third sector organisations or support for ministers, Welsh Government staff, WCVA on Third Sector empowerment*

**21.** *For equalities third sector organisations only*

- **What mechanism, if any, does your third sector organisations use to evaluating your participation these engagement mechanisms?**

- **How well are your third sector organisations configured to take advantage of the Partnership engagement mechanisms (TSPC/ Ministerial Meetings)?**

- **How has your third sector organisations learnt from or adapted as a result of participating in the partnership?**

*PROMPTS: in terms of strategic approaches or priorities, staffing or resources, developing political awareness?*

- **Is there anything else you want to tell me?**

**Appendix 2: Ethics Committee Submission**

<p><b>Cardiff School of Social Sciences</b>                  Head of School - Professor Amanda Coffey FAcSS</p> <p><i>Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithasol Caerdydd</i>                  Pennaeth yr Ysgol Yr Athro Amanda Coffey FAcSS</p>			
SREC Ref No:			
<p><b>STAFF, MPhil/PhD &amp; PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE RESEARCH PROJECTS</b></p> <p><b>Ethical Approval Application Form</b></p> <p><i>Must be submitted at least TWO WEEKS before a School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) meeting to: socsi-ethics@cardiff.ac.uk</i></p>			
<b>SECTION A: PERSONAL INFORMATION</b>			
Please tick relevant project type:		<b>Staff Project</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>PhD Project</b> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Title of Project:</b>	A Critical Exploration of Equalities NGOs' Engagement with a 'Sub-State' Statutory Partnership between Government and the Third Sector by reference to the Developments in the Devolution of Wales.		
<b>Project Start Date:</b>	October 2016	<b>Project End Date:</b>	September 2019
<b>Project Funder:</b>	ESRC		
<b>Name of Researcher(s) / Student:</b>	Amy Sanders		
<b>Signature of Lead Researcher / Student:</b>			
<b>Student Number:</b>	C1653303		
<b>Student's Email Address:</b>	SandersA1@Cardiff.ac.uk		
<b>Supervisors:</b>	1 Paul Chaney	2 Dan Wincott	
<b>Supervisors' Signatures:</b>	1	2	
<p><b>Before completing, please now read the Application Guidance Notes at the end of this form</b></p>			

## SECTION A: PROJECT SUMMARY

1.	<p><b>Below</b>, please provide a <b>concise</b> general description of your dissertation project</p> <p>In Wales, the state-third sector partnership is given statutory footing through constitutional law, making it a requirement on originally the Body Corporate: National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) according to the Government of Wales Act, 1998) and later the Executive: Welsh Government (WG) according to the Government of Wales Act, 2006 to engage with the third sector.</p> <p>My research will explore the significance of this statutory state-third sector partnership in terms of the changing narratives, the actors' accounts of the objectives and the efficacy of the engagement mechanisms, with a focus on the changes as devolution developed in Wales and specifically in relation to equality organisations.</p> <p>I will make use of an analytical framework for the third sector's participation in state-third sector partnership based on existent literature and I will apply Yanow's (2000) analytic process to evaluate a statutory partnership at sub-state level.</p> <p>This will involve analysing secondary data to inform the main study which will consist of semi-structured interviews with key actors in the statutory state-third sector partnership in Wales.</p> <p>Yanow, D. 2000. <i>Conducting interpretive policy analysis / Dvora Yanow</i>. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Thousand, Calif. : Sage Publications.</p>
2.	<p>What are the research questions?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To explore the key actors' accounts of the objectives of statutory state-third sector partnership.</li> <li>2. To explore the key actors' accounts of the efficacy of statutory state-third sector partnership mechanisms.</li> </ol> <p>This critical exploration will be achieved through the prism of equality Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) and with reference to the devolutionary developments.</p>
3.	<p>Who are the participants?</p> <p>I would like to interview:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) a purposive sample of the strategic leads in Equality Third Sector Organisations</li> <li>(ii) members of the Welsh Government's Third Sector Team staff</li> <li>(iii) members of WCVA engagement staff (who coordinate the engagement mechanisms on behalf of the Welsh Government)</li> <li>(iv) Members of the NAfW Third Sector Staff team</li> <li>(v) A small number of Assembly Members / Welsh Government Ministers involved in the engagement mechanisms and equality issues</li> </ol>
4.	<p>How will the participants be recruited?</p> <p>I aim to recruit a purposive sample of key actors involved in the statutory state-third sector partnership in Wales. This purposive sample will be based on the participants listed in q3 and will be informed by the preliminary research into secondary data concerning this partnership.</p> <p>I will send them background information about my research and follow this up with a phone call, with the aim of providing both written and verbal information about the purpose of the research, what their involvement will be and how the results of the research will be used.</p> <p>They will not be offered any payment as an incentive and the incentive to take part will purely be on the grounds to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribute to research that is relevant to the third sector in Wales</li> <li>• Ensuring they are kept informed of the results of the research</li> </ul>
5.	<p>What sort of data will be collected and what methods will you use to do this?</p> <p>Interview data from semi-structured interviews</p>
6.	<p>How and where (venue) are you undertaking your research?</p>

	<p>Wherever possible, in the place of work of the participant, or, if they would prefer, in a public space that is local to them.</p> <p>What is the reason(s) for using this particular location?</p> <p>The aim is to choose a location that is convenient for a busy professional with a limit to the time they have available to take part in the research.</p>
7.	<p>(a) Will you be analysing secondary data (that is, data collected by others for research purposes)?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>If YES, does approval already exist for its use in further projects such as yours?</p> <p>No. However, all such data are presently in the public domain and take the form of policy documents, administrative records and transcripts of legislative proceedings and the like which, as noted are openly and publicly available via the internet and other open sources e.g., libraries.</p> <p>(b) Will you be using administrative data (that is, data collected by other for registration, transaction or record keeping purposes)?</p> <p>Yes – as noted previously, these are publicly available data</p> <p>If YES, how will you be using these data (e.g., sifting for suitable research participants or analysing the data) ?</p> <p>I will be thematically analysing making use of analytic methods described by Yanow (2000). This analysis will feed into the content of the semi-structured interviews.</p> <p>Yanow, D. 2000. <i>Conducting interpretive policy analysis / Dvora Yanow</i>. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.</p>

### SECTION B: RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

8.	<p>(a) Does your project involve children or young people under the age of 18?</p> <p>If <b>No</b>, go to 10</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
	<p>(b) If so, have you consulted the University's guidance on child protection procedures, and do you know how to respond if you have concerns?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
9.	<p>(a) Does your project involve one-to-one or other <i>unsupervised</i> research with children and young people under the age of 18 ?</p> <p>If <b>No</b>, go to 9(b)</p> <p>If <b>Yes</b>, go to 9(c)</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
	<p>(b) If your project involves only <i>supervised</i> contact with children and young people under the age of 18, have you consulted the head of the institution where you are undertaking your research to establish if you need a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check?</p> <p>If <b>Yes</b>, and you do need a DBS check, then go to 9(c); if you do not need a DBS check, then go to Question 10.</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
	<p>(c) Do you have an up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check ? (Please give details below if you have a pending application)</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
10.	<p>Does your project include people with learning or communication difficulties?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
11.	<p>Does your project include people in custody?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
12.	<p>Is your project likely to include people involved in illegal activities?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
13.	<p>Does your project involve people belonging to a vulnerable group, other than those listed above?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>

14.	Does your project include people who are, or are likely to become your clients or clients of the department in which you work?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>SECTION C: CONSENT PROCEDURES</b>				
15.	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
16.	<p>What procedures will you use to obtain informed consent from participants? During the recruitment process I will send them background information about my research (a written summary of the research) either through e-mail or post or both and I will follow this up with a phone call, with the aim of providing both written and verbal information about the purpose of the research, what their involvement will be and how the results of the research will be used. Before the interview takes place I will give participants a consent form that again explains the purpose of the research, what their involvement will be and how the results of the research will be used. It will emphasise that they can withdraw their consent to participate at any time without giving a reason. I will give participants a verbal explanation of the content of the consent form and plenty of opportunity to read the form before they consent.</p>			
17.	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
18.	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
19.	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reasons?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
20.	Will you give potential participants a significant period of time to consider participation?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
21.	Does your project provide for people for whom English / Welsh is not their first language?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>SECTION D: POTENTIAL HARMS ARISING FROM THE PROJECT</b>				
22.	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
23.	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing a detriment to their interests as a result of participation?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
24.	<p><b>Below, please identify any potential for harm (to yourself or participants) that might arise from the way the research is conducted</b> <b>PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE BOX BLANK</b></p>			
(i)	<p><b>Anonymity:</b> One potential for harm would be if the identity of the participant was not properly anonymised. Flick describes the Expert Interview drawing on Meuser and Nagel's work (2002, in Flick 2009) and as he highlighted, the participant may have greater concern about issues of confidentiality, where delicate issues concerning their organisations come up in interview. Preserving the anonymity of participants is a greater challenge when conducting expert interviews, because anonymity can be compromised if, for example, I publish quotes from the professional which clearly reveals to which third sector organisations or state institution they belong. I will be asking for participants opinions about the Welsh Government's third sector engagement mechanisms. In a similar study conducted by Chaney (2015) interview participants from the third sector highlighted the danger of being seen to be critical of the Welsh Government, in terms of the third sector organisation positioning with regards to the Welsh Government. Anonymity is therefore an important consideration. Accordingly, I will anonymise all accounts emerging from the research.</p>			
(ii)	<p><b>Disillusioned participant:</b> Another potential risk of harm would be if I, or the participants, were to experience any distress from any adverse reactions from potential participants. As Flick explains expert interviews require a</p>			

solid level of expertise from the interviewer, to ask about complex processes using appropriate questioning (Flick, 2009). Interviews with experts are also more likely to be time pressured given their professional responsibilities. (Flick, 2009). Given the high status of participants that I intend to recruit (senior managers and politicians), there will be a fair amount of pressure on me to ensure the interview is well structured, using appropriate language that evidences my understanding of the subjects concerned and conveys the relevance to the participants, and thus a worthwhile use of their time. If I were to misjudge this, it might be distressing for me, as the interviewer, or it might be distressing for the participants being interviewed. Accordingly, I will be fully prepared and will have done the requisite preparatory work to avoid any of the foregoing issues.

- (iii) **Level of information sought:** It is important to be mindful that an interviewer is in a powerful position and they must put the best interests of their participants first in asking questions that might place undue pressure on participants to reveal information, beliefs and opinions beyond the level they would want to convey. I will make sure I conduct the research in order to avoid such issues being problematic.
- (iv) **Managing potential frustrations:** In fact researchers can occupy both powerful and subjugated positions that criss-cross during the micro-politics of narration in interview (Morison & Macleod, 2014). Meuser and Nagel (2002, cited in Flick 2009) argue that expert interviewees can assert control through, for example, giving lectures instead of responding to questions and answers or engaging the interviewer in other matters than that at hand. This could be a frustrating and disempowering experience for me as an interviewer and it will be important to manage any frustrations well in the best interests of both myself and the participant. Accordingly, I will use my research skills to ask appropriate questions/ use appropriate prompts to avoid potential problems.
- (v) **Critical role:** My research will include exploring the efficacy of the Welsh Government's engagement mechanisms which are the work of both the engagement teams in the WCVA (Wales Council for Voluntary Service) and the Third Sector Team in Welsh Government. If it were considered to be highly critical of the work of either team then this could be damaging to these team members. I will therefore ask appropriate question and be alert to this issue. Anonymity of participants will be paramount and offset/ avoid negative issues in this regard.

Chaney:2015. Exploring the Pathologies of One-Party-Dominance on Third Sector Public Policy Engagement in Liberal Democracies: Evidence from Meso-Government in the UK. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 26(4), pp. 1460-1484.  
 Flick, U. 2009. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 4th ed. ed. Los Angeles and London: SAGE.  
 Morison, T. and Macleod, C. 2014. *When veiled silences speak: reflexivity, trouble and repair as methodological tools for interpreting the unspoken in discourse-based data*. *Qualitative Research* 14(6) pp. 694-711

25. **Below, please set out the measures you will put in place to control possible harms to yourself or participants**  
**PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE BOX BLANK**

- Mitigating steps to minimise harm:
- (i) **Anonymity:** As well as the usual steps for protecting anonymity, in terms of removing names, I will also review any data selected for publication to ensure that it does not contain identifying features.
  - (ii) **Disillusioned participant:** I have worked in the sector for 16 years so I have a good knowledge of technical terminology and third sector understanding. In addition I will conduct a preliminary study that will inform my interview content. Furthermore, I keep up to date with all developments concerning the state-third sector partnership.
  - (iii) **Level of information sought:** I will ask questions appropriate to the subject matter and I will ensure that if participants exhibit a reluctance

	to reveals any specific information then I will be respectful of this. I will also ensure the participant is aware that they can withdraw consent to participate at any time.		
(iv)	<b>Managing potential frustrations:</b> I will ensure that I build up a good rapport with my participants drawing on my interpersonal skills that I have developed in my years working with the third sector, politicians and civil servants. I will ensure that I have regular debrief sessions with my supervisors during the interview process to manage any frustrations. I will not show signs of frustration to my participants and will maintain my professional conduct throughout the interviews.		
(v)	<b>Critical role:</b> I will ensure that I will frame all my communication with Welsh Government representatives and the WCVA from a positive perspective and I will be framing any research findings in the context of how they can be used by the Welsh Government to positively impact on their work with the third sector in the future.		
<b>SECTION E: RESEARCH SAFETY</b>			
Before completing this section, you should consult the document 'Guidance for Applicants' – and the information in this under 'Managing the risks associated with SOCSI research'.			
26.	Are there any realistic safety risks associated with your fieldwork?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
27.	Have you taken into account the Cardiff University guidance on safety in fieldwork / for lone workers?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>SECTION F: DATA COLLECTION</b>			
The SREC appreciates that these questions will not in general relate to research undertaken in SOCSI. However, for further University guidance and information please see the links below.			
28.	Does the study involve the collection or use of human tissue (including, but not limited to, blood, saliva and bodily waste fluids)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	If <b>Yes</b> , a copy of the submitted application form and any supporting documentation must be emailed to the Human Tissue Act Compliance Team ( <a href="mailto:HTA@cf.ac.uk">HTA@cf.ac.uk</a> ). A decision will only be made once these documents have been received. For guidance on the Human Tissue Act: <a href="http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/govrn/cocom/humantissueact/index.html">http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/govrn/cocom/humantissueact/index.html</a>		
29.	Does the study include the use of a drug?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	If <b>Yes</b> , you will need to contact Research Governance before submission ( <a href="mailto:resgov@cardiff.ac.uk">resgov@cardiff.ac.uk</a> )		
<b>SECTION G: DATA PROTECTION</b>			
30.	(a) Are you collecting sensitive data? [Defined as: the racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs (or similar), trade union membership, physical or mental health, sexual life, the commission or alleged commission any offence, or any proceedings for any offence committed or alleged to have been committed the disposal of such proceedings or the sentence of any court in such proceedings.]	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	If <b>Yes</b> , how will you employ a more rigorous consent procedure?		
	(b) Are you collecting identifiable data? [Please note, this includes recordings of interviews/focus groups etc.]	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If <b>Yes</b> , how you will anonymise this data?		

The audio recordings will only be linked to the interviewee by name on a password protected computer on the University's network. Analysis of these data will only take place using an anonymised key/ code that conceals the identity of the interviewee.		
(c) Will any non-anonymised and/or personalised data be retained?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
If <b>No</b> , what are the reasons for this? Compliance with CU policy on managing audio recordings of interviews.		
(d) Data (i.e. actual interview recordings, not just transcripts) should be retained for at least five years or two years post-publication. Have you noted and included this information in your Information Sheet(s)?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
31.	<b>Below</b> , please detail how you will deal with data security. Please note, personal laptops (even password protected) stored in personal accommodation are not acceptable. Storage on University network, or use of encrypted laptops is required.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All research data will be stored safely and complying with the Data Protection Act.</li> <li>• Physical data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Cardiff University Social Science PhD office, which itself is a locked office, requiring card admittance which is limited.</li> <li>• The office is regularly assessed to ensure it meets data protection requirements and that potential damage due to hazards such as fire and flood are minimised.</li> <li>• Digital Data will be stored in and backed up in accordance with Cardiff University protocol, in the University's centralised storage shared drive in a project specific, limited access folder.</li> <li>• No data will be stored on a personal laptop.</li> <li>• The only people who will be able to access my data include: Amy Sanders and potentially, my two supervisors Paul Chaney and Dan Wincott. All named people will sign a confidentiality agreement.</li> <li>• Each participant in my research will be assigned a project generated ID number.</li> <li>• Storage of data will be contained within a recommended hierarchical folder structure with file naming in with the Cardiff University guidance for naming electronic files.</li> <li>• As data is processed a number of versions will be created, so there will be a strict version control method used in which a unique number will be assigned to each version of the data.</li> <li>• Longevity of the storage of data in line with requirements to keep data for a minimum of 6 years will also be achieved in accordance with Cardiff University protocol, with one digital copy retained in the Cardiff University off-site storage facility.</li> </ul>		
If there are any other potential ethical issues that you think the Committee should consider please explain them on a separate sheet. It is your obligation to bring to the attention of the Committee any ethical issues not covered on this form.		

### **Application Guidance Notes**

**Making an application to the School Research Ethics Committee if you are a member of staff or an MPhil / PhD / Professional Doctorate student**

**Please Note: the SOCSI SREC web page links highlighted below are currently unavailable – please instead refer to the following SOCSI Shared Drive Folder: S:\ SREC proformas and resources**

There are five stages in preparing an application to the Research Ethics Committee. These are:

1. Consider the guidance provided in the SOCSI Shared Drive Folder: **S:\ SREC proformas and resources**.
2. Discuss any ethical issues you have about the conduct of your research with your co-investigators or supervisor(s).
3. Complete this Staff/MPhil/PhD/Professional Doctorate Student application form.
4. Sign and date the form, and if applicable ask your supervisor(s) also to sign.
5. Submit one copy of your application to the secretary of the School Research Ethics Committee – see contact details on Page 1.

**PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING BEFORE COMPLETING YOUR APPLICATION:**

1. Illegible handwritten applications will not be processed so please type.
2. Some NHS-related projects will need NHS REC approval. The SREC reviews NHS-related projects that do not require NHS REC approval. See guidance provided in the SOCSI Shared Drive Folder: **S:\ SREC proformas and resources**.
3. You should not submit an application to the SREC if your research involves adults who do not have capacity to consent. Such projects have to be submitted to the NRES system.
4. Staff undertaking minor projects as part of a course of study (e.g. PCUTL) do not need SREC approval unless the project involves sensitive issues. This exemption does not apply to Masters dissertations and Doctoral research.
5. Research with children and young people under the age of 18.
  - i) *One-to one research or other unsupervised research with this age group requires an up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check (formerly called Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Check).*
  - ii) *If your research is in an institution or setting such as a school or Youth Club and all contact with the children and young people is supervised you will still need to check with the person in charge about whether you need a DBS check; many such organisations do require DBS checks for all those carrying out research on their premises, whether this includes unsupervised contact or not.*
  - iii) *You will need to have an awareness of how to respond if you have concerns about a child/young person in order that the child/young person is safeguarded.*
  - iv) *You will also need:*
    - a) *permission from the relevant institution*
    - b) *consent from the parent or guardian for children under 16*
    - c) *consent from the child/young person, after being provided with age-appropriate information.*

See guidance provided in the SOCSI Shared Drive Folder: **S:\ SREC proformas and resources**.

6. Information on data management, collecting personal data: data protection act requirements, can be accessed via: <https://intranet.cardiff.ac.uk/staff/research-support/integrity-and-governance>
7. Information on Research Ethics (including Ethical Issues in Research – informed consent etc.) can be accessed: <https://intranet.cardiff.ac.uk/staff/research-support/integrity-and-governance>
8. The collection or use of human tissue (including, but not limited to, blood, saliva and bodily waste fluids): The Committee appreciates that the question relating to this in this application form will not in general relate to research undertaken in SOCSI. However, for further University guidance and information on the Human Tissue Act, please see: <https://intranet.cardiff.ac.uk/staff/research-support/integrity-and-governance>
9. For interesting examples of information sheets and consent forms, please see the SOCSI Shared Drive Folder: **S:\ SREC proformas and resources**.

## Appendix 3: Information sent to participants prior to interview

### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE THIRD SECTOR AND GOVERNMENT IN WALES WITH A FOCUS ON EQUALITY - Information Sheet

Hello, my name is Amy Sanders, and I am currently undertaking a PhD at Cardiff University. I have a background in participation, engagement, inclusion and equality. I have returned to academic studies after a considerable period working in the third sector and I am passionate about the Welsh Third Sector and its relationship with the institutions of devolved government.



**What is the research about?** This research is about the relationship between the third sector and the institutions of government in the context of the devolved state. It is particularly focussed on the mechanism of third sector engagement examined from the perspective of equalities organisations. The Welsh third sector-government relationship is set out in constitutional law, thereby making it particularly worthy of research interest. The research will consist of an examination of the purpose and configurations of the third sector engagement mechanisms and how they are used to advance equalities organisations' interests, as well as an examination of how these third sector organisations have adapted as a result.

**What will participation involve?** Participation will involve an interview with the researcher. Interviews will last approx. one and a half hours. Interviews will take place at a convenient time and place for the interviewee. No preparation for interviews is required.

**What about confidentiality?** I have gained ethical approval and permission to complete this project from Cardiff University's Ethical Approval Committee (Social Sciences).

As part of this agreement, I will anonymise the names of all people, places, and organisations in order to protect anonymity. I will also review any data selected for publication to ensure that it does not contain identifying features.

Anything that is said within the interviews will remain anonymous and all data will be held securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1998.

Following completion of this study, a PhD thesis will be written and submitted for examination. It is likely that the information will be further discussed in academic presentations and journal articles.

A summary of the findings will also be written and will be made available to all participants.

**Questions?** I hope you will agree to take part in the study, and would really appreciate your involvement. If you have any further questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact either myself or one of my supervisors at Cardiff University.

**Researcher:**

Amy Sanders  
[SandersA1@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:SandersA1@cardiff.ac.uk)

**Supervisors:**

Professor Paul Chaney  
[ChaneyP@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ChaneyP@cardiff.ac.uk)

Professor Dan Wincott  
[WincottD@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:WincottD@cardiff.ac.uk)

If you have any concerns about the way in which this research is being conducted, please contact: Professor Paul Chaney, WISERD, Cardiff University, 38 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BB

## Consent form

### **I agree to participate in the following research study:**

A Critical Exploration of Equalities Third Sector Organisations Engagement with the Institutions of Government at a 'Sub-State' level in Wales 2011-2019

### **I understand the following:**

- 1) My participation is voluntary.
- 2) I can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. If this happens, I will be asked if I am happy for the information I have already shared with the researcher to be used further in the study.

### **I understand and consent to the following:**

- 1) Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed
- 2) The interview(s) will remain confidential unless in the following unlikely circumstances:
  - Due to serious concerns for the well-being of any participant, the researcher reserves the right to seek further advice from the study supervisors. In this instance, the participant will be kept informed regarding this.
  - Due to the serious concerns of the safety and well-being of a child or vulnerable person, the researcher would follow standard safeguarding procedures.
- 3) I am aware that my name will be changed to protect my identity and that appropriate steps will be taken to preserve the anonymity of the organisations that I represent.

Signed (participant): Signed (researcher):

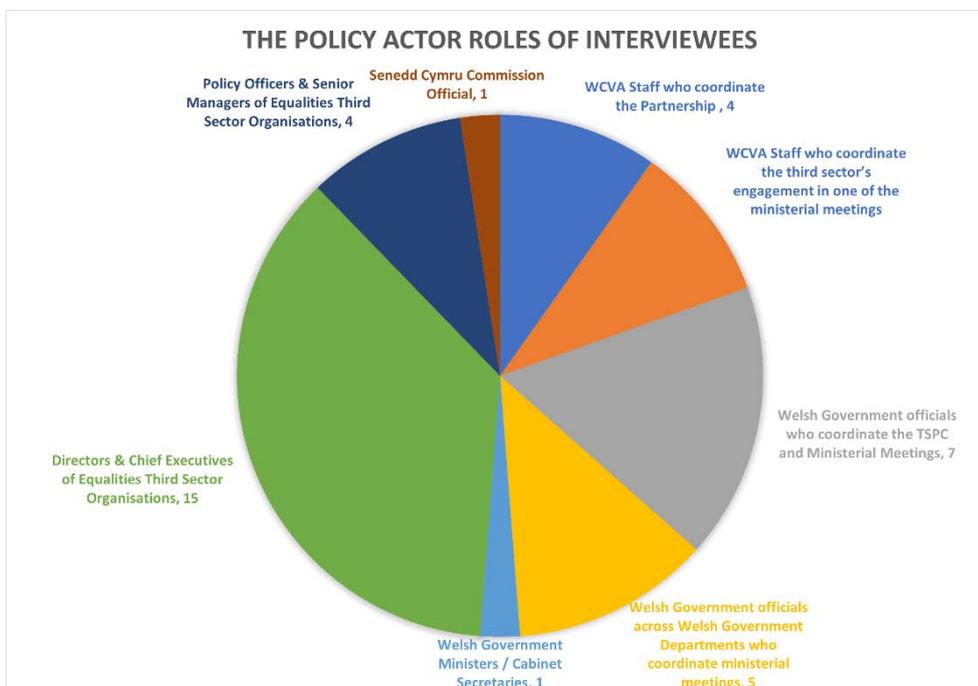
Print: Print:

Date: Date:

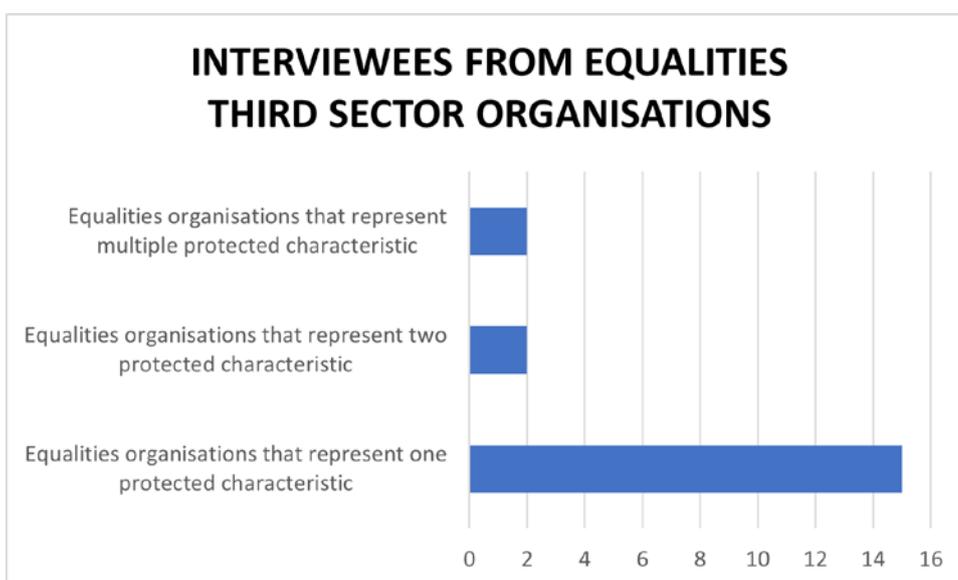
#### Appendix 4: Schedule of interviews & interviewee list

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Interview Schedule</b>	<b>Interviewee list</b>
<b>WCVA</b>	15/01/2018	Participant 3
	17/01/2018	Participant 4
	19/01/2018	Participant 5
	22/01/2018	Participant 6
	29/01/2018	Participant 7
	01/02/2018	Participant 9
	01/02/2018	Participant 10
	06/02/2018	Participant 11
<b>Welsh Government</b>	28/09/2017	Participant 1
	16/02/2018	Participant 12
	22/02/2018	Participant 13
	23/02/2018	Participant 14
	28/02/2018	Participant 15
	06/03/2018	Participant 16
	13/03/2018	Participant 17
	15/03/2018	Participant 18
	16/03/2018	Participant 19
	18/03/2018	Participant 20
	19/03/2018	Participant 21
	24/04/2018	Participant 22
	11/09/2018	Participant 25
<b>Equalities Third Sector Organisations</b>	31/01/2018	Participant 8
	14/08/2018	Participant 23
	11/09/2018	Participant 24
	17/09/2018	Participant 26
	17/10/2018	Participant 27
	22/10/2018	Participant 28
	23/10/2018	Participant 29
	24/10/2018	Participant 30
	29/10/2018	Participant 31
	15/11/2018	Participant 32
	20/11/2018	Participant 33
	21/11/2018	Participant 34
	26/11/2018	Participant 35
	26/11/2018	Participant 36
	03/12/2018	Participant 37
	10/12/2018	Participant 38
	06/02/2019	Participant 39
14/02/2019	Participant 40	
15/02/2019	Participant 41	
<b>Other</b>	12/12/2017	Participant 2

Given that these were elite interviews from a small cohort of policy actors involved in a named partnership, it is important to protect the confidentiality of participants. To ensure the interviewees are suitably anonymised, the data concerning interviewees have been disaggregated. Thus, data in this appendix and also in Section 2.3.1 have been presented in such a way to prevent comparison between tables and figures, since this might compromise anonymity. Below are the details of the policy actor roles of interviewees. A summary of this information is also in table 4.2.



As explained in the Methodology, the decision was made to not name which equalities organisations participated. Similarly, the equalities categories are disaggregated from the Participant Numbers to ensure anonymity. In the bar chart below, you can see whether interviewees from equalities organisations represented one or more protected characteristic:



If you would like to know the level of engagement of the interviewees and their organisations in the Partnership please refer to Table 4.3.

The graph below reveals the equalities strands represented by interviewees' organisations. This includes interviewees who represented more than one strand and sometimes differed from the Partnership network theme that related to them. Therefore, this differs from the data presented in Table 4.4.

