

Queen Mary
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A study into the lived experiences of
tenant participation in London's social
housing post-Grenfell

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DECLARATION

This report entitled:

A study into the lived experiences of tenant participation in London's social housing post-Grenfell

was composed by me and is based on my own work. Where the work of others has been used, it is fully acknowledged in the text and in captions to tables and illustrations. This report has not been submitted for any other qualification.

Signed: 

Date: 04.05.2021

Acknowledgements:

I would like to take this opportunity to firstly thank my dissertation supervisor Joe Penny for supporting and encouraging me throughout one of the most challenging yet rewarding part of my degree. I am very grateful to have had your guidance and reassurance from the beginning to the end of this process. I would also like to thank all of my participants for partaking in this research and sharing their experiences and valuable contributions as without them this research would not have been possible. Lastly, I want to thank my family and friends for their continued love and support throughout my time at university.

I hope this research has been able to provide my participants with a platform to have their voices heard and that it successfully emphasises the importance of listening to tenants and residents.

As we draw near to the fourth anniversary of the Grenfell Tower disaster, I want to take this opportunity to express my solidarity with the community of Grenfell and I would like to dedicate this research to the Grenfell survivors and victims, you will not be forgotten.

Abstract:

The Grenfell Tower fire of June 2017 exposed the fragility of tenants' voice and tenant participation in London's social housing. This study aims to explore the lived experiences of tenant participation for social tenants and participation professionals in London's social housing in a post-Grenfell climate. Based on the notion that tenant voice had been neglected in Grenfell (Flynn, 2019), this research involved carrying out 19 semi-structured interviews with social tenants and participation professionals to provide participants with an opportunity to have their voices heard. The analysis demonstrated that tenant participation is supported in theory, as made evident by the supporting legislation and regulation, but not in practice as revealed by lived experiences of poorly regulated and tokenistic participation. In response to the research gap regarding the lack of tenants' ideals and perspectives of 'good practice' tenant participation, this research aimed to explore tenants' ideals for meaningful participation and to create a series of tenant-informed recommendations. The findings highlighted a rejection of the consumerist approach to tenant participation in demand for a citizenship-orientated approach. Furthermore, this study explored the perceived efficacy of a legal right to participation and found that overall there exists strong support for the legalisation of the right to participation.

Overall, the research has revealed that lived experiences of tenant participation for tenants are associated with powerlessness and lack of control. Finally, this paper encourages the UK government and landlords to listen to tenant dissatisfactions and ideals and ensure they are safeguarding opportunities for meaningful participation and control.

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Abbreviations:

TMO Tenant Management Organisation

TRA Tenants and Residents Association

RSH Regulator of Social Housing

RTC Right to the City

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Serving as the catalyst for my research was the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire which broke out in a block of flats in North Kensington London resulting in 72 deaths (Preece, 2019). The fire was ignited by a faulty fridge-freezer overheating on the fourth floor, yet it was the tower's flammable cladding and inadequate fire safety measures which helped the fire spread to the rest of the block (BBC News, 2017). "*KCTMO – Playing with fire!*" was the headline of a blogpost written by Grenfell tenants and residents 7 months before the Tower went up in flames (Grenfell Action Group, 2016). Preceding the fire, Grenfell residents voiced concerns around fire-safety in the tower block and feared it would take a "catastrophic event" before Kensington and Chelsea TMO (KCTMO), their landlord, would listen to their residents (Grenfell Action Group, 2016, para.1). This prophetic blog post and the atrocity of Grenfell shines light on the fragility of tenant voice and participation in London's social housing (Preece, 2019), and as Bulley et al (2019) note, it is an important exemplification of resident participation gone awry. Power (2017:2) asserts that Grenfell was "a consequence of a lack of local control", although it is widely recognised that many other factors were responsible (see: Renwick, 2019; Marshall, 2019; Hohmann, 2019). This topic of tenant participation is incredibly timely and important as Flynn (2019) highlights that Grenfell triggered a national debate around the current condition of the tenant participation in social housing. Therefore, my research aims to explore the lived experiences of tenant participation in London's social housing in a post-Grenfell climate.

According to Pawson et al (2011:3), tenant participation "is about how tenants or others living nearby can influence a social landlord's activity". Tenant participation at the local estate level in the United Kingdom (UK) first emerged in the 1970s in an attempt for tenants and landlords to improve social housing conditions (Goodlad, 2001). Since then, tenant participation has become a norm for social housing providers and is supported by various legislation such as the Right to Consultation, which ensures landlords are conferring with tenants prior to any decisions being made, and the Right to Manage, which provides tenants with partial control over their housing's management (Preece, 2019). Key scholars who have transformed our understanding of tenant participation include Sherry Arnstein whose ladder of citizen participation has been adapted by housing providers across the UK to structure their menu of tenant participation, as well as Cairncross et al (1994) whose tenant participation typology has enabled researchers to classify experiences of tenant participation into one of three approaches. Structures of tenant participation can be divided into landlord-led (scrutiny panels, tenant forums, surveys, annual general meetings, community initiatives) and tenant-led (TMOs, TRAs, housing activist groups) (Preece, 2019). However, participation is also facilitated by community-led housing structures which can be attained through a Right to Transfer (Bradley, 2012).

The Right to the City, coined by social theorist Henri Lefebvre in 1968, is an “ongoing and collective struggle for urban inhabitants to [self-]manage the city” (Purcell, 2013a:311). Lefebvre’s idea signified a rejection of capitalism which he argued alienated urban inhabitants from the city through a prioritisation of the exchange value of urban space over its use value for citizens, which subsequently led to the privatisation of the city’s space and property (Aalbers and Gibb, 2014). Lefebvre called for urban inhabitants to join in the struggle to re-appropriate the city so they could “make it their own, and use it to meet their own needs” (Purcell, 2013a:318). Furthermore, key scholars Butler (2012) and Purcell (2014) contend that pivotal to the RTC is having a right to participation. Today, the right to participation is a prerequisite to realising a right to adequate housing, a human right ratified by the UK under the UN’s International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (General Comment 4, 1991). Nevertheless, the right to participation is not enshrined in law and so is not legally enforceable (Wolf, 2020). Considering that the ICCPR’s right to participation existed at the time of Grenfell, yet Grenfell residents’ experiences of participation were inadequate (Preece, 2019), it begs the question: would a legal right to participation be useful to safeguard tenant participation? This is a relatively unexplored idea in the literature, however TAROE Trust (2018) demand tenant participation becomes an enforceable legal right. Therefore, I wish to fill this gap by researching whether a legal right to participation could be useful in safeguarding tenant participation.

This research aims to explore the lived experiences of tenant participation in London’s social housing post-Grenfell. Further, it aims to propose a series of recommendations for tenant participation based on tenants’ ideal form of meaningful participation, and it explores the extent to which a legal right to participation is useful in safeguarding tenant participation.

To achieve these aims, I pose three research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of tenant participation in London’s social housing today?
2. What should meaningful tenant participation look like and how can we achieve this?
3. To what extent do London’s social tenants perceive a legal right to participation a useful measure for safeguarding meaningful tenant participation?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows; Chapter 2 provides a critical overview of the literature which contextualises my research and Chapter 3 outlines and justifies the qualitative methodology I have used to conduct my research. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 include a detailed analysis of my findings according to my three research questions (in the above order). Finally, Chapter 7 concludes

with a reflection of my research findings, the contributions and broader implications of this study, and the opportunities for future research.

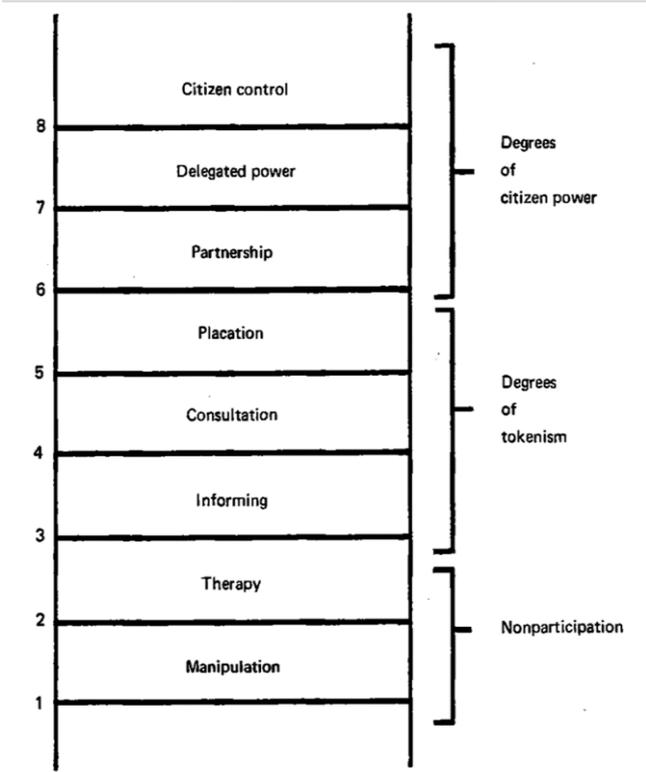
In this study, social tenants refer to those paying below market-price for their rent living in either local authority housing, a housing association, temporary accommodation, or council-owned sheltered housing. Two participants in this study identify as residents living in a housing cooperative and community-owned housing.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tenant participation

“The first attempts to define tenant participation were based on Arnstein’s model of community participation” (Ward, 1992:151). Arnstein (1969) devised the ladder of citizen participation to inform citizens of how they could participate in local decision-making (Figure 1). Contemporary tenant participation studies regard Arnstein’s ladder as an influential theory (see: Bradley, 2014; Preece, 2019; Simmons and Birchall, 2007) and some UK-based social housing landlords have adapted Arnstein’s ladder to illustrate participation opportunities available (see: Hammersmith & City council, 2019-2022:5; Stevenage council, 2018:3; Vale of Glamorgan, 2012-2015:7). The relevance of Arnstein’s ladder to tenant participation today serves as justification for reference to the ladder within this research. Furthermore, the concept ‘meaningful tenant participation’ saturates the literature and is frequently used to signify the epitome of successful involvement. Nevertheless, there exist disparities in its conceptualisation, ranging from its association with capacity building for tenants (The Democratic Society, 2019), to stronger regulation over participation (TAROE Trust, 2018), to ensuring tenants have a say in decision-making (Burns and Heywood, 2004). Considering the ambiguity surrounding this concept, I will ask my participants to provide their interpretation to generate a clearer understanding for my second research question.

Figure 1: The Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969:217).



Preece (2019) notes the importance of considering tenant participation alongside the theme of power. Tenant participation research by Bradley (2014) and Hickman and Preece (2019) revealed that overall social tenants perceive their powers to be limited in influencing decision-making, having their voices heard, and they highlight a lack of empowerment by their landlords to participate. However, there is a clear divide in the literature concerning what influences tenants' experiences of power. Researchers such as Fraser and Gibson (1991) and Fakere (2020) argue that the availability of tenant participation opportunities are a clear indication of tenant power. Whereas Goodlad (2001) and Redmond (2002) dispute this, stating that the presence of participation structures does not suggest tenants' power will increase as instead the authors claim that power is contingent on the prevalence of pre-existing power disparities between tenants and their landlord. McKee and Cooper (2008:133) claim that tenant power depends on landlords "will to empower". Furthermore, Gaventa (2006) posits in his 'power analysis' that the creators of the space for participation will enjoy greater power within it. Hickman and Preece's (2019) research strengthen this as tenants' power was reportedly stronger in tenant-created participation structures compared to landlord-led structures. My research will explore tenants' lived experiences of participation through the theme of power to try to understand what exactly influences tenants' experiences of power.

Moreover, Preece (2019) highlights that landlords also have more clout when it comes to defining 'good practice' tenant participation, with tenants' ideals and perspectives remaining largely absent from this. Various studies and reports on tenant participation have been released, yet they devise 'good practice' tenant participation without evidencing how or whether tenants informed this (Bradley, 2012; Muir, 2015). This is particularly ironic considering that an overwhelming portion of the literature repeatedly described tenants as 'experts' of their housing and their opinions as 'valuable' to their landlords and the decision-making processes in their housing (Bradley, 2012, 2014; Flynn, 2019; Millward, 2005; Tpas, 2017; Ward, 1992). Therefore, this study will fill this research gap by acknowledging tenants' expertise through gathering their perceptions of their ideal participation and then using this to create a series of tenant-informed recommendations on how to achieve this.

Furthermore, tenant participation research has highlighted that participation can often be tokenistic, wherein landlords create the illusion that tenants are involved when in reality tenants' viewpoints will have no real influence in the decision-making (Lundy, 2018). Existing research on tenant participation demonstrates that tenants are aware of the tokenistic participation structures, describing them as 'tick box exercises' for the landlord and claiming that their views have been disregarded in decision-making, ultimately leading to feeling discouraged to continue participating in their housing (Bradley, 2014; Brown and Gariban, 2019). Grenfell is a case in point, as Apps (2021) notes that resident participation

in Grenfell Tower's KCTMO was tokenistic as residents reported that their supposed 'involvement' during plans for the tower's refurbishment was simply for the purpose of influencing residents to support the plans as opposed to sincerely seeking their opinions on the project. Nevertheless, Nelson and Lewis (2019) critique the literature for over-emphasising tenant participation as tokenistic, as they demonstrate that tenants have had some influence over the redevelopment plans of their social housing in London. However, Nelson and Lewis's research reflects findings of one case of participation in social housing regeneration which is not sufficient evidence to criticise the tenant participation literature as a whole which comprises of tenant participation in issues ranging from local housing services to demolition projects. Therefore, I argue that their critique is perhaps overstated and that it is important to acknowledge the tokenistic examples of tenant participation.

One of the pivotal approaches to tenant participation emerging from the research was Cairncross et al's (1994) three approaches to tenant participation. The consumerist approach is characteristic of treating tenants as customers and eroding collective participation structures (and in doing so individualising tenants). A traditional approach is apparent where landlords are reluctant to share power with their tenants and where scrutiny panels are used to regulate tenant behaviour. Finally, a citizenship approach is illustrated by tenants having control over their housing management and feeling empowered to participate. Research studies have revealed the consumerist approach as the predominant approach to tenant participation in the UK today, and have attributed this to the current era of Neoliberalism (Bradley, 2014; Hickman and Preece, 2019; Pawson et al, 2011; Redmond, 2002). I am intrigued to discover whether this finding of a predominantly consumerist approach still stands. First emerging in the 1970s, the political ideology of neoliberalism is typified by a reduction in state spending, processes of privatisation and the increased presence of the private sector in society, and the encouragement of commercial behaviour from citizens (Dodson, 2006). In the context of social housing, neoliberal policies such as the Right to Buy in 1979 led to the increasing privatisation of social housing as tenants were allowed to buy their homes at a reduced price and councils were allowed to sell their housing stock to the private sector (Hodkinson et al, 2012). The privatisation of social housing quickly led to it becoming a marketplace where tenants were expected to behave as customers (Monno and Khakee, 2012). Consequently tenant participation today is "envisaged as a market force" whereby landlords' primary motivation for 'customer participation' is business improvement, and collective participation measures are eroded in favour of individual market-based methods (Bradley, 2014:46). Thereby demonstrating the connections between the neoliberal era, its associated consumer culture, and the consumerist approach to tenant participation.

2.2 Tenant managed and community-owned housing

This section of the literature review demonstrates that occasionally social tenants make claims to take over their housing management by forming a Tenant Management Organisation (through the Right to Manage) or take community ownership of their housing (through the Right to Transfer) (Bradley, 2012). Mullins and Moore (2018) list the different models of community-owned housing such as housing cooperatives, community land trusts, and self-help housing, however since this is not the principal focus of my research, I will discuss the community-owned literature as a whole.

“TMOs are locally based, grassroots community groups that want to improve local conditions in their social housing estate or small area” (Power, 2017:1). TMOs provide tenants with devolved decision-making powers and ‘some’ control over their housing management (Bradley, 2014; Simmons and Birchall, 2007; Tunstall, 2000). Simmons and Birchall’s (2007) study highlighted that TMOs on the whole provided tenants with greater control over their housing and reported positive experiences regarding their abilities to shape decision-making. However, absent from their research were references to the limitations of TMOs as Bradley (2014) and Power (2017) note that TMOs are limited in their ability to act and participate independently of their landlord because their landlord retains ownership of the property when TMOs form and thus overall responsibility for the housing (Power, 2017). Contrastingly, residents living in community-owned housing (also referred to as community-led) have full control and management over their housing since the community holds ownership rights over the properties (Field and Layard, 2017). Rosenberg (2011) is supportive of the connection between ownership and participation, suggesting that tenants and residents’ experiences of participation and control over their housing is enhanced by ownership.

In the literature community-owned housing was often discussed in tandem with the English policy of localism. In 2011, the UK’s then Coalition government introduced the Localism Act as “a pledge to devolve decision making to local communities” (Bradley, 2014:93). The advantages of transferring control to the local community (localising control) have been widely documented. For example, it has been reported that community-led housing strengthens accountability, increases participation and community empowerment (Rosenberg, 2011), creates an environment for collective and democratic representation of tenants (Bradley, 2014), as well as increasing communities’ overall satisfaction with their housing management (Sendra, 2018). However, the Localism Act has come under scrutiny over the years. One reason is that localism reduces the state’s support within the community which renders it difficult for those communities with fewer resources and a decreased capability to self-organise (Flint, 2006; McKee 2016; Sendra, 2018). In addition, despite claims for increased empowerment of the community through their ownership and management of their housing, Komporozos-Athanasiou

et al (2019) warn that power disparities can be reproduced at the local level between residents. Therefore, whilst community-led housing has the potential to be an effective strategy for residents, we cannot neglect the fact that community-led housing is not without its challenges and so I will be mindful of this when analysing residents' experiences of participation within community-led housing.

2.3 The Right to the City

The RTC is a political claim for social change and for urban inhabitants to ultimately take control of the city (Lefebvre, 1996). Lefebvre's RTC symbolises a Marxist critique of capitalism which he argued was responsible for the disenfranchisement (alienation) of urban inhabitants from the city (Aalbers and Gibb, 2014). Under capitalism, urban space and property is commodified through the prioritisation of their exchange value (economic value) over their use value (a product's value in relation to human need) (Purcell, 2014; Schmid, 2012). Consequently, this prioritisation leads to a greater concern of the city's economic growth above its use value for urban inhabitants, resulting in their exclusion and marginalisation from the urban. Witnessing this process of commodification in 1960s France, Lefebvre saw the RTC as a way for urban inhabitants to take control of their urban space to facilitate a more inclusive space which values the use of the city over and above its exchange value (Brenner et al, 2012; Butler, 2012; Purcell, 2013b). Lefebvre's vision for the RTC was to be struggled for through autogestion (also referred to as self-management), wherein urban inhabitants refuse to allow their conditions of existence in the city to be dictated by the state and its capitalist system (Lefebvre, 1996).

Research has revealed the popular appropriation of the RTC as a counter to neoliberal urbanism and its associated exchange value over use value prioritisation, commodification of property and urban space, and disenfranchisement of urban inhabitants (Harvey, 2008; Brenner et al, 2012; Pierce et al, 2016; Purcell, 2002). For example, various initiatives such as the World Charter RTC (2005), UN HABITAT, and social movements such as the USA's Right to the City Alliance regard the RTC as a paradigm for achieving democratic inclusion in the city (Domaradzka, 2018; Turok and Scheba, 2018). Although critiqued by some scholars as a vague right and an abstract claim (Merrifield, 2013; Purcell, 2002), evidently the RTC has influenced organisations and initiatives across the world which are bound by the notion that citizens should have a right to determine their lives in the city (Çelik and Gough, 2014). Moreover, underlying the RTC is the right to participation which refers to urban inhabitants' involvement in decisions made about the city (Butler, 2012; Purcell, 2014). However, Lefebvre notes that the provision of participation from the top-down can lead to tokenistic involvement which can only resemble that of a charade (Butler, 2012). Furthermore, the right to participation has been grounded in concrete struggles for realising housing needs. For example, the right to participate was established as a prerequisite to realising a right to adequate housing under the UN's ICCPR (Wolf,

2020). The right to participation has also been used to counter the effects of neoliberal and consumer logic which hinders the self-organisation and participation of citizens in decision-making around their housing in the city (see: Darcy and Rogers, 2014; Domaradzka 2018). The strong connections between the right to participation and housing in the literature supports the exploration of a right to participation in London's social housing.

Finally, a longstanding debate within the RTC literature is whether the RTC should be perceived a radical or reformist right (Turok and Scheba, 2018). For Lefebvre, the RTC is emblematic of a radical right and a "cry and demand" for urban justice (Lefebvre, 1996:158; Marcuse, 2014). Purcell (2014) and Turok and Scheba (2018) align with Lefebvre, claiming that a radical right enables people to mobilise as a collective through their demand for control. However, those adopting a reformist view reimagine the RTC as a legal right which is believed to be the most effective way to achieve substantial change for citizens in the city and enables citizens to hold the state to account where they fall short (Bras-Gomes, 2018; Brown, 2013; Huchzermeyer, 2018). Whilst I agree that a legal RTC provides grounds for accountability, I am also cognisant of Butler's (2012) contention that such a legislative act necessitates state support, and in cities where this is already lacking, a legal RTC will be ineffective. Finally, reflecting on the importance of the right to participation within housing, and the absence of a legal right at the time of Grenfell, I will explore the value of a legal right to participation in safeguarding tenants' participation.

2.4 Conclusion

The literature review has sought to provide a critical overview of the research which best contextualises my study. Tenant participation research frequently referred to tenants' experiences of power yet there were contradictions in the literature regarding what influenced tenants' perceptions of power. The existing research fails to resolve the contradictions, therefore my research will explore lived experiences of tenant participation alongside the theme of power to navigate through these contradictions. Furthermore, the review highlighted a research gap wherein tenants' ideals and perspectives remain largely absent from our understanding of what tenants' desire from tenant participation. Thus, this study attempts to fill this gap by first asking tenants to describe their ideal participation and then creating a series of recommendations based on their ideals. Moreover, my research will address the radical versus reformist debate (arising from the RTC) in the context of a right to participation as I explore whether a legal right to participation would be useful in safeguarding tenant participation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Qualitative Research

According to Corbin and Strauss (2014:11) qualitative research enables researchers “to get at the inner experience of participants”. Pivotal to my study is gaining an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of tenant participation as well as tenants’ ideal participation, therefore a qualitative methods approach was adopted. As Mazzei and Jackson (2009) claim, qualitative research seeks to privilege the interviewee’s voice; considering that Grenfell sparked a strong debate around tenant voice, I viewed it essential to use qualitative interviews to provide my participants with an opportunity to have their voices heard and centralised. Providing further justification for centralising the tenant voice is the tenant participation literature review findings which repeatedly portrayed tenants as ‘experts’ of their homes.

3.2 Secondary data

I collected various secondary data such as social housing and tenant participation manifestos to update me on the latest information within tenant participation today (LTF, 2021; TAROE, 2018). I also looked at tenant involvement strategies in London which was valuable to the research because it familiarised me with the existing participation structures. Clark (2005:69) warns that “secondary data reflect the aims and attitudes of the people and organisations that collected the data”. I considered this limitation and adopted an objective approach when reading through tenant involvement strategies online to prevent me from being influenced by the housing providers’ participation perspectives before commencing my interviews. Furthermore, I collated newspaper articles and blogposts about the Grenfell fire to provide me with a deeper understanding of the sentiment surrounding the disaster and the factors implicated within the fire.

3.3 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview enables the researcher to “address specific topics related to the phenomenon of study, while leaving space for participants to offer new meanings to the study focus” (Galletta and Cross, 2013:24). The opportunity to ask additional questions, beyond the initial set of questions I had pre-prepared, enabled me to acquire clarification on certain points raised by my interviewees. Tracy (2020:157) notes that “semi-structured interviews are more flexible and organic in nature” which provides the interviewee with the space to introduce new topics and arguments which the researcher may not have contemplated. Considering my research aims to understand participants lived experiences of participation, their ideals, and stances on a right to participation, a semi-structured interview seemed appropriate to use.

Each interview began with an informal conversational style achieved through asking my participants to tell me about themselves. This facilitated a relaxed atmosphere for my interviewees and set the tone for an informal conversation which encouraged my participants to speak freely and contribute more information (Galletta and Cross, 2013). Due to the circumstances of Covid-19, the current social distancing measures led me to conducting interviews through Skype or Zoom, an example of synchronous online interviewing. This method of online interviewing was the most appropriate because the visual aspect of the video calls allowed me to draw on verbal and nonverbal cues from my participants which would have been difficult to achieve through asynchronous methods such as email or text (Janghorban et al, 2014). The interview was divided into three sections corresponding to my three research questions (see chapter 1). Prior to conducting the interviews, I piloted the interview questions on a family friend living in social housing to assess the quality and clarity of my questions (Majid et al, 2017).

3.4 Purposeful sampling

In qualitative research “sampling is typically purposeful” wherein the researcher intentionally selects the participants they believe best fit the study and its objectives (Forman et al, 2008:766). To recruit tenant participants, I researched and then approached London-based TMOs, TRAs, and social housing activists through their provided contact details. Moreover, I researched social housing providers in London (local authorities and housing associations) and sent emails to their tenant engagement teams to recruit participation professionals for an interview. Where I received no response, I approached the tenant engagement managers directly via LinkedIn. For those who agreed to participate, I arranged a mutually convenient time and video platform for the interview. Finally, Corbin and Strauss (2014:6) state “it takes listening to many voices to gain understanding of the whole”, therefore I aimed to interview a minimum of fifteen to twenty participants to develop as a rich an understanding of tenant participation as possible.

3.5 Research participants

For the purposes of this study, ‘participation professionals’ refer to those whose profession it is to either provide and/or oversee tenant participation such as resident engagement teams, tenant advisors and housing consultants. ‘Social tenants’ include individuals who rent their housing from a social housing provider and for the two participants living in community-led housing I will refer to them as ‘residents’ to distinguish between the different housing tenures. Moreover, in my research on the right to participation in the UK I encountered the organisation which Daniel works for. The organisation applies the right to participation throughout their project work to support marginalised communities

in their struggles surrounding housing, health, homelessness, and education. Therefore, I sought an interview with Daniel to deepen my understanding of the right to participation in practice.

The following table provides a summary of the research participants.

Table 1: Table detailing information about the research participants and their interview

| Participant(s) (pseudonym) | Background Information | Date of interview | Duration of interview |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Jane | A UK-based consultant and tenant advisor. | 21.08.2020 | 1:20:49 |
| Sara | Chair of an East London Federation of Tenants and Residents Association. Housing activist. | 21.08.2020 | 2:01:08 |
| Tim | Council tenant, South London. | 03.09.2020 | 1:59:21 |
| James | Tenant in a mutual ownership housing co-op, East London. Housing activist. | 04.09.2020 | 58.98 |
| Daniel | Director of a rights-based organisation in Northern Ireland. | 04.09.2020 | 1:19:08 |
| Mary | Tenant engagement officer for a West London council. | 08.09.2020 | 1:33:01 |
| Bryan | Sheltered housing tenant in a West London borough. Vice chairman and active member of a sheltered housing residents association. | 08.09.2020 | 1:43:58 |
| Ben | Council tenant living in a TMO, in Inner London. Housing activist. | 10.09.2020 | 1.01.54 |

| | | | |
|---|--|------------|---------|
| Jessica | Council tenant, Inner London. Housing activist. | 18.09.2020 | 43:18 |
| Chloe | Homeowner in council housing, North London. Housing activist. | 18.09.2020 | 1:12:57 |
| Deanna | Temporary accommodation resident, North London. Housing activist. | 24.09.2020 | 52:12 |
| Linda | Temporary accommodation resident, North London. Housing activist. | 21.08.2020 | 1:10:39 |
| William | Housing consultant for TMOs. | 25.09.2020 | 49:22 |
| West London TRA Catherine Hannah | Chair and treasurer of the TRA TRA. Housing activists. | 25.09.2020 | 1:13:41 |
| Freya | TMO estate manager, North West London. | 28.09.2020 | 36:24 |
| Adam | Head of Customer Engagement, West London housing association. | 01.10.2020 | 54:05 |
| David | Engagement Officer, Southwest London housing association. | 06.10.2020 | 1:21:40 |
| Niamh | Resident Involvement Manager, for an Inner London council. | 16.10.2020 | 40:19 |

| | | | |
|---------|--|------------|-------|
| Stephen | Founder and resident in a community-owned housing association, Inner London. | 08.10.2020 | 30:26 |
|---------|--|------------|-------|

3.6 Coding

I transcribed the interviews within twenty-four hours of them taking place and analysed them through coding. “Coding is a way of developing and refining interpretations of the data” (Taylor et al, 2015:172). Reading the transcripts, I applied emic coding wherein I highlighted the codes, ideas, and concepts which emerged from the text and listed these in an excel spreadsheet for organisational purposes (Townsend and Urbanic, 2014). Finally, I applied thematic coding to my interviews where I categorised my codes into themes which assisted me in structuring my research analysis. Coding was an appropriate analysis method because it enabled me to interpret the large quantity of text in an organised way (Cope, 2009).

3.7 Positionality

According to Bourke (2014:3) positionality “represents a space in which objectivism and subjectivism meet”. I ensured that I remained objective throughout the research process whilst remaining conscious of my subjectivity and identity so as to allow my interviewees to ultimately shape the research findings. I accounted for my positionality by considering my identity as a 20-year-old female at university who has not lived in social housing or community-led housing as did my participants. However, I do not feel this impacted the responses because all of my participants seemed willing to contribute and share their opinions. Secondly, I considered my presuppositions around tenant participation; my knowledge and readings around Grenfell had informed me of the weak participation culture and fragile tenant voice in London, therefore I ensured that I remained neutral and open to all responses even if they had contradicted these presuppositions.

3.8 Ethics

Padgett (2014:2) highlights that qualitative research is vulnerable to complex ethical questions and dilemmas due to the “dynamic and ongoing nature of relationships” and “flexibility of qualitative inquiry”. I fully informed my participants of the research and research aims and provided them with an informed consent form which they were asked to sign provided they wanted to take part. Fortunately, all research participants agreed to having their interviews recorded, which meant that the analysis of the interviews was easier to perform as all the information was recorded. Longhurst (2010) claims that anonymity and confidentiality are two important ethical issues to consider. Therefore, I assured my participants they would be given a pseudonym name and their data and recording would be stored on a password protected phone and deleted at the end of the research process. Moreover,

I notified my participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Another ethical principle I considered was protecting my participants from emotional harm. Where possible I avoided introducing distressing topics gratuitously in the interviews, and where such topics had arisen such as tenant-landlord conflict or poor housing conditions, I approached these 'carefully' and 'empathetically' (Padgett, 2014:6).

3.9 Limitations

Although a qualitative methodology was the most appropriate approach for my research, I encountered a few challenges. For example, the Wi-Fi connection dropped out on multiple occasions which interrupted the speaker's point. However, due to my awareness of internet connectivity issues (James and Busher, 2009), I minimised the impact of this by providing interviewees with my back-up contact details so we could resume the interview over the phone. Furthermore, due to the open nature of the semi-structured interviews, a few interviews over-ran the maximum time of 1-hour, which meant that by the time we reached 1-hour I had still not asked all of my questions. A few of my participants were unable to continue past 1-hour and so I had to be selective in the remaining questions I could ask, which meant that I had not acquired as in-depth answers for some of my questions as I had intended. If I were to repeat this research, I would clarify with my participants how much time they were willing to commit prior to the interview to ensure that I made full use of that time.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT ARE THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TENANT PARTICIPATION IN LONDON'S SOCIAL HOUSING TODAY?

This chapter explores the lived experiences of participation for London's social tenants and participation professionals. To set the scene, I draw on secondary research and tenants' perspectives on the importance of tenant participation. Secondly, I provide an overview of today's social housing regulation to contextualise the first theme to emerge from my analysis: 'weak regulation'. I then explore the lived experiences of participation through Cairncross et al's (1994) typology, and the third theme of tokenistic participation evaluates lived experiences of participation alongside Arnstein's (1969) 3 degrees of tokenism (Figure 1). The theme of power is embedded throughout this analysis in light of the literature review findings highlighting its significance and its repeated reference in the interviews.

4.1 Tenant participation importance

"It is crucial" – Jessica

Some interviewees alluded to the weak participatory culture on the Grenfell estate to emphasise the importance of tenant participation in social housing; Tim and Jessica claimed that the inadequate participation culture and neglect of Grenfell residents fire safety concerns was partially responsible for the disaster, echoing Bulley et al (2019) and Preece's (2019) points in Chapter 1. Furthermore, Chloe highlights that strong tenant participation allows tenants to "wield a lot of power and you can demand a lot of things", and Jessica claims that participation offers her a sense of control over housing-related decisions. Moreover, 8 of the 11 tenants in this study explicitly referred to their 'expertise' as an explanation for the importance of tenant participation, reinforcing the literature review findings that tenants are experts of their housing. For example, Catherine states that tenants must be seen as a "real resource" to their landlords to ensure decisions made about their housing are well-informed. Thus, tenant participation is "crucial" for safeguarding tenants, providing tenants with control and a means to contribute their housing expertise in decision-making.

4.2 Weak regulation of tenant participation

Following the Grenfell fire, the then social housing regulator 'Homes and Communities Agency' fell under scrutiny as demands were made by residents, activists, and academics to revise social housing regulation (Renwick, 2019). As of 2018, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) monitors the provision of tenant participation under the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, a 'consumer standard' for social housing providers (Shelter, 2021). In November 2020, the White Paper proposed to strengthen the consumer regulator for tenants in response to the Grenfell disaster (MHCLG, 2018).

However, it would be premature for my research to analyse the effectiveness of the White Paper's proposals since this study coincided with the Paper's release.

Social tenants and participation professionals unanimously perceived tenant participation as poorly regulated. Tim critiques the RSH for inefficiently monitoring whether participation is "meaningful or effective". James notes the implications, claiming this "light-touch, hands-off" regulation leads to a loss of motivation for social housing providers to deliver meaningful participation. For instance, engagement manager Niamh feels tenant participation provision is down to the housing provider's discretion. Consequently, Tim notes that participation becomes contingent on the political will and internal compulsion of housing providers to facilitate it which suggests that meaningful tenant participation is provided on an ad-hoc basis, further implying that tenants may have uneven experiences of participation depending on their housing provider and their political will. Catherine and Hannah illustrate this as they compare the previous resident engagement team's disengagement with their TRA and intermittent empowerment of their tenants to participate, with the current team who provide tenants with a say in decisions and have developed a strong relationship with their TRA.

Moreover, involvement managers Mary, David, Eva, and Adam share the view that the regulator is primarily focussed on the governance and financial viability of the housing provider at the expense of consumer standards. Adam reported:

"We had an IDA [in-depth assessment] at the beginning of this year [2020], and my exec director who represents all the customers involved wasn't even interviewed, so the regulator didn't even talk to her about consumer regulation, not even once, because they are talking about governance and viability."

Adam's encounter with the regulator reveals the disregard of tenant participation matters and consumer standards in favour of governance and financial viability concerns. This reflects Hickman and Preece's (2019) findings that the regulator marginalises tenant participation experiences for the assessment of the provider's economic viability. Further, this is incredibly significant because it demonstrates the contradictory nature of the RSH in setting the Empowerment Standard yet disregarding this during an opportunity to assess it. Therefore I argue that tenant participation is supported in theory (evident by the RSH's consumer standards) but not in practice due to the regulator's inattention to tenant participation matters. Nonetheless, I view Adam's disapproval of the staff not being interviewed about tenant experiences of consumer standards as somewhat problematic

because it suggests that participation professionals' views better reflect the tenant voice. This is indicative of Cairncross et al's traditional approach which I discuss below.

4.3 Traditional and consumerist approaches

Scrutiny panels are one hallmark of the traditional approach to tenant participation which according to Cairncross et al (1994) are used to control tenant voice. Tenants in the study reported that scrutiny panels provided them with few opportunities to have a real say over decisions. For instance, Chloe described them as "the lapdog of the council" wherein the council (the landlord) controls the agenda for tenant discussions. Similarly, Tim mentioned they are often "tightly controlled by [council] officers" on his estate. The landlords' control over tenant voice illustrates Gaventa's (2006) power analysis in which he posits that those who create the space for participation will have greater power and control within it. In light of the contradictions within the literature review regarding what influences tenant perceptions of power, the presence of participation structures does not indicate tenant power, as Fraser and Gibson (1991) argue, instead these findings reveal strong support for Gaventa's spatial dimension of power. Furthermore, these findings, while preliminary, suggest that other participation structures facilitated by landlords may also be at risk of being dictated by the landlords and subsequently marginalising tenant voice in the process. Contrastingly, residents living in community-managed housing describe having control over "everything" such as rents, repairs, meetings, and governance because they have created the spaces for participation (Stephen). Whilst community-led housing appears a securer way to provide tenants with control, Sendra (2018) comments that this is not always feasible for communities lacking the resources and capacity to do so, thereby suggesting some social tenants may repeatedly find themselves participating in structures controlled by their landlords.

The most apparent indication of the consumerist approach to participation was the language participation professionals used to describe tenant engagement. Tenants were referred to as 'customers' or 'consumers' participating in 'consumer involvement' which was justified by David who emphasised "it's a business case to say we need to listen to residents". Referring to the RSH, it is conceivable that their 'consumer' standards are encouraging housing providers to treat tenants as customers. Moreover, driven by this business rationale, social housing providers employ individualistic market-research techniques such as surveys to assess tenant satisfaction (Bradley, 2014). My research revealed that surveys are the main method of listening to tenants, however participants expressed their dissatisfaction around this method. For instance, Tim asserted "we are not customers, we are tenants"; Sara felt that the surveys reduced tenants to "data sources" and "numbers"; Jessica felt "sceptical" of her landlord's use of surveys. Considering the current circumstances of Covid-19, TPAS

(2020) cautioned that digital surveys are becoming the preferred engagement method to navigate Covid-19 restrictions, suggesting that lived experiences of individualised participation are likely to continue.

Furthermore, the erosion of collective tenant participation is another characteristic of the consumerist approach. Bryan recounts that the council have allowed collective participation structures such as community days out for sheltered housing tenants (accommodation for the elderly) to “slip away” in favour of consumerist methods such as surveys and fewer collective meetings. For Bryan, as well as Jessica and Chloe, the erosion of collective participation has culminated in feelings of powerlessness, denoting that the consumerist approach induces powerlessness lived experiences. Finally, in light of these consumerist findings I agree with Bradley (2014) that the neoliberal forces of the market have conditioned tenant participation, and I argue that the concern for business improvement and the regulator’s prioritisation of financial viability are telling of the housing provider’s preoccupation with exchange value above tenants use value of their housing. Resultantly, this has marginalised tenants from decision-making in their housing in a similar way to this prioritisation alienating urban inhabitants from the city according to Lefebvre.

4.4 Tokenistic participation

Sara describes participation on her estate as ‘awful’, “particularly where that engagement is usually a landlord looking for a consultation fig leaf”. She provides an example illustrative of Arnstein’s (1969) ‘tokenistic consultation’ wherein participation is implemented to create the illusion that citizens are being engaged. During a stock transfer on Sara’s estate, her previous landlord (council) held a consultation meeting promising tenants they could retain their TMO if they voted for the transfer over to a housing association. Nevertheless post-stock transfer the TMO was derecognised, which indicated to Sara that their consultation was simply a “tick box exercise” for landlords to falsely attest their engagement of tenants. Notably, Sara’s case is not unique as the London Tenants Federation’s (2021) (LTF) manifesto for social housing highlighted the precarity of stock transfers for participation structures as they often involve the derecognition of TRAs and TMOs. Moreover, despite tenants Right to Consultation, in practice this was neither upheld nor respected by Sara’s landlord, and in a similar vein Chloe acknowledges that this right “can be overturned”, reinforcing the argument that tenant participation is supported in theory but not in practice. Simmons and Birchall (2007) also assert that the UK’s tenant participation legislation and schemes are poorly implemented and thus easily flouted by landlords, leading them to similarly conclude that the government’s commitment to tenant participation remains supported in principle but not in practice. Further, tenants on Sara’s estate contested their landlord’s decision in an attempt to reclaim their TMO, yet their protests fell on deaf

ears, demonstrating Arnstein's (1969:219) first degree of tokenism 'tokenistic information' which denies citizens "power for negotiation". Similarly, tenants such as Jessica, Chloe, and Tim describe their experiences of tokenistic participation alongside feelings of powerlessness which supports findings in the literature review which connect tokenistic participation and powerlessness.

Furthermore, Tim recounts an incident where tenants were consulted by the council on the implementation of cycling sheds around the estate. However, the council had instructed the wrong cycling sheds to be installed in the incorrect locations to those which the tenants had chosen. This is illustrative of Arnstein's third degree of tokenism 'tokenistic placation' as tenants were provided with an opportunity to advise, yet the decision remained ultimately with the powerholder, in this case the landlord. Sara and Ron's examples are important because they validate Lefebvre's (1996) contention that the top-down provision of participation can become tokenistic. Contrastingly, community-led housing residents James and Stephen report satisfactory experiences of consultation and make no reference to tokenistic participation. Thus, these contrasting experiences between social tenants and residents in community-led housing suggests that the latter may be a more effective in safeguarding participation, as argued by Bradley (2014).

Finally, I wish to reiterate the point made by Apps (2021) who remarked that Grenfell exposed experiences of tokenistic participation for Grenfell's residents. Whilst I acknowledge that tokenistic participation did not cause the fire, it most certainly had a role to play and the fact that my study has demonstrated experiences of tokenistic participation for some tenants is extremely disconcerting given Apps statement.

4.5 Conclusion

Despite the perceived importance of tenant participation, my findings revealed a weak culture of participation in social housing which is poorly regulated, diminishes tenant power through collective participation erosion and control of tenant voice, and is tokenistic. Further, the research reinforced the argument that tenant participation is supported in principle but not in practice. Useful illustrations of this included the manipulation of the Right to Consultation and the regulator's neglect of Consumer standards regarding participation during their inspections of a housing provider.

CHAPTER 5: WHAT SHOULD MEANINGFUL TENANT PARTICIPATION LOOK LIKE AND HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE THIS?

This section explores three ideals which emerged from my interviewees' responses, followed by a series of recommendations to explain how they could be achieved. Upon reflection I argue that their ideals mark a rejection of a consumerist approach to participation in demand for a citizenship-orientated approach.

5.1 Defining meaningful

The majority of tenants in my research defined meaningful tenant participation as ensuring that the tenant voice is listened to, and that landlords have evidenced how their voice has been incorporated into the decision-making process. For instance, Chloe defined meaningful as having "constructive conversations" with her landlord, and Tim and Ben described meaningful as having the ability to influence, challenge, and impact decision-making. Whereas Bryan associated meaningful participation with "people sitting out there in armchairs chatting away", denoting that community is a key element for Bryan. Moreover, meaningful was defined within the discourse of power; West London TRA members claimed "it is about having a portion of the power" and Jessica noted that it was being empowered by her landlord to participate. It is clear meaningful tenant participation is complex to define, however its shared interpretations include being listened to and having this evidenced, feeling part of a community, and feeling empowered.

5.2 Tenants' ideal participation and recommendations

1. Meaningful say in decision-making

A common ideal among tenants was to have a meaningful say in decision-making regarding their housing. For Deanna, this meant having the opportunity to share her views with her landlord and be assured they "will be taken into consideration". Tim recognises that participating "does not necessarily mean I get what I want all the time", instead, like Deanna, it is about having his views "reflected into the decision-making process". Jessica builds on this explaining that a meaningful say means having "an equal say", suggesting that it is important that tenants have an equal opportunity to share their views. Furthermore, Section 4.1 of the analysis provides an explanation for this ideal as it highlights the almost unanimous sentiment that tenants are experts of their own housing and thus their say in the decision-making process was perceived to be vital. These findings are important because they highlight the ongoing demand for tenant voice to be strengthened, a demand which Flynn (2019) notes resurfaced post-Grenfell.

Recommendation 1: Implement a mandatory audit trail for landlords to demonstrate how tenant perspectives were sought and how these perspectives have shaped the final decision. The outcomes of tenant-landlord discussions must be regularly monitored by the RSH (Flynn, 2019), and the regulator should provide tenants the opportunity to share their views to avoid having participation professionals representing the tenant voice (see Section 4.2 for this example).

Recommendation 2: Provide tenants with greater decision-making responsibility such as through participatory budgeting. Legard (2011) describes participatory budgeting as an empowering participatory process which provides tenants with the opportunity to decide how and where a surplus of money should be spent. Tim recounts that participatory budgeting on his estate is one of the most effective methods of providing tenants with a meaningful say because their landlord was restricted in interfering with their decision.

2. Space to self-organise and act collectively

Tenants emphasised the importance of having space to practice collective and self-organised participation, as Jessica describes:

“the most effective tenant involvement is where the tenants organise themselves and where the local authority allow them that space and ideally the funding”

Similarly, Chloe and Sara possessed a strong belief for collective action and justified this on the premise that “it’s much more effective when you come together to get your voice heard” (Sara). Moreover, some tenants assigned landlords with the responsibility to facilitate tenant participation and tenants the responsibility to run it, reinforcing the desire for self-organised participation (Jessica; Sara; Ron). This ideal is critical to research on tenant participation because it reinforces tenants’ dissatisfaction with the erosion of collective participation (Chapter 4) and implies the rejection of the consumerist approach in favour of a citizenship-orientated approach characterised by self-organised, empowered, and collective participation (Cairncross et al, 1994). According to Gaventa’s (2006) power analysis tenants ideal for self-organised participation would provide them with the power to set the agenda for discussions and distance themselves from “officer-led” participation structures (Jessica). In addition, for collective participation to thrive Gaventa emphasises that citizens must “claim” and “create” their own spaces. However, Sendra (2018) reminds us that this may be impractical for communities lacking the resources or capacity to claim their own space, and this limitation is considered in the following recommendation.

Recommendation 3: Landlords must provide tenants with capacity-building training and the sufficient resources to enable them to effectively self-organise (Chloe; Preece, 2019).

Recommendation 4: Landlords must formally recognise established tenant groups and respect their self-organisation by ensuring they do not interfere or attempt to control tenant discussions and agendas (Jessica; TAROE Trust, 2018).

3. Increase tenant management opportunities

Tenants also described their ideal participation to comprise of more tenant management opportunities. Sara encapsulates this ideal when she states, “we need far more TMOs”. Prior to the derecognition of Sara’s TMO, she notes that it provided residents with “fantastic tenant participation”, and James reinforces this:

"the thing that makes tenant management such a winner is you completely localise the management. So fundamentally it is a very hands-on way of managing problems"

This ideal aligns with research from the literature review which portrayed TMOs as a useful mechanism for offering tenants with control over their housing management. Further, Ben, who is part of his estate’s TMO, claims tenants benefit from devolved decision-making and devolved budgets because it guarantees tenants a say in decision-making. Nevertheless, Ben warns that power imbalances and hierarchical structures can materialise in TMOs when it is the same tenants who attend the meetings and take leadership positions within the group. Therefore, these risks of power disparities and unrepresentative TMOs will be taken into consideration in the recommendations. Additionally, their ideal is emblematic of Lefebvre’s RTC in which he encourages a process of autogestion to enable citizens to take control of the city, suggesting that the RTC as an idea is relevant to housing today. Finally, their claims for tenant management are important to highlight considering a Right to Manage already exists, suggesting that it is ineffective since it supports participation in theory and not in practice, and thus requires strengthening.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen, resource, and fund tenants Right to Manage to provide them with an opportunity to form a TMO on their estate, gain more control over their housing management, and to safeguard against the derecognition of TMOs.

Recommendation 6: Democratised housing management to prevent power disparities and unrepresentativeness arising in TMOs. Ensure the facilitator of tenant-led meetings is equipped with the tools to identify and interrupt any imbalances of power between tenants (James).

5.3 Conclusion

Tenants and residents' ideals ranged from having a meaningful say in decision-making, having the space to self-organise as a collective without the interference of landlords, to more opportunities for tenant management. Furthermore, it is clear from these ideals that my participants reject the consumerist approach to participation in their desire for 'self-organisation', 'collective participation', and 'joint management' signifying Cairncross et al's (1994) citizenship criteria.

CHAPTER 6: TO WHAT EXTENT IS A LEGAL RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION A USEFUL MEASURE FOR SAFEGUARDING MEANINGFUL TENANT PARTICIPATION?

6.1 It is necessary, but not sufficient

All of my research participants agreed that a legal right to participation would be useful. Most were aware that “there already is” a right to participation but that it is not strong enough because “it is not legally implemented” (Ron). However, their support was conditional; participants called for the right to be “enforced” (Ros; Sara; Stephen), “enacted” (Chloe), and “implemented” (Jane; Tim) in the law, and this was justified by Sara on the premise that “a right is only as good as your power to enforce it”. For Linda and Deanna, a legal right to participation must provide tenants with the choice to participate which presents an interesting perspective to the one above because it suggests that the right to participation should be enforced by law but not enforced upon the tenants to realise it. This is echoed in McKee’s (2009:6) research wherein some tenants in her study emphasised that the right to participation must comprise a “right to choose” how or whether they want to participate. Moreover, James was also supportive of a legal right, however he noted this would need to be easily accessible, well-resourced, and funded by the government. James also referred to the Right to Manage as an example of a legal right which is inaccessible and poorly funded, and Catherine mentioned the Right to Consultation can be tokenistic at times. This indicates the fragility of legal rights in housing and enhances claims for the ‘enforcement’ of a legal right to participation. In addition, Daniel recommends against a prescriptive right because he believes it could not account for a community’s cultural context since communities across the country differ in their capacity, resourcing, and motivation levels. Whereas the TAROE Trust (2018) advocate a prescriptive right to tenant engagement. Considering my findings regarding the “light-touch” regulatory framework for tenant participation and its impact on creating ad hoc participation (Chapter 4), I agree with TAROE Trust’s claim for a prescriptive right because I believe it could minimise the risk of the right’s realisation becoming contingent on the political will and interpretation of the housing provider.

Nevertheless, the interview findings highlighted that a legal right would not be sufficient by itself to safeguard tenant participation. It was apparent from the research that a strong community was fundamental to meaningful tenant participation. Chloe claimed that communities necessitated education on how they could realise their rights, and Daniel suggested we increase capacity building within communities to empower them to hold the state to account when their participation rights are violated. In stark contrast, Muir and McMahon (2015:54) “do not recommend a legal right to participation” because they believe that meaningful participation depends on the presence of an organisational culture within the community typified by trust and accountability. However,

organisational cultures are difficult to sustain as the movement of people in and out of a community, bringing with them different attitudes towards participation, may subvert the existing organisational culture (CIPD, 2020). Thus, a legal right to participation alongside community capacity building appears a more dependable approach to safeguarding meaningful participation than a legal right by itself. Furthermore, Stephen remarked that a legal right to participation does not address the causes of the weak participatory culture in social housing, such as “inequality, lack of ownership, exclusion from power and control”. Therefore, it is discernible that a legal right to participation is not sufficient because it does not deal with the causes of poor tenant participation.

Surprisingly, reference to a radical approach to the right to participation was absent from interviewees’ responses, implying that Lefebvre’s radical notion of the RTC may be outdated. Interestingly, these findings contradict tenants’ ideal for more collective participation which is a key feature of a radical approach according to Turok and Scheba (2018). In this paper’s attempt to address the radical versus reformist debate, I conclude it is not perceptible as to whether one side of the debate is stronger than the other since my participants revealed support for a reformist approach to the right to participation whilst also describing a radical ideal for self-organisation and collective participation.

6.2 Conclusion

To conclude, a legal right to participation was supported by the majority of my participants provided it was enforced, accessible and offered tenants the choice to participate. However, it is not sufficient in safeguarding tenant participation; interviewees raised the point that communities must be educated and have their capacity strengthened, and the causes of weak tenant participation must be addressed to realise this right. Finally, I argue that the research findings do not fit just one side of the radical-reformist debate since both radical and reformist notions were alluded to in this study.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This research has provided an exploration into the lived experiences of tenant participation in London's social housing through an in-depth analysis of tenants and participation professionals interviews. In this post-Grenfell climate, tenant participation is a poorly regulated process dependent on the political will of the housing provider to facilitate it. Further, tenant participation exemplifies a hybrid of Cairncross et al's (1994) traditional and consumerist approaches due to the lived experiences illustrating a combination of the two. For example, the tenants' voice was often described as controlled by landlords and collective methods of participation have sometimes been eroded in favour of individualised and market-led research techniques such as surveys. These findings weaken claims in the literature (Chapter 2) that the predominant approach to participation is consumerist, however they reinforce the pertinence of Cairncross et al's typology. Within these two approaches tenants lacked both power and control which is important to highlight considering that Power (2017:2) claimed that Grenfell was "a consequence of a lack of local control". Thus, my findings of weak tenant control could be perceived as a slight cause for concern and so I hope that this signals to the UK government and housing providers the significance of safeguarding tenant control. Methods of engagement were found to be incredibly tokenistic which indicated that the legislation already in place to support tenant participation supports participation in theory but not in practice, for instance the Right to Consultation was easily overridden for tenants in my study. This argument extended to the lived experiences of the derecognition of TMOs despite tenants' Right to Manage, and the disregard of tenants' experiences of participation by the regulator during inspections despite the RSH's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard. Furthermore, since my research was conducted at a similar time to the White Paper's release, I was unable to analyse the effectiveness of its proposals regarding tenant participation today, thus it would be useful for future research to explore tenant participation in the context of the Paper's proposals to assess whether the government has learnt from its mistakes concerning Grenfell.

My research complements the literature which revealed a strong connection between participation and power since my findings demonstrated that power was consistently referred to when tenants described their lived experiences of participation as poorly regulated, individualistic, landlord-controlled, and tokenistic. Moreover, there was a divide in the literature regarding what influences tenant experiences of power. My findings challenged the viewpoints of Fakere (2020) and Fraser and Gibson (1991) that tenant participation is an indication of power, and in so doing supported Gaventa's spatial dimension of power. Given that we know lived experiences of participation in landlord-controlled spaces lead to a reduction in power and control, I hope that this encourages communities

to mobilise together to claim and create their own spaces for participation to enable them to achieve greater control.

In response to the research gap highlighted in the literature review regarding tenants' ideals being neglected in participation research (Preece, 2019), I proposed a series of tenant-informed recommendations for each ideal. Moreover, the tenants' ideals are incredibly important for housing providers because they inform them of the rejection of their consumer approach to tenant participation and signal tenants' desires for a citizenship approach due to their calls for management, self-organisation, and collective participation.

In view of the right to participation not having been legalised at the time of Grenfell, this research aimed to understand whether a legal right to participation could be useful in safeguarding tenant participation. Based on my interviews, a legal right to participation is necessary to implement since its legalisation was supported by all participants. Nevertheless, it was not regarded sufficient by itself because the interviewees noted the need for capacity building for communities and to address the causes of weak participation which one interviewee believed was inequality and a lack of ownership. Thus, I hope that this informs the government of the perceived usefulness of a legal right to participation, the importance of capacity building, and the need to address weak participation causes. In an attempt to contribute to the radical versus reformist debate arising from Lefebvre's RTC, the results revealed that whilst a reformist approach to participation is supported, their ideals for self-managed housing and collective action are also redolent of a radical approach. Thus, it cannot be argued in this context whether one side of the debate is stronger.

This research transpired from the Grenfell Tower disaster; therefore I view it essential to dedicate the final reflections of this paper to Grenfell. Grenfell exposed the fragility of tenant participation, the weak tenant voice, and the lack of local control. Unfortunately, it became clear from my research that the lived experiences of tenant participation do not reflect much change from those in Grenfell. Participation remains poorly regulated, tenants have little control over decisions, and their voice is often marginalised by landlords in tokenistic participation structures. However, there is hope for change provided landlords listen to tenants' dissatisfactions, ideals, and recommendations and act accordingly. Another important point which emerged from this research is tenants' discontent of individualised participation methods such as surveys, however the current situation of Covid-19 has meant that surveys are becoming the preferred method of involvement as it traverses Covid-19 restrictions. Thus, I propose that future studies explore how social housing landlords can employ

participation measures which adhere to Covid-19 restrictions whilst also ensuring that they are not individualising tenants simultaneously.

Finally, I wish to emphasise that tenants are the experts of their housing. Grenfell residents were aware of the fire safety issues prior to the devastating fire, yet their voices went unheard and in a similar way tenants in my study regard themselves as experts of their housing yet also experience a marginalisation of their opinions. Therefore, in light of Grenfell and my research findings, I contend that it is extremely important that tenants are empowered and provided with meaningful participation opportunities in their housing. After all it is their home so why shouldn't they be given a meaningful say?

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Some questions were not relevant to all participants since both residents and participation professionals made up the research participants, therefore where appropriate I removed certain questions from the interview list depending on the interviewee.

Section 1: Lived experiences

1. Would you be able to tell me a bit about yourself and your work with X?
2. What does meaningful tenant participation in housing mean to you?
3. What does tenant participation in your housing look like to you? OR What does X do to increase tenant participation in housing and wider estates?
4. In what ways is tenant participation in decision-making in your housing important to you?
5. Do you see any issues with diversity in participation in your housing?

Section 2: Ideal participation

6. In an ideal world, what should meaningful tenant participation in your housing look like to you?
 - a. How can this be achieved?
7. From your experience working at X, what do tenants want from participation in their housing / wider estate?

Section 3: Right to participation

8. What rights, if any, do you think you have as a tenant?
9. Are you having discussions around rights and housing? What are you talking about?
10. Do you think that there should be a legal right to participation in decision-making in housing and/or wider estate? A legal right in this context means enshrined in the UK's law.
11. How could we empower people in your community to express their individual rights to participate in their own housing and wider estate?