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The Politics of Old Age

OLDER PEOPLE’S INTEREST ORGANISATIONS IN THE IRISH CONTEXT

By

Martha Doyle

October 2011

A Thesis submitted to the
University of Dublin, Trinity College
in fulfilment of the requirement of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy
DECLARATION

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# Table of Contents

Declaration............................................................................................................................................................................... ii  
Executive Summary ............................................................................................................................................................. vi  
Acknowledgements............................................................................................................................................................ viii  
1: Introduction...................................................................................................................................................................1  
   1.1 Introduction......................................................................................................................................................... 1  
   1.2 The political construction and institutionalisation of old age......................................................................... 2  
   1.3 Older people's interest organisations ................................................................................................................... 5  
   1.4 Operationalizing older people's interest organisations....................................................................................7  
   1.5 Rationale for the study .............................................................................................................................................. 8  
   1.6 Thesis aims and objectives ....................................................................................................................................... 9  
   1.7 Structure of the thesis .............................................................................................................................................10  
2: The international literature ......................................................................................................................................... 13  
   2.1 Introduction............................................................................................................................................................... 13  
   2.2 Theorisation of interest group influence on policy..........................................................................................13  
       2.2.1 Pluralist theorists.............................................................................................................................................13  
       2.2.2 Elite theorists................................................................................................................................................... 14  
       2.2.3 From pluralism to governance.....................................................................................................................16  
       2.2.4 Post-empicrist: Discourse, ideas and ideology.......................................................................................16  
   2.3 Older people's interest organisations................................................................................................................. 19  
       2.3.1 Representation at the beginning of the twentieth century ............................................................................ 19  
       2.3.2 Representation from the 1950s...................................................................................................................20  
       2.3.3 Lack of Representation..................................................................................................................................23  
       2.2.4 Strategies of influence....................................................................................................................................26  
       2.2.5 Strategies of survival......................................................................................................................................27  
       2.2.6 Influencing the Policy Process .....................................................................................................................28  
   2.4 'Identity politics'. .......................................................................................................................................................32  
       2.4.1 Who joins older people's interest organisations? .................................................................................. 33  
       2.4.2 Motivations for joining....................................................................................................................................34
2.4.3 Group Consciousness: An age-based identity

2.4.4 Policy design and an age-based identity

2.5 Conclusion

3: The politics of old age in Ireland: The political, economic and social policy context

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Development of social policy in Ireland

3.3 The rise and fall of the 'Celtic Tiger'

3.4 Social policy towards older people

3.5 Older people’s interest organisations

3.6 Conclusion

4: Research design and methodology

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Aims and Objectives

4.2.1 Work and internal dynamics of older people’s interest organisations

4.2.2 Identity politics as it relates to the members of older people’s interest organisations

4.2.3 Policymakers’ perceptions and constructions of older people’s interest organisations

4.3 Epistemological and theoretical perspective - Critical gerontology

4.3.1 My epistemological assumptions

4.4 Research design

4.4.1 Qualitative methods

4.4.2 Data Gathering Methods

4.4.3 Sampling Strategy

4.4.5 Naturally occurring data

4.4.6 Data Analysis

4.4.7 Validity of Qualitative Methods

4.4.8 Ethical Considerations

4.4.9 Limitations

4.5 Presentation of the findings
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The participation of older people's interest organisations in the policy process has been promoted in international fora and at national level in the majority of established democracies throughout the world. Despite this, remarkably little academic attention has been given to the work of these organisations. The limited extant literature tends to focus almost exclusively on the politics of old age in the context of macro political and global economic forces. This thesis seeks to address this deficiency by exploring three separate but inter-linked issues: 1) the work and internal dynamics of older people's interest organisations in Ireland as relayed by directors, staff and members of the organisations; 2) the issue of older people's 'identity politics' as perceived by the members of older people's interest organisations and 3) policy makers' and junior ministers' perceptions of the organisations and the discourse deployed to legitimize this perception.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a critical gerontology perspective, placing an emphasis on the structural and cultural issues which contextualize the experience of ageing and the discourses which surround the participation of older people's interest organisations in the policy process. Qualitative interview and focus groups were conducted with 69 research participants. The sample consisted of the directors/chairpersons of 10 national older people's interest organisations, 38 staff/members of these organisations, 20 senior civil/public servants and 5 former Junior Ministers. The data was analysed using a ground theory approach.

FINDINGS

Work and internal dynamics of older people's interest organisations

The analysis revealed that the identity-defining labels which older people's interest organisations adopt to define their constituency and their related needs are somewhat ambiguous. Such a strategy may be expedient on two levels. Firstly, the possibility of antagonizing a section of the older population is reduced and secondly, it may be useful when attempting to petition for policy change for the older population in general. The analysis also revealed that organisations seek to effect change beyond the legislative arena, they aim particularly to alleviate institutional and cultural ageism and empower older people at both the individual and collective level. It appears that the work of organisations is closely connected to their strategies for survival and is the result of a range of factors that are endogenous to the organisation such as personal contacts, members' interests, funding and inter-group relationships.
Older people’s ‘identity politics’

The analysis suggests that the identity-status of the members of older people’s interest organisations is not based solely on an age-based identity. Instead, other overlapping statuses such as family member, carer, volunteer, or activist appeared to be of significance and these non-age-defining statuses may be variables which foster affinity ties among members. At a collective level, however, the members of older people’s interest organisations believed that ageism was widespread and that their former (tax)contributions and their current work as carers and volunteers were not given due importance by the wider society. Activism in an older people’s interest organisation was therefore heavily predicated on a quest to gain greater recognition for the rights of older people and ensure that the state would provide the protection and security to which they believed older people were entitled.

Policy makers’ perspectives of older people’s interest organisations

The analysis revealed that policymakers held conflicting attitudes towards older people’s interest organisations. They affirmed the benefits of consultation with these organisations in the context of the policy making process. However, they simultaneously suggested that the organisations lacked the capacity to adequately inform the policy agenda. This perceived weakness of older people’s interest organisations was coupled with a perception that age-targeting was not an appropriate policy consideration. The result was that older people’s interest organisations’ role in the policy process was relegated from that of active participant to ‘included observer’. Consultation was used by policymakers to give the appearance of genuine citizen engagement but instead frequently served as a facade to legitimize the promotion of their predetermined agendas and preconceived policy plans.

Conclusions

The thesis argues that older people’s interest organisations will need to be more explicit in relation to which segments of the population they represent and aim to target in particular policies. Furthermore, it contends that older people’s ‘identity politics’ will remain highly relevant in the coming decades. This ‘identity politics’ will not be related to chronological age but will be the result of older people’s resolution of the structural and cultural constraints which impact upon them. Finally, the findings of the thesis demonstrate that participation of older people’s interest organisations will remain relatively meaningless until those in dialogue with them acknowledge the legitimacy of their expressions of self-interest. Only in this manner can older people’s organisations be treated with equality within the policy making process.
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1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest achievements of the twentieth century was the extension of the human life span, a trend that is still ongoing in most countries (Oeppen and Vaupel, 2002). More people are living longer and often healthier lives. Life expectancy, from infancy to old age, has improved across the world (Riley, 2001). As a result, significant changes in age distribution have taken place across both the developed and developing world (Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, 2005). Populations are 'ageing' and a further significant increase in the proportion of the population aged 60 years and over is expected globally. Particularly noteworthy in the coming decades will be the increase in the number of persons aged 80 years and over. To accommodate these changing demographics, it is argued that policy reformulation is required (Pierson, 1994). The inclusion of older people and their representative groups in the policy debates concerning these policy changes is viewed as essential by both social gerontologists (Estes et al., 2001; Walker, 1999, 2006a) and international bodies (United Nations, 2002).

This thesis focuses on older people's interest organisations in the Irish context. Informed and inspired by a critical gerontology perspective (Phillipson, 1998) it takes a three-pronged approach and explores 1) the work and internal dynamics of older people's interest organisations in Ireland as relayed by directors, staff and members of the organisations, 2) the issue of older people's 'identity politics' as perceived by the members of older people's interest organisations, and 3) policy makers' and former junior ministers' perspectives on older people's interest organisations. The thesis focuses on the role of older people's interest organisations in Ireland from their inception in the mid-1990s to the end of the first decade of the 21st century. This opening chapter contextualizes the 'politics of old age' at the end of the first decade of the new millennium and provides a brief introduction to the subject of older people's interest organisations and the objectives and rationale for the study. Following this discussion it provides a summary of the structure of the thesis.
1.2 THE POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION AND INSTITUTIONALISATION OF OLD AGE

Old age is a construct which is politically (Estes, Biggs, & Phillipson, 2003; Walker, 2006b), historically, and culturally (Torres, 2001) defined. Chronological age did not hold any significant relevance in pre-industrial society (Young & Schuller, 1991). Historically age was more a function of a person's role within the familial network; as Hockey and James (2003) explain, people 'aged' when they assumed new roles such as parent or grandparent. Contemporary understandings of 'old age' are thought to have emerged from the institutionalisation of pension and welfare policy across the countries of the Northern hemisphere from the end of the nineteenth century. For the first time chronological 'old age' became a significant marker which denoted one's entitlement to specific welfare benefits. Old age was objectified through retirement and the provision of welfare supports. According to Biggs and Powell (2001:10), 'Social Welfare came to colonize the meaning given to old age.'

The expansion of the welfare states in the United States and Europe and associated allocation of welfare benefits, such as pensions, housing support and long-term care assistance to older people received widespread public support in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century (Estes et al., 2003; Walker, 2006a). A considerable degree of consensus existed among Western governments that older people were a deserving group and that public services should be provided to adequately cater for their needs (Estes et al., 2003; Walker, 2006a). However, it is argued that the expansion of the welfare state was motivated by economic interests rather than a moral economy based on values of reciprocity and solidarity (Kohli, 1987). Walker (2006b) for example argues that that the expansion of the welfare states occurred at a time of full employment. The small population of older people who were not active in the labour market were viewed as 'externalities'. The provision of pensions was thus seen as, 'an appropriate way of socializing the costs of retirement as well as assisting industry to rejuvenate the workforce' (Walker, 2006b: 62).

While the provision of welfare supports was a significant buffer against poverty, the institutionalisation of old age led to its stigmatisation (Townsend, 1982, Walker, 1999a). Binstock (1983) argues that morally the provision of welfare supports was justified under
the guise of 'compassionate ageism'. Older people were portrayed as a homogenous group, frail and vulnerable (see for example, Tuckman & Lorge, 1953). Old age was conceptualised as a time of disempowerment, as Schulz and Binstock (2006:7) argue with reference to the United States:

The lowest level of economic status, health, and functional capacities that could be found among older persons became familiar as common denominators in public discourse. Elderly persons tended to be seen as poor, frail, dependent, objects of discriminations, and above all deserving.

While the institutionalisation of welfare supports may have contributed to the categorization of old age in a negative manner, it has been argued that the provision of pension and welfare benefits provided a security which was beneficial to the older population (Phillipson, 1998; Phillipson & Biggs, 1999). As Phillipson (1998:125) succinctly phrases it, 'the institutions of retirement and the welfare state played an important role in bracketing out many fundamental anxieties associated with events such as the loss of work in early older age, to loss of bodily function in late old age'. However, the economic and moral rationale behind the provision of extensive welfare supports to older people were undermined from the 1970s by neo-liberal advocates. Estes et al. (2003:125) note that '[r]esource allocation to the elderly became 'contested' rather than 'consensual'.'

The global economic recession of the late 1970s can be identified as a turning point in the politics of old age, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom. International organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund contributed to the construction of the notion of ageing as a crisis by placing emphasis on the economic costs of demographic ageing (Phillipson, 2002; Walker, 2006b). Espousing a neoliberal agenda they called for greater privatization of pension schemes and reformulation of welfare policies. Against the international backdrop of budgetary constraints the reframing of economic expenditure called into question the long-term financial sustainability of welfare systems (Katz, 1992). As Walker (2006) argues, future projections of dependency ratios were used to paint alarmist pictures of the socioeconomic consequences of demographic ageing. Policy discussions on old age were dominated and transformed by the theme of 'crisis'.
In the United States and Europe a number of public officials and academics have been complicit in fuelling this conception of ageing as a crisis by identifying older people as the unwarranted beneficiaries of a disproportionate amount of the public budget, at the expense of other (supposedly more deserving) younger people (Thomson, 1993). For example, in Germany, Roman Herzog, former judge at the Federal Constitutional Court (1983-94) and former President of Germany (1994-99), in 2008, following the German government decision to increase the public pension by 1.1 percent, suggested that ‘this development could end in a situation in which older people plunder the young’. (Bloom et al. 2008, cited by Goerres, 2009). Similarly, Willetts (2010: xxi) in the United Kingdom comments that ‘the baby boomers, having enjoyed so far a spectacularly good deal, are dumping too many problems on the younger generation...At the moment [the baby boomer generation] looks like a selfish giant’.

From the 1990s, the politics of old age has been influenced by the globalization of capital and the financial markets (Phillipson, 2002). Within this global framework the social construction of older people as a deserving group and the assumption that the state should allocate a disproportionate amount of resources to them, is still questioned (World Bank, 1994). The coupling of a marketisation of welfare (Powell & Biggs, 2000) and continued calls for greater privatisation of pension and health care, has the impact of transforming old age from a time of relative security to a period of significant ‘risk’ (Biggs & Powell, 2001). Underlying this neoliberal globalised agenda is the ‘individualization of the social’ (Ferge, 1997) and the argument that individuals rather than the state must take responsibility for their own welfare, as Phillipson (1998:119) explains:

“The notion of an ageing society (with social responsibilities) becomes secondary to the emphasis on ageing individuals – with the crisis of ageing seen to originate in how individuals rather than societies handle the demands associated with social ageing.”

Should the ‘individualisation of the social’ materialise as a dominant policy response to changing demographics, security in old age will become dependent on market-based
imperatives. This neoliberal globalised backdrop has heralded what scholars have termed a 'new', 'radicalised' and 'deeply entrenched' politics of old age (Walker, 2006a).

Coinciding with a discourse which promulgates the individualisation of old age is a discourse relating to the active participation and inclusion of older people. This discourse is frequently associated with the notion of 'successful ageing' (Holstein & Minkler, 2007) and has become more prevalent since the 1990s. In the European context, Article 25 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states: ‘The Union recognises and respects the rights of older people to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life’ (Westerhof & Tulle, 2007:239). The European Commission has also designated 2012 as the ‘European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between the Generations’. The notion of the participation and inclusion of older people in the political, social and cultural context is an important aspect of the discourse of ‘active ageing’ and has had direct implications for the mobilisation of older people in older people’s interest organisations; an issue to which I now turn.

1.3 Older people’s interest organisations
What role older people’s interest organisations play within the ‘new politics of old age’ constitutes one of the central questions of this thesis. Older people’s participation and inclusion in political, social and cultural life was first promoted in the international context at the First World Assembly of Ageing in New York when the 1982 United Nations Action Plan on Ageing called for the inclusion of older people in the policy process, stating that ‘The aging should be active participants in the formulation and implementation of policies, including those especially affecting them’ (United Nations, 1983). The Second World Assembly convened by the United Nations General Assembly twenty years later in 2002 adopted the Madrid International Plan on Ageing (United Nations, 2002). This Plan placed significantly more emphasis on the inclusion of older people and their representative groups in the formulation of ageing policies. Paragraph 20 highlights the importance of older people’s interest organisations as ‘an important means of enabling participation through advocacy and promotion of multigenerational interactions’. Article 22, objective 2 (Issue 1), and paragraph 119 called on national governments to assist with the establishment and financial support of older people’s organisations, while paragraph
118 specifically calls for the inclusion of older people's interest organisations on 'national committees on ageing'.

The notion of the participation of older people's interest organisations in the policy process is reflective of a general promotion of the involvement and inclusion of civil society organisations in the consultation, planning and decision making process (Crozier, Huntington & Wakanuki, 1975, Putnam, 2000; Marinetto, 2003). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggests, for example, that the inclusion of civil society organisations in the policy process can enhance trust in government, improve the quality of policy outcomes, contribute to higher compliance in policy decisions and ensure public policy and services include the needs of marginalised and frequently excluded populations (OECD, 2002, 2009). Similarly, The World Health Organisation (WHO) Action Area 14.2 calls on countries to 'enable civil society to organize and act in a manner that promotes and realizes the political and social rights affecting health equity'. At the European level special privileges and financial support have been granted to civil society organisations to facilitate their participation. For example, Article 11 and 47 of the draft European constitution endorses 'regular dialogue and inclusion in the policy making process with representative associations and civil society' (Acheson & Harvey, 2008).

National governments have promoted and facilitated the participation of older people and their representative groups in the policy process to varying degrees. Not only have governments provided financial support for the formation of older people's interest organisations in established democracies, north and south, they have also helped to support the development and inclusion of these organisations in the policy-making process. Examples include initiatives such as the 'Better Government for Older People' in the United Kingdom (Biggs & Powell, 2001) and the National Strategy for an Ageing Australia (Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, 2002) which sanctions the participation of older people in the policy process (Warburton & Petriwskyi, 2007).
1.4 Operationalising Older People's Interest Organisations

As outlined in more detail in the next chapter, the origins of older people's interest organisations can be traced to the late nineteenth century. However, their growth has been more significant, and their policy influence more profound, in recent decades. In the new millennium the spectrum of older people's interest organisations has expanded to include professional advocacy and self-advocacy groups (Vincent, 1999). They can be organised and staffed by older people themselves, or, as is the case with many of the larger organisations, be led by professionals who advocate on their behalf.

One of the central arguments of this thesis is that the extant literature on older people's interest organisations tends to categorise their work in an overly narrow manner. As a result it fails to capture the full spectrum of activities beyond advocacy which fall under their remit. The reality is that the majority of older people's interest organisations are engaged in numerous activities in addition to interest representation, for example, the provision of age-specific services, and they may not self-identify as a pressure or interest group. Pratt (1993) identifies two categories of older people's groups in the United Kingdom, United States and Canada, namely, 'age coalitions' and 'pensioners' coalitions'. The former are concerned with broader welfare and healthcare benefits, while the latter focus most of their attention on lobbying for improved pension entitlements. This broad dichotomisation, however, may obscure important intra-group differences and overlapping spheres of competence. If we look to research in the United Kingdom, further categorisation is possible and informative. For example, Ginn and Arber (1999) distinguish between pensioner organisations whose main priorities relate to national issues of pensions and health; associations of retired people which are usually organisations of middle-class older people whose main focus is the welfare of older citizens and the social and employment opportunities available to them; and charities who advocate for older people and offer advice and local services.

Additional categories of older people's interest organisations include 'industry-based retirement associations', whose membership is dependent on previous occupational status (Bornat, 1998); cause- or identity-based advocacy organisations, which focus on specific subgroups of the older population, such as women or ethnic minorities, and organisations
which represent older people with specific illnesses, such as Alzheimer's Associations (Schulz & Binstock, 2006).

1.5 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Over the past three decades international literature has highlighted the importance of older people's participation and representation in the policy-making process (Binstock & Quagagno, 2001; Dobson, 1983; Estes et al., 2003; Hudson, 2008; Pratt, 1983; Walker, 1998). However, remarkably little academic attention has been given to the issue of older people's political representation. Walker (2006a:339) comments that the relationship between ageing and politics is a 'relatively neglected topic in gerontology'. The literature relating to these organisations tends to look at them in a simplistic manner; they are either influential or not, biased or unbiased. The extant literature takes an outcome based focus, as opposed to an operational or process driven analysis of the organisations. Little attention has been given to their membership. The over-emphasis on macro political forces means there are glaring short-comings in the literature. As Binstock and Quadagno (2001) state 'characterizations [of older people's interest organisations] are largely based on reputational data rather than systematic empirical investigations'.

In short, a notable lacuna exists in the literature with regard to (1) the work of older people's interest organisations (outside of policy-specific case studies); (2) how older people's interest organisations define and consult with their constituencies; (3) the perceptions of interest group representatives of participation in the policy making process; (4) the attitude of individuals towards membership of older people's interest organisations; and (5) policy makers' perceptions of older people's interest organisations. This thesis attempts to address these deficiencies in the literature by adopting a holistic approach to the analysis of the work of older people's interest organisations. It seeks to do this by attending to the linkages between the work of older people's interest organisations, member's 'identity politics' and policy-makers' perceptions of the organisations.
1.6 **THESIS AIDS AND OBJECTIVES**

The thesis seeks to address the emergence on the Irish political scene of older people's interest organisations since the late 1990s. It examines organisations which are independent of the government in both their constitution and operation and it does not explore issues that arise in the domain of older people's organisations formed by government, such as senior councils or user panels, visible in countries such as Austria, Norway and Denmark (Evers & Wolfe, 1999). The decision not to include government organised user-groups in the analysis is largely due to the fact that the institutionalization of such groups in the Irish context is nascent (Department of Health, 2008).

From the outset the study adopts a critical gerontology perspective placing an emphasis on the structural and cultural issues which contextualize the experience of ageing (Phillipson & Biggs, 1998). It advances the literature on older people's interest organisations along two important lines. First, the thesis broadens the focus from a macro level examination of the political participation of older people to a more nuanced micro level analysis. This is significant in light of the fact that the majority of studies on the politics of old age and the issue of older people's representation focus almost exclusively on the issue of older people's participation in older people's interest organisations in the context of macro political and global economic forces (Estes et al., 2003; Hudson, 2008; Torres-Gil, 2005; Walker, 2006b). By focusing on the issues of salience to the members and directors of older people's interest organisations the thesis provides an important insight into the factors which impact upon their operational decisions and effectiveness.

Furthermore, by focusing on policy makers' perceptions of the politics of old age and the representation of older people through older people's interest organisations, the thesis sheds light on the manner in which participation is legitimatised and utilised. Examining the Irish context, the specific research questions are:

1. Who do older people's interest organisations in Ireland represent?
2. How do they seek to represent this constituency?
3. What are the factors which impact upon older people's interest organisations' engagement in political advocacy work?
4. How do the members of older people’s interest organisations conceptualise old age and what implications does this have for the operation of older people’s interest organisations?

5. What are policymakers’ perceptions of older people’s interest organisations and how relevant are these organisations to policymaker’s work?

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into nine chapters. Chapter 2 summarises the international literature from both social gerontology and political science. It provides an overview of the theorisation of interest group influence on the policy process, the literature on older people’s interest organisations and explores the theme of older people’s ‘identity politics’.

Chapter 3 contextualizes the study by providing a historical overview of the contemporary politics of old age in Ireland. It offers a brief analysis of the ideological evolution of social policy in Ireland and the government’s allocation of social transfers during the economically prosperous period between the late 1990s and 2007. It introduces the various older people’s interest organisations operating at the national level in Ireland and outlines the factors which contributed to the emergence of an older people’s sector from the 1990s. The institutional and political structures which facilitate the participation of older people’s interest organisations are described to provide the reader with a framework within which to contextualize the analysis of these organisations in Chapter 5, 6 and 7. The Chapter concludes with an analysis of those few existing studies which address the political influence of older people’s interest organisations in Ireland.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design and methodology. It summaries the predominant epistemological assumptions which underpin a critical gerontology perspective, identifying those assumptions which inform the subsequent analysis. This is followed by an overview of the research design and methodology. Attention is given to the sampling
strategy and the data analysis techniques employed. Finally the limitations inherent in the study are discussed.

The research findings are presented in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. Chapter 5 addresses the thesis research questions, two, three and four presented above. It offers an account of the work of older people's interest organisations in Ireland as gleaned from the interviews with their staff and members. It explores the constituency which older people's interest organisations in Ireland seek to represent and how they strive to work with and represent this constituency. It reveals how these organisations not only aim to effect political change through traditional advocacy, but also seek to work in the wider community and engage with older people to alleviate institutional and societal ageism and empower older people at an individual and collective level.

Chapter 6 explores older people's interest organisation members' perspectives on identity politics and provides an account of their views on old age as an identity-defining concept. In so doing, it reveals how older people's interest organisations provide members with firstly, an opportunity to legitimize and negotiate their post-retirement status and secondly, a mechanism to safeguard their 'state-determined identity', when this identity is viewed to be under threat by proposed policy changes in pension and welfare supports.

Chapter 7 addresses policymakers' perceptions of older people's interest organisations and the relevance of these organisations to policymakers' official work duties. It provides an insight not only into policymakers' vacillating and ambivalent perceptions of older people's interest organisations, but also their thoughts on social policy as it relates to older people in general. In doing so it highlights the relatively marginal role older people's interest organisations play in the work of policymakers and also, the perceived irrelevance of (old) age-targeting in social policy development in Ireland.

Chapter 8 provides an account of the 2008 medical card protest in Ireland, which occurred following proposed budget cuts, from the perspectives of the members and directors of
older people's interest organisations, former Junior Ministers of State and policymakers. The medical card protest was the largest protest orchestrated and executed by older people to occur in the history of the Irish state, with a combined total of over 15,000 older people attending rallies in two Dublin locations. This chapter outlines the involvement of older people's interest organisations in the protest, the factors which led to the mobilisation of such large numbers of older people and policymakers' learning from the event.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 9, reflects on the key findings of the thesis. It seeks to examine the interconnection of the three central themes of the thesis: the work and internal dynamics of older people's interest organisations; older people's identity politics; and policymakers' conceptions of older people's interest organisations. Inspired by a critical gerontology perspective, it looks to the future and discusses possible trajectories for older people's interest organisations' development and a possible focus of their activities in the coming decades.
2: THE INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION
Drawing upon literature in the social gerontology and political science fields, this chapter seeks to outline the international scholarly literature in the area of older people's interest organisations. Focusing largely on political science literature, Section 2.2 provides a summary of the theorisation of interest group influence in the policy process. Following this, the literature pertaining to older people's interest organisations emerging from the social gerontology and political science literatures is summarised in Section 2.3. Among the primary themes to emerge are questions of representation, strategy and influence as they pertain to older people's interest organisations. Section 2.4 is devoted to issues relating to the members of older people's interest organisations and the related theme of 'identity politics'. The chapter concludes by summarising gaps and deficiencies in the extant literature on older people's interest organisations.

2.2 THEORISATION OF INTEREST GROUP INFLUENCE ON POLICY
The perspectives emerging from academic writings on the subject of interest group involvement in the policy-making process have shifted significantly over the decades. The evolution of this writing can be broadly categorized as transitioning from a) an initial focus on an implicitly equitable model of democratic pluralism, to b) one of elite theorists focused on the unequal distribution of power across interest groups, to c) policy sub-networks and finally to more discursive approaches which emphasise how public policy is influenced by its framing within political discourses. The following discussion provides an introduction into each of these traditions.

2.2.1 PLURALIST THEORISTS
Pluralist theorists suggest that power is diffused across groups of organisations whose actions and interactions ultimately lead to a democratic equilibrium. These theorists advance the view that organisations will mobilize to ensure representation of all groups at the point in time when it is particularly in their interest to do so. Proponents of this theory included Ernest Griffith (1939), David Truman (1951) and Robert Dahl (1967). Within
this framework interest groups continuously organise and dissolve according to public demand and particular events. Policy decisions are not made in isolation by state policy legislators but rather, as Hudson and Lowe (2004:115) explain, ‘the policy process is essentially driven by public demands and opinion... [and the state is viewed] as an arbiter of competing interests’. The state is seen as operating in the interest of all citizens.

Advocates of pluralism as a means for ensuring ‘democratic equilibrium’ have been criticised for adopting an overly simplistic approach to the manner in which political power and influence are exercised (McFarland, 2004). Furthermore, for critics of this theory, its implicit assumption that all interest groups are necessarily capable of organising and subsequently wielding political power is problematic. As Estes (1999:21) comments it ‘has been faulted for idealizing democracy and “public choice” while overlooking the power of large-scale vested interests and the “mobilization of bias” built into interest group politics’. Critically reviewing the literature, Jordon (1993:60) argues that pluralism is an underdeveloped theory which fails to adequately unravel the complex variables which influence the policy process:

‘it has never gelled into that coherent model at which critics can take ready aim. It is a rather simple idea about the nature of political life, not a sophisticated set of observations predictions and value positions’.

By the late 1960s pluralist theory was rejected by many political scientists for its failure to challenge the status quo due to its unquestioning acceptance of existing power structures as inherently equitable and to account for issues raised by hegemony theorists who emphasised how power can be manipulated and controlled (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Lukes, 1974).

2.2.2 Elite theorists
‘Anti-pluralist critics’ or ‘stratification’ or ‘elite’ theorists such as Mills (1956), Bachrach and Baratz (1970) and Schattschneider (1966) argued that particular privileged groups were granted greater legitimacy within policy negotiations. This in turn allowed them to engage with political actors and thereby wield large amounts of power and influence. These scholars, while refining classical pluralism, still emphasised the importance of
interest groups as legitimate actors in the policy process. However, unlike traditional pluralist theorists, they emphasised oligarchic coalitions within the policy-making process. Central to this new dialogue was the notion of ‘insider’ groups – those groups more closely aligned to the political decision makers - and ‘outsider’ groups (Schattschneider, 1966). Decision-makers were regarded as occupying a social group shared by certain leaders and representatives of particular interest groups who, by virtue of this shared identity and common social space, could wield undue influence. Explaining the theory and the privileged status of particular groups, Mills (1956) comments:

‘The people of the higher circles may also be conceived as members of a top social stratum, as a set of groups whose members know one another, see one another socially and at business and so, in making decisions, take one another into account’

(Mills, 1956:11)

McFarland (2004:33) notes that scholars in this tradition coined new terms such as ‘subgovernments, little governments, clientelism, interest group liberalism, interest group capture, whirlpools of power...[and] iron triangles’ to describe the elite control of the policy process. Also relevant for elite theorists was the ‘second face of power’, more particularly those who had power over agenda-setting and which issues reached the policy agenda (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). The issues of coercion, authority, manipulation and power through the threat of sanctions became relevant in this second dimension of power. This theory was subsequently developed by Steven Lukes (1974) who argued that there were in fact ‘three faces of power’, control over the political agenda through decision-making and non decision-making as argued by Bachrach and Baratz, but also control over ideological power. Lukes essentially emphasised power as domination and compliance. Aspects of his theory of power find resonance in later post-empiricist writings. For example, Lukes (1974) emphasises how the powerless may be socialized to accept dominant normative values or beliefs which are not in their own best interests. He argues that the dominated acquiesce and accept an unequal status quo, and ‘accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they view it as natural and unchangeable, or they value it as divinely preordained and beneficial’ (Lukes 1974:24). While not explicitly addressed, the connection between power, knowledge and discourse is apparent in Lukes (1974) theory.
2.2.3 FROM PLURALISM TO GOVERNANCE

Elite theorists emphasised that the policy-making process was disproportionately dominated by special economic interest groups (Olson, 1965; Stigler, 1975) and that organisations representing the general public were less likely to mobilise due to their inability to exert influence. The growth of social movements in the 1960s, however, led to criticism of the argument that public-interest groups were less likely to form than economic interest organisations. The emergence of citizen groups from the 1960s onwards led to greater theorising around the formation of social movement organisations, their resources and capacities (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) and subsequently their involvement and influence in the policy process (Tarrow, 1994). From the late 1970s, scholars such as Heclo (1978) and Rhodes (1981) argued that attention needed to shift to how private and public interest groups outside government were granted access to 'issue networks' or 'policy subsystems'. Attention shifted from government to governance and the fact that through 'policy networks' or 'policy communities' a diverse range of public and private stakeholders were granted access to the policy process. Policy making was thus viewed as a negotiated process involving a policy issue determined spectrum of groups which included civil society organisations (Smith, 1993). Membership in the policy communities or networks is fluid and loosely controlled to accommodate the diversity of policy issues and interest groups (Daly, 2003). While governance and network theory accounted for the inclusion of citizen organisations in the policy process it provided little insight into, or explanation of, how final policy decisions were ultimately reached (Hill, 2005). In fact, while citizen organisations and public interest groups were granted access to these policy communities or networks, it is argued that their ability to exert influence within this fora has been limited (Shaw, 2011; Taylor, 2007).

2.2.4 POST-EMPIRICIST: DISCOURSE, IDEAS AND IDEOLOGY

While not explicitly related to the theorisation of interest group influence, the work of post-empiricists is highly relevant to the discussion of older people's interest organisations since it emphasises the primacy of political discourses. Post- empiricists no longer see the central question to be addressed as merely one of 'who has access to the policy-making process?', but demand responses to contextual issues such as; 'How is the policy issue being conceptualized or 'framed' by the parties to the debate? How are the issues selected, organized, and interpreted to make sense of a complex reality?' (Fischer,
2003:143). Viewed from the perspective of the participation and inclusion of citizens' groups in the policy process this contextualization or framing of policy issues, shifts attention to how participation is legitimated or constructed in political discourses. The concept of discourse as defined by Westerhof and Tulle (2007:236) is the 'sets of institutional and cultural systems that provide meaning, map out the space in which social practices are made possible and constitute 'official' knowledge or truth'.

Foucault (1973, 1977, 1982, 1988) was interested in the notion of discursive systems at particular historical junctures. In order to gain an understanding of the evolution and practical implications of discursive systems he conducted extensive archival analysis tracing the genealogy of a diverse range of social practices and institutions, for example, Western prison and school systems and the development of the medical and psychiatric profession. His work is described by Kritzman (1998; xvii) as 'a genealogical analysis of the forms of rationality and the microphysics of power that incarnate the history of the present'. Foucault understood discourse as being embedded in social practices and institutions and closely intertwined with power and the associated production of knowledge and 'truth'. He focused on three disciplinary discourses. Firstly, 'dividing practices', whereby certain individuals are objectified and divided from wider society, for example, prisoners, those who are mentally ill and delinquents. Secondly, 'scientific classifications' where, through the imposition of surveillance practices, usage of classificatory systems and new technologies, particular discourses and practices emerged which objectified particular individuals and legitimated certain practices. Thirdly, through 'technologies of the self' Foucault argued that individuals as active agents through a process of 'subjectification' self-construct themselves within discursive systems. Thus through a process of subjectification and objectification disciplinary discourses were consolidated. Foucault viewed the state as 'an individualizing and a totalizing power' (Foucault, 1982: 213). However, Foucault argued that dominant discourses emanating from state institutions could be resisted and challenged. For example, in Human Nature, he writes:

'the real political task in society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them' (Foucault: 1974: 171 cited by Rabinow, 1984:6)
With some exceptions (Biggs & Powell, 2001; Frank, 1998; Katz, 1998) the applicability of Foucault’s work to social gerontology has received scant attention, however, his emphasis on the evolution of discursive systems is relevant to how participation of interest groups are constructed within political discourses. Barnes, Newman and Sullivan’s (2007) writings offer a constructive approach to addressing the manner in which participation may be constructed. They outline four official models of public discourse which shaped participation in public policy in the United Kingdom from the late 1960s. The four categories of this discourse which they identify are: the empowered, the consumer, the stakeholder and the responsible.

The ‘empowered’ public discourse emerged in the 1960s and its subjects were primarily disadvantaged and marginalised communities. Their empowerment under this model was considered achievable through a combination of greater targeting of services to them complimented by community development projects which facilitated the inclusion of these populations in policy-committees at both the local and national level.

The ‘consuming’ public discourse is closely related to the liberalisation of public services and positions the state’s relationship with the citizen as that of the regulator of services consumed and chosen by the public. According to Barnes et al. (2007:13) this discourse contributed to government adoption, and pervasive use, of private sector inspired terminology such as ‘value for money’ and ‘accountability’. The state plays an important role in guaranteeing ‘choice’ and access to services for the consuming public. Its role is transformed from service provider to service regulator whose primary focus is on quality assurance and monitoring.

The ‘stakeholder’ public discourse emphasises that citizens have a vested interest in ensuring the efficient functioning of state institutions. This ‘stake’ in the public realm is multifaceted and is a function of the hybrid and interchangeable relationship of citizens with service providers, either as tax-payers, service users or ‘indirect beneficiaries of the provision of services to others’ (Barnes, et al. 2007:15). This discourse is manifested in
various forms of participatory governance some of which have potentially profound implications for existing democratic structures. Arguably its most extreme form envisages the replacement of representative democracy with deliberative democracy or what Hirst (1994) (cited by Barnes et al. 2007) describes as 'associative democracy', where decisions are made through a network of voluntary associations.

Finally, the 'responsible' public discourse emphasises individual autonomy, responsibility and duty to the state and community. Emphasis is placed on the family, civil society, self-governance and self-discipline. The Conservative manifestation of this discourse in the United Kingdom in the 1980s centred on private education, health insurance and Neighbourhood Watch schemes. Its liberal orientation conceived the responsible public discourse as one premised on the notion of communitarianism. Active citizenship and civic engagement is invoked. The government is positioned as a facilitator of communitarian practices. Seeking to enhance social cohesion within and across communities, government supports 'the building of community capacity, by acting to overcome barriers that divide communities and by developing an evidence base of 'what works' that can be shared widely' (Barnes et al., 2007:21). Whether the manifestation of the 'responsible public discourse' has resulted in an emphasis on social obedience and individual communitarianism or collective communitarianism is questioned.

2.3 Older people's interest organisations

2.3.1 Representation at the beginning of the twentieth century

The precursors to contemporary older people's interest organisations in Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth century were in many cases established by war veterans who lobbied for pensions or subsidized salaries (Skocpol, 1992). For example, in Germany by 1921 there were six such organisations, with a membership of 1.3 million. The largest of these organisations, the Reichsbund der Kriegsopfer, Behinderten, Sozialrentner und Hinterbliebenen (League of war victims, disabled, pensioners and survivors) founded in 1917, by 1921 had 639,856 members (Cohen, 2003). Among its aims was the advancement of the interest of older veterans in broader welfare issues, such as free or reduced fares on public transport, higher pensions and secure employment
Membership in the various organisations frequently aligned with veterans’ ideological values, for example, their religious or political (conservative or social democratic) affiliation. It was not until the 1930s and more prominently in the post-World War II years, with the formation of pensioner associations, that organisations would petition for the wider older population. For example, the National Spinsters’ Pension Association was formed in the United Kingdom in the mid-1930s (Bornat, 1998), the Swedish People’s Pensioners National League in 1939 (Gaunt, 2002), the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Association in Canada in the 1940s (Henry Pratt, 1993) and the Pensioner Association (Pensionisten Verband) in Austria in 1949 (Gaunt, 2002).

It was noted in Chapter 1 that the expansion of the welfare state in the post-war years and the associated allocation of benefits on the basis of chronological age formed the basis of a new status for older people. As Phillipson (1998:38) argues, ‘growing old became framed within the context of the new language of ‘social rights’ and ‘social citizenship’. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that in the decades following the creation of the welfare state, a burgeoning of older people’s interest organisations was evident across the United States and Europe. The existence of age-related benefits and associated age-based policies provided older people’s interest organisations with an incentive to mobilize to protect these entitlements and identify shortfalls in the existent policies (Binstock & Quagagno, 2001; Estes et al., 2003; Street, 1999; Walker, 2006a). This causality was succinctly captured by Hudson (1998:132) in his observation that ‘the policy generated the politics’.

2.3.2 Representation from the 1950s
Beginning in the 1950s a new wave of older people’s organisations started to emerge, first in the United States and later in other mature democracies in the northern and southern hemispheres (Binstock & Quadagno, 2001; Day, 1998; Pratt, 1974; Pratt, 1993; Walker & Naegele, 1999). These organisations consisted largely of professionally paid directors and staff who advocated for the needs of older people (Day, 1998; Pratt, 1993; Walker, 1999). A number of factors have been forwarded as contributing to the growth and stability of these groups. For example, Pratt (1974:114) suggests that technological advances, an increase in the revenue (generally) accumulated from membership dues and a more benign political structure contributed to their growth in the United States. Walker (1999)
argues that the increased political activity of older people's interest organisations paralleled social movements across all spectrums of civic society and that demographic changes and increases in the population of older people corresponded with an increased political relevance of older people’s issues. Binstock and Quadagno (2001) propose that an increased emphasis on membership incentives attracted and retained members within organisations and that ‘coalition building’, whereby different organisations with broadly similar objectives organised under one umbrella body, has been a successful political strategy which helped organisations to unify. In other instances organisations have joined together to form a single larger organization. An example of such ‘coalition building’ can be observed in Australia, where the National Seniors association of Queenslanders merged with Mature Australia of New South Wales and Later Years of Queensland in 1991 and subsequently incorporated the Self Funded Retirees of Western Australia and ARPA Over 50s Association Ltd.¹

This mobilization of professional advocacy groups, which commenced in the 1950s, was particularly pronounced in the United States. According to Binstock and Day (1996), by the mid-1990s there were over 100 national organisations in the United States representing the voices of older people. The largest organisation, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) had a membership of 40 million and recorded assets of $99 million in 2008 (Binstock, 2010). With the exception of the Catholic Church it has the largest membership of any organisation in the United States (Cassel, 2005). Other organisations of note in the United States include the Alliance for Retired Americans, which represents approximately four million retired trade union members and the Gray Panthers, famous for their charismatic founder Maggie Kuhn and their ‘avant-garde’ style of activism including high visibility media events (Martinez, 1990).

The smaller number of older people’s interest organisations in Europe is largely attributed to the more powerful trade union movements in Europe (Anderson, 2001). However, it can also be argued that state-sponsored initiatives to facilitate the participation of older people at the local and national level reduced the need for older

people to form older people's interest organisations. For example, Denmark, Norway and
the Netherlands have provided legal jurisdiction for senior citizens' boards within local
municipalities (Walker & Naegele, 1999). In France the National Committee for
Pensioners and Old People established in the 1980s has an advisory function at local,
regional and national levels (Evers & Wolfe, 1999; Schulte, 1999).

Furthermore, the political participation of older people in interest group organisations in
Europe may be more significant than Anglo-Saxon scholarship suggests. For example, in
the United Kingdom, the National Pensioners Convention claims to have over 1000 local
and national groups with a total of 1.5 million members. In Denmark, DaneAge, formed in
1986, has a membership of 584,000 in 2012, which represents 28 per cent of all Danes
aged 50 and over. It has 217 local chapters consisting of more than 10,000 volunteers
working in the local chapters, doing voluntary social work, coordinating local membership
activities and local advocacy. The Pensioner Association (Pensionisten Verband) in
Austria has 1,717 local groups and 385,000 members in 2012. The
Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Senioren-Organisationen of Germany claims to represent
over 100 older people's interest organisations, with a total membership of 13 million
older people in 2012. The absence of comparative and national research in this area,
however, contributes to a perception that the organisation of older people at the
European level is less significant than in the United States.

Older people's representation in the trade union or labour movement is undisputedly
more significant in Europe than in the United States. Figures compiled by Anderson and
Lynch (2007) reveal that Italy, followed by France, Norway, Germany and Austria has the
highest percentage of pensioners in trade unions at the turn of the millennium. Their
research outlines how the representation of retired members within trade unions differs
depending on the status accorded to the pensioner wing of the union. Those who can
exercise most influence are the retired members who are represented in separate pensioners' unions which have equal status to other sectoral unions. This is the
predominant model in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal. It contrasts with retired union
members in organisations in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and
Luxembourg. Unlike their European neighbours they do not have this autonomous status
of separate pension unions but instead remain members of their original sectoral unions having independent representation at the confederal level (Anderson, & Lynch, 2007). In Germany, Austria and Scandinavia, retired workers also remain union members in their original sectoral union but are not granted any formal mechanisms to independently advance their specific concerns.

2.3.3 LACK OF REPRESENTATION
The claim of older people's interest organisations to be representative of the older population is central to the legitimization of their participation in the policy process. However, policy-makers and older people's interest organisations themselves may seek to marginalize and limit the inclusion of certain sub-populations of older people whose interests and aspirations may not align with those of policy officials or the dominant ideology or focus of the organisations (Barnes, Newman, Knops, & Sullivan, 2003). These two groups, officials and organisations, consequently exert a certain degree of influence on the construction of older people's representation in the policy-making space. 'Discursive practices' can give rise to exclusion from this space (Barnes et al., 2003), through, for example, determining how the constituency or target group is to be defined. Attention on issues such as class, gender, race, disability and sexuality, for example, is dependent on how they are represented within interest organisations and participatory fora. If the definition of the group does not focus on these characteristics, the issues and concerns particular to them can fall off the radar and are excluded due to their invisibility. Exclusion can also be enforced on the basis of competency. An emphasis on technical knowledge and skills can led to a situation where the participation of certain populations is viewed as less relevant (Barnes et al., 2003). This is of particular relevance to older people in contexts where less value is attributed to experiential knowledge than to 'technical' knowledge.

Binstock and Day (1996) note that frequently older people's interest organisations in the United States have differed on ideological issues and that many do not campaign for the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized among their populations. They argue that higher participation rates of economically independent individuals has significant ramifications for the political agendas of older people's interest organisations. European scholars also highlight the potential pitfalls of a middle class bias in older people's interest
organisations (Evers & Wolfe, 1999). This bias could contribute to differential opportunities for participation among the population of older people and give rise to a scenario where the voice of the more financially and socially vulnerable individuals within the population of older people is not given priority in the work of older people's interest organisations (Evers & Wolfe, 1999). It is argued that this skewed representation of older people, reflective only of the aspirations of the middle class, is used by legislators to their own advantage. For example, in the United Kingdom, Ginn and Arber (1999) note that middle class interests have received more attention than protests from pensioners' organisations representing less economically secure older people. They provide the example of how media attention generated by objections of certain conservative groups of older people to 'asset testing' for long-term care led to a rise in the permitted asset value level and only benefitted individuals with such assets to begin with.

The argument is also made that larger organisations, such as Age Concern in the UK, led by professionals, may not take as radical an approach as the older population themselves (Vincent, 1999). Professionally led organisations are potentially more likely to appease policymakers, if they perceive this as strategically wise from a self-interested career and employment perspective (Vincent, 1999). In the United States AARP's endorsement of the passage of the Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act (MCAA) in 1998 provides an interesting case study of the incongruence that can exist between interest groups and the wider population and how the priorities of middle class members may dominate. The MCCA sought to expand the Medicare2 programme and place a cap on out-of-pocket expenses on Medicare benefits (something which would be of benefit to all Medicare beneficiaries) (Binstock, 2005; Street, 1993). This expansion was to be financed by an increase in Medicare premiums for older people, which would have placed a greater financial burden on the wealthier older people. However, AARPs endorsement of the Act was vehemently opposed by the lobbying activity of primarily white, middle and upper middle income seniors (Street, 1993:439) who joined forces in the Senior Coalition Against Catastrophic Act – a coalition of more than 50 groups (Street, 1993). Within 17 months the

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2 Medicare is a national health insurance programme for people age 65 years and older and persons aged under 65 with certain disabilities.
Act was repealed - something unprecedented in America's political history (Binstock, 2005; Rix, 1999).

How older people's interest organisations define their policy priorities has a direct relationship with how they construct their constituency. Jönson and Nilsson's (2007) review of the literature suggests that the portrayal of older people as frail and needy has been utilized by older people's interest organisations to bring about an improvement in policies for older people. They cite the work of Nelson (1982) who argues that older people's interest organisations have tended to use contradictory images of older people. On the one hand, the image of older people as frail or needy has been forwarded when articulating the need for particular benefits and supports, while on the other hand, the use of ageist stereotypes of older people as needy and frail has been criticised where they constitute discrimination against older people. This dilemma is also highlighted by Vincent (1999:74) in the UK context, he outlines how:

Age Concern, like other organisations of and for older people, is caught in a dilemma. On the one hand it seeks to undermine the image of older people as sick and disabled and replace it with a positive image of ageing, while on the other hand it also seeks to ensure an appropriate level of care for the minority of older people who do need social care and medical services.

Jönson and Nilsson (2007) also argue that the notion of 'merit' or 'deservingness' has been hijacked and manipulated by right-wing groups to justify the marginalization of certain groups in society such as migrants and criminals. They contend that the use of 'merit' is contentious and has potentially negative implications for inter-generational relationships. While the notion of merit in the context of old age could be framed positively, by valuing the life-course of all people, they voice concern that such an approach generally fails to materialise and instead results in the categorisation of certain groups as less deserving and the notion of certain benefits or supports are 'unmerited'. Such a discourse is inherently divisive and, in addition to its potential for generational conflict, is likely to stigmatize some citizens in society as less worthy.
2.2.4 Strategies of influence
Interest groups invest substantial time and resources in attempting to acquire information from policy-makers (Beyers, 2008). The result can be that greater attention is placed on information access than strategizing and lobbying (Salisbury, 1990). Frequently, interest groups operate in a reactive and opportunistic manner lacking strategic plans or clearly defined agendas. Their actions may be dictated by the channels through which they can gain access to information and by the policy agendas advanced by government (Salisbury, 1990). Before an organisation takes a particular policy stance they need to be adequately informed, as Salisbury (1990:226) notes, they must know what people inside and outside a government are ‘thinking and planning’. This, he argues, can put the interest group into a position of ‘profound dependence’ …they need access to officials not so much to apply pressure or even to advocate policy as to be told when something important to them is about to happen’ (Salisbury, 1990:227).

Commenting on the National Council for Senior Citizens in the United States, Berry and Wilcox (2007) note that while they aspired to set organisational goals and priorities in a systematic and rational manner, decisions were often made on a more ad hoc basis; priority was not always given to issues which related to low-income seniors and normally the organisation was reacting in response to government rather than vice versa. In addition they found that the need for an organisation to rapidly mobilise in response to a topical policy concern resulted in certain issues being sidelined or temporarily put on hold. Similarly, Binstock and Day (1996), suggest that many of the strategies of older people’s interest organisations are defensive, reacting to proposed legislation, rather than proposing changes. In the United States Martinez (1990:158) suggests that organisations such as the National Council of Senior Citizens took a confrontational approach to advocacy, using mass mobilizations of their support base in order to draw attention to their issues and pressurise the government into action. The Gray Panthers, on the other hand, adopted an ‘avant-garde’ style of activism and staged ‘high visibility media events’ (Martinez, 1990:157). The AARP adopted more indirect insider strategies where they elicited the participation of middle class members who acted as ‘amateur lobbyists’ lobbying politicians directly or providing testimony and written statements at public hearings (Martinez, 1990:157).
Arguably the most important and effective tactical weapon available to interest groups is their ability to convince politicians that they are capable of influencing the political behaviour of their members and mobilizing them to affect election outcomes. Binstock (1999) terms organisations' potential ability to mobilise and influence the votes of its members 'electoral bluff'. While noting the possibility of successfully mobilising their members as a unifying political voting bloc has not previously been demonstrated in the United States, he argues that most politicians are reluctant to risk the eventuality of such a development and hence will aim to facilitate these groups. In the United States, the AARP frequently invests millions of dollars into public relations campaigns to inform their members and the public at large of the policy agendas of political leaders. For example in the 2008 Presidential elections the AARP sponsored public fora for both Republican and Democratic candidates to share their opinions on health care reforms, social security and benefits for home caregivers (Bosman, 2007). They also spearheaded an initiative called 'Divided we Fail' and published a 12-page information booklet outlining all statements made by two Presidential nominees (Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain) on access to affordable health care and long-term care insurance.

2.2.5 Strategies of survival
An analysis of older people's interest organisations needs to explore their strategies of influence, while simultaneously paying attention to their strategies of survival, since their tactical choices may be closely related to organizational maintenance, including ensuring the very existence of the organisation (Beyers, Eising, & Maloney, 2008; Lowery & Gray, 2004). For example, Gray and Lowery (2000) advocate that studies on interest representation should explore interest organisations from a 'population ecology' perspective. Drawing from the analytical techniques of ecological science they argue that the study of interest organisations should focus on how they interact with each other and adapt to the demands of their environment. Issues of competition, resources, adaptation and niche partitioning influence the diversity and survival of interest organisations in a particular interest population. An understanding of the internal dynamics of interest organisations is also important in this 'population ecology' approach since it contributes

3 http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org_/build/templates/issues/dwf/pdfs/DWF-InTheirOwnWords-0808.pdf
towards the explanation of why different organisations engage or disengage in lobbying activities at different times.

While social gerontologists have not looked at interest organisations from a population ecology perspective, the themes of competition, resources, adaptation, niche partitioning and organisation survival have nevertheless received their attention. For example, Pratt’s (1993:218) analysis of older people’s interest organisations reveals that one of two criteria were essential for a group’s survival, namely ‘substantial external patronage’ or ‘a strong network of supportive local chapters’. Evers and Wolfe (1999) note that in the past older people’s voluntary associations in the United Kingdom were relatively autonomous and depended less on public monies than associations, in, for example, Germany. This, however, has changed and increasingly these organisations are dependent on public money, in some instances for the delivery of services, which increasingly are funded only on a contractual basis. Thus their power as autonomous organisations has been weakened which in turn, Evers and Wolfe (1999) argue, has undermined their ability to influence public policy. This point is also raised by Vincent (1999) who suggests that the legal status of a number of older people’s organisations as charitable organisations creates obstacles for them when attempting to represent the voice of older people. An additional structural impediment that Vincent (1999) highlights is how the financial viability of a number of organisations is more related to the donating general public than the older people they hope to represent. He argues that:

‘there is at least a potential, if not active, conflict of interest, between the requirements of an organisation not to offend those who provide its funds and the needs of elderly people for significant changes to their social and political position’. (Vincent, 1999:94).

2.2.6 INFLUENCING THE POLICY PROCESS
The ‘senior power model’ or ‘grey power thesis’ proposes that the higher voting rates, and political activism of older people in older people’s interest organisations, translates into older people being a powerful dominant force in national politics. This argument, which is frequently the outcome of sensationalised media treatment, is generally regarded by both gerontologists (Estes et al. 2003, Walker) and political scientists (Campbell, 2003;
Goerres, 2009; Schulz & Binstock, 2006) as a simplification of a complex issue which ignores the unequal distribution of power across different groups in society (Street, 1999) and the reality that the population of older people cannot be assumed to coalesce together as a unified voting entity. Students of both political science and gerontology suggest that the promulgation of a grey power thesis is advanced to legitimize retrenchment and reformulation of age-based policies.

With some exceptions the small group of social gerontologists who have commented upon the influence of older people's interest organisations are advocates of the political economy of ageing perspective. The political economy of ageing borrows from elite theories and ascribes greater importance to conflict as opposed to consensus between groups (Estes, 2001). Proponents of this perspective argue that the influence of older people's interest organisations is likely to be constrained by other groups representing economic and business interests.

Focusing largely on the English and American context, political economists revealed how the social and economic dependence of certain populations of older people on the state was negatively reinforced by particular social policies. For example, Townsend (1981) argued that the enforcement of a fixed retirement age and associated forced withdrawal from the labour market, the introduction of early retirement schemes as a mechanism to mask unemployment status and the inappropriate admission of older people to residential

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4 For example, in the United States, Robert H. Binstock, Andrea Louise Campbell, Henry J. Pratt who are political scientists. Chris Gildeard and Paul Higgs are social scientists, however, they are not proponents of a political economy perspective.

5 The political economy of ageing paradigm which emerged in both the US (Estes, 1979) and United Kingdom (Townsend, 1981; Walker, 1981) in the early 1980s charged that mainstream gerontologists were engaging in 'acquiescent functionalism' (Townsend, 1986). Such scholars, they argued, conceptualised society and social structures as having minimal impact on individuals. Instead the 'problems' of the old were conceptualised as residing largely with the individual. Emphasis was placed on social order which is viewed as being predetermined and maintained through social norms and how individuals adopted to these social norms (Victor, 2005).
care facilities led to a ‘structured’ (Townsend, 1981) and ‘artificial’ (Townsend, 1986) dependency. These measures also led to the perception that the income needs of older people were less than those of the economically active and the devaluation of older people in the workplace. As noted in Chapter 1, Walker (2006b) argued that the expansion of the welfare state in the post-war years and associated increased allocation of welfare supports to older people were aligned with the economic priorities of the day. Gilleard and Higgs (2007) also argue that the politicization of health care and pension reforms in the United Kingdom have not been the result of older people’s interest organisations’ agitation but rather the attention given to these issues by public sector workers represented by trade unions and policy analysts focused on changing demographics.

In the area of health care policy, political economists tend to focus on ‘structural interests’ and the hegemony of for-profit service provider groups such as nursing homes and insurance companies. The ‘medical-industrial complex’ (Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, 1971) or the ‘ageing enterprise’ (Estes, 1979), which consists of professional service providers, is perceived as having a vested interest in the biomedicalization of ageing, the privatization of health care, the dominance of the ‘medical model’ and the preservation of old age as a social and health problem (Estes, 2001; Estes, 1979; Navarro, 1995, 1999). The definition or production of ‘cultural images’ by legislators is argued to be central to the manner in which the very concept of ageing, and the social policies to which it gives rise, is developed. Estes (1999:28) writes:

‘[t]hose who control the definitions of aging used in public policy in effect control access to old age benefits such as medical care as well as the costs and structures of care. Currently, public money and professional effort are disproportionately expended on acute rather than chronic care and on institutional (hospital and nursing home) rather than social supportive services for the elderly. Both reflect a definition of health and health care in old age that is a product of the professional dominance of medicine and consistent with a profitable medical care industry’.

Similar to post-empiricists, political economists and critical gerontologists therefore emphasise how the concept of ageing and policies for older people are socially constructed by policy elites. This construction is achieved through the control over the
production of, and capacity to manipulate, ideological value statements. Policymakers, in an attempt to divert criticism from unpopular policy changes, may engage in 'symbolic camouflage' (Estes et al., 2003:135). Issues of social inequality are converted into rationalized problems. For example Estes et al. (2003) trace how the discourse in the Republican mid-term election was changed from a discourse on 'privatization' of health care to consumer 'choice'. Another example, of this symbolic camouflage is evident in Schultz and Binstock's (2006) description of Republicans' attempt to privatize aspects of Social Security in 2003, by arguing that the introduction of 'personal accounts' was 'the center-piece of the 'ownership society' (Schultz & Binstock, 2006:218).

Older people's interest organisations are consequently viewed as having limited influence in this political economy perspective (Street, 1999, Walker, 1999, 2006⁶). By and large, researchers outside the political economy school do not voice greater levels of optimism with regard to the extent of this influence. For example, Binstock and Quadagno (2001:341) argue that the influence of older people's interest organisations in the United States 'has been largely confined to the successful efforts of relatively small purposive organisations that have been successful in lobbying for relatively minor policies'. Commenting on the relative influence of older people's interest organisations in the United Kingdom context Vincent, Patterson and Wale (2001) state:

'\textit{there is little evidence of increased responsiveness by governments or political parties to organised groups of older people. It is difficult to find examples of political parties having been particularly enthusiastic or efficient in the identification of issues that are important to older voters, or having been sensitive to presenting issues in a manner that appeals to older voters.}'

Notwithstanding this seeming pessimism, older people's interest organisations are thought in some instances to be granted 'symbolic legitimacy' (Schultz & Binstock, 2006) which facilitates access to policy makers and public platforms and thereby raises the profile of older people's issues. As Estes et al. (2003) acknowledge, older people's interest organisations may play an important role in influencing political ideologies which portray

⁶ Walker (1999) is optimistic that these groups will exercise most influence at the local level.
older people as a deserving group and in the social construction of old age. Binstock and Quadagno (2001) suggest that frequently public officials engage with such organisations to legitimize their attempts at consultation with the general public and grant them special privileges in public platforms such as congressional hearings, conferences and national media. Day (1990) argues that elected officials in the United States frequently collude with interest groups to advance their own political agenda, receive information and marshal support for certain public programmes. Commenting on the relationship between government and interest groups, she writes, ‘Government does not simply react to interest group pressures; in many cases government supports and encourages them’ (Day, 1990:132).

Some researchers have also identified specific instances where older people’s interest organisations have successfully influenced policy. For example Feltenius’s (2008) analysis of Pensioner Organisations’ influence on pension, dental and health reforms in Sweden suggests that they have played an important role in policy reforms forcing government to reformulate policies in these three areas.7 The Italian pensioners’ trade union success in the pension reforms in 1996 is documented by Campbell and Lynch (2000). In the United States influence is evident in ‘AARP’s endorsement of the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act (MMA) 2003, which provided coverage of outpatient prescription medication to Medicaid beneficiaries (Iglehart, 2004; Schulz & Binstock, 2006) and two years later when AARP again were successful in their campaign to oppose a Republican proposed reform to privatize aspects of social security (Hudson, 2008; Schulz & Binstock, 2006).

2.4 ‘IDENTITY POLITICS’

The review of the literature above focused on issues relating to older people’s interest organisations’ strategizing and influence. Another theme of central importance to the subject of older people’s representation and participation in older people’s interest organisations is the notion of identity politics. Two key questions which emerge in the

He attributes their success to their membership size, their professional expertise and the fact that they represent approximately 40 per cent of the over 65 population. Crucial to their success was the fact that they managed to gain membership on key policy committees that provided them with the opportunity to articulate their concerns.
context of older people’s identity politics are: Whether or not ‘old age’ alters a person’s sense of identity and fosters a greater sense of solidarity with and among other ‘older persons’? Is identity-formation consolidated or defined in older people’s interest organisations? Before elaborating on the literature addressing these questions, the discussion below first provides a summary of literature which explores the characteristics of the members of older people’s interest organisations and their motivations for joining an older people’s interest organisation.

2.4.1 Who joins older people’s interest organisations?
Who the members of older people’s interest organisations are is central to how policymakers legitimise the inclusion of the organisations in the policy process (Barnes, Harrison & Murray, 2011; Barnes et al., 2003). As Barnes et al. (2011:2) argue, public officials can undermine the participation of particular organisations by labelling their members as the ‘usual suspects’ or ‘an atypical minority’. The majority of older people are not members of political representative groups. For many who are retired, organized political representation formerly available through trade unions or workplace organisations is no longer accessible (Walker, 1999). For those who are constrained by physical or intellectual barriers – such as cognitive impairments or learning disabilities, low-income, age, gender and race discrimination or (sometimes) full-time caring responsibilities - membership in an older person interest group is likely to be uncommon (Walker, 1999). Analysis by Barnes et al. (2003) of an older people’s group found that older people with mental health problems, those in residential care or those with disabilities generally were not active members or on committee boards.

Some hold that older people’s interest organisations tend to be male-dominated (Walker, 1999), but in the absence of empirical research in this area, the accuracy of this assertion with regard to contemporary organisations is questionable. Traditionally, however, the majority of members in pensioners’ organisations tended to be men who had been active in the labour market (Vincent, 1999). The age profile of the members of older people’s interest organisations is also an unexplored area. Goerres’ (2009) analysis of the European Social Survey indicated that older cohorts were more likely to be involved in institutionalised political participation and to be members of political parties or interest
groups, as compared with the "young old" who were more involved in non-institutionalised forms of participation, such as, street protests or letter writing; a finding which provides illustration of the importance of cohort variables in the context of empirical studies on older people's political participation in older people's interest organisations. However, he found that distinctions in the modalities of participation between age groups are declining over time and a significant increase in the number of people using non-institutionalised forms of political participation is 'equalising the likelihood of participation across all groups (Goerres, 2009:138).

Arber, Perren and Davidson's (2002) analysis of the 1999 wave of the British Household Panel Survey explored older people's membership patterns in a range of organisations, including sports, religious, community and interest groups. Their findings reveal 'a strong class and education inequality in social organisation membership' (Arber et al., 2002:92). While no significant gender differences were found in overall organisation membership rates, men were more likely to be members of political parties, trade union or environmental groups. There was greater involvement of women, on the other hand, in community support groups and pensioner organisations. Men who were divorced or who had never married were less likely to join an organisation, however, women in the same situation were conversely more likely to be members of an interest, religious or community organisation. Membership in interest organisations was heavily skewed toward those who were middle class, more educated and had a higher household income. This contrasted with the members of social organisations who tended to be working class and less educated. Of particular note was the finding that membership in political, community or environmental organisations increased with age (once socio-economic and status were controlled for), with the greatest likelihood of membership in the above organisations occurring at age 80 and over. Arber et al. (2002) suggest the reason for this is that decreased membership in sports and activity based organisations is compensated for by membership in more sedentary political interest groups.

2.4.2 Motivations for joining
The literature on older people's interest organisations provides little insight into the reasons why older people may join an interest organisation. To gain an insight into the
membership of interest groups, more generally, it is necessary to examine the political science literature in this area. The pioneer scholar in the arena was Mancur Olson (1965). He proposed a rational model of analysis suggesting that an individual's propensity to join an interest group was contingent on tangible membership incentives. The free-rider dilemma was created when individuals believed that membership would not elicit benefits over and above those occurring to non-members and thus refrained from participating. To surmount this challenge organisations, he argued, were required to offer selective incentives to their members. For a large group to be successful, he believed, it must not only lobby for the collective good of its members but also provide additional services on their behalf. These 'non-collective services', Olson (1965:145) argued, attract members and maintain the viability of the organisation.

The following decades saw a refinement of this incentive theory as a basis for why people became members of interest organisations. Clark and Wilson (1961), suggested that membership incentives could be grouped into three categories 1) material benefits, 2) solidarity related benefits and 3) purposive benefits. Material benefits related to tangible monetary benefits or receipt of services and information. Solidarity related benefits were intangible benefits ‘that derive in the main from the act of associating’ with other members. (Clark & Wilson, 1961:134). Purposive benefits related to the wider ‘suprapersonal goals of the organisation’ (Clark & Wilson, 1961:135) rather than individual benefits. Tesk (1997) argues that the Clark and Wilson incentive theory is an oversimplification and does not sufficiently explain the motivations of political activists, particularly those who do not pay membership dues. He contends that an emphasis on membership incentives reflects a preponderance in the political sciences to focus on the individual value maximization model, which presupposes that the individual and organisational leaders are inherently self-interested, or as Tesk (1997:17) phrases it, engaged in an exercise of ‘instrumental-to self calculation’. In short, Tesk (1997) argues it does not allow for the strong moral commitment that social activists, both members and leaders, may have for particular social issues.

Unfortunately, due to the paucity of research in this area, the gerontology literature offers little insight into whether older people become members of older people’s interest organisations for reasons other than those ‘instrumental-to self calculation’. The extant literature suggests that motivation for membership is aligned with Clark and Wilson’s
incentive typology. For example, Arber et al. (2002) mention that membership in older people's organisations enhances self esteem. Pratt (1993) avers that membership generates social capital since many organisations have networks of local groups or chapters which allow members to participate at the local community level. According to Berry and Wilcox (2007) membership enhances the 'democratic capacities' of members and fosters 'a larger political identity'. Anderson and Lynch (2007:194) argue that retired trade union members who remain members of their sectoral unions obtain solidarity related benefits with membership largely serving 'to maintain contacts with former colleagues, to benefit from union provided services, or to take part in recreation activities provided by unions'.

Commenting on membership incentives in the United States in the early 1970s and 1980s, Binstock (1974) and Pratt (1983) argued that older people's interest organisations which provided selective and solidarity benefits to their members (through local chapter meetings) did not have to adapt their political advocacy work in line with their members' interests. However, attempts in 2007 by Age Concern in the United Kingdom to extend membership through the creation of a subsidiary company titled 'Heyday' which would provide new members with selective benefits such as cheap travel insurance and information, did not attract the anticipated 300,000 members and instead only 45,000 joined, 14,000 of whom were non Age Concern members (Revill, 2007).

Barnes and her colleagues (Barnes, 2008; Barnes et al., 2011; Barnes, Newman & Sullivan, 2006; Barnes et al., 2007) arguably offer the most detailed insight into the drivers for membership in older people's interest organisations. They highlight how membership in older people's interest organisations can act as a source of identity maintenance for those formerly engaged in political activism and identity reconstruction for those for whom political activism is a new activity in their life (Barnes et al., 2011; Barnes et al., 2006). Of particular note are their findings that membership is not based on an 'instrumental-to self calculation' in which individuals seek to maximise their own interests. Instead, they found that activists in older people's interest organisations were motivated to work for and represent more disadvantaged older people. Membership, however, fulfilled a personal motive to stay active and engaged, something which Barnes et al. (2011:15) argue 'may
reinforce a fault line between active and non-active older people'. In addition to fulfilling cognitive needs, participation in participatory fora can also fulfil affective needs and allow for the expression of frustration, anger, stigma and discrimination (Barnes, 2008). In such contexts, membership can foster a sense of solidarity with other members as persons with a shared experience of disadvantage and confirm and legitimate their right to voice their concerns (Barnes, 2008). The writings of Barnes and her colleagues thus provide an insight into the issue of 'identity politics', a theme which is addressed in further detail below in the context of an 'age-based identity'.

2.4.3 Group Consciousness: An age-based identity

In order for older people to mobilise as a collective interest group it is argued that they must first share a sense of identification or group consciousness.® The emergence of a collective group consciousness or identity, something which has been ascribed to women and the poor, has been linked to increased political participation (Olson, 1970; Verba & Nie, 1972). The possibility of older people possessing such a collective age-based consciousness seems to have been stronger in the academic writings of the 1960s and 70s than in more recent years. For example, in 1965 Arnold Rose (cited by Blakie, 2002) argued, that given older people's propensity 'to interact with each other increasingly as they grow older, and with younger persons decreasingly' they were likely to develop a shared collective consciousness or identity with their peers. He therefore suggested that 'the elderly seem to be on their way to becoming a voting bloc with a leadership that acts as a political pressure group' (Rose, 1965:14). Neugarten (1974:197) similarly hypothesized that future cohorts of older people would be more politically active and wield greater political influence than did previous generations. Dichotomizing the 'old' into the 'young-old' and 'old-old', Neugarten argued that the former would be particularly influential in the 1990s:

'These young-old experiences and their attitudes, combined with their higher education levels, will probably lead the future young-old to exert a potent influence upon

® The concept of group consciousness was originally formulated using Marxist terms which placed an emphasis on disadvantaged groups and excluded dominant groups, such as the rich, professionals or corporate businesspersons.
government. Compared to the young-old of the 1970s, the young-old of the 1990s are likely to wield their influence through direct political action and to make demands of both the public and private sectors to bring the benefit structure in line with their raised expectations.

As noted above recent writings on the issue of older people’s group consciousness tend to be more circumspect as to the existence of, or potential for, such a consciousness. Critical gerontologists suggest that changing demographics and wider disparities within the population of older people do not augur well for the possibility of unitary representation. These scholars are sceptical about the mobilization of older people in older people’s interest organisations, given their heterogeneity and presumed diversity of interests. They argue that it may not be age per se that acts as a unifying basis for solidarity, but instead other characteristics such as ethnicity, socio-economic status and socio-cultural and political ideologies. In the context of a reformulation of access to age based benefits, Torres-Gill (1993; 2005) and Street (1999) argue that division and competition among the population of older people may accentuate in the future. Torres-Gill (1993:254) believes the ‘organized, relatively well-off elderly [who] carry more weight, are more age conscious, and [who] can play the political game’ are likely to be the winners if such a competition for resources between older people comes to fruition.

Globalization is also predicted to impact negatively upon the development of an age-based consciousness. In particular, globalization is argued to impact upon the experience of ageing, and alter the once linear life course – education, work, retirement – into a “nonlinear” path (Phillipson, 2006). Factors which contribute to this “nonlinear” path, include, ‘the collapse of lifetime jobs (hastened by the globalization of finance and the mobility of capital); and increased rates of human migration’ (Phillipson, 2006:50). This restructuring of the life-course is likely to alter perceptions and understandings of ‘old age’ and lead to greater diversity within the older population, something which may not concur with the development of an age-based shared identity.
More recently, scholars who can be viewed as advocating a 'culture of ageing' thesis, have argued that old age as institutionalized and conceptualized through the modern welfare state has become a redundant socially ascribed category. Proponents of the 'new cultures of ageing' have challenged the political economy perspective and its associated emphasis on the impact of structural forces on the lives of older people as 'anachronistic' (Higgs & Jones, 2008:21). They argue that the political economy perspective gives inadequate attention to agency. They call for greater attention to the diversity of people's life-courses in their later years and the 'individualization of the social' which they believe has distanced citizens from the state. Proponents of this thesis therefore argue that the individualization of the life course in the twenty-first century allows for greater individual agency and ends a relationship of dependence on the state (Giddens, 1991). As Moody (1993:xxxviii) explains:

'\textit{the postmodern culture of aging presents itself as freedom from constraint...For the postmodern sensibility, time, aging, and the historical past are not entirely real. They represent a }\textit{"social construction" that we can change at will, whether in societies or in our individual lives.}'

Scholars of the new post-modernist culture of ageing thesis are also attentive to the heterogeneity of older people. Older people are subsumed into the wider population; the basis for differentiation is no longer chronological age but instead one's consuming or purchasing habits, as Gilleard and Higgs (2000:8) explain:

\begin{quote}
It is increasingly meaningless to consider 'age' as conferring some common social identity or to treat 'older people' as a distinct social group acting out of shared concerns and common interests. The growing disparities of wealth within the retired population and the concomitant rise of lifestyle consumerism mean that more and more 'sites of distinction' are emerging which fragment and render less possible any common cultural position that can be popularly represented as 'ageing'.
\end{quote}

Conscious of the consumption habits of older people and their associated quests to avert the physical signs of ageing and be subsumed into the dominant youth culture, scholars
and advocates of the notion of a ‘culture of ageing’ focus on age resisting as opposed to age identifying practices. Membership in an older person’s interest group is seen as being irrelevant to the majority of older people. For example, Gilleard and Higgs (2000:71) state ‘changes in the worldwide sales of anti-ageing cosmetics might provide a better index of social resistance to ageism than evidence of political mobilization around social policies toward ‘the aged’. Similarly, a number of years later they argued that ‘old age is not an identity that creates any sense of solidarity or stirs any new desire for recognition: It remains an ascribed community defined by social policy’ (Gilleard & Higgs, 2007:283).

Blakie (2002) considers the possibility of the emergence of an old age subculture, and an associated cultural identity, akin to a youth subculture. In particular, he focuses on the factors which are likely to unify or divide the older population. He suggests that how older people construct and maintain their identity and esteem in old age can be classified as falling into one of three cultural scenarios, namely, a culture of resistance, a culture of consolation or a culture of incorporation. A culture of resistance is characterised by maintaining or negotiating identity through acts of defiance vis-à-vis expected behaviour patterns. Cultures of consolation on the other hand are manifested in cases of individuals who, due to imposed isolation from society, draw on internal narratives of their past or an imagined community to bolster their self-esteem and identity. The culture of incorporation sees older people as either remaining incorporated in the mainstream consumer culture or associating themselves with other older people in organisations. This notion is consequently the most relevant to the current discussion.

Laslett’s notion of a Third and Fourth Age, and the distinction between them is relevant to Blakie’s concept of a ‘culture of incorporation’. Laslett (1994:4) argued that life can be divided into four broad stages: 'first comes an era of dependence, socialization, immaturity and education; second an era of independence, maturity and responsibility, of earning and of saving; third an era of personal fulfilment [Third Age] and fourth an era of final dependence [Fourth Age]'. The relationship between these phases of life and chronological age is variable and dependent on the individual’s life experiences. For example someone may enter the Third Age during their working life and remain in that phase well into their
retirement, potentially never entering into the Fourth Age. This conception of life and ageing blurs the distinction between midlife and old age.

Blakie sees the majority of older people in their Third Age as enjoying a culture of incorporation. This culture can be manifested in their continued, or potentially more active, participation in the dominant consumer culture. It is also manifested in situations where older people choose to come together, for example in retirement communities. This coming together can lead to the creation of an age-based subculture and the formation of a separate and distinct age-based identity. Blakie (2002) regards the culture of incorporation as conducive to the development of an age-based subculture premised on an old-age based generational solidarity, as manifested in older people's interest organisations. However, he also sees the political, economic and social heterogeneity of older people as a possible source of division which could likely erode this sense of solidarity. He consequently contends that older individuals are more likely to coalesce around a shared 'politics of lifestyle'. Similar to Higgs and Gilleard (2000) and Jones et al. (2008) he believes consumption habits may be the defining variable of identity and lifestyle throughout people's lives and well into old age.

The writings of Iris Marion Young (2000), however, point to the possibility of researchers making incorrect assertions regarding the issue of identity. She regards it as overly simplistic to assert that an individual's identity can be subsumed under the single label 'old person'. Her central argument is that aligning one's identity to a broad social identifier, such as age, race, gender or sexual orientation, fails to give sufficient recognition to the interaction of different identity status, personal agency, individuality and structural forces which shape one's identity. Identity formation, she argues, occurs from birth, and is conditioned by social, environmental, cultural and historical structures. Through a process of 'communicative interaction' individuals interact and 'identify one another as belonging to certain social categories, as standing in specific relation to one another, and enforce norms and expectations in relation to one another' (Young, 2000:100). For her, 'the lives of different individuals are structured by differing constellations of groups'. 'Identity politics' according to Young (2000) is therefore not just a function of struggles between dominant and other group identities for the purposes of recognition, but is rather
a function of how groups react to cultural and structural forces which interact to foster inequality and marginalisation, as Young (2000:103) explains:

'The public political claims of such groups, however, rarely consist simply in the assertion of one identity as against others, or a simple claim that a group be recognised in its distinctiveness. Instead, claims for recognition usually function as part of or means to claims against discrimination, unequal opportunity, political marginalization, or unfair burdens.'

2.4.4 Policy design and an age-based identity

Finally, another area, which is frequently given more attention by political scientists than social gerontologists, is the impact of 'policy-design' as opposed to 'identity politics' on the participation of older people in older people's interest organisations. A relevant finding of Goerres's (2009) analysis of older people's participation in the English council tax protests in 2004/2005 was that the perception of a shared policy threat, rather than a shared identity based on age, unified the protestors. This suggests that political participation may in many instances be a function of proposed changes to the age-based welfare entitlement system. Policy design can have the effect of legitimizing certain benefits and it may also serve to foster the creation of groups of citizens whose relationship with the state is formalized through the receipt of state benefits.

Street (1999), Campbell (2003) and Pierson (1996) among others have emphasised the importance of 'policies' interpretative effects'. Pierson (1996, 2001) suggests that making policy changes in welfare states which have universal systems of benefits is more challenging for governments, due to the fact that universal systems foster greater levels of solidarity and cohesiveness among constituents. A key aspect of universal programmes as Street (1999:122) argues is that they 'unify the middle class behind the welfare state'.

9 He marshals the example of the pension reform in the UK during the Thatcher era which resulted in the previously relatively cohesive pension system splintering into myriad private and occupational earnings-related pensions which made the formation of a coherent 'lobby' in defence of the state earnings-related pensions impossible (Pierson, 1996).
This ‘incorporation’ of the middle class into the welfare system (Esping Andersen, 1990) has the effect of legitimizing the benefits and as Street (1999:122) suggests serves to create ‘solidaristic political interests among elderly citizens’.

Commenting on the universal nature of social security in the United States, Campbell (2003) also argues that universalism elicits solidarity, provides greater legitimacy to benefits and raises the perceived deserving nature of recipients. An end to universalism, she suggests, would split constituencies of older people into different and potentially competing groups and thereby reduce their collective influence. She argues that the universal nature of social security in the United States has ‘democratised senior participation, reducing participatory inequality within the senior constituency’(Campbell, 2003:10). Furthermore, she conjectures that the stigmatizing nature of means-tested benefits, in contrast to universal benefits, has the effect of depoliticizing recipients of means-tested benefits. Citing the work of Pierson (1993) who alludes to the ‘cognitive effects’ of policy feedback, Campbell (2003:6) states that ‘policy design sends messages to clients about their worth as citizens, which in turn affects their orientations toward government and their political participation’.

2.5 Conclusion

The literature, which is available in the English language, on older people’s interest organisations largely relates to the North American, United Kingdom and Australian contexts. A danger inherent in summarizing and collating the findings from this literature is the potential to ignore the national political, social and cultural contexts which impact upon the creation, operation and survival of older people’s interest organisations. Furthermore, the preponderance of North American research, in particular that from the United States, means that the picture gleaned from this research may be reflective of issues peculiar to the United States liberal welfare regime. Its relevance to European states, where the neoliberal agenda is less ingrained, is therefore questionable. In fact the relatively small body of studies addressing older people’s interest organisations accentuates the potential for making inaccurate inferences and drawing erroneous conclusions. It is possible for example that the middle class bias may be overstated or less relevant in other geographies. Equally the conclusion that the members of older people’s
interest organisations tend not to advance policy changes which are advantageous to all age groups may not be universally true. In short, the dearth of extensive and in-depth research in this area leaves the assessment of the importance and relevance of older people's interest organisations in the twenty-first century as very much a work in progress, which for now cannot be relied upon for solid and widely applicable conclusions.

The literature addressed in this chapter highlighted the role of discourse in defining both the concept of ageing and in framing the context in which social policy in relation to it is developed. In doing so it addressed how participation, representation and social policy are constructed and legitimized. The chapter touched on the interconnection of organisations' strategies and their survival with the nature and extent of their participation in the policy space and provided an introductory discussion to the issue of 'identity politics'. The thesis seeks to expand on these themes. It aims to do this by broadening the analysis of older people's interest organisations beyond the traditional focus on the macro politics of old age to address its 'micro' dimensions by the incorporation of the perspectives of leaders and members of older people's interest organisations and the policymakers who interact with them. Focusing on the Irish context, it explores the characteristics and internal dynamics of older people's interest organisations; the perceptions of 'identity politics' of their members and the notions of participation, representation and the politics of old age as seen through the eyes of policymakers. The following chapter provides an introduction to the relevant Irish social and political context, which will be followed by an introduction to the research methodology.
3: THE POLITICS OF OLD AGE IN IRELAND: THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction to the Irish economic and social policy context as it relates to the politics of old age and organisation of older people's interest organisations. Such an overview is necessary to contextualize the environment in which contemporary older people's interest organisations in Ireland function. The chapter begins with a short summary of some of the key factors which have influenced developments in Ireland's social policies in Section 3.2. Section 3.3 outlines the changing economic fortunes of Ireland during the 'Celtic Tiger' years and the impact Ireland's new-found prosperity had on government spending in the area of social protection and on alleviating income inequalities. This section also provides a brief insight into the extent of the economic downturn from the perspective of older people following the collapse of the 'Celtic Tiger' and the accompanying austerity measures which government has introduced since 2008. The focus of the chapter then shifts to policy formation as it relates to older people in Ireland (Section 3.4). Section 3.5 addresses the emergence of older people's interest organisations and the institutional structures which facilitate their participation at both the national and local level.

3.2 DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL POLICY IN IRELAND

While it has frequently been noted that Ireland's welfare structure has much in common with the United Kingdom's liberal welfare state (Esping-Anderson, 1990), the Irish system does in fact differ in many ways from that of its former coloniser and closest neighbour (Fanning, 2003). O'Donnell and Thomas (2006) suggest that 'Ireland does not appear to illustrate the conclusions of Esping-Andersen's typology, not obligingly clustering with other countries, nor finding a home easily'. Others have classified Ireland as a 'Catholic Conservative' welfare state (Cochrane & Clarke, 1993). However, while the powerful historical influence of the Catholic Church finds resonance with Christian Democratic welfare states, the legacy of liberalism, a feature of post-independence Ireland, serves to
dilute many of these similarities. Mirroring the United Kingdom, the Irish state introduced programmes of tax-funded unemployment and pension benefits at the turn of the nineteenth century (Fanning, 1999). According to Fanning, the legacy of the British Poor Law of 1838, which provided assistance to workhouse residents in Ireland, explains the liberal legislation of the early twentieth century and distinguishes it from Christian Democratic regimes which emphasise mandatory social insurance programmes.

It is widely recognised that the development of Irish social policy and state institutions have been significantly influenced by both its colonial past and its post-independence efforts to consolidate a new identity as an independent state. The institutional features of Ireland’s public administration were also influenced by colonialism. However, Fanning (1999:54) underscores the fact that, in contrast to the British public administration, the Irish administration was ‘characterised by paternalism and emphasis on military security which resulted in the centralized administration of policing’. Burke (1999), examining the development of Irish social policy from 1831 to 1951, argues that three distinct phases of influence can be identified. The first, during the nineteenth century, saw the creation of the poor law system and led to a centralised approach to Irish policy making. The second, 1900-1921 ‘an era of radical change’, corresponds with the introduction of Liberal reform in Britain and the introduction of an Irish national insurance system, albeit substantially different from the British equivalent and only providing minimal protection to the majority of the population. The third phrase, 1922-1951, she labels the ‘survival’ years. This era can be classified as deeply conservative. The Constitution of 1937 granted special privileges to the Catholic Church and enshrined restrictions on women’s right to work (Burke, 1999). The Church’s privileges were not removed until 1972 (Murphy, 2003) and Ireland’s entry into the European Community in 1973 had far reaching implications for women’s rights (Conroy, 1995:40).

The cocktail of traditional agrarian and Roman Catholic conservatism and British style liberalism has exerted a strong influence on the development of Ireland’s social policies since the foundation of the state. Its effects can be seen in the emphasis placed on family responsibility for older people and a relegation of the state’s responsibility to a residual
role in those areas so as not to encroach on the fabric of the family (Fanning, 2003).
According to Fanning (2004:5) the juxtaposition of Liberalism and Catholicism:

'contributed to the social and sexual regulation of Irish society. It offered a discourse of moral responsibility that regulated the domestic sphere as well as the workplace.... Both held that the state should only act when the male breadwinner was proven to have failed to provide for his dependents. Both contributed to an official ideology of the privatised family'.

The degree of influence of these two ideologies has changed dramatically in recent decades. In particular, secularisation, improved access to education and modernising influences from outside the state increased social liberalism in areas such as women's rights and sexuality (Fanning, 2004). Conroy (1995:37) contends that 1960s' Ireland witnessed an 'explosion of new social ideas' and the publication of 'Planning the Just Society' by Fine Gael in 1965 'broke with the tradition of viewing all state social intervention as an outsider's intrusion into the family and the voluntary sector'. With an increase in social movements, such as the women's movement, new elements of pluralism entered Irish politics (Conroy, 1995).

Since the 1970s ideological influences in both Britain and Ireland have converged to a greater extent than in the past. The concept of neo-liberalism and the associated emphasis on individualism has led to the challenging of the role of the state as the provider of welfare benefits and services. Fanning (1999) succinctly summarises four of the main attributes of neo-liberalism visible in both the UK and Ireland, namely: privatisation in the provision of services, deregulation to encourage private sector competition, privatisation of responsibility in health and pensions and a new emphasis on the informal sector and a new emphasis on the voluntary sector. He suggests that, in contrast to the British welfare state which was developed on the axis of left-right ideologies, the Irish welfare state has instead been 'articulated along an ideological continuum of responses to social change' (Fanning, 2003:5). This ideological continuum, he holds, consists of Catholic conservatism at one end and individualism and secularisation at the other. While social policy reforms since the 1970s have served to extend social protections to vulnerable groups within Irish society, increasingly social-inclusion policies have been framed in accordance with a right-
of-centre agenda (Fanning, 2003). Hardiman and MacCarthaigh (2008:6), however, contend that Irish politicians generally attempt to steer clear of defined ideological stances:

'[Irish] governments typically attempt to blur sharp lines of ideological division, and to work with approaches to policy that are depicted as pragmatic and realistic rather than derived from a clear set of partisan principles'.

3.3 THE RISE AND FALL OF THE 'CELTIC TIGER'

From the mid-1990s to early 2007 Ireland witnessed unprecedented economic growth. As O'Malley and McGrath (2008:1) state, 'by the end of the twentieth century the Republic of Ireland had transformed itself from the 'poor man of Europe' to one of its leading lights'. Thought to mirror economic transformations in Asia such as those in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan in the 1980s, Ireland's economic turnaround was dubbed the 'Celtic Tiger' (O' Hearn, 1998). The transformation of the Irish economy occurred through a process of market liberalisation, a construction boom and foreign direct investment through low corporation tax (Barry, 1999; Bergin, FitzGerald, Kearney, & O' Sullivan, 2011; O' Malley & McGrath, 2008). By 2003, the OECD (2005) observed that Ireland's GDP per capita lagged only behind that of the United States, Norway and Luxembourg (Hughes, Clancy, Harris, & Beetham, 2007).

The dramatic economic transformation and government budget surpluses in the final years of the 1990s and early years of the new millennium provided the Irish government with the opportunity to increase social welfare benefits and ensure all segments of society benefited from its new-found prosperity (Murphy, 2006). However, Murphy (2006) argues, 'a neo-liberal fixation on low state intervention persisted', the Department of Finance remained focused on cost containment and did not improve social protection to the extent that the economic conditions would have allowed. When viewed in an international comparative context, Ireland maintained low rates of social welfare spending (McCashin & Payne, 2006). Citing Peillon (1995) and the OECD, McCashin and Payne (2006) estimate that approximately 15 per cent of GNP was allocated to welfare
benefits, in contrast to 32 per cent in Germany, 31 per cent in Norway and 25 per cent in the United Kingdom.

According to Jacobson and Kirby (2006:33), at the centre of the economic transformation was 'a shift in governance towards subordinating social policy to an extremely free-market economic policy, with the result that the latter always took precedence over the former'. Despite the roll out of a National-Anti Poverty Strategy in 1997, Jacobson and Kirby argue that the emphasis on building social inclusion amounted to rhetoric and piecemeal policy initiatives, and that decreasing budgets were allocated to social protection. Murphy (2006) is of the view that a refusal to index-link welfare payments to wage growth contributed to greater levels of inequality in Ireland and a higher risk of poverty for those dependent on social welfare. This 'pauperisation of segments of society', she argues, 'is directly attributable to a conscious policy decision to keep social welfare payments low' (Murphy, 2006:96).

O'Donoghue and McDonough's (2006) analysis of the 1987, 1994 and 2001 Economic and Social Research Institute's Survey of Lifestyle and Usage of State Services found that income inequalities increased substantially during the Celtic tiger period. While they observed a decrease in the rates of absolute poverty they noted an increase in relative poverty. However, Whelan, Nolan and Maitre, (2007:88) argue 'that the depth of deprivation in Ireland is a good deal more modest than suggested by radical critics of the Celtic Tiger experience'. They argue that a poverty assessment needs to consider 'economic vulnerability' by analyzing multiple forms of deprivation thereby addressing economic strain and the subjective experience of economic stress. Applying this method to the 2004 Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) data, they argue that one tenth of the population were 'vulnerable but not consistently poor' (Whelan et al., 2007:103).

Data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2011) suggest that the incomes of older people increased significantly during the years of the Celtic Tiger. Analysing 2004 and 2009 EU-SILC data, the CSO found that the average weekly gross income for persons aged 65 years and over rose from €289.05 in 2004 to €428.86 in 2009. This increase in income
had the effect of decreasing the 'at risk of poverty' rate from 27.1 per cent to 9.6 per cent, the deprivation rate from 10 per cent to 9.5 per cent and the consistent poverty rate from 3.9 per cent to 1.1 per cent. The increased income levels were attributed to a rise in social transfers (+52.6 per cent) and an increase in occupational pensions (+85.8 per cent). When compared with other age groups, the gross weekly increase in income of persons aged 65 years and over was highest at 48 per cent over the four year period, in contrast to an 18 per cent increase for those aged 18 to 64 and a 17 per cent increase for those aged under 18 years (Central Statistics Office, 2011). Among the older population women and those who were entirely reliant on the state's non-contributory pension were the most likely to be at risk of income poverty (Stewart, 2005).

Due to a collapse of the domestic property market, the failure of the national and international financial sector and numerous national fiscal policy failures the Irish economy experienced significant contractions from 2008 on-wards (Bergin et al., 2011). As a result of the economic recession and the requirement to reduce budget deficits, the government has since 2008 introduced a range of austerity measures. One of the first of these proposed measures was the removal of the universal entitlement to the medical card to persons aged 70 years and over, details of which are described in Chapter 8. Over the period 2008-2011 more than €20 billion, or 13 per cent of GDP ex ante, in budget cuts were imposed (Bergin et al., 2011). Between 2012 and 2014 a further €10 billion in cuts are planned. In total it is planned to reduce the budget by the equivalent of one fifth of GDP. Bergin et al. (2011) suggests that it will not be until 2013 that Ireland may again experience economic growth.

3.4 SOCIAL POLICY TOWARDS OLDER PEOPLE
The institutionalization of 'old age' in Ireland was initially limited to those who were severely economically impoverished. The 1703 Act of Irish Parliament; the Acts in 1735 and The Poor Relief Act of 1838 provided publicly funded institutional care in Houses of Industry to the extreme poor and older people with no family support or other recourse (O’ Connor, 1995). At the turn of the nineteenth century these Houses of Industry were converted to County Homes whose main focus was care of the aged and infirm (Timonen & Doyle, 2008). The passage of the Pensions Act of 1908, which provided a means-tested
non-contributory old age pension for persons aged 70, was the first piece of legislation that established chronological age as a signifier for entitlement to specific welfare benefits.

The institutionalisation of 'old age' was not extended to the general population until the 1960s and 1970s. In 1961 a contributory old age pension was introduced. However, Pierce (2008) outlines that it was only in the 1970s, when the ceiling for social insurance contributions was removed, that pension coverage was increased significantly. In 1977 the pension age was reduced from 70 years to 66 years and in the 1980s the self employed were granted access to an old age contributory pension (Pierce & Timonen, 2010). In more recent years all persons aged 66 years and over were granted free travel on all public rail and bus services, an allowance for electricity and natural gas, free television licenses and telephone rental. As outlined in Chapter 8, in 2001 a universal medical card was introduced for all persons aged 70 years and over, but the unconditional entitlement to this benefit was subsequently revoked in 2008. Proposals under the new National Pensions Framework will mean that the age at which people qualify for the state pension will increase over time, from 66 years of age in 2014 to 67 years in 2021 and 68 years in 2028 (Government of Ireland, 2010).

Since the publication of the first policy document on older people in 1968, there have been competing discourses regarding older people. Policies have primarily been concerned with health and in particular institutional and community long-term care (Department of Health, 1994; Inter-Departmental Committee on the Care of the Aged, 1968; Working Party on Services for the Elderly, 1988). The medicalization of old age is certainly observable within the earlier policies documents where issues of illness, dependency and institutional care are given prominence. O'Loughlin (2005) noted that policy documents from the 1990s, including Shaping a Healthier Future (Department of Health, 1994) and Quality and Fairness: A Health System for You (Department of Health and Children, 2001), depart from earlier policy documents by focusing attention on consumer orientation and responsiveness. A manifestation of a greater emphasis on consumer choice is observable in the context of community services for older people since the start of this millennium, where the expansion of a welfare mix, of private, public and non-profit providers has been
encouraged on the basis of affording greater choice to the consumer (Doyle & Timonen, 2008; Timonen, Doyle, & O'Dwyer, 2012).

The passing of the 1998 Employment Equality Act focused greater attention on the issue of ageism. According to O'Loughlin (2005) this Act 'places Ireland at the forefront across the European Union in working to eliminate discrimination'. However, as pointed out by Hughes et al. (2007) the Unfair Dismissals Act is not applicable to persons of retirement age. Furthermore, persons aged 66 years and over are not entitled to statutory redundancy payments and persons on the non-contributory pension lose their benefits if they earn more than €7.60 a week (Hughes et al., 2007).

Since the 1980s the notion of positive / healthy ageing strategies has also been adopted in policy documents (Gallagher, 2006). In turn initiatives have been funded by the government and run in conjunction with a number of older people's interest organisations (Age and Opportunity and Age Action Ireland) to advance a more positive portrayal of older people and recognise their needs beyond the narrow ambit of care needs. Pierce (2008), however, argues that the theme of an ageing 'crisis' has been discernable in policy documents since the 1990s. She provides the example of a 1993 report by the National Pensions Board (1993) and the Years Ahead Report (Department of Health, 1988) where the issue of dependency ratios and demographic changes are discussed in the context of escalating costs and unsustainability of public finances. Pierce and Timonen (2010) also note that this theme of unsustainability of public finances in the face of demographic changes is also observable in more recent national pensions framework documents (Government of Ireland, 2010).

Pierce and Timonen (2010:32) highlight the fact that the political economy perspective reveals the 'inherent inequities in the "hidden welfare state"' and that social policy can serve to advantage certain segments of the population. As outlined above in Section 3.3 many of the policy decisions made during the Celtic Tiger years served to provide minimal social protection to those solely reliant on social welfare benefits and thereby accentuated disparities between the rich and poor. In the area of health and income, these inequities
are particularly evident. For example, the passage of the Pensions (Amendment) Act 2002 which introduced second tier private pensions saving retirement accounts (Murphy, 2006) is more advantageous to higher income segments of the population. As McCashin and Payne (2006) highlight, ‘employers face no legal requirements to fund occupational pensions, and hence these pensions are concentrated among higher income groups and ... subsidized by tax relief’. Ireland also has a complex two-tier system of health coverage which advantages the more economically secure with the financial resources to access private hospital care (Wren, 2003). Access to community care is poorly defined and geographically dependent (Timonen et al., 2012). According to O’Shea (2006:16) ‘care of the older people remains in crisis, primarily because of the failure to develop a strategic planning framework for older people that would provide consistent policy direction and leverage the funding necessary to deliver the services’.

3.5 Older people’s interest organisations

3.5.1 Emergence and evolution of older people’s interest organisations
There is little documentary data available on the emergence and evolution of older people’s interest organisations in the Irish context. Interviews with the directors of the national organisations conducted as part of this thesis research revealed that the first older people’s interest organisation to form in Ireland was the National Federation of Pensioners Association in 1976. This organisation can be classified as an industry-based retirement association. Membership is based on previous occupational status, in either the public or private sector and the main area of focus is occupational pensions. Shortly after, in 1978, the Federation of Active Retired Associations was formed. The main focus of this organisation is to promote the social and recreational opportunities available to older people. Both these organisations originated as grassroots organisations, formed by older people themselves. In 1982 the Alzheimer’s Society of Ireland was established by the family members of people with Alzheimer’s. A questioning of the biomedical model of Alzheimer’s which failed to consider the personal perspective of sufferers led the organisation to shift its focus from an Alzheimer’s carers’ support group to an organisation which also advocated for and represented people with the illness.
In 1989 the National Council for the Aged (National Council for the Aged, 1989:57) alluded to the absence of any national older people's interest organisation in Ireland, stating:

'It is noteworthy that Ireland does not have a forum in which older people themselves can identify their priorities and which would give direct expression to these priorities'.

In recognition of this deficiency the National Council for the Aged organised a national conference to specifically address the participation and representation of older people. The outcome of this conference was the establishment of Age and Opportunity - a non-profit organisation charged with the responsibility of promoting greater participation of older people and changing attitudes towards older people. In 1990 the Retired Workers Committee was established in the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. The committee was granted independent representation at the confederal level. Shortly thereafter, in the mid-1990s the Irish Association of Older People, the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, Age Action Ireland and the Older Women's Network were established.

The climate in Ireland in the 1990s was very receptive to the development of older people's interest organisations. The economic prosperity of the late 1990s and first years of the new millennium had a positive impact on organisational membership, and in this period there was an increase in membership dues and funds available to the organisations. Illustrative of this is the growth of the Federation of Active Retired from 2,500 members in 25 affiliate organisations in 1985 to over 23,000 members in 495 affiliate organisations in 2010. Simultaneously, all of the organisations received increases in governmental funding contributing to their financial solvency and in some instances growth. In particular, varying amounts of support were given by the National Council of Ageing and Older People (formerly the National Council for the Aged) and the Department of Health and Children. The European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations in 1993 and the United Nations International Year of Older People in 1999 were particularly important given that both initiatives provided a financial stimulus for the newly formed organisations.
An important development in the area of older people’s groups has been the provision of philanthropic support to many of the interest groups from 2005 onwards. The financial support for the establishment of an umbrella organisation, the ‘Older and Bolder’ initiative - which counts among its members organisations such as Active Retirement Ireland, Age & Opportunity, Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Carers’ Association, the Irish Hospice Foundation, the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, Older Women’s Network and the Senior Help Line - was a significant event in the evolution of the older people’s sector in Ireland.

By 2010, the categorisation of older people’s interest organisations in the Irish context mirrored that in the United Kingdom as formulated by Ginn and Arber (1999) and Bornat (1998) and outlined in Chapter 1. This means they can be grouped into either associations of retired people whose main focus is the social opportunities available to older people or charities which advocate for older people and offer advice and local services. In addition, pensioner’s organisations which primarily advocate for health benefits and pensions can be classified as ‘industry-based retirement associations’. The organisations can be further subdivided into those which are volunteer-led and those that are managed by paid staff. The majority of the directors in professional-led organisations were recruited when the organisations were created and remain as CEOs to the present day.

The largest organisation within the older people’s sector is the Senior Citizens Parliament which in 2012 has 400 affiliated organisations whose memberships combine to a total of 100,000 individuals. The National Federation of Pensioners’ Associations has over twenty affiliated organisations with a membership of approximately 30,000 retired workers. The Federation of Active Retired has over 500 local Active Retirement Associations with over 23,000 members. Age Action has approximately 2000 individual members and 250 membership organisations (including commercial and statutory organisations). The Older Women’s Network has approximately 750 individual members and 39 affiliated organisations. The Irish Congress of Trade Union (ICTU) Retired Workers Committee represents the retired workers in approximately 50 unions affiliated to the national trade union body. The Alzheimer’s Society Ireland has over 2500 members and the Irish Association of Older People has a mailing list of 2000 individuals/organisations. Age and Opportunity is not a membership organisation. The membership profile of Irish older people’s interest organisations varies significantly, and, as outlined in Chapters 5 and 6, so
also does the involvement of members of these organisations in the conduct of their activities. Membership numbers, while indicative of the support an organisation can claim to have, are not necessarily a reliable indicator of how active or effective an organisation is in practice.

3.5.2 Institutional and Political Structures Facilitating Participation

There are a number of channels via which interest groups in Ireland can seek to gain access to power. These include the national social partnership programme, consultation at the local authority or county council level, and local level partnerships. Figure 3.1 below provides a rudimentary illustration of the channels of consultation available to older people’s interest organisations within the Irish policy process. The mechanisms of consultation at national level, represented by the continuous arrows, include negotiation in social partnership talks, membership of independent policy committees and informal consultation and dialogue with policy officials. Consultation mechanisms at the local level include membership of City and Council Development Boards (CDB) or Strategic Policy Committees (SPC), or local partnership participation programmes. Lobbying local and national politicians, which is also a potentially powerful informal mechanism for participation in influencing the policy making process (Collins and O’Shea, 2003) is represented in the diagram by the broken arrows. The discussion below expands on the formal methods for participation, namely consultations and partnerships at the national and local levels.

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10 Since 2007 social partnership process at the national level is moribund (McDonough & Dundon 2010).
Participation mechanisms at the national level

Policies concerning older people are cross-departmental and consequently span a range of policy-making government departments including the Departments of Health and Children, Social Protection, Finance, Transport and Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. In January 2007 the government formally announced the establishment of a new office, Junior Minister of State for Older People. Junior Ministers, with the exception of the Junior Minister of State for Children, are not members of the cabinet. This means their ability to make far-reaching policy decisions is limited. An example of the limited power of the Junior Minister of State for Older People is the fact that responsibility for long-term care policy is under the jurisdiction of the Minister for Health and Children while responsibility for pensions remains with the Minister for Social Protection. The findings in Chapter 5 illustrate that access for organisation to the Junior Minister of State for Older people is well facilitated, however, this may have come at the cost of more restrictive access to senior government Ministers.

11 In 2010 the position of Junior Minister of State for Older People was subsumed into the Junior Minister of State for Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older People.
At the statutory level, the National Council for the Aged was established in 1981 to act in an advisory role to the Minister for Health and Children on all aspects of ageing and the welfare of older people in the Republic of Ireland. The Council, whose establishment was recommended some 13 years earlier in the 1968 Care of the Aged Report (O’Loughlin, 2005), was succeeded by the National Council for the Elderly in 1990 which in turn was renamed the National Council of Ageing and Older People (NCAOP) in 1997. According to Quinn (2008), since its inception in 1981, the Council published approximately 100 reports on the subject of older people. Among the key functions of the NCAOP were, ‘To advise the Minister for Health and Children on all aspects of ageing and the welfare of older people’ and ‘To assist the development of national and regional policies and strategies designed to produce health gain and social gain for older people’.

Membership on the advisory committee of the NCAOP was by invitation from the Minister of Health and Children. According to interviews conducted as part of this thesis research, membership of older people’s interest organisations on this forum was limited. The 2003 Prospectus Report (Audit of Structures and Functions in the Health System) recommended that the National Council on Ageing and Older People be amalgamated into the Department of Health. The Council was reconstituted as a National Advisory Council on Older People (House of the Taoiseach) in 2008 and was dissolved with effect from 1 September 2009 under the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. The amalgamation of state agencies into government departments was justified as a cost saving exercise, however, research by Quinn (2008) suggests that state agencies in Ireland had little impact on social policy and that their relationship with government departments was weak. There is little evidence to suggest that the NACOP was an exception to this pattern.

**Social Partnership**

One of the main avenues for interest groups to exert influence on the policy making process over the last two decades has arguably been through the ‘social partnership process’. ‘Social partnership’ is characterised as a competitive corporatist system where

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12 www.ncaop.ie/who.html
organised interests gain privileged access to both policy making and policy implementation. The partnership process was created in 1986 following changes to the National and Economic Council (O’Donnell & Thomas, 2006). In 1993 a new partnership body, the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) was established, with the responsibility of focusing on the social issues of unemployment and social exclusion. Members of this forum included representatives of economic interest groups together with members of the Oireachtas (National Parliament) and the community and voluntary sectors (O’Donnell & Thomas, 2006). While social partnership provides a range of interest groups access to policy-makers, Huges et al. (2007:479) argue that ‘social dialogue is rarely about negotiating new policy initiatives so much as it is about the ratification, clarification and implementation arrangements for existing government policies’.

Since its inception in 1986 there have been seven national partnership agreements (O’Donnell & Thomas, 2006). There has been a noticeable shift in the direction and emphasis of the partnership agreements from the first agreement in 1987 to the most recent agreement in 2006.13 In particular, the predominant focus on economics and wage bargaining was supplemented by an added emphasis on social policy and social inclusiveness (Murphy, 2005). This new emphasis presumably reflects the entry of the community and voluntary sectors (‘pillars’) into the social partnership process in 1999 (Larragy, 2006). The inclusion of older people’s issues on the agenda has come about at a slower pace. While older people’s interest organisations were represented by the umbrella organisation, the Wheel, from the late 1990s, it was not until 2006 that the national older people’s interest organisations, Age Action Ireland and The Irish Senior Citizens’ Parliament, were granted independent status as members of the community and voluntary pillar.14


14 Other members of the community and voluntary pillar included, Carers Association, Children’s Right Alliance, Congress Centres for the Unemployed, CORI Justice Commission, Disability Federation of Ireland, Irish Council for Social Housing, Irish National Organisation for the
In the 2006 national agreement, 'Towards 2016' (Department of the Taoiseach, 2006) older people were identified as a specific target group within the life cycle approach. In addition to an improvement in income standards and access to health care, it calls for the promotion of education and employment opportunities for older people, along with greater participation of older people in civic life. It is noteworthy that the social partnership document 'Towards 2016' (Department of the Taoiseach, 2006:64) makes explicit reference to the 'role which the voluntary disability sector continues to play as an advocacy and service delivery mechanism'. No such reference is made to the role of older people's advocacy; instead it is recommended that policy in the area of long-term care and pension be formulated in cooperation with the social partners. Arguably, the lack of explicit reference to older people's interest organisations as an advocacy mechanism is reflective of the low priority given to the older people's sector - which is addressed in Chapters 7 and 8.

The extent to which social partnership facilitated the meaningful inclusion and participation of the community and voluntary sector in the policy process is contested. Hardiman (2006) argues that the implications of social partnership for policy making have not been well documented. It has been suggested that representation within the partnership process was not evenly distributed and that many organisations have not been adequately resourced to facilitate their participation (Broaderick, 2002). Ó Cinneide (1998) has expressed reservations about the extent to which significant decision-making may have moved outside the control of elected politicians and into a domain in which accountability is difficult to enforce. However, Hardiman (2006) argues that actual responsibility for developing and implementing policy did not fundamentally change with the growth of social partnership and that politics has retained its primacy. Broaderick (2002) holds a similar perspective and argues that the centralised political system ensured that national government ultimately remained the body holding power, controlling which organisations are involved in decision making and to what extent.

Unemployed, Irish Rural Link, National Association of Building Co-operatives, National Youth Council of Ireland, Protestant Aid, Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Wheel.
In Fanning's (2003:8) opinion the partnership process facilitated an inequitable form of negotiation, which, "expressed a conservative pluralism that excluded marginal groups in society, even if it purported to represent a societal consensus".

Kirby (2006:194) cites the work of Powell (2003:92) who refers to the relationship between the community and voluntary sector and the government in social partnership as a 'symbiotic relationship' and argues that since its entry into the partnership process the community and voluntary sector has lost much of its 'critical capacity'. Kirby (2006:194) gives the example of the government's withdrawal of funding from the Community Workers' Co-operative, formally members of the partnership, as evidence of a 'disciplinary strategy on the part of the state towards those sectors of civil society that are adopting a more oppositional stance'. The voluntary sector's reliance on public monies and the insecurity this engenders is also referred to by other writers (Achenson, Harvey, Kearney, & Williamson, 2004; Hughes et al., 2007). Commenting on the broader panoply of non-profit organisations Huges et al. (2007) suggest that the non-profit sector's dependence on government monies limits the extent to which organisations can engage in political campaigning. They attribute government's cut in funding to a Traveller organisation, Citizen Traveller, to the fact that the organisation was campaigning for a change to existing legislation. Citing the work of Acheson et al. (2004), they also outline the fact that the refusal of sixteen members of the community pillar to support the partnership Sustaining Progress report 2003-2005, resulted in these members losing their position in the pillar and also in a range of other consultative committees.

**Government Committees and User-Involvement**

In addition to its formalized procedures of monitoring and overseeing the implementation of the basic terms of the agreements, the social partnership has over time developed an elaborate network of working parties, committees and task forces. Membership in the social partnership thus privileged the inclusion of certain groups within policy committees. O'Donnell and Thomas (2006) note that while the majority of these fora were temporary, a number, such as the Housing Forum have become institutionalised. Organisations outside of the partnership process also theoretically are granted access to government committee meetings. Involvement of the wider voluntary and community
sector in the policy making process was advocated in the government White Paper Supporting Voluntary Activity in 2000. However, Huges et al. (2007) note that a study conducted three years after the report’s publication suggests that its implementation has been limited. The inclusion of service-users in consultation fora has been advanced in a number of government documents including Delivering Better Government in 1996, the Quality Customer Service Initiative in 1997, Reducing Red Tape: An Action Programme of Regulatory Reform in Ireland in 1999 and Regulating Better in 2004 (Hughes et al., 2007). However, Huges et al. (2007) contend that user-consultation at the national level remains nascent and requires further attention.

PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL
While the focus of the thesis is on how older people’s interest organisations participate at national level, an understanding of the participatory mechanism available to groups at local level is necessary for an understanding of the interrelationship between, and relative importance of both of these levels of participation. This understanding is particularly important when it comes to performing international comparisons of the work of older people’s interest organisations. For example, in the European context, Walker (1999) has argued that older people’s interest organisations are likely to be most effective at the local level. However, as the following review illustrates, this is not likely to be the case in the Irish context given the limited level of policy decisions that are taken at this level in Ireland.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT
The Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898 established the system of local government and county councils in Ireland. From the outset their functions were largely administrative and were not influenced by the needs of the local community (Forde, 2005). Daeman and Schaap (2000) assert that Irish local government is a ‘government in transition’. The hegemony of central government, they maintain, was required in order to assert Irish independence and the current structures are the outdated legacy of that intent. In contrast to other European states, the influence of local government has been diluted by the presence of additional large regional and local bodies, such as the Health Service Executive which operates independently from the local authorities (Collins & Quinlivan,
2005; Daemen & Schaap, 2000). Unlike local government in many other EU countries, Irish local governments have no responsibility for health, education or social welfare.

The Local Government Act 2001 introduced a number of new participatory structures to Irish local authorities which aimed to facilitate local policy and service development. In particular, the establishment of both the Strategic Policy Committees (SPC) and City and Council Development Boards (CDBs) constituted a new and significant departure, which theoretically, should help facilitate the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in local policy decision-making. While these new structures were formed on the pretext that they would promote citizen and community participation at the local level Tierney (2006) contends that the failure to decentralise policy-making renders engagement with them relatively meaningless. Forde (2005) posits that recent reforms made to local government which served to clarify and consolidate its role, have led to the adoption of 'contractual and consumerist' forms of consultation. She also notes that the Local Government Act (2001) failed to implement the recommendations of the Devolution Commission (1997) that national committees consisting of statutory government departments, local authorities, service providers and user-groups be established to discuss matters of policy related to local government.

There is little documented evidence of older people's interest organisations' participation in either CDBs or SPCs. Delaney et al. (2005) found that fewer than a third of the CDBs had developed specific actions to facilitate the involvement of older people in CDB activities. Interviews with 34 CDB representatives indicated that 14 CDBs had held targeted consultations with older people or older people's interest organisations, in relation to the development of CDB strategies and age-specific plans. Seven indicated that older people's participation had been achieved though general public consultation. Thirteen had no strategic measures in place to involve older people or their groups within the CDB process. A lack of appropriately mobilised and coordinated representative groups of older people was cited by CDB representatives as a reason for this and a factor prohibiting the involvement of older people. Where older people's groups participated they were most frequently representatives of active retirement associations. There was a perception among CBD representatives that these organisations may only provide a one-sided view of
older people which was not representative of those who were socially excluded and isolated (Delaney et al., 2005). From the perspective of the older people's interest organisations these consultations were regarded as ineffective, with only four of the 25 individuals interviewed on their behalf having positive impressions of the consultation process (Delany et al., 2005).

Local Partnerships
Local partnership is a network of community-based local development companies. They have been defined by Wall (2000:333) as 'the engine of local development policy'. In 1990 NESC proposed a new area-based partnership approach to tackling social exclusion and unemployment. This led to the development of a new regional partnership agreement entitled the Programme for Social and Economic Progress (O'Donnell & Thomas, 2006). Initially, this took the form of 12 pilot initiatives (O'Donnell & Thomas, 2006). The success of these pilot projects led to the establishment of 38 local area partnerships and 31 community partnerships. The Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has lead responsibility for the partnership programmes as part of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme but Pobal (an intermediary that works on behalf of Government to support communities and local agencies formally known as Area Development Management Ltd) manages the programmes.

Wall (2000) argues that this local partnership system yields little influence within the wider policy-making process and that it is not effective in the mainstreaming and roll-out of any innovative practices developed as part of these partnerships. Additional factors which he argues prohibit the effective functioning of the partnerships within the system of public administration are: the inconsistent way in which the partnerships are funded; inadequate monitoring and lack of public consultation in relation to the allocation of funds; a lack of coordination between various partnership bodies and the inability of elected representatives to provide input into the formulation of local partnership development plans. The latter issue, and the associated hostility it generates between local government and the partnership has been noted by Walsh (1998:329) who observed 'growing political tensions with local elected representatives'. He also maintains the current
system of local partnership is ineffectual due to their 'anomalous, administrative status, limited public accountability and inadequate co-ordination structures'.

Older people have been identified as a target group of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme' (Pobal, 2005), however, the extent of their involvement in the local partnership process appears to be minimal. In 2002, Pobal commissioned an action research project which sought to devise a planning and implementation strategy for working with older people. The report, which consisted of three case studies, concluded that:

‘there is little evidence in Ireland of the kind of grass roots mobilisation of older people at local level required to drive a substantial agenda for change. Furthermore, the existing structures to influence relevant local policies and practices have not been designed or developed to specifically accommodate older people.’ (Pobal, 2005:21)

While the three case studies documented by Pobal offer useful examples of innovative practices, the report suggests that the majority of the partnership programmes are at the ‘pre-development’ stage.

3.5.3 The influence of older People’s interest organisations
There is a paucity of research in the Irish context on the participation of older people’s interest organisations in the policy process. In line with Binstock and Quadagno’s (2001) critique of the international literature on older people’s interest organisations, most commentaries on older people’s interest organisations in the Irish context are based on ‘reputational data rather than systematic empirical investigations’. According to the Equality Authority (2002:25), older people’s interest organisations exert little influence on, and are not adequately represented in, the decision making process:

‘The present generation of older people and their organisations are not sufficiently represented in the policy making processes. The concerns of older people are addressed in some of these processes but often without the direct input of those
affected. Getting more older people and their organisations involved in the policy making process poses challenges for policy makers and for older people themselves.'

Basing her analysis on policy reports and research documents, Carney (2010) draws conclusions similar to those of the Equality Authority, finding that older people in the Irish context are ‘politically quiescent’ with the ‘lack of cohesion’ among older people’s interest organisations reducing their ability to influence government. Gallagher (2006) and Edmondson (2002:100), however, take a somewhat different view and are optimistic about the future potential of older people’s interest organisations to effect change, with Edmondson (2002:100) suggesting that,

‘Emerging groups of the ‘active retired’ and similar older people’s associations will, it may be hoped, radically alter [the] situation [of older people in Ireland] in the future’.

Acheson and Harvey (2008), provide the most thorough analysis of, and informed insight into, the older people’s sector both north and south of the border. Based on qualitative interviews with the directors of voluntary and non-profit organisations and five civil/public servants working in the ageing arena they suggest that the older people’s sector plays an instrumental, rather than an agenda setting role in policy evaluation and determination. One challenge, which they state organisations confront, is the difficulty in gaining access to policy officials in the Department of Finance. Acheson and Harvey (2008) argue that this is a deliberate tactic employed by the government to keep non-governmental groups at arm’s length from key decision-makers. Echoing Pierson’s (1996, 2001) analysis, they suggest that the absence of universal welfare benefits for older people in Ireland has ramifications on the political agendas pursued by the older people’s sector on their behalf. Many of the groups do not attempt to engage in political debates regarding how neo-liberal policies marginalize particular segments of the older population. Instead, discussions with policy-makers are focused on less politically controversial issues such as loneliness and recreation.
The organisations, with the exception of Age Action, are characterised as somewhat benign and passive, being largely in agreement with policy officials on official policy and only airing grievances with regard to its lack of implementation. Acheson and Harvey (2008) contrast this with what they term the radicalised disability movement in Ireland and the 'mature' voluntary sector in Continental Europe. Nonetheless, they insinuate that policy makers may be using engagement with the older people's sector as a form of policy legitimisation, involving them in the policy discussions, but severing this participation at the crucial implementation stage.

3.6 CONCLUSION
This chapter has argued that the contemporary manifestations of the 'politics of old age' in Ireland have their roots in the country's colonial past and are tempered by postcolonial and Catholic conservatism. Recent decades have seen radical changes due primarily to external 'modernising' influences and infiltration of the political and social agendas by neo-liberal ideologies. Nevertheless, the exact role of the state in the provision and regulation of services for older people remains somewhat ambiguous and poorly defined. Public polices, some of which can be traced back to as early as the nineteenth century have served to accentuate disparities of wealth and well-being within the Irish population. In many instances unequal access to health, social care services and work related benefits, including pensions, have led to ingrained structural inequities, which tend to impact negatively on the less economically secure among the older members of the population. While the 'boom years' of the Celtic tiger coincided with increased allocation of funding to certain services targeted at older people, few of these were made universally available. It remains uncertain what impact the current stringent spending policies will have on the 'politics of old age' in Ireland.

The chapter introduces the most significant, in terms of membership and influence, older people's interest organisations operating at the national level. It outlines how the majority of the organisations have been established in response to government initiatives as opposed to emerging from grassroots movements. With the bulk of these organisations originating in the early to mid-1990s, the older people's sector is still very much a nascent one. Much of the growth it experienced occurred in the first years of the new millennium,
facilitated by the increases in public and philanthropic financing during this period. Existing literature does not provide for an adequate understanding of the degree to which effective consultation was practiced at national and local levels. The social partnership programme represents an opportunity for a small number of older people's interest organisations to operate at a strategic policy-making level. Participation of older people's interest organisations at the local level is nascent and has perhaps in the past been constrained by the political structures in place. While the research of Acheson and Harvey (2008) provides a useful insight into the older people's sector in Ireland, it does not provide detailed information on a number of issues. For example, it does not explore who the constituents of older people's interest organisations are; the manner in which older people's interest organisations consult with their constituency; the factors which influence the extent to which older people's interest organisations engage in political lobbying; member's perceptions of 'identity politics' and why they join older people's interest organisations. Furthermore, their study gives insufficient attention to how senior policy officials perceive and are responding to the new phenomenon of older people's interest organisations and their associated demands and aspirations. Before exploring these issues in greater detail in subsequent chapters the next chapter outlines the design and methodology of the research study.
4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 reviewed the international literature on the theory of interest group influence, internal dynamics of older people’s interest organisations and the issue of ‘identity politics’ as it relates to older people. Chapter 3 offered an insight into the Irish economic, social policy and political context. This chapter shifts the focus of the discussion to the research methodology employed to gain an insight into the organisation, work, and influence of older people’s interest organisations in the Irish context. Section 4.2 provides an introduction to the aims and objectives of the research. Following this, the epistemological perspective influencing the study is explained and an elaboration of the methods adopted in the study is provided in Section 4.3. Section 4.4 addresses the research design. Attention is given to the sampling strategy employed, the approach to data collection and analysis and the ethical implications and limitations of the research. The chapter concludes by outlining the organisation of the findings in the remaining chapters.

4.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

As outlined in Chapter 1 the thesis seeks to address the emergence on the Irish political scene of older people’s interest organisations. More specifically it seeks to explore the intersection of 1) the work and internal dynamics of older people’s interest organisations, 2) older people’s ‘identity politics’, and 3) policy-makers’ perspectives and constructions of older people’s interest organisations. The study is inspired by a critical gerontology perspective. This is reflected in its recognition of the importance of structural and cultural issues as they impact upon the work of older people’s interest organisations and the emphasis placed on the social construction of themes such as ‘old age’, ‘representation’, and the discourses employed by directors and members of older people’s interest organisations and policy-makers which relate to the ‘politics of old age’.
As stated in Chapter 1 the thesis advances the literature on older people's interest organisations along a number of important lines. Unlike most of the literature addressing older people’s interest organisations, this study is not based on secondary data sources. Instead it is premised on extensive primary qualitative data. The value of this approach is that it gives air to the voices of the directors and members of older people’s interest organisations and of policymakers who interact with these organisations on a regular basis. Doing so allows the study to go beyond the impact of external macro economic and political structural forces on older people's political representation and addresses the micro drivers behind its evolution. This shift is significant in view of the fact that most existent studies on the politics of old age and the issue of older people’s political representation tend to focus almost exclusively on how policy and institutional design impact on the participation of older people in the political process (Binstock & Quadagno, 2001; Estes et al., 2003; Hudson, 2008; Torres-Gil, 2005). The effects of the internal dynamics of older people’s organisations and of the perceptions of policymakers of their role in the political process are generally not considered. In order to address this deficiency the thesis seeks to expand on this limited area of social inquiry. The thesis a) sheds light on the perceptions of directors and members of older people’s interest organisations on older people’s representation and their participation in the process of policy making and implementation, b) considers policymakers’ impressions of the work and relevance of older people’s interest organisations and how they impact on the policy making-process, and c) based on the perspectives of these primary actors at the national level, and informed by the international literature, considers the potential of the older people’s sector in Ireland.

The research questions can be organised into three distinct categories, namely, questions which relate to: 1) the work and internal dynamics of older people’s interest organisations; 2) 'identity politics' from the perspectives of the members of older people’s interest organisations and 3) policy-makers' perceptions of older people’s interest organisations, how they have been responding to them and the need they see for doing so in the future. The research therefore, unlike the majority of existent studies, takes a wide multi-perspective approach which seeks to ground the ‘macro’ understanding of older
people's interest organisations' participation in the political process in their 'micro' internal and national realities. The specific research questions are elaborated below.

4.2.1 Work and internal dynamics of older people's interest organisations
The first three questions of the thesis focus specifically on the work and internal dynamics of older people's interest organisations and explore:

1. Who do older people's interest organisations in Ireland represent?

2. How do they seek to represent this constituency?

3. What are the factors which impact on older people's interest organisations' engagement in political advocacy work?

The first question aims to describe the constituency of older people's interest organisations and the second question seeks to explain how older people's groups represent this constituency. These questions are inspired by the paucity of research which critically unpacks who, within the heterogeneous population of older people, older people's interest organisations seek to represent. Chapter 2 noted that scholars have acknowledged the diversity of interests within the older population, however, few have considered how older people's interest organisations attempt to accommodate this plurality of interests. Question three seeks to critically interpret the factors which impact upon older people's interest organisations' involvement in political advocacy. The posing of this question also stems from the seeming lack of explanation in the existent literature as to how the internal dynamics of older people's interest organisations impact upon the work they pursue. In the absence of a clearer understanding of the reasons why older people's interest organisations become involved in particular lobbying efforts the perception of their contributions may be over- or under-stated.

4.2.2 Identity politics as it relates to the members of older people's interest organisations
Question four of the thesis moves from an analysis of the internal dynamics of older people's interest organisations to the issue of older people's 'identity politics'. Focusing specifically on the members of older people's interest organisations, it explores:
4. How do the members of aged-based interest organisations conceptualise old age and what implications does this have for the organisation of older people’s interest organisations?

Inspired by the hermeneutic school of critical gerontology (Cole & Sierpina, 2006), this question looks at older people’s understanding of the representation of older people. The posing of this question arose from the seeming uncertainty in the literature regarding older people’s ‘collective consciousness’ or ‘identity politics’ and lack of attention to the reasons why individuals join an older people’s interest organisation.

4.2.3 Policy makers’ perceptions and constructions of older people’s interest organisations

Finally, question five of the thesis explores policy makers’ (former Junior Ministers’ and senior civil/public servants’) perceptions of older people’s interest organisations. In particular, it seeks to explore:

5. What are policymakers’ perceptions of older people’s interest organisations and how relevant are these organisations to the work of policymakers?

Chapter 2 highlighted that the work of interest organisations cannot be detached from the wider policy context and the discourses in which participation is legitimated. It argued that the manner in which policies for older people are socially constructed by policy elites has far-reaching consequences for the relative influence of older people’s interest organisation. The posing of question five, therefore, can illuminate not only policy-makers’ perceptions of the participation of older people in the policy process but also the normative frameworks they use to justify the inclusion or exclusion of older people’s interest organisations in the policy process.

4.3 Epistemological and theoretical perspective - Critical gerontology

The research is inspired by a critical gerontology perspective, which can be categorised as a critical inquiry perspective. Critical theory stands in contrast to traditional non-critical research methodologies. It does not aspire to align itself with the deductive logic of positivism, which holds that there is a universal objective truth (Crotty, 1998; Moody,
It assumes some of the qualities of interpretivism, which emphasises meaning and understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), but unlike interpretivism it is value laden, in that it seeks justice and equality (Crotty, 1998). Critical gerontology can be described as a critical inquiry epistemology. As Estes et al. (2003) explain:

'Critical gerontology asks why a particular analogy or metaphor is used to explain adult ageing and how the assumptions contained within theory and policy influence our understanding of the position of older people in society...Critical gerontology requires a fusion of the study of structural inequalities in society and the personal experience of ageing, because both are essential for social action and progressive change. (Estes et al., 2003: 3).

As Phillipson (1998:14) highlights, 'the meaning of critical gerontology is itself somewhat evasive'. It seeks to examine the impact of structural forces or the divisions and inequalities within the population of older people, by attending to the impact of policy at a national and international level, and considers how globalization has become a dominant force which impacts upon inequities in later life (Baars, Dannefer, Phillipson, & Walker, 2006). In addition to this focus on the macro level, critical gerontology also seeks to explore interpretative understandings of old age (Moody, 1993). Attention to the micro level has been spurred by criticisms of the political economy approach as being over-deterministic, or as outlined in Chapter 2, 'anachronistic' (Higgs & Jones, 2008:21). Critical gerontology, in addition, is concerned with the shift from a modern to a late, or postmodern, age (Phillipson, 1998).

Much of the work to-date applying a critical gerontology perspective has taken a macro-orientated approach, which has the effect of excluding 'social relations at the microtexture of everyday life' (Powell, 2006:65). However, in the current millennium greater recognition is given to the need to integrate both the macro and micro perspectives (Holstein & Minkler, 2007). According to Powell (2006: 52) 'critical gerontology is a perspective whereby genuine knowledge is based on the involvement of the "objects" of study in its definition and results in a positive vision of how things might be better, rather than an understanding of how things actually are'. Central to the idea of critical gerontology is that
the researcher adopts a value-committed approach to research. As Moody (1993:xvii) argues, critical gerontology researchers provide ‘a positive vision of how things might be different’. Similarly, Holstein and Minkler (2007:14) contend that it is incumbent on researchers adopting a critical gerontology approach, to ‘look ahead’ and make suggestions as to how the situation, as it relates to older people, can be improved.

Of fundamental importance to critical gerontology is the social construction of ageing and the discourses in which policy and research are embedded (Phillipson, 1998). As Moody (1993) explains, critical gerontology is critical of ‘instrumental reason’ or any assertion that the politics of old age and the conglomerate of voices within the ageing enterprise (medical-industrial complex, academics, policy-makers) conspire to yield a politics which is always for the betterment of ‘older people’. Critical gerontologists instead argue that power, knowledge and domination are of central importance. For this reason, it seeks to expose the contradictions inherent in social policies as they relate to older people and question who is advantaged or disadvantaged by the design of social policy.

4.3.1 My epistemological assumptions
Critical gerontology challenges researchers to examine the epistemological assumptions and implications’ of their work. As Holstein and Minkler (2007:15) indicate, it challenges researchers to acknowledge their ‘tacit value commitments’, since ‘research cannot occupy a value free realm...we all view the world – and do our research - with a view from somewhere’ (Holstein & Minkler, 2007:19). It is therefore incumbent on researchers to lay bare their value commitments and perceptions of ‘old age’.

My own perceptions of ‘old age’ are informed by the extensive, enriching and regular contact I have with persons of retirement age in my own personal life; parents, parents-in-law, aunts, uncles, former lecturers and work colleagues. It is also informed by the contact I have had with ‘older people’ whom I have interviewed (Doyle, O'Dwyer, & Timonen, 2010; Doyle & Timonen, 2007; Timonen & Doyle, 2012) or worked with (Doyle &
Timonen, 2010) over the course of six years working in the field of social gerontology. My perceptions of later life concur with those of Bytheway and Johnson (1993:34), who argue that it is ‘fundamentally ageist to presume uncritically that it is possible to identify a group and label it ‘old people’. I believe the label ‘old/older people’ serves to reify old age as something marginal or different. While employing the label ‘older people’ in the current thesis, I seek to avoid objectifying old age or engaging in a process of ‘Othering’ which results in ‘marginalisation from being the other’ (Barter-Godfrey & Taket, 2009; Young, 2000). Notwithstanding the above assertions, I believe it is important to acknowledge that a life can be broadly segmented into separate phases, and these distinct phases may be of significant practical social, economic, political, cultural, historical and normative relevance.

I do not view particular phases of the life course as more desirable that other stages. Instead, inspired by a Freirean philosophy which attends to the creative and emancipatory capacity of humans I view the life course as a journey of constant learning and increased awareness. I believe the potential for learning is not rooted in a postmodernist perspective of material expression, but, instead is related to a broader existential project of personal and communitarian creation as conceived by Freire’s (1972; 1995) perspective of the human ‘conscientisation’ project. This perspective as outlined by Crotty (1998:149-150) conceives humans:

‘As conscious beings .... endowed with creative imagination. This means that they find themselves confronted not only by brute factuality, sheer material circumstance, but by what can only be described as a human situation. This is a situation that holds creative possibilities, for humans are able to see it not only in terms of what it is but also in terms of what it can be. They can do something about their situation and, precisely as human beings, they are called to do something about it. This, and only this, is the kind of freedom human beings enjoy. It is a situated freedom, an embodied freedom - not the freedom to realise absolute,

15 Here I am referring to a participatory research project in which I was the lead researcher and worked with a group of 15-20 older people over a 9 month period (Doyle & Timonen, 2010).
abstract ideals as such, but the freedom to address themselves to their situation, seize upon its growing points, and out of the worse to create the better.

I believe this human 'conscientisation' project is applicable at all stages of the life course. In later life, the human situation may be altered, whether inter alia by retirement, changed personal networks or changed physical and cognitive health. I do not hold a postmodernist perspective that regards the individual as being wholly autonomous uninfluenced or unrestrained by structural forces. Instead I hold a perspective which aligns with Baars (2006:26) that: 'the individual homo economicus can only function as a tiny part of an overwhelming economic system that tends to dominate all other social relations'. Thus, I believe the individual human 'conscientisation' project is influenced and at times constrained by larger structural forces outside the control of the individual. Furthermore, I concur with Holstein and Minkler (2007:26) and Bernard and Philips (2000) that the dichotomization of later life by researchers into the third and fourth age does not serve much purpose. It is an artificial categorization that has the effect of stigmatizing those who are cognitively or physically disadvantaged in later life. Similar to Holstein and Minkler (2007:26), and as outlined again in the concluding chapter of the thesis, I hold, 'an intergenerational life course perspective. In this way, we do not separate the sick from the well, the very old from the less old'.

4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN
The following section elaborates on the methods used during the research project. It introduces the epistemological assumptions of qualitative research, the sampling strategy employed and the approach to data analysis.

4.4.1 QUALITATIVE METHODS
Qualitative interviews were deemed the most suitable research method to gain an in-depth understanding of older people's interest organisations and related politics of old age in the Irish context. Placing emphasis on how social actors construct and interpret their worlds, critical gerontology is particularly amenable to a qualitative research methodology. As mentioned earlier critical gerontology does not align itself with the
deductive logic of positivism which holds that there is a universal objective truth and is critical of 'instrumental reason or rationality' (Moody, 1993) and therefore seeks to understand rather than predict. As Lynch (1999:50) explains, critical theorists 'shifted interest from the almost exclusive concern with 'how biased is the data? to concerns about whose interests are served by the bias'. Qualitative research is concerned with research participants' understandings, perceptions and frames of reference (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2001). As Silverstein (2001:112) explains, interview responses are not viewed 'simply as true or false reports on reality. [Instead, we can treat such responses as displays of perspectives and moral forms'. Kvale (1996:11) similarly explains how qualitative research allows research participants 'to formulate in a dialogue their own conceptions of their lived world'.

The qualitative approach is also particularly suitable for studies which are exploratory in nature (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Its flexibility enables the researcher to refine and develop their research as themes emerge (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It allows the researcher to modify their line of enquiry and explore previously unconsidered issues (Robson, 1993). Unlike quantitative research, attention is not given to quantifying the number of responses to a particular issue. Instead as Kvale (1996:206) argues, 'the creation of appropriate categories may be just as significant a contribution to knowledge as the number of observations made for the different categories'.

The aim of qualitative research therefore is not to test or falsify theory/hypotheses, but rather to seek explanation. In most instances it is categorized as inductive rather than deductive. However, Kuczynski and Daly (2003) outline how rather than adhere to a strict inductive/deductive dichotomization, qualitative research can adopt an interpretive inductive approach. In such an approach, emphasis is not placed on rigidly applying one theoretical framework, but instead, researchers, sensitized by the existing theoretical literature on the subject area, engage in a process of induction and deduction. As Kuczynski and Daly (2003) explain, 'Rather than assuming the pretense of a blank slate in approaching phenomena, as in objective induction, the researcher approaches a problem from the perspective of theoretical sensitivity to existing concepts, ideas, and theory.' (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003:383).
4.4.2 Data Gathering Methods
The research can be divided into three distinct fieldwork phases. The first stage consisted of qualitative interviews with the directors/chairpersons of eleven national older people’s interest organisations. The second stage was conducted after analysis of first round interviews had taken place and consisted of focus group interviews with the members or staff of nine older people’s interest organisations. The third stage consisted of interviews with twenty senior civil and public servants and five former Junior Ministers of State for Older People.

The interviews can be described as semi-structured (Robson, 1993). Such an approach is deemed preferable to a structured interview as it allows the researcher to modify the questions in the context of the particular interview (Robson, 1993). The interview schedules employed in the three stages of the data gathering exercise are appended to this thesis.

4.4.3 Sampling Strategy
The sampling techniques employed in qualitative research are generally termed ‘purposive’ (as opposed to ‘random’ as is typical in quantitative research) reflecting the fact that samples are chosen for a specific purpose which is decided in advance of the fieldwork (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A total 69 persons were interviewed. The following discussion outlines how the three research participant groups, directors/chairpersons of older people’s interest organisations, members/staff of older people’s interest organisations and policy makers were accessed.

Directors/Chairpersons of Older People’s Interest Organisations
Chapter 1 noted that the label ‘older people’s interest organisations’ applies to a panoply of organisations, some of which are membership based and some memberless. In addition the label incorporates a range of organisations whose predominant focus may be service provision, recreational and leisure activities or political advocacy. Given this broad spectrum of organisations, the decision was made to interview the directors/chairpersons of all of the national organisations who fall into the broad and amorphous grouping ‘older people’s interest organisations’. Such an approach has numerous advantages, most
notably, it allows for a greater insight into: the population ecology of older people's interest organisations (Gray & Lowery, 2000); how organisations cater for the diverse population of older people; why particular organisations emphasise particular activities such as lobbying or service provision and the organisation of the overall older people's sector in Ireland.

A 'variational sampling' technique (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was employed to access directors/chairpersons of age based interest organisations, since the rationale behind including all older people's interest organisations in the sample was justified on the grounds that it allowed for significant variations across the organisations to emerge. Invitation letters were sent to the directors/leaders of the eleven national organisations. The aims and objectives of the thesis were outlined in the letter, along with an assurance of confidentiality should they partake in the research (see Appendix A). This letter was followed by a telephone call, where a time and date were arranged for the interview. Every director/chairperson agreed to participate in the study.

One organization, The National Association of Widows was included in the study following a recommendation from a senior civil servant. However, analysis of this organisation was not included after the decision was made that the organisation could not strictly be classified as an older people's interest organisation. While the majority of its members were of retirement age, the organisation when it was founded in 1967, was established to support women who had become widowed at a young age. The older age of its membership was thus the result of its long establishment and commitment and interest of members to remain affiliated to the organization.

MEMBERS AND STAFF OF OLDER PEOPLE'S INTEREST ORGANISATIONS
The members and staff of older people’s interest organisations who participated in the study can be classified as a 'convenience sample' (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Following the completion of stage one preliminary analysis of the fieldwork, contact was again made with the directors/chairpersons of the organisations seeking their willingness to identify interest group members who would take part in focus groups. In instances where the
organisation was not a membership organisation permission to interview staff members was sought (see Appendix A). All the organisations were obliging and provided the contact details of staff or members who were willing to participate in the research. The director of one membership organisation was unable to obtain members willing to participate in the study. Prospective focus group attendees were contacted by mail and a follow-up phone call during which a time to conduct the focus group was arranged.

The decision to conduct focus groups was taken because it was viewed as a time-efficient method to speak with the greatest number of members of older people's interest organisations. Furthermore, focus groups were seen as advantageous since they facilitate the expression and discussion of a range of ideas and experiences of focus groups participants as they interact and share ideas with each other (Stewart, Shandasani, & Rook, 2007). As Litosseliti (2007) relays, focus groups provide a more natural environment than one-on-one interviews as people's opinions are influenced and prompted by the responses of other focus group attendees, as is more usual in real life interactions. Focus groups also had the added advantage of observing how the members of older people's interest organisations interact together and diverge or converge on their opinions on older people's interest organisations.

Table 4.1 Sample profile: Older people's interest organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Older people's interest organisations</th>
<th>One-on-one semi-structured interview</th>
<th>Focus group: No. of participants</th>
<th>Total N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Action</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age and Opportunity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Retirement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Association of Irish Widows</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICTU Retired Workers' Committee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Association of older people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
National Federation of Pensioner’s Associations | 1 | 6 | 6
Senior Citizens Parliament | 1 | 6 | 7
The Older Women’s Network | 1 | 2 | 3
The Alzheimer’s Society | 1 | 2 | 3
Older and Bolder | 1 |
Total | 11 | 38 | 44

* Numbers are not the sum total of the columns, reflecting the fact that either a Chairperson/Director interviewed in the one-on-one interview also participated in the focus group.

**Senior Civil and Public Servants**
Senior civil and public servants were accessed through a process of *reputational case selection* (Miles & Huberman, 1994) whereby senior personnel in the Office for Older People in the Department of Health and Children provided the contact information concerning expert informants who were involved in the formulation of policy with a specific age-focus. Invitation emails were sent to each of these research participants and follow-up phone calls were made shortly after to arrange an interview. All the contacted research participants agreed to take part in the research. A number of respondents offered to elicit the participation of colleagues who had involvement with older people’s interest organisations. In three such instances, these colleagues joined respondents in the research event, turning these interviews into small focus groups as detailed in the table below.

**Junior Ministers of State for Older People**
The five Junior Ministers of State for Older People who held the position between 2007 and 2010 were also interviewed as these were identified as *politically important cases* (Miles & Huberman, 1994). An invitation letter was posted to each of the former Junior Ministers. This was followed by a telephone call where further explanation of the thesis was provided. Interviews with the former Junior Ministers took place in their constituency office or place of work.
### Table 4.2 Sample Profile: Policymakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Civil/Public Servants</th>
<th>One-on-one semi-structured interview</th>
<th>Focus group: No. of participants</th>
<th>Total N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Health and Children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Social Protection</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Transport</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Finance</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of the Taoiseach</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Environment, Heritage &amp; Local Government</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Community Rural &amp; Gaeltacht</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Statistics Office</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Council on Ageing &amp; Older People</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Justice (Equality Authority)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Service Executive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minister of State for Older People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Áine Brady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maura Hoctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivar Callely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Tom Moffatt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.4.5 Naturally occurring data

Silverman (2001) refers to the importance of naturally occurring data and the benefit of going 'into the field' to authenticate data obtained in interviews and gaining a more informed understanding of the social phenomena under study. In an attempt to acquire an improved understanding of the work of the participating organisations I attended the annual general meeting of three of the groups and report/project launches of two organisations. As Silverman (2001) notes this 'data' is not unmediated and is subject to
the researcher's interpretations and reasoning. However, it helped to provide a clearer insight into the work of the organisations and also provided an opportunity to talk to the members of older people's interest organisations in an informal manner.

Mid-way through the fieldwork research the government announced its plan to end universal availability of the 'medical card' to all persons aged 70 years and over. As detailed in Chapter 8, the announcement of this decision resulted in the largest public demonstration by older people in the history of the state. The demonstrations were the most significant public demonstrations orchestrated by any Irish older people's interest organization since their inception. Given the significance of the event in the context of older people's politics in Ireland, the decision was made to incorporate an analysis of the events and learning surrounding the demonstrations from both the perspectives of the interest organisations and policy-makers. In order to gain an improved insight into the demonstration I attended both the medical card protests organised by Age Action in Saint Andrew's church and the street protest organised by the Senior Citizens Parliament in Kildare Street in October 2008.

4.4.6 Data Analysis
The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and inputted into Nvivo 9 (QSR International Pty Ltd), a software package that aids the analysis of qualitative data. Inspired by the ground theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, Charmaz, 2003, 2006), the data analysis can be described as a cyclical, iterative and continuous process - there was continual coding and recoding. Analysis of the interviews consisted of three key phases and commenced early in the fieldwork research stage.

In phase 1, open coding of the interview transcripts took place with the assistance of Nvivo 9 which aided data management and retrieval. Provisional concepts, themes and patterns were identified and allocated labels. The coding frame was refined in phase 2 where a process of axial coding was undertaken. More specifically, the connection between the categories and contexts in which they occurred were identified. Construct sub-categories were also identified, for example data relating to the work and organization of older people's interest organisations was arranged into the inhibitors and facilitators of participation. Data relating to members' perceptions of older people's interest
organisations was grouped into benefits and motivations for joining older people's interest organisations. Data relating to policymakers' perceptions of older people's interest organisations was grouped into the perceived advantages and disadvantages of older people's interest organisations in the policy process. In phase 3, theoretical coding took place and categories were integrated into 'a larger theoretical scheme' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). Core categories were identified. The core categories which guided the final organisation and analysis of the data are graphically displayed in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Theoretical scheme guiding final data analysis

4.4.7 VALIDITY OF QUALITATIVE METHODS
There is no agreed definition of validity in qualitative research (Dellinger & Leech, 2007). Indeed, some researchers, sometimes referred to as antirealists (Mays & Pope, 1995), would contest the application of the term 'validity' in qualitative research and argue for the use of the term 'credibility' or 'trustworthiness' (Dellinger & Leech, 2007). Relativists,
on the other hand, such as Hammersley (1992) provide a more substantive list of what should be examined when considering the issue of validity. Hammersley (1992) argues that consistency of theoretical claims, transferability, reflexivity, novelty of the claims, the extent to which formal theory is produced and the degree of development of such theory be outlined in qualitative research reports. Borrowing suggestions made by Mays and Pope (2000) on the 'credibility' or 'validity' of qualitative findings, I have attempted to make a precise and detailed exposition of the methods of data collection and analysis. I have adopted reflexivity by outlining my epistemological perspective. Finally, through the completion of second round interviews with the members and staff of each of the organisations I have acquired respondent validation and triangulation and sought to pay specific attention to negative or disconfirming cases.

4.4.8 Ethical Considerations
The study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, in May 2008. The research population – directors, employees and members of older people’s interest organisations and senior public servants and junior Ministers - cannot be classified as a vulnerable group. However, it was important that informed consent for their participation in the project was sought. As Christians (2005:146) states, research respondents should 'enter the research voluntarily and with adequate information about the [research] procedures and possible consequences'. Following the guidelines stipulated by Stringer and Dwyer (2005) all interviewees were informed of the nature and purpose of the study in writing prior to the interview, and orally before the interview took place. They were assured that they could withdraw at any stage of the interview and refrain from answering any questions. A consent form (Appendix C), confirming permission to take part in the research, was signed by all the participants.

All of the research participants were assured of privacy and confidentiality(Christians, 2005). Pseudonyms and disguised locations have been applied where reference is made to individual names or locations. The issue of confidentiality was particularly relevant for public servants since the Official Secrets Act 1963 prohibits civil servants from disclosing official information 'including views and advice in verbal or written form' (Quinn, 2008:45),
unless authorized to do so. Quinn (2008) argues that the impact of this legislation has limited our understanding of the workings of government departments and contributed to high levels of secrecy regarding policy formulation in the Irish context. In light of the above restrictions civil and public\textsuperscript{16} servants who took part in the research were assured that their identities would remain anonymous. For this reason, quotations in Chapter 7 and 8 are not identified at the individual or departmental level. While adhering to such a strict code of anonymity reduces the salience of some of the statements, the advantages are apparent, namely, research participants were less likely to forward the 'official line' (Duke, 2002:48 as cited by Quinn, 2008) and spoke openly about their involvement with and opinions of older people's interest organisations. While Junior Ministers are not bound by the Official Secrets Act, they too were assured of complete anonymity in the presentation of interview data, in order to facilitate their participation and also reduce the probability of obtaining the 'official line' only.

4.4.9 Limitations
Social desirability was certainly evident in some of the interviews with organisations directors, junior ministers and civil servants. An attempt was made to identify such bias by attending to missing information and instances where questions were deflected. Social desirability by organisation directors was observable when they spent a disproportionate amount of interview time discussing other work initiatives, such as research projects undertaken by other bodies. The same practice was observable with policy makers and former Junior Ministers when they appeared to engage in rhetorical speech and did not specifically address the research question. In such instances research participants' responses were queried, but in two instances it was not possible to get beyond 'the official line'. It could be argued that this may not be viewed as a limitation of the study, but rather an inevitable aspect of conducting research with political elites (Duke, 2002).

Interest groups have contact with civil servants across numerous sections of the various government departments. While the people I interviewed are, or were in the past,

\textsuperscript{16} 'Public servants' are persons working in state agencies, for example, the Health Service Executive and the National Council of Ageing and Older People.
predominantly active in the area of ageing and social policy, or issues that can be perceived as directly impacting on older people such as transport and housing, it is possible that I have omitted some civil servants who have had close working relationships with older people’s interest organisations. The fact that my sample was derived largely with the help of officials in the Office for Older People in the Department of Health and Children, goes some way towards reducing the probability of this and limiting its impact where it did occur. Furthermore, a number of respondents when asked to suggest the names of other relevant informants, provided contact details of potential respondents and in three instances arranged for their participation in interviews.

Another limitation of the study was that focus group attendees were accessed via organisation directors, and hence represented a convenience sample. Ideally a random sample of members would be chosen to ensure a diverse range of the members of older people’s interest organisations were interviewed. The identification of members via a gatekeeper meant that participants in the focus groups, by and large, were quite active members of the organisation. In three instances, focus group attendees consisted of the members of specialist committees. While this has advantages in that the sample may reflect a population of members who are informed about the organisation, there is the attendant disadvantage that this group may not accurately reflect the general membership of the respective organisations.

4.5 Presentation of the Findings

The findings of the research are presented in the next four chapters. Chapter 5 explores the work and internal dynamics of older people’s interest organisations. It discusses how older people’s interest organisations define their constituency and how they seek to work with, or represent, this group. The Chapter also explores the factors influencing the extent to which organisations center their activities around political advocacy. Chapter 6 focuses on the members of older people’s interest organisations. It outlines their perceptions of an old age ‘identity politics’ and the impact of this on the involvement of older people in older people’s interest organisations. Chapter 7 outlines policy-makers’ perceptions of older people’s interest organisations, the relevance of the organisations to their work and policy-makers’ perceptions of social policy as it relates to the population of older people.
Chapter 8 then examines the medical card demonstration by drawing from the perceptions of policy-makers and directors and members of older people's interest organisations with regard to older people's participation. The specific focus of the chapter is the involvement of the organisations in the protest and policymakers' views of the event. The final chapter of the thesis, Chapter 9, attempts to draw together the analysis of the preceding four chapters and concludes with some suggestions as to how the work of older people's interest organisations may take on greater salience in the twenty-first century.
5: FINDINGS I: OLDER PEOPLE'S INTEREST ORGANISATIONS: WHO, HOW AND WHAT THEY REPRESENT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As outlined in Chapter 2, there is a tendency in the academic literature to examine the politics of old age and the work of older people's interest organisations at the macro level. Furthermore, attention is usually given to the issue of influence in the context of specific policy initiatives (Feltenius, 2008; Iglehart, 2004; Schulz & Binstock, 2006) rather than extending the analysis to explore the broader panoply of work in which they engage and the internal dimensions of the organisations' operations. This chapter seeks to address this deficiency and sets out to explore three interrelated questions namely:

1) Who do older people's interest organisations represent? 2) How do they seek to represent them? and 3) What are the factors which impact on older people's interest organisations' engagement in advocacy work?

As noted in the opening chapter of the thesis the definition and relevance of the notion of 'old age' is contested in the twenty-first century. How older people's interest organisations define their constituency is thus highly relevant. Section 5.2 explores this issue in the Irish context and examines who, within the population of older people, older people's interest organisations attempt to represent and how they ascertain the policy priorities of this constituency. Section 5.3 highlights the fact that older people's interest organisations do not specifically seek to effect political change solely through traditional methods of policy negotiation. It outlines how, in addition to this work, organisations seek to affect attitudinal change, alleviate both institutional and societal ageism, and empower older people politically, socially and culturally. Section 5.4 considers the reasons why political lobbying, namely, campaigning and seeking legislative changes, is not always positioned by these organisations as their primary function or objective. Unlike most other research which tends to focus on a specific organisation, the analysis here is not organisation-specific. The findings emerge from the interviews and focus groups conducted with the
directors, staff and members of ten older people's interest organisations (see Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 for further details).

5.2 WHO THEY REPRESENT: DEFINING THEIR CONSTITUENCY

Interest organisations are usually categorized as organisations that seek to represent the views of their members. They are thus frequently labelled as 'self-interested' – their interests are usually explicit since their constituency is easily defined. An important aspect of older people's interest organisations (in the Irish context at least) was that the majority of the organisations indicated that they sought to represent the interests of both members and non-members. Their constituency is the all-encompassing category of 'older people', a heterogeneous group whose interests are not necessarily clear-cut. The organisations therefore did not appear to pursue an Olsonian model of collective action (Olson, 1965), that is maximizing the number of members by attempting to offer selective benefits to attract them. Instead, organisations seemed to adopt an approach that has more in common with McCarthy and Zald's (1977) social movement theory, in so far as they sought to mobilise conscience adherents or individuals who are involved in the organisation but do not stand to benefit from the policy work of the organisation in all instances.

Membership organisations thus did not confine their 'constituency' to members who had paid their subscription dues. Instead, organisation directors tended to speak in broader terms about their constituency and argue that their focus was 'all older people', or, in the case of issue-specific organisations, older people who aligned with their organisational objective, that is, older women, persons with occupational pensions or persons with Alzheimer's. Therefore, three of the organisations intimated that they aim to represent and express the priorities of the older population in general. One attempted to represent the voice of older women, one the voice of persons with Alzheimer's and their carers, one the voices of active older people in the community and another retired persons on occupational pensions. The remaining two, which were not membership organisations, did not classify themselves as representative groups, however, they stated that they wished to provide a mechanism to facilitate the expression of the voice of older people, particularly, vulnerable marginalized older people.
Apart from those organisations where membership was related to former occupational affiliation, the criterion for membership was kept deliberately vague. While one organisation stated they welcomed people of any age, typically 55 years and over was viewed as an appropriate age at which membership began. Members, however, tended to be those of pensionable age, or those who retired early. Hence a strong positive correlation existed between retirement from paid employment, or non-working, status and membership.

Representation of 'vulnerable' older people was claimed in interviews with five organisation directors. However, the use of the term 'vulnerable' was somewhat ambivalent. At times it was associated with particular subgroups of older people, including older Travellers, those who are isolated in rural areas, older marginalized women and older homeless people. In other instances, it was associated with medical, housing, transport and social needs. Vulnerability was therefore a complex multidimensional construct. While economic status was not necessarily a measure of vulnerability, as the following quotation illustrates, the use of the term 'vulnerable' was most frequently juxtaposed with income insecurity:

Our priority would be to protect the most vulnerable of older people, and it is not necessarily always vulnerable on income levels, you could be vulnerable due to poor health, poor housing circumstances, people may be in good health who just had a job in the 60s, 70s and 80s who didn't have a pension and are now dependent solely on the state pension for their livelihood or survival ... any older person who is sick would be under the classification as vulnerable.

(Director, organisation 10)

Indeed in most instances, the theme of monetary resources was raised when research participants spoke about the 'vulnerable'. Justification for greater welfare benefits for older people was typically prefaced by a description of an older person who was dependent on the non-contributory (minimum State) pension or an older person who was living alone and isolated. This corroborates arguments discussed in Chapter 2 by Jönson and Nilsson (2007) which focus on the importance of 'identity construction' of older
people's interest organisations. In particular, their argument that older people's interest organisations adopt a discourse which portrays the population of older people as isolated, frail and needy in order to bring about improvements in policies for the general population of older people was discernible. Such categorisation, if used predominantly, however, could be construed as being contradictory to the objective of achieving attitudinal change in relation to older people. This is particularly true given the organisations' stated objective of alleviating ageism (discussed below) and criticisms of ageist stereotypes which hold all older people as dependent.

Older people in residential care fell into the broad constituency of older people's interest organisations, however, the manner in which they engaged with these people was poorly defined. Only one organisation stated that they do not attempt to represent the needs of older people in residential care, instead they attempted to 'be a voice for people that are well, that are active are independent....we are talking about the 95 per cent of older people that are living independently'. Another director relayed how at the inception of the organisation a focus on the participation of older people who were active in the community precluded them from recognising older people in residential care as falling within the remit of their work. However, changing normative portrayals of older people in residential care led the organisation to re-examine their focus and to include them. While it appears that the remaining organisations were concerned about the needs of institutional care residents the extent to which they engaged with such people to facilitate the expression of their voice was limited.

5.2.1 ASCERTAINING THE OPINIONS OF THEIR CONSTITUENCY
Older people's interest organisations' ability to act as a proxy for the diverse population of members and non-members was a formidable challenge due to the fact that a large majority of members did not seek to become actively engaged in the political strand of the organisations. Activism, in the form of attendance at meetings and responses to calls for policy opinions was frequently the domain of a small committed group of members. As a result, organisational decisions were generally considered to be a synthesis of evidence-based research knowledge, professional knowledge and opinions and preferences of members.
The extent to which the wider membership of older people’s interest organisations were granted the ability to influence policy priorities of the organisation was unclear. Whether a form of bottom-up democratic decision making was practiced in all instances was not possible to ascertain. It appears that organisational decisions tended to be made by a small number of professionals/committee members. In such instances the assumption made by organisation directors and staff was that they, or, committee members’ own personal experiences and interaction with other older people equipped them with adequate knowledge of the issues of importance to older people. Decision-making structures seemed most transparent in organisations where specialist committees were convened for particular policy issues. The following statement, by a staff member, provides an insight into how the opinions of committee members are included in submission documents:

Well when I am forming policy, or putting in a submission my background is research so that is something I naturally do anyway. I would research, but the great thing about me working here is that I have a huge research group and that is them, it is the older people that are in this organisation and I am at such an advantage because my submissions have the actual words of older people and what they genuinely want because they are telling me directly. So I feel when I am putting in a submission I am really at an advantage there because I have got the core group and what they want, and it is their words that are sprinkled all through my submissions all the time. So there would be a lot of research, a lot of consultation with our members, nothing is my view my work, it is what they tell me and I basically type it up for them, so everything is from our members.

(Staff member, organisation 1)

An unspoken assumption, which appears to have been made by committee members themselves, was that their opinions reflected the views of the wider membership. Committee members' gender, geographic and socio-economic background was not seen to bias opinions. The age demographic varied substantially and included persons in their early to mid-80s. Many of the older members had been active members since the inception of the group, in some instances serving for over 20 years. As was the case among
organisation directors, a number of committee members had acquired professional knowledge through their involvement in the older people's sector over the years. This knowledge was viewed by both members and directors as providing them with a solid basis for arriving at an objective informed insight into the needs of the older population. Consistent with the findings of Barnes et al. (2003), older people with mental health problems, in residential care and or those with disabilities generally were not active members on the committee boards.

According to statements made in the interviews, with the exception of two organisations where volunteers are elected annually at the Annual General Meeting by delegates from affiliated organisations, membership of committees was somewhat haphazard. For most organisations it was a case of whoever comes forward rather than a concerted effort to elicit the participation of a diverse range of older people, since getting new members to accept positions of responsibility within the organisation was difficult:

There's an election every two years or whatever but it's the same people year on year. So we had an election last September, and I think we'd four new faces on the general purpose committee which meets every month, but a lot of them who would be like in, the chair and the secretary like, are in their late 70's early 80's so they've health problems. So it makes it quite difficult sometimes to co-ordinate the meetings or whatever.

(Staff members, organisation 7)

Contact with members outside committees appeared limited at times and most organisations appeared not to have a coordinated communication strategy with their wider membership. Organisations did not have the ability to routinely distribute information relating to their policy work with the full membership. Furthermore, some organisations did not have the capacity to include individual older people not affiliated to a local older people's organisation. Others indicated that they welcomed correspondence with non-members by phone or email, however, the inclusion of these people constituted one-way, once-off, bottom-up communication.
The annual general meeting allowed organisational leaders and staff to interact and come into face-to-face contact with members. However, while organisations attempted to facilitate two-way communication at these events, many of the AGMs appeared to serve more as an opportunity to inform members of the organisations' activities than a functioning two-way communication mechanism. In some cases the AGM provided organisations with the opportunity to decide on key motions for the forthcoming year. While this appeared to lend an air of democratic decision making, the degree to which the feedback of members was actually incorporated into the text of the final decisions was difficult to assess. Statements made in relation to one organisation would appear to point towards the existence of a communication vacuum:

A lot of the wider issues that are passed in the AGM are referred back to the executive committee and I would love to know what happens to them. Are they buried with gravestones or are they acted upon by the executive committee.

(Member, organisation 7)

Also consistent with the findings of Barnes et al. (2003), the AGMs of the larger organisations took place in a formalised manner, with a podium and roaming microphone. As Barnes et al. (2003) point out, only those comfortable with speaking up are likely to take part in such a formalised forum.

Despite the stated wish to represent 'vulnerable' older people, the manner in which organisations ascertained the priorities of hard-to-reach marginalized older people was not clear. Three organisation directors relayed how customized and nuanced communication was required to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized older people in consultation meetings. In particular, the use of non-stigmatizing language needed to be adopted. As one respondent explained, rather than use the language of 'anti-poverty measures or social exclusion' discussions were framed in the context of achieving 'quality of life' for older people. It appears that organisation directors hoped to access these marginalized older people through intermediaries, such as local partnership bodies, but work at this level seemed nascent. There were a small number of examples of good practice (including the inclusion of persons with dementia), but whether these were once
off or sustainable collaborations was difficult to identify. Enabling older people with mental health problems and those in residential care to express their opinions and policy priorities frequently seemed to be more of an aspirational than operational reality, something which one respondent acknowledged:

I think, there is a whole area of stigmatisation [around people in residential care], and it's alive and well within older people's organisations, and I can understand why - because we want to fight for the reality of ageing well and that is great. And some of our population are in the full of their health but they are caring for somebody whether it's a physical or mental health issue or a learning disability or a cognitive disability, there is a whole awareness internally within the community of older people that needs to happen and I would be the first to say that sometimes it is forgotten.

(Director, organisation 3)

A structural/organisational dilemma which appeared to make consultation difficult was the fact that the organisations had limited ability to engage with such people over a prolonged period of time due to resource constraints. Efforts were made by a small number of organisations to travel around the country and hold consultation meetings with their members and other older people – however, for most, the ability to do so was limited. A common theme emerging from the interviews was that the research participants had made efforts to form alliances with local older people's interest organisations. They hoped they could piggyback on existent local networks and thereby capitalize on their skills and resources. Such a strategy was regarded as more cost and time effective than recruiting or mobilising individual older people. Maintaining organisational cohesion across the affiliated groups was considered both a priority and challenging, as one respondent noted 'we need more of them giving us the information about what they're finding out so that we will be able to process it'. This suggests that the potential exists for national organisations to become disconnected from their local constituents. However, the degree of presence of national organisations at the local level was difficult to glean from the interviews, although it appeared that organisations which focused on social and cultural activities faced less of a challenge eliciting the involvement of local organisations.
5.3 How they work on behalf of their constituency: Modalities of influence

Chapter 2 argued that much of the literature on older people's interest organisations focuses on their work in a narrow manner, only referring to it in the context of policy-specific case studies. For this reason, the thesis research also sought to explore the various modalities of work of older people's interest organisations in the Irish context. Organisations' efforts to effect change can be grouped into three broad categories: 1) seeking policy change, 2) mobilizing and empowering older people, and 3) challenging, reducing and overcoming institutional, societal and cultural ageism. The overarching theme running through all of these strands was equity and fairness and the all-encompassing objective of enhancing the quality of life for older people.

5.3.1 Seeking policy change
All of the organisations intimated that they were interested in the economic security of older people and older people's ability to access health and transport services. Benefits that the research participants claimed organisations to have successfully secured included free transport on the Luas\(^{17}\) and free cross-border travel for persons aged 66 years and over. Directors in four organisations argued that they were instrumental in securing greater economic security for older people by persuading government to increase the value of the non-contributory pension benefits, extend tax relief on occupational pensions from €30,000 to €36,000 per annum and guarantee that women have a pension in their own right. One organisation also claimed they had instigated the introduction of the free universal medical card for all persons aged 70 and over in 2001.

Influencing elected representatives
Organisations frequently relied on the informality of the Irish political system to influence policy decisions. Influence thus appeared to be frequently exerted outside the formalized institutions or committees and policy networks. Instead the securing of benefits occurred in a very unstructured manner. By and large, research participants intimated that access

\(^{17}\) The Luas is a light rail transport system in Dublin which commenced operations in 2004.
to the Junior Minister of State for Older People was forthcoming, a finding that is corroborated in other studies which highlight the accessibility of Irish elected representatives to their constituency (Gallagher & Komito, 2005; Hughes et al., 2007). As Hughes et al. (2007) argue a system of brokerage in which elected TDs secure benefits for their constituency is a common feature of the Irish political landscape. This informal brokerage is captured in the following remarks:

X and Y they went up to Z, he was the Minister for Social Welfare.... They sat down with him and said we want to discuss the budget, it's coming up you know. And, minister Z goes, how much do you want? You know what I mean, and then they said some mad figure like ten pounds, whatever it was at the time, and they actually got it, you know it was exactly what they wanted.

(Executive committee member, organisation 7)

Meetings with Ministers were usually one-off and bilateral. It is possible that this reflects an overall tendency by the organisations to focus on specific one-off benefits rather than long-term restructuring issues. Given the informality of the brokering relationship between elected representatives and directors and senior members of older people's interest organisations, it is not surprising that the personality or personal interests of a politician or policy-maker was regarded as a key enabling factor:

I think it is about the relationship it is about engagement.... But some of them [the Junior Minister of State for Older People] you would go down and you would be very reasonable and you say "look this is the logical progression, we need support here". Others you would go in and you would have to bang the table and say "look you are not listening to me". So depending on who you are talking to you take a different approach. Now without naming names, there would be some who were only there to be benevolent and were not interested in policy changes.

(Executive committee member, organisation 5)

An inside departmental 'champion' was therefore regarded as necessary to marshal policy changes which were in line with the organisation’s priorities. Interest in older people’s
issues was thought to be amplified when politicians and policy-makers acquired first hand contact with older people to whom the policy proposals related. Allowing older people to share their personal stories and outline the consequences of policy decisions on their life was therefore considered an effective and persuasive tactic. Furthermore, politicians' and policymakers' own personal relationships with older people were thought to influence decisions and elicit greater interest in a particular policy issue:

It's got to do with the issue and sometimes it can be a matter of a politician and his mother is in that situation and they have seen it for themselves, who has been through the heartbreak of it and knows why it has to be done, you do find those all the time. You find people in the meetings saying this is a huge issue because my mother or father is going through this now. And it makes it so much easier rather than trying to say look there is only 3 per cent of people or 4 per cent of people in this situation but they are very important for them, you are flying then, because they can really tell the story.

(Staff member, organisation 10)

The informal nature of policy making was not thought to be ideal in all instances, and a number of organisations relayed that in recent years they have focused greater attention on exerting influence through more formal mechanisms. Such an approach may be increasingly necessary in light of scandals in the 1990s resulting from political impropriety and corruption (Coakley, 2005). As a result of these scandals calls for greater levels of government accountability and transparency have led to the establishment of state agencies to separate policy-making and service delivery/regulatory functions and since the mid-1990s the passage of a raft of legislation to aid access to information by the public (Hughes et al., 2007).

**Influencing Civil Servants**

Contact with civil servants was largely through invited committees and working groups. The creation of the Ageing Well Network, a philanthropically funded network of public, non-profit and private sector personnel working in the area of older people, was noted as providing a valuable opportunity for interest groups to liaise with policy-makers. By and
large, relationships between civil servants and the organisations seemed more cooperative than adversarial. However, when engagements did occur, it appears to be unsatisfactory from the point of view of many of the members, directors and staff of the organisations, primarily due to their lack of power to influence the decisions of the civil servants. In particular, research participants argued that policy-makers had a narrow understanding of the issues of concern to older people and little appreciation of the impact of policies on the everyday lives of older people:

One of the problems in this country is that people in Finance, of all departments ... they should be put out on the ground there, to work out in the community. Some of these people never worked in the community and they don't realise the impact of the decision they are making and the effect on the community. They just have this thing about finance and how you raise finance and how you shift it from one place to another and under the different headings, but there is no thought of what effect this will have on these people.

(Organisation 1, Executive committee member)

Whether civil servants' perceived lack of knowledge is specific to the area of social policy and older people or is reflective of a more endemic problem within the civil service is open to question. For example, Boyle, O’Riordain and O’Donnell (2002) question the skills sets of some members of the civil service, their reluctance to engage in cross-departmental issues and to focus greater attention on the development of long-term policy. Certainly findings, outlined in Chapter 7, relating to policy makers perspectives' of older people's interest organisations, support the statement made by the respondent above and point to civil servants' lack of awareness of the implications of policy changes on the lives of older people.

PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS
Calls from government for public submissions in relation to policy questions provided opportunities for organisations to relay their policy perspectives and demands. The reliance on such a strategy is potentially problematic as it essentially consists of a one-way form of communication since organisations receive no feedback on their submission.
One of the vehicles of influence for some organisations was the pre-budget submission. Three organisations attended a specially convened annual pre-budget meeting where they were each afforded six minutes to put forward their policy demands. By and large, this event was seen as a public relations exercise. The general perception was that key decisions on the budget had usually been made by the time the meeting was convened:

It’s nonsense. Decisions on the budget have been made last February, been made after the revised estimates, whenever the last estimates are received. This nonsense of sending in submissions in December.... And then [the Minister] meets us in early December or late November. They already know. But anyway it’s good to raise the profile of the organisation, network, you know all that kind of stuff.

(Staff member, organisation 7)

While three of the organisations felt that the quality of their budget submissions had improved with experience, the majority confirmed that they merely repeat the same requests annually in the hope that persistence will effect change, as one respondent put it, ‘we defy them to change [the policy]’.

Social Partnership
Chapter 3 provided an introduction to the development of social partnership and outlined that since 2006, Age Action Ireland and the Senior Citizens’ Parliament have been members of the voluntary and community pillar. Membership in the partnership process was seen as a major achievement and a significant progression for the older people’s sector by the majority of research respondents irrespective of organisational affiliation.

Social partnership provided those directly or indirectly (ICTU Retired Workers Committee) involved in the process with a greater opportunity to cultivate relationships with key civil servants and ministers. But similar to assessments (Ó Cinneide, 1998; Broaderick, 2002; Hardiman, 2006) outlined in Chapter 3, dissatisfaction was expressed in relation to the mechanisms and modalities of communication within the partnership talks. The topics to be discussed in the main were viewed as dictated by government rather than by the organisations. This forced organisations to take a more reactive than proactive
approach and limited their ability to present new ideas at the policy making table. The theme of simply vocalising a concern was raised by representatives of three organisations – as one respondent stated ‘everybody gets their little soapbox…..and I don’t know what they decide after they meet us’. The general picture emerging from the interviews was one of the government providing the organisations with an opportunity to raise their concerns, but subsequently offering little or no follow-up discussion of the ideas or issues raised. For some of those outside the partnership process, access to information and contacts with relevant policymakers was reduced. As the quotation below illustrates the perceived ability to influence was compromised:

If you are outside social partnership you are outside a loop. And there are people, sometimes there are lines of communication …… you might then be aware that a particular proposal has come to social partnership and is being discussed there. But you haven’t got a way of interacting with that formally and influencing it, so I think in terms of the age sector, social partnership has been limited in terms of the access of the age sector and what is going on there.

(Director, organisation 4)

Participation at policy committees
Organisations were invited to participate in policy committees to varying degrees. Research participants regarded themselves as offering an important perspective and articulating the policy priorities of older people when attending these governmental working groups. Examples of participation included two organisations (and one indirectly through the trade union body) on the Pensions Board, three (one indirectly) in social partnership, one on a Transport Committee, three on the Nursing Home Standards Working Committee and two on the development of the Nursing Home Support Scheme. Other organisations which participated less frequently in working groups had served on the Primary Care Strategy Working Group, the Elder Abuse Implementation Committee and various HSE working groups. These fora typically allowed representatives of the organisations to provide input and to comment on policy proposals, and as a respondent described it ‘counteract the Alice in Wonderland situation that many policy groups claim’.
However, the extent to which they were able to wield influence within these fora is difficult to assess based on the information gleaned in the interviews. In the case of one organisation, it appeared that an invitation to attend a government policy committee was seen as a success in of itself, or in the words of one respondent, 'we would be flattered to be invited'. This expression of deference to the government's authority is echoed in research conducted by McInerney & Adshead (2010) on civil society organisations partaking in participatory fora at the local level. Commenting on civil society representatives they interviewed, McInerney and Adshead (2010:106) relay that the 'general refrain was one typified by 'better in, than out'. Indeed, in the present research, the issue of changing or influencing the attitudes rather than policy directives of civil servants and elected representatives to one which was more age friendly was presented as a central ambition. This theme is expanded upon in greater detail in the following section.

5.3.2 Challenging, Reducing and Overcoming Institutional, Cultural or Societal Ageism
The statement 'it's not so much changing policy, its changing attitudes' made by the director of one organisation resonated with the views of members of five other organisations and highlights how changing attitudes rather than policy was frequently regarded as an important aspect of the organisations' work. All organisations made attempts to refute ageist stereotypes of older people and to provide insights into the lived reality of older people in Ireland. They also perceived a necessity for attitudinal change at the institutional, cultural and societal level.

18 The extent to which organisations were able to wield influence in these fora was unclear. It appeared that influence was often dependent on additional extraneous factors. For example, support by the Courts and a member of the Sinn Fein party was thought to have contributed to the government's decision to abolish the age-limit on jury duty. Similarly, financial concessions given to Coras Iompar Eirean (CIE) (national bus company) and the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) were believed to have assisted organisations in their efforts to secure free travel and medical cards. Attempts to influence policy were made difficult by the fact that frequently the administration was perceived as holding ideological perspectives consistent with minimizing welfare supports and the tax contributions of the rich.
Alleviating institutional ageism

Respondents believed that insufficient priority was given to the area of older people’s issues by policymakers and consequently it was part of their raison d’être to instil in policy makers a greater appreciation of the importance of the issues affecting older people. Attitudinal change was considered necessary before recognition of the fact that older people are afforded insufficient attention and prioritisation would be possible. Ageism was thought to be institutionalized and endemic in Irish social policy. Two organisations were critical of the institutionalization of a mandatory retirement age. The predominant view among staff and members of the organisations was that health policy placed an intrinsically lower priority on the needs of older people than other members of society. As one respondent argued, older people are not mainstreamed into the health system and primary health care places less value on older people than it does on other members of the population:

We are talking equality to start with. In many cases we are not looking for things from other sections in society, we are not trying to take from other sections of society, or ask for things that other sections don’t have. But we are asking for equality and that sometimes sounds very obvious, but when you see some of the situations and you hold that up as a policy. How come rehabilitation is only available to younger people, if it is scarce? Why is it deprived to an older person who has a stroke and given to somebody who has a car crash? So it would be based around that basic principle of equality and within campaigning for older people, campaigning that older people are an equal part of society that has equal value and equal access.

(Director, organisation 10)

The lack of free mammogram screening to women aged 65 years and over, the shortfall in chiropodists and the inadequate provision of community care services were given as other examples of how older people were unfairly disadvantaged. The financial burden placed on older people in need of long-term care was viewed as particularly unfair and ageist. Research participants argued that the Nursing Home Support Scheme Act of 2009 (Department of Health and Children, 2006) penalized older people to a greater extent than the wider population. The expectation that older people in need of long-term care services
be required to contribute up to 80 per cent of their assessable income towards the cost of care upfront, in addition to a maximum of 15 per cent of an individual's asset wealth (including their house), payable at the time of settlement of the individual's estate (that is, after death) was seen as an example of institutionalized ageism. As one organisation director outlined:

We are hugely concerned about the inequality that the Fair Deal\textsuperscript{19} represents, you know the fact that it is a major, major departure in Irish healthcare. And I think if it was used as an example to roll out to any other section of society I think you would have more screaming, if it was said oh well the cost of chemotherapy machines don't come cheap, you know you don't expect to be treated for nothing do you.

(Director, organisation 10)

The fact that incontinence wear, prescription charges, occupational therapy and physiotherapy sessions are not covered by the scheme and have to be paid for separately by the individual was also criticised by this respondent. It is noteworthy, that while the perceived unfairness of the Nursing Home Support Scheme was raised in almost all the interviews, most organisations had not actively pursued any lobbying activity in this area.

All the organisations looked favourably on the development of a positive strategy on ageing. However, one director intimated that a rights-based approach was the only way to guarantee that adequate protection was afforded to older people.

**Alleviating Cultural or Societal Ageism**

In addition to combating structural or institutional ageism, organisations sought to tackle cultural or societal ageism. Ageist attitudes were considered to be prevalent in wider society and reinforced by the media. For this reason organisations believed altering ageist

\textsuperscript{19} In arguably an exercise of symbolic camouflage (Estes et al. 2003) (see Chapter 2) The Nursing Home Support Scheme Act of 2009 was given the colloquial label the 'Fair Deal' by policy officials. In May 2011 the Health Service Executive announced that the annual budget for the scheme was used up and prospective claimants could not be guaranteed funding and are placed on a waiting list. Individuals unable to access the scheme must therefore either stay on the waiting list for an unspecified period of time or pay privately for their long-term care.
negative stereotypes in wider society was an integral component of their work. Addressing ageist portrayals of older people in the media was seen as a fundamental aspect of this work. It involved challenging such portrayals in advertisements through the broadcast commission or organising and advertising activities which focused on the positive and empowering aspects of growing older. Shifting these ageist attitudes and normative understandings which hold that older people are vulnerable and therefore somehow incapable of active and meaningful participation in society was regarded as a major challenge. As one respondent explained, it required that they continue to 'constantly chip away at stereotypes and negative attitudes'. Placing emphasis on older people's civic participation, research participants challenged societal exclusionary perceptions which had the effect of marginalizing older people. Instead organisations hoped to gain support across all generations on the value of older people in their communities:

What we are about is ensuring that the perception of older people is about older people being fully in control of their lives. Of being participative in their lives. Of being very involved in their communities.

(Executive committee member, organisation 6)

Research participants held that society needed to redefine its perceptions of older people. As elaborated in the preceding section increasing the participation of older people in civil society was a focus for a number of the organisations. It was anticipated that an outcome of this participation would be a more positive construction and appreciation of the value of older people. The perception that political interest in the area of older people was also influenced by the general public's interest meant that interest groups had an added incentive to change societal views of older people.

Furthermore, an appreciation of the worth and value of older people was thought to be required by professionals working with older people. Professionals working in NGOs and the community sector were not precluded from the group of professionals who hold ageist attitudes towards older people. As the staff member of one organisation relayed in the following quotation, expectations of older people needed to be challenged and greater recognition needed to be given to the capabilities of older people:
As a society we need to utterly change our mind about what people's entitlements and people's capacity are....I think society and often people working in the professions with older people often assume look they are a bit frail, they don't need anything except the basic needs. And in our projects we often see surprise, oh God that man is dancing when he is not able to walk much, or singing and he doesn't talk from one end of the week to the next, so it about policy but it is also about attitudinal change.

(Staff member, organisation 9)

Finally, public interest in the area of ageing was thought to be positively elevated by international bodies such as the European Union. According to one director, the influence of international bodies is frequently not recognised by the public but has a direct positive impact on older people and the organisations which work on their behalf.

5.3.3 EMPOWERING OLDER PEOPLE
All of the directors/chairpersons spoke about the broad and all encompassing objective of empowering their members or the older population in general. Central to research participants' understanding of empowerment was an enhanced self-esteem and confidence, 'a political awakening' and enhanced ability of older people to speak and advocate for themselves. Empowerment was conceived as occurring at the individual level but also appeared to be correlated with collective activism in the political or community arena.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT
Chapter 2 makes reference to Binstock and Quadagno's (2001) argument that one of the most important tactics available to older people's interest organisations is their potential ability to influence the votes of their members and the wider older voting constituency, a tactic they term 'electoral bluff'. In the present study a complementary theme emerging from a broad spectrum of interviews was that of 'political empowerment'- which could occur at both the collective and individual level. Efforts to bring about empowerment included the hosting of information sharing evenings for their members, where invited
politicians were given an opportunity to outline their policy priorities. Information pamphlets on the policy priorities of the organisation were, in a small number of instances, distributed to members who were then asked to petition local politicians on these issues. Empowerment at the local level was encouraged by one organisation through the allocation of philanthropic money to local groups to enable them to strengthen their voice and decision-making capacity. Political empowerment, however, was typically associated with older people exercising their voting rights.

The ‘political awakening’ of older people was raised in the interviews and focus groups as an important prerequisite to effect attitudinal change from within the population of older people themselves. The success of the medical card demonstration which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 was regarded by those interviewed to have changed older people’s perceptions of themselves and their ability to articulate their own needs and concerns in a positive manner. Furthermore, in line with the priorities of all of the organisations, the protests were thought to have elicited a sense of pride in old age and undermined prior beliefs that older people were a burden on society. In a small number of instances this new-found political empowerment was translated into some members becoming more active in their organisations and being assigned leadership roles in policy meetings.

**INDIVIDUAL VERSUS COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT**

Collective empowerment was associated with an enhanced sense of solidarity amongst the older population and increased civic participation. In such instances the aspiration was that older people would construct a new collective civic identity:

> We talked about having a movement of all the people and we are a long way from that of course but the notion that you join our organisation not only to look after your own interests but also the interests of other people would be important, almost active solidarity.

(Director, organisation 10)
The notion of contributing to the community appeared central in research participants' understanding of collective empowerment:

So our whole aim always is to affirm older people and also to support them in an attitude of participative citizenship rather than passive citizenship. And so what we would all the time be advocating is that older people would recognise gifts in themselves and that they would be prepared to constructively participate in the community.

(Executive member, organisation 6)

Other organisations promoted a concept of participation which was more orientated towards an individualised project of empowerment. A defining feature of these organisations was that they focused on personal change and the ability of older people to engage in social, physical and cultural activities in their community. The objectives in these instances revolved around enhancing the skills, status and self-esteem of older people. Empowerment was achieved through the provision of educational programmes such as Information Technology training and provision of social and recreational activities. The circulation of newsletters was also described as being a useful cost-effective mechanism to communicate and educate members. The main policy interest of one organisation was the promotion of greater participation of older people in physical activity and art initiatives.

5.4 What influences political activism and lobbying

Section 5.3 above outlined how organisations seek to effect change in a number of ways, most notably through direct political activism, alleviating institutional, cultural and societal ageism and empowering older people at the political, individual or collective level. The following section explores the factors that influence older people's interest organisations' pursuit of political activism. It argues that the extent to which organisations focus their activities on political lobbying is the result of a range of factors that are endogenous to the organization, such as personal contacts, members' interests, funding and inter-group relationships. This reaffirms the arguments made in Chapter 2 that the activities of interest organisations should be analysed using a population ecology
approach (Lowery & Gray, 2004), and reveals how organisations' strategies for influencing their target groups are closely connected to their strategies for survival.

5.4.1 INTER-RELATIONSHIP OF FUNDING AND POLITICAL ADVOCACY

As their German (Evers & Wolf, 1999) and British (Vincent, 1999) counterparts, older people's interest organisations in Ireland appeared to be heavily reliant on public funding. As noted in Chapter 3 the Irish political system, through the provision of public finances, was conducive to the mobilization of older people's interest organisations in the last decade of the twentieth century. However, some fifteen years after the inception of many of the organisations, funding restrictions now appear to discourage older people's interest organisations from engaging in advocacy work. With some notable exceptions, most national organisations did not originate as grassroots organisations and did not depend on membership dues for their survival. Instead, by and large, organisations were heavily dependent on public money in the first decade and a half following their inception.

Given that they are now unlikely to receive significant funding for purely advocacy/campaign work, organisations have a limited, or even negative, financial incentive to engage in lobbying. Only six of the organisations regarded direct political action (campaigning and lobbying for legislative changes) as their core work. For the four remaining organisations, with the exception of solicited requests for submissions, lobbying was by and large not political in nature but instead revolved around attempting to acquire funding for existing programs and services.

To ensure their financial solvency, organisations were essentially forced to diversify their activities into areas other than advocacy. The most secure sources of funding tended to be the funding of services or education programmes. This forced organisations to identify and develop services which they or others currently did not provide but which could potentially attract public funding. Once an organisation secured sustained funding for its core services, it could then attempt to become more involved in campaign and advocacy work. As a result organisations strategically orientated their work to secure government funding, while at the same time attempting to channel some resources to advocacy. This strategising is captured in the following comments of a respondent:
We have always regarded ourselves primarily as an advocacy group ... [But] it is not extremely difficult to cut funding for advocacy, government departments don’t employ gadflies that bite at them. And a lot of work certainly in the early days was project based, because if you did a project with group A or B or C, you got some money for it. But nobody is going to give you any money for funding for advocacy, even for information work, because it is always seen as soft.... So what we have said is that we are primarily an advocacy group, but part of our advocacy would be to identify services that don’t exist, or sorry, let’s put it another way, to identify unmet needs and then the services that might address those unmet needs.

(Director, organisation 10)

This tightening of the public purse introduces a degree of ambiguity into the organisations’ area of focus and leads to potential overlap and competition for funding with other organisations, as all are forced to seek funds from the same shrinking public funding streams. Another disadvantage of the organisations’ reliance on public money, relayed by a number of research participants was the tendency not to publicly criticise the work of government in case it might jeopardise their funding. Echoing arguments made in Chapter 3 regarding the nebulous connection between funding and critical advocacy in the Irish context (Achenson et al., 2004; Hughes et al., 2007; Kirby, 2006), one director commented on voluntary organisations’ ‘timidity’ in response to the government’s ‘vindictiveness’, similarly another director stated:

The degree of fear around independent advocacy is enormous in terms of the government system....I think there has been a kind of shut down in terms of trying to narrow the ground or the space within which people can independently advocate.

(Director, organisation 4)

Of particular relevance to older people’s interest organisations is the stipulation by the Charities Act 2009 that charities cannot engage in lobbying activities. This places a major restriction on the extent to which organisations can become involved in political advocacy, as it puts them at risk of losing their tax-exempt status. One director explained the almost farcical scenario into which this Catch-22 type limitation forces them:
I have an ongoing battle with the women in the Revenue Office, that you can't have a tax number if you are a lobbying organisation...[She asks] “Do we lobby?”, and I said, “Not at all, let me put it this way to you, occasionally the minister would call us in to ask our views about certain things and we would certainly give them, but we don't do lobbying”.

(Director, organisation 2)

Furthermore, the recent transfer of funding responsibility for older people's interest organisations from the Department of Health and Children to the Health Service Executive (HSE)\textsuperscript{20} has increased the financial insecurity of these organisations and creates further uncertainty with regard to their continued role as advocates. The tenuous link between advocacy and service provision has been questioned by the Health Service Executive. The general perception among research participants was that the HSE had a low regard for their work. More problematic for the organisations is the fact that advocacy work is not classified as a service by the Health Service Executive and therefore is not funded. Relaying this lack of appreciation of the HSE for their work one respondent stated:

The HSE funded us when they set up and then two years ago they suddenly announced that because we do not provide a service, because we are an advocacy group that they could no longer give us funding and they just took the whole lot away over night. And that was an appalling thing because advocacy is a service and most of us are volunteers and are on various HSE groups in our own areas from elder abuse to you name it, community forums, health groups and so on, so we certainly do hours of work, doing various HSE things voluntarily.

(Director, organisation 1)

\textsuperscript{20} The HSE is responsible for the provision of health, community care and personal social services either directly or through private health service providers, voluntary hospitals and voluntary/community organisations. The Minister for Health and Children has overall responsibility for the Executive in Government.
The transfer of funding from the Department of Health and Children to the HSE, was also significant from another perspective. Relationships, which had been established with the staff and officials of the Department of Health and Children, were no longer useful for operational purposes. It consequently represented an overnight severing of the connection and understanding the organisations had with the government. Administrative support was viewed to have diminished following the transfer to the HSE. This was compounded by the fact that the HSE was a large organisation and was difficult to navigate. A tangible outcome of this transfer of responsibility to the HSE was an increased reliance of the organisations on philanthropic support.

5.4.2 INTER-RELATIONSHIP OF MEMBERS’ INTERESTS AND POLITICAL ADVOCACY

Even among those organisations whose central remit was political advocacy, policy-stances appeared somewhat vague, and in some instances a degree of passivity or timidity was discernible. For example, the seeming passivity of one organisation in the context of the Nursing Home Support Scheme was captured by one director’s statement that ‘we didn’t come out against it one way or the other’. Further examples of this timidity emerged in other interviews in statements such as, ‘we don’t criticize’, ‘they give us a good hearing because older people vote’ and ‘we just try to get our point across’.

Another internal reason potentially limiting the eagerness of organisations to make explicit their policy positions are contexts where discrepancies exist between the profile of their average members and that of the target group on which the organisation wishes to focus attention. Alluding to the difficulties faced in such contexts one director explained that, ‘a lot of our time is spent on things that really are only for a portion of our membership’ a situation reiterated by another respondent:

We would feel that the biggest target group for our organisation would be a person on a single income. But a lot of the people who are active [in the organisation] you will find aren’t on a single income, they’re not on a single pension.

(Executive committee member, organisation 1)
This combination of a diverse ‘membership’ and a reliance on limited public money would appear to be conducive towards adoption of rather vague policy positions which on the surface may appear to lack substance. Adopting such a stance could be categorized as being ‘intentionally ambiguous’ (Estes, 1979). As Estes (1979:66) remarks in the context of legislative and administrative mandates in the United States, ‘intentional ambiguity obviates the necessity for making value decisions explicit’. Such an approach may be expedient for older people’s interest organisations in the short-term, since vague value statements may have the effect of not antagonizing a particular constituency within the broad population of older people or of alienating their primary funder, the State. However, it is also likely to be to the detriment of the development of a long-term social policy which is consistent with the aspirations of older people and their organisations as, ironically, its unintended effect may be to provide policymakers with the latitude they need to impose their own policy agendas while appearing to be in compliance with the position of those organisations which represent older people’s interests.

5.4.3 Capacity limitations

Capacity limitations were evident in all organisations interviewed. As a result all organisations, including those whose main raison d’etre was lobbying, had to be highly selective about the policy issues they actively pursued. The focus of their lobbying activities was dictated by the availability of time, the level of expertise within the organisation and the need to allocate their limited resources to other key initiatives. Constraints arising from funding limitations put them in a position where they were forced to respond to policy proposals instigated by government. This posed a dilemma for organisations as it constrained their potential to invest time in policy issues that were not on the government’s policy agenda. In addition, the amount of time required to pursue specific policy issues forced organisations to channel their resources into a restricted number of policy areas and posed problems for them with follow-up on implementation where they were successful in realizing policy change. The labour intensive nature of the work, the dilemma with regard to implementation follow-up, and the need to strategically contextualize choices in light of the potential return on the effort invested was captured by this director:

You get a piece of legislation through. It’s been in your life for God knows how long and then you move on to something else, and that is the system ....The Fair Deal has
taken up a huge amount of time. Now if we want to check on what is really happening with the Fair Deal that is going to take another three years. You know picking up poor cases, that identify either the problems we feared, or the problems that arise because we hadn’t thought of them and that is happening all the time, you know. That is just one piece of legislation for 4.8 per cent of the population, what about the other 95 per cent?

(Director, organisation 10)

Statements made in the interviews corroborate the work of Salisbury (1990) which suggests that organisations are dependent on, and directed by, the policy priorities of government. Thus, careful and deliberate consideration was given to how organisations allocate time to the relevant policy issues and other non-advocacy work. To bolster their capacity and sustainability the national organisations formed alliances with older people’s organisations at the local level whose members could lobby politicians in their constituencies. However, attempts to affiliate local organisations were challenging and limited resources, staff and time, acted as a barrier to local capacity building. Frequently, contact with local groups was ad-hoc and opportunistic, as one respondent pragmatically put it, ‘we have to grab opportunities’. While the issue was not raised in the interviews, it is conceivable that should a greater emphasis be placed on the formation of alliances as a means for lobbying, national organisations may eventually compete for access to local groups. Another complicating factor in the relationships between national and local organisations is that the expectations and demands of members of local groups were either not aligned with those of the national organization, or were beyond their ability to meet:

I had hoped initially that we would set up local groups which would be self-sustainable, but as time passed it became very obvious that they were not self-sustainable, they always wanted, not just administration, but they wanted presence, you know they wanted [our executive officer] to be there, and they didn’t want to be run necessarily by themselves and the hope was that those leaders that were each in community would filter up and take over but people didn’t want that at all.

(Director, organisation 2)
5.4.4 **Collaboration**

The international literature highlights how coalition building among older people's interest organisations can work to the advantage of individual organisations and strengthen the overall voice of the sector (Binstock & Quadagno, 2001; Street, 1993). In the present study collaboration and membership under umbrella organisations was particularly attractive for those national organisations whose main focus was the provision of social and recreational activities, and for whom political advocacy was only one strand of their work. In such instances collaboration was viewed as a vehicle to become involved in 'hard policy issues' or as noted by a respondent:

> [An umbrella group is] a useful avenue because it means that we can bring the issues that people are talking about, their everyday concerns to a broader table for it to be taken onboard, rather than us trying to be everything to everybody. We can't, you know.

(Director, organisation 8)

The formation of an umbrella organisation was viewed by some as a mechanism for enhancing the credibility of, and generating wider public support for, the older people's sector. Membership of an umbrella group, it was believed, could provide organisations with an opportunity to capitalize on their collective strength. Consensus building was an essential aspect of this work:

> I would have some involvement with Older and Bolder and my understanding is that it was a meeting of minds. It is an alliance built on shared understanding and with any of us there can be different emphasis, individually we can have different emphasis on things but actually it is a platform to come together and take a big picture and have a unified voice across the sector, representative of a broad range of older people.

(Staff member, organisation 9)

As the quotation above highlights, the desire for intergroup collaboration was tempered by a desire to also maintain organisational autonomy. Organisations strove to assert and
maintain distinct areas of specialization. Two directors mentioned how they did not want to subsume their position in an umbrella organisation or relinquish their role as director. In the words of one director, 'some older people's groups phone up and say yes that is what we want [a collation of older people] we want to join a choir, now who is going to be the choirmaster'. While the theme of a 'unified voice' was central to many of the research participants, statements made during the interviews called into question the extent to which this could be accomplished. A factor which was cited as having the potential to reduce collaboration was inter-group rivalry. Despite the affirmations that they all work for a collective cause, namely, the betterment of life for older people in Ireland, statements made in the interviews and focus groups reveal deep-seated tensions, vastly divergent opinions and even resentments across some of the groups. Many research participants talked openly about competition within the sector, but suggested that this competition is never openly acknowledged. A cause of this rivalry may be related to competition for scarce resources. As the following quotation illustrates, it appears that organisations want to preserve their ideas so as not to financially advantage another organisation:

I meet all the same people, and they are very, very charming and nobody is holding back, but when it comes to the crunch of actually working together for a common aim to achieve you know a joint outcome, show me a few examples of it and I really would be delighted but there are not many there... NGOs don't work more together, because they are terrified if they give you, if they tell you something, somebody will swipe their idea or get funding for it, cause there are people who do that, we have evidence of it.

(Director, organisation 2)

Some antagonism was apparent towards organisations who employ paid younger staff to speak on behalf of older people, instead of older people themselves. As one respondent stated, 'we don't need people speaking on our behalf, we can do that on behalf of ourselves'. While, by and large, respondents saw this competition and antagonism as a normal feature of the sector, others believed that it compromised the sector and weakened its voice.
5.5 Conclusion

This chapter sought to examine who older people’s interest organisations represent, how they seek to represent this constituency, and the factors which impact on organisations’ engagement in advocacy work. It revealed how organisations may intentionally use vague and broad terms to describe their constituencies and when appropriate may place emphasis on representing ‘vulnerable’ older people. Borrowing a term used by Carrol Estes, it argued that organisations may employ language that is intentionally ambiguous. Such 'intentional ambiguity' can serve to accommodate the needs of a wider population of older people. In addition, it can serve to downplay differences of opinion within the population of older people, something which can be highly significant when lobbying for policy change for the general older population.

The chapter highlighted the fact that the manner in which organisations ascertained the opinions of their members and wider constituency varied significantly. Given that some organisations appear to have limited contact with their members, beyond those who are on committees, the question arises as to whether or not older people’s interest organisations are necessarily always the best conduit for the expression of the aspirations and demands of older people. Arguably, the central issue may not be who is speaking on behalf of older people, but, on what grounds can they claim that they are expressing the views of this constituency. Ideally, policy decisions should be made on the basis of a bottom-up deliberative process, but the ability to do this appears to be constrained by resources and members’ limited desire to participate in advocacy work. Internal difficulties sometimes compromised the extent to which organisations could interact with their members and the older population in general and their ability to stimulate and facilitate the active engagement of a broad spectrum of older people in the policy making process. In this context the possibility of older people’s interest organisations displaying oligarchic tendencies as hypothesized by Michel (cited by McFarland, 2004), where decision making is centralized and the preserve of organisation leaders, seems heightened. While this was not discernable in the findings, the potential of such an eventuality nevertheless exists and appears to be exacerbated by resource challenges.
The chapter has also highlighted that lobbying and advocacy work is not a pivotal strand of the work of all older people's interest organisations. The analysis suggests that some organisations do not specifically seek to effect political change through direct means, but instead seek to affect attitudinal change in the general public, help inform members of political issues and equip them with the tools to critically evaluate age-related policies so they are more empowered to voice their opinions and ultimately exercise their voting power. In particular, the elimination of ageism was a central objective of all the organisations. Both manifest institutional and societal ageism were regarded as being prevalent. At the institutional level, policy issues relating to older people were considered to be problematised and cloaked in the language of crisis. Social equality was non-existent and older people were viewed as disadvantaged in areas such as long-term care. Older people's interest organisations therefore placed emphasis on facilitating the positive participation of older people in the community to enable them to fulfil their personal potential and make a meaningful contribution to the communities in which they live.

Canvassing politicians, attendance at policy committees and policy submissions, were nonetheless core work of the main lobbying organisations. Many relied on the informality of the Irish political system to influence policy decision, making formal submissions only with regard to the budget or in response to a public call for submissions. The reliance on such a strategy is potentially problematic as it implies that older people's interest organisations may not seek to be engaged in on-going discussion on the issues of concern to them with policymakers and decision makers. Furthermore, concentrating exclusively on the budget cycle, which is not focused on long-term restructuring of society, but rather short-term economic modifications, may not be the most relevant or fruitful avenue for organisations interested in effecting long-term policy changes. While some organisations are granted representation in governmental working groups, it appears that in many of these working groups there was dissatisfaction with the mechanisms and modalities of communication and suggestions were made that deliberation on issues raised and associated decision making processes lacked transparency.

Finally, the chapter revealed some of the reasons why older people's interest organisations may seek to limit the extent to which they engage in political advocacy. It points to the relevance of the population ecology theory of interest group representation as advanced by Lowery and Gray (2000) which emphasises the importance of
organisation survival within an ecology of interest groups. In particular, it highlighted that organisations face different internal pressures. They are faced with the challenges of securing financial support, sustaining the interest of their members and, working within severe resource constraints, relying on their members to act as voluntary participants. Competition across the older people's sector appeared in some instances to be related to resource constraints and compromised the sector's collective voice. The outcome of this competition was that organisations rarely engaged in collective policy campaigns thereby failing to capitalize on their collective rather than individual strengths. This theme is closely connected to whether or not the members of older people's interest organisations share a collective 'identity politics', an issue which is explored in the following chapter.
6: FINDINGS II: IDENTITY POLITICS – OLDER PEOPLE’S PERSPECTIVES

6.1 INTRODUCTION
There are few studies which explore the members of older people’s interest organisations conceptualisation of old age. As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, older people's conceptualisation of old age is argued to be in a state of flux and has been given insufficient attention in the social gerontology literature. A focus on older people's conceptualisation of old age has the potential to contribute to discussions on cultural perspectives of ageing – something which has been flagged to be of relevance to both critical gerontologists and postmodern theorists alike. It is also highly relevant to the existence and work of older people’s interest organisations, since it can elucidate whether or not the theme of an ‘identity politics’ is relevant to the members of older people's interest organisations, and whether this ‘politics’, is constructed around the lines of chronological age or other issues such as a shared perception of marginality and discrimination (Young, 2000). Based on an analysis of six focus groups with a total of 30 members of older person’s interest groups, this chapter addresses question four of the thesis, namely, how do the members of older people’s interest organisations conceptualise old age and what implications does this have for the organisation of older people’s interest organisations? Section 6.2 outlines how the members of older people’s interest organisations conceptualise ‘old age’ and Section 6.3 explores how membership in an older people’s interest organisations provides an outlet for members to maintain and reconstruct aspects of their identity at older ages.

6.2 CONCEPTUALIZING ‘OLD AGE’

6.2.1 AN AGE-BASED IDENTITY
Chronological age was not a construct on which research participants framed their identity. In a small number of cases participants made conflicting statements about how they perceive their own ageing. For example, Margret a 76 year old active member of an organisation spoke about celebrating her ageing and being proud of her age, however,
later in the interview she stated how she ages successfully by denying the fact she is ageing. The incongruity of her age-identity is clearly visible in the following quotations:

I find myself all the time saying to people, you know I’m such and such an age because I don’t think that I should apologise to people. In fact I think it’s a gift.

Later in the interview however, she made the remark,

I do believe in Positive Ageing myself because the way I am ageing I am ignoring it. That’s my way of reporting it.

(Margret, Organisation 6)

This suggests that people may be ambivalent about how they construct their identity and at times an age-based identity is undermined by a desire to forget about ageing and the ageing process. While research participants could not readily associate their identity as solely an age-based one they universally criticised societal conceptions of old age as a time of decline and inactivity. Such portrayals were thought not to reflect the reality of old age. To highlight the insignificance of age as a category research participants spoke about people who remained active cognitively and socially and maintained lifelong hobbies or pursuits. The important issue was that identity was maintained rather than renegotiated.

That individuals age differently was echoed to varying extents across the focus groups. Research participants repeated how some people choose to maintain activity levels as they aged and others to disengage. The reasons why individuals may opt for either one of these strategies, however, was not expanded upon. Despite the fact that people stated they did not want to focus on their age or ageing per se – they simultaneously asserted that ‘old age’ was not something which should be constructed as negative in the wider society. In fact, virtually all the research participants were critical of depictions which cast ageing as something negative. The antithesis of this, positive ageing, was only discussed in one focus group, where it was argued that it inadvertently attempts to conceal the natural ageing process, by portraying an image of older people which does not allow for physical, cognitive or social decline. Echoing arguments made by Tulle-Winton (1999) and Holstein
and Minkler (2007) that the positive ageing paradigm, by placing a disproportionate amount of attention on health as a measure of success, devalues many people (both young and old) and fails to attend to the existential experience of human development Jenny stated:

And the stress that that [the notion of positive ageing] puts on people that they cannot be comfortable being the age they are and what made me slightly cynical was I was seeing all these very elderly people with limited mobility talking about growing old gracefully. And talking about their rights to an active sex life and things like that. And the next year I’d go along to this conference, they’d be gone to heaven. They’d have disappeared. So the whole struggle is getting that happy medium and being comfortable in that. The reason why we wouldn’t focus so much on Positive Ageing we would want people to acknowledge that it’s a fact of life that as time goes on our capacity diminishes physically and mentally. And we can’t deny that. And it’s how to manage that in the most positive way.

(Jenny, organisation 6)

6.2.2 Health as an identity-defining construct
Health appeared as an important identity-defining construct. Individuals were not thought to necessarily identify with an age-based identity particularly if they were in good health.

Research participants’ perceptions of identity thus went beyond that of an age-based one. They did not wish to be isolated as a group on the periphery of society, but instead viewed themselves as equal members of society, as one respondent phrased it, ‘older people don’t want to be all the time with older people’. Instead, research participants situated themselves as members of an intergenerational family. Echoing arguments made by Young (2000:99) that ‘the lives of different individuals are structured by differing constellations of [social] groups’ respondents identified themselves as members of the wider multi-generational family. Relationships which had developed between grandparents and grandchildren in particular were mentioned in all the focus groups as something to be celebrated and grandparenting was regarded as an important role from which satisfaction was derived.
The occurrence of ailments, tiredness, or reduced energy, however, brought about an awareness of the ageing process and the potential possibility of a decline in cognitive and physical functions. However, it appeared that research participants did not wish to dwell on this issue. This sentiment was encapsulated in the following statement:

When I get up in the morning I don’t say to myself, 'I'm 76'. I get up in the morning and I say what have I to do. Now okay, a lot of the time if I'm coming up those stairs and not feeling good I am saying, I'm feeling my age.

(Margaret, organisation 6)

A distancing between older people in residential care and the research participants was discernible in the focus groups. This ‘distancing’ in itself is not a new finding (Tulle-Winton, 1999), however, the interest lies in the fact that this distancing is perhaps a reaction to the ageist categorisation that is thought to occur in the media and general public, where older people are cast as feeble, dependent and in many instances as nursing home residents. The distancing of infirm or dependent older people within the community was also discernable in one focus group. This distancing was more ambivalent since it took the form of exclusion or non-accommodation. More particularly, research participants relayed how their organisation could not accommodate within their membership people who were incapacitated physically or mentally. Such people could only be accommodated if they were accompanied by a carer:

The organisation is not geared to be a carer’s organisation, and there is a thin line there, and yes we have people travelling and have crutches and one or two who are just not fully with it, but usually they come in the company of a friend, and they could be looked after. Look let's say we go as far as we possibly can, we simply cannot take stretcher cases, we can't take wheelchairs, so we can take wheelchairs if there is public transport but remember that you are supposed to be able to look after yourself cause the core ethos of [our organisation] is older people doing things for themselves, by themselves, that is the ethos, now how far we can go, is really up to the individual groups.

(Oliver, organisation 8)
However, it should be emphasised that this stood in stark contrast to the sentiments expressed in four of the focus groups. In fact, the need to protect and ensure the welfare of those who were ill or isolated was stated as a key function by members of these four organisations. An example of the inclusion of infirm members in a palliative care committee was given as the ideal scenario of inclusion:

Now what we did with that is that one of our members is in full time care because she has lost her mobility but she is a very mentally alert woman. So when the [palliative care] report came to us, I brought it up to her and the group in the hospital where she is and asked her would she be interested in joining their committee on palliative care. Now her husband said to her, he said 'oh I find that very depressing.' Well she said 'I don't because I am meeting very interesting people'...And she's contributing now you see. And even contributing it does give you a sense of worth...

(Alice, organisation 6)

In these four focus groups research participants, therefore did not want to disassociate themselves from the sick or infirm older people. Notwithstanding this they did not want their own identity as an older person to be subsumed within a stigmatised categorisation of old age as a time of infirmity. These findings find resonance in Barnes et al.'s (2011) argument that a 'fault line' may exist within the members of older people's interest organisations which demarcates, the active from the inactive, and in the current thesis, the dependent from the independent. The findings also suggest that research respondents unwittingly dichotomise the older population along similar lines to Laslett's (2006) Third and Fourth age distinction.

6.2.3 CARICATURES OF OLD AGE
Research participants believed that normative constructions of older people were negative. The majority argued that depictions of older people in mainstream society marginalised older people. The identity of older people was undermined by institutionalised and cultural ageism. Statements made in the focus groups echoed those of Phillipson (1998:51) who argues the identity of older people is placed into a 'zone of
indeterminacy’ marginal to both work and welfare. The medicalisation of old age was viewed as pejorative and was considered as contributing towards the perpetuation of stereotypical negative perceptions of old age as a time of illness, frailty and dependence. The media were viewed as one of the worst culprits in perpetuating negative stereotypes of older people. In the following dialogue research participants spoke about older people being ghettoised as irrelevant citizens. Older women in particular were affected by, paradoxically, being rendered invisible:

Frank: The media are still not representing us properly, we are very unhappy about newspapers and television coverage on older people. 

Interviewer: Why are you not happy with it?

Frank: We are represented as a kind of separate group, a ghetto group of older people, who have specific problems, which they exaggerate. You are on your way out is another way of looking at it, then you have a younger group, 50 say and they are working.

Tom: And they always say we are moaning, which we are not.

Frank: and paying taxes and all the rest of it and they have to be looked after, especially with the marketing and all the rest. And then you have the children, the important group now. But we are the bottom of the heap when it comes to proper recognition. I just tell you, when you watch any television and when they mention older people, down they go to the wrinkly legs, and the Zimmer frame and the stick.....Very rarely do you see older people advertising stuff. And the ladies suffer mostly from that, cause as soon as you come to a particular age, women disappear, you see all the soaps, they shove them out the door as soon as they get to a certain age.

(Organisation 5)

It is noteworthy that Frank was the only focus group respondent who had constructed older people’s identity as potential consumers. In the previous statement he is lamenting the invisibility of older people in the media and the fact that older women are not represented in commercial advertisements. In this sense, it appears that this respondent
would prefer the construction of older people as consumers. The fact this theme was only addressed by one individual, however, does not suggest that this depiction of older people as consumers is a central issue of importance to the focus group attendees.

The negative categorisation of older people was also thought to emerge from the government. Older people's issues were viewed as relatively unimportant and on the periphery of the policy agenda. Politicians were considered to have little regard for older people and to even harbour negative attitudes towards them:

I heard one TD talking [on television] and his attitude is that people over 65 have had their day and the people they should concentrate on are the younger people, where all the money should go, they look at us as expendable .......but the people in government they know that we won't be around that long and that they are sort of using that as a lever.

(Paddy, organisation 1)

Respondents argued that government portrays older people as a group who have little to contribute and hence a burden to the rest of society. They regarded their rights as being undermined by the framing of discussions of older people in the context of a crisis or burden. The discourse of blame is captured in the following dialogue between focus groups research participants:

Jason: We also feel at the moment, we are almost a target for the way the country is at the moment, the fact that we are living too long actually, unless they bring in some euthanasia or something to knock us out, we are definitely living too long

Frank: And costing too much

Jason: And costing too much, we are almost the bullyboys now there are so many over 65s in Ireland at the moment.

(Organisation 5)
The ‘worth’ of old people was also viewed to be less than other members of society as was encapsulated in the statement by a respondent when referring to an accident involving his mother which was calculated as ‘low claim’ and thus of little relevance:

The unfortunate thing is that society in general values older people less than they do any other section of the community and that comes homes to you, well it came home to me many years ago, when my mother was knocked down in a car accident and they put it down as a low value claim, ok, because of her age, and it was negligence on the driver’s part, but it was seen to be not worth while pursuing it because of low value and because of her age. She was 78 years of age, and that is the way society in general views an older person.  

(Vincent, organisation 8)

6.2.4 Generational identity: Pre-retirement contributions
Respondents appeared to share a collective ‘generational identity’ which was revealed through the relaying of stories of their past. The importance of storytelling as a consciousness raising mechanism is underscored by Young (2000:73) who argues it allows members to ‘identify the basis of their affinity...[and] help affinity groupings give an account of their own individual identities in relation to their social positioning and their affinities with others’. The importance of storytelling was elucidated in the focus groups where it was used to illustrate research participants’ shared collective past. Research participants expressed a shared generational identity which revolved around the fact that they had collectively, as a cohort, lived in the economically constrained decades of the 1940s, 50s and 80s. They had endured harsh economic times in the past and when working had paid high taxes. Individuals relayed stories about their own individual histories to highlight how they had earned (through tax payments) and were entitled (as a consequence of tax payments and past hardships) to the welfare benefits they received. As such, they also shared a non-stigmatising ‘state-determined identity’ (a theme explored below in greater detail). An example of how the telling of personal stories was relevant to their relationship with the government is provided in the following focus group dialogue:

John: I mean I can only speak for the 40s, some of them can speak for the 30s, and I come up through a generation when we all went to school in our sopping feet, literally there was holes in our shoes. And we came up through that generation
and we had nothing, and things moved on and we worked on and paid taxes in the 70s. I remember working in the post office in the 70s and there was 60 or 70 per cent tax on over time, and you were doing this overtime to have something, it wasn’t to bloody well go on a foreign holiday, it was to feed your family, and you were paying 60 per cent tax on it....

ALL: Yeah

Paddy: That is across the country, that is the mindset of older people at the moment

Richard: We were born and reared in tough times. Like I can remember the Second World War. I can remember German planes were coming over, and after the war there was a tremendous situation with unemployment and people had to go to other countries and send money home, and I was one of them. And I was lucky enough to be able to come back and get work here. But regardless it was tough times and you didn’t make much money and you couldn’t stay in school because like my father died when I was 16. I had to give it up cause I was the only son in the family and I had to support [the family]. So we all came through tough times, we all made our contribution to the country and now the government is trying to cut back and cut back on us and that’s not fair.

(Organisation 1)

The telling of such stories highlighted older people’s collective ‘generational identity’ and was used to justify the welfare benefits research participants received and legitimate their demands for improved benefits. The notion of entitlement was central in all the focus groups discussions. Research participants framed their entitlements as a ‘right’ which was earned through payment of taxes. Susan who was in her mid-60s argued that this sense of entitlement is highly relevant to ‘younger old’ women, who like herself, were economically active for most of their lives:

I think we have earned the right. We have worked all our life, whereas the generation before us may have got handouts, but we are not getting hand-outs we have worked, I mean I worked 47 years ... we demand what we are entitled to, whereas, people of [my mother’s] generation because they stayed at home,
probably didn't feel, you know the way my mother-in-law they wouldn't take anything from social welfare, they would go why would you ask for anything, they wouldn't ask for anything, home care, home help, they always shied from it. My mother-in-law was 90 when she died and wouldn't have anyone near her home, anyone come into her house, oh no, because it was beneath you, but our generation accept it, because we believe we are entitled to it.

(Susan, organisation 2)

Far from viewing the welfare state as being redundant in their lives, as has been argued by some cultural theorists, these people believe they entered into a lifelong contractual relationship with the state. This relationship is viewed as a reciprocal relationship, where previous contributions are acknowledged through the provision of pension and welfare supports. Through previous economic contributions they had earned their right to a secure future, which should be bulwarked by the state. There appeared to be a lack of questioning about older people's rights vis-à-vis other citizens rights. In one instance, the notion of merit, as articulated by Jönson and Nilsson, (2007) was discussed. In this instance, the notion of the unmerited (namely, unemployed and migrants) was raised:

But I do think as Irish people in general, we are lucky in a lot of the things we get. I know they are pulling back on a lot of things for younger people and you know there are pulling back on the children's allowance, but I think they actually went overboard on a lot of those things, and they cost us a lot, you know giving children's allowance to people who don't even live in the country and thing like that whereas ordinary people...and another thing I always found was wrong to give so much money to young unemployed people and they have cut back on that, I think that is a brilliant idea, because less money they might look for a job, more money they won't, I think that is good, you have to keep them on their toes in general.

(Susan, organisation 2)

Research participants did not believe they had stopped contributing to society once they were no longer economically active. Of significance to all the focus group attendees were
the contributions they continued to make to civil society and families. Research participants underscored the contribution older people make as volunteers in organisations such as the Meals on Wheels and the Seniors' Helpline. The provision of child care services to family members was also mentioned by many as an important activity. These unpaid activities were viewed as being valuable contributions, which, while not stated explicitly as meriting financial support, validated the income they received from the state.

6.3 Identity Maintenance and Reconstruction in Older People's Interest Organisations

Individual motives for joining an older people's interest organisation were diverse and reflective of the range of categories of organisations. Membership of an older people's interest organisation was categorised as one aspect of a multi-dimensional life. In the words of one respondent, membership in the organisation, 'plays a role but it's not everything'. Gubrium (1993) comments how the 'local culture' in residential and community support groups provided Alzheimer sufferers a cultural space to discuss and assign meaning to their changed lives. Similarly, membership in an older people's interest organisation provided members with a 'cultural space' to both recreate and maintain their identity. It helped them to maintain their autonomy and provided a centre from which to organise aspects of their social life. For those who were engaged in political activism pre-retirement, in a trade union or the women's movement, membership provided a mechanism to maintain their identity as an activist. Membership also provided an anchor to negotiate new forms of identity, through the provision of education and cultural activities. And finally, it provided individuals with a mechanism to safeguard their 'state-determined identity', when this identity was viewed to be under threat by proposed policy changes in pension and welfare supports. These themes are expanded upon below.

6.3.1 Maintaining and Fostering a Sense of Autonomy and Comradeship

A recurring theme across many of the focus groups was that membership in an older people's interest organisation offered an outlet to meet other people. This was particularly the case for those in active retirement association type organisations. Discussions in these groups centred less around older people's political identity and more around the notion of
comradeship. Despite the desire mentioned above to be involved with all age cohorts in society, forming friends with people of their own generation was viewed in favourable terms. However, the basis of these friendships may not be chronological age alone. Statements, such as having the opportunity to meet people 'of the same ilk' and the following statement suggests that groupings within the population of older people may at times centre around additional identity constructs such as socio-economic status:

But the activities that [name of organisation] provides to older people also has a very big place in improving the lives of older people, because it gives them something to get washed and dressed and go out to and for a lot of people, and especially for people with a second pension and are fairly comfortably off it gives them a social platform and that is what they are looking for.

(Karen, organisation 1)

The opportunity to meet people whose background is concordant with their own was therefore construed in positive terms. A finding which supports Young's (2000) arguments that identity is a function of the structural and cultural forces which influence each person at the individual level.

Membership in an older people's interest organisation was particularly important for those with limited familial networks, for example those who were widowed, unmarried or geographically distant from their family. The opportunity to meet other individuals was particularly welcomed by those who had become single as a result of bereavement. Membership in an organisation can alleviate a dependence on younger family members who may want to 'get on' with their own lives. The remarks made by Gavin provide an insight into the social support and sense of belonging that can be derived from membership in an organisation:

There is a coming together of minds. So we can all talk and discuss where we are going, what we are doing with our lives. Unfortunately a lot of the people, including myself have been bereaved and left without. Bereavement is an awful thing. It happens to all of us and so you can communicate with others....otherwise I would be ringing up my two kids, but they have got their own lives, they don't
want to hear me talking about small things....so I can have a structure on my life with the [name of organisation], which I couldn't do otherwise....I have got pals within it, about five guys and every couple of weeks we go to the cinema. So we are a group within a group and we have a man's night out usually the guys, and we go and see a fantastic film in [name of town], we go to the pub, we have a laugh and a chat and then afterwards we have fish and chips, like the last of the summer wine, we have a great time..... If I wasn't in it, I wouldn't have met these people, it is great to meet guys, they are living alone, manage quite well, are getting out and about but within the [organisation] I have made pals, they are not just fellow members they have become pals, we talk men's talk.

(Gavin, organisation 8)

A reduction in social networks was something research participants were forced to contend with. 'Old age' as a time in which one is confronted with bereavement was mentioned in all the focus group interviews. Following such a significant life changing event, the possibility of identity renegotiation became salient. For some, the impetus to join an older person's interest group stemmed from a desire to counteract this reduction in friends and colleagues. Membership in older people's interest organisations served as a useful mechanism to enhance ones self-esteem by eliciting a new sense of belonging. In addition, the educative benefits of participation in an older people's interest organisation were underscored by a small number of research participants. Those who mentioned this emphasised the importance of remaining mentally stimulated and keeping informed.

6.3.2 MAINTAINING AND CREATING A POLITICAL ACTIVIST IDENTITY
Chapter 2 noted how much of the literature on individuals motivations to join interest organisations assumes that individuals engage in an exercise of 'instrumental-to-self-calculator' or put simply, is based on self-interest. However, the findings in the current research corroborate those of Barnes et al. (2006, 2011) that for many, membership is based rather around achieving social justice for older people.
A large proportion of research participants who were engaged in the advocacy or political strand of the organisations were committed social activists pre-retirement. This is not a new finding in itself, but in the current discussion on age-identity the interest lies in the fact that the findings suggest that retirement is not necessarily a time of reinvention but instead a time to maintain pre-retirement activities which have been an established part of one's identity. In this context it could be argued that 'identity maintenance' is, for some, more usual post retirement than 'identity reconstruction'. Membership in an older people's interest organisation provides a mechanism to maintain the identity of a political activist. They had a life-long interest in the areas of social justice and equality and campaigning for the rights of the disadvantaged. These respondents wanted to reinvest their skills and life experience by becoming active volunteers in an older people's interest organisation. For example, Michael relayed how he has been an active social campaigner since age 14, and Margret had been active in both the Trade Union and Women's Movement:

I am sure that the reason that I got involved in this was that I was kind of an active trade unionist and like I continued on then, and we said like we really got involved by accident but just continue on that.

(Margaret, organisation 6)

Research participants who could be classified as activists tended to focus greater attention in their discussion on the wider population of older people rather than their own needs. Importance was placed on the role they could play in bringing about improved living conditions for vulnerable older people. Vulnerability was related to social isolation, lack of access to transport services and economic insecurity. They spoke more frequently about the governments' unwillingness to adequately provide for older people and negative depictions of older people in wider society. This group appeared to be more deeply committed to repudiating the negative categorisation of older people as frail and dependent. Furthermore, they spoke more frequently about their desire to alter older people's self conceptions, enabling them to recognise their own potential as a unified political lobbying group.
Research participants were unsure about what motivates some older people to engage politically to a greater extent than others. The argument was forwarded that a culture of citizen participation, through, for example, the trade union movement, was not embedded in the Irish psyche. As a result people were not accustomed to the idea of joining campaign groups. There may be some truth in this argument, given that membership in local and national political groups, trade unions and professional associations in Ireland is below the OECD average (Hughes et al., 2007). In the present study trade union affiliation pre-retirement was viewed as a facilitator to ones continued engagement in interest organisations post-retirement. Individuals who were not previously involved in trade unions were considered less likely to be involved in interest organisations post-retirement:

There are lots of firms out there, no union, no nothing and people have nowhere to go and no one to represent them and that is why there are so many people don’t even know about us. So that is one of the reasons why there are so many people out there who are not members, unless it comes from their job, or your union and they have an older people's branch.

(Eamon, organisation 7)

Another explanation for people's disinterest in engaging in the political side of the organisation was that people wanted to focus on their own recreational pursuits in retirement. Individuals who pre-retirement were not involved in community activities or membership organisations and post-retirement were in good health were viewed to be less predisposed to join an older person’s interest group:

As long as your health is okay and you have an adequate income, you’re really not going to be going around looking for clubs and other things unless you were the type who always did that. And like, a lot of people just don’t think about ageing. You only think about ageing when the bones give or the hand gives.

(Ruth, organisation 6)
An element of political passivity and apathy was also attributed to some members of the general older population. This political passivity was attributed to the former dominant influence of the Catholic Church which was thought to have promulgated a subservient acceptance of the status quo. Current and emerging cohorts of older people however, it was argued, would have a greater sense of political activism and empowerment:

People tended to be rather passive and accepting and also we were brought up, well most of us were brought up, in a church where you offered things up, there was no other solution, so you were very accepting and there is an analogy to some extent with the women’s movement. In the sense, that when I first became involved in the equal pay issue, there was quite a constituency of women who thought it was disrespectful to disagree, so that also happened with older people you see, so probably now as we get a more informed and better educated society people will be more articulate.

(Alice, organisation 6)

However, Alice’s expectation that future cohorts of older people may be less politically quiescent was not shared by other research participants. Indeed many argued that their contemporaries have a limited awareness and interest in political issues. The perceived complacency of this group of people was summed up by Gerry’s remark ‘a lot of people have the attitude, ah the government will look after us’. Such an attitude was revealed in a number of the focus groups. For example, Elizabeth voiced her satisfaction with the welfare benefits she received and her disinterest in politics generally and reluctance to contact local politicians in her area:

I don’t need to talk to a councillor. Why should I, they don’t provide anything to me...I don’t want to know them to be quite honest with you. I want to know what [name of organisation] are doing, and how they are getting on, and how they are making money and how they have got the groups together and what activities and trips are on and most people think like that.

(Elizabeth, organisation 8)

Similarly, in another focus group interview Susan outlined how she was satisfied with the health care infrastructure and welfare provisions afforded to her:
When you come 65 you get your retirement pension, and then 66 you have your bus pass, your electricity, your gas or whatever and in general I think older people are well looked after, albeit that the amount of money I think if you compare it to what our ancestors were getting it is good, you know you are getting around €225 a week, that is what I get on my retirement pension, which I think is good.

(Susan, organisation 2)

An important finding was that while some research participants indicated that they had no personal desire to become involved in the ‘political’ or lobbying strand of the organisation, they appreciated the importance of this strand to the overall well-being of the older population and inadvertently themselves. For example, when Susan was prompted about the relevance of older people’s interest organisations, given that she thought that the benefits older people received were satisfactory, she stated:

**Susan:** I think we certainly do need an older people’s organisation, because the government won’t listen to a solitary person, whereas if there is an organisation that has clout, then they will listen.

**Jane:** Perhaps the organisations keep them on their toes.

(Organisation 2)

In Susan’s case and those of other research respondents, while they did not seek to engage in the political strand of the organisation, they placed value on this aspect of the work. For example, Gavin who also was not interested in taking part in the political side of the organisation commented:

We are not interested as a group in getting into the political end, but there should be people in the political end who have an interest in active retirement people or senior citizens.

(Gavin, organisation 8)
6.3.3 Safeguarding a 'state-determined identity'

Gilleard and Higgs (2000:64) argue that current generations of older people strive to resist the 'state-determined identity' of the 'old age pensioner'. However, the current findings revealed that the interviewed members of older people's interest organisations did not seek to sever their relationship with the state. Rather than seeking independence from the welfare state, research participants looked to the state to ensure it offered security of health care and income in old age. Indeed, their main policy concerns revolved around the persistent threat of the dismantling of the traditional welfare state.

Research participants did not categorize their relationship of dependence with the state in negative terms nor did they seek emancipation from this 'state-determined identity'. Instead as citizens of the state and based on their previous productive status, they believed they had earned the right to a number of welfare benefits. The point of contention for research participants was that they had entered into their retirement years with a false sense of security on what the state should and would provide for them. Membership in the advocacy strand of an older people's interest organisation was thus heavily predicated on a notion of maintaining this security and related continuance of a 'state-determined identity'.

Both research participants on the state pensions and those on contributory pensions forwarded that they confront uncertainties surrounding their future economic security. Two respondents in different focus groups categorised older people as a 'sitting target'. Older people were viewed as suffering from higher income insecurity than other groups. A number of research participants argued that they were victimised in the current recessionary climate where government budget cuts such as the introduction of prescriptions charges, means-tested medical cards and a proposed reduction in pension rates disproportionally impacted on older people. The argument was forwarded that the young economically active have the ability to increase their income by working harder or longer, however, older people are limited in their ability to increase their incomes and are reliant on the state not to reduce their pensions or impose additional tax levies. Furthermore, for some older people, the prospect of coming through the economic
recession seemed unlikely and hence unfair that in the final years of their lives they should be disproportionally disadvantaged:

Older people are not going to be around for the recovery, well some of us will, but we all won’t be around for the recovery, so I don’t know why we won’t say, hold on, I have only got a few years left in this world, you are not going to take that away from me, that is the thinking.

(Martin, organisation 1)

While it could be argued that the institutionalization of old age via forced retirement led to a 'structured dependency' (Townsend, 1981), in so far as research participants relied on the state for their continued financial and health related wellbeing, the state provisions which they received in these areas provided older people with a sense of security. They did not seek liberation from the welfare state or hold a perception which accords with Jones et al. (2008:118) that 'forms of welfare that emphasise solidarity and decommodification are considered anachronistic and therefore legitimate targets for reform'. In the current context this dependency was not construed as being prejudicial to older people. Instead, this dependency was viewed as a natural result of the reciprocal relationship between the state and the individual. The source of tension was not the economic reliance on the state per se, but instead the fear that the state could not be relied upon to uphold its side of the contractual relationship and maintain an adequate level of income and welfare protection. Thus, far from calling for an independent relationship with the state, research participants were calling for greater welfare provision from the state.

This 'state-determined identity' was not seen as stigmatizing; in fact it appeared that the security bestowed by the state engendered a sense of empowerment within the older population. By and large, research participants did not classify themselves as financially impoverished – their pensions either contributory (frequently public sector) or non-contributory, afforded them a lifestyle which, judging by the absence of statements to the contrary, seemed to provide them with an adequate standard of living. Research participants, however, were emphatic that they had earned and were entitled to their pensions. This conviction empowered research participants to speak out against any
threats to their earned entitlement. As Gerry stated, 'it is up to us to make a noise, [remind government] we are here, we are alive, we are still contributing, we are still paying taxes, I am still paying taxes'. An example of where this 'structural empowerment' was most apparent was in the case of women who prior to reaching pension age were financially dependent on their husbands. On becoming 65 and gaining a state pension in their own right some women had a new sense of autonomy and financial independence which fostered a new found sense of empowerment.

No reference was made to private pensions in the focus group interviews. However, a relevant issue was raised in one group, when it was claimed that a new culture of individualisation has emerged which is not based on equality and will undermine solidarity within society:

There would be some of the business people and others, who believe pensions should be reduced, social welfare should be reduced....There is people out there who believe in a society of not of merit, well it is a society of merit in a sense, that what you have you have earned, individualisation, your right to this is because you were born into that family, you had a right to that education, you had a right to that income and other people who are poor that is their fault, there is a bit of that in Ireland, far more so in America, but it has crept in here too and that is a danger to solidarity, it is one of the biggest problems that we may face in the future.

(Michael, organisation 1)

Related to this theme was the statement in another focus group that a dependence on the exigencies of the market has proven to have failed and can recast individuals back to a dependence on the state:

But we are also now going to have a group of new poor older people. Say women who are widows who thought the husbands had left them wonderfully provided for. The ones who were self-employed and never paid a stamp, so that they had invested and invested very often in bank shares and the interest from those were keeping widows very, very comfortably and suddenly they find they have absolutely nothing and they don't know whether they are entitled now to look for
a non-contributory pension or whatever. And they ring the local offices in the [organisation] to say suddenly I have got nothing what should I do, where do I go

(Eamon, organisation 7)

Those with occupational pensions believed they faced a vulnerable unknown future in which their pensions could be reduced or additional taxes imposed. Research participants in this predicament believed government had little sympathy for them. Commenting on a meeting with a former Minister for Social Protection a respondent relayed how they felt the Minister believed there was no importance in their demands. They believed that the 'good innings' perspective was unfairly applied, government seemed to assume that they were lucky to have worked in the past and to have an occupational pension:

With all due respects to her, she was a lovely lady, very attractive, very well dressed, very, very sharp, but all she did was sat smiling at us, and when we were leaving she told us how lucky we were to have had good jobs and everything else and she hopes she will meet us again, that was the full extent of it, goodbye, and it was almost like giving you two fingers going out the door.

(Colm, organisation 8)

This 'good innings' notion is inherently ageist, and in the current context finds resonance in Walker's (2006b) argument that the public pension system contributed to the perception that older people in retirement do not require a similar income to those who are economically active. This argument, however, was vehemently criticised by research participants who strongly held that they should be afforded the same lifestyle post-retirement. Emphasising the desire to maintain a similar lifestyle post-retirement a respondent stated:

what we have been trying to achieve is that on retirement that there be some kind of relationship between the incomes of what people would have on retirement and what they had prior to retirement, because the income that they had gave them a certain type of lifestyle and what we would be trying to do, we acknowledge that you can't expect to have the same, but at least you should have at least 80 percent of whatever type of a lifestyle you had, you know and to continue on with that.

(Tom, organisation 5)
The fact that government was not supportive of an expansive welfare state was regarded as the fundamental problem underlying many of the issues faced by older people. Government’s reluctance to expand benefits was attributed to the ideological standpoint of the government, which was viewed to be centre-right and not premised on the notion of equality. Furthermore, the government’s allocation of tax incentives and allowances to the wealthier strata of society was criticized and was considered to have a direct negative impact on older people by depriving them of potential revenue streams.

6.4 Conclusion

As outlined in Chapter 2, many writers (Gilleard & Higgs, 2007; Torres-Gil, 1993) have referred to the relevance of older people’s collective consciousness, or age-based identity, to older people’s interest organisations, but few have conducted qualitative research with older people themselves to ascertain their perceptions of this issue. The findings discussed in this chapter suggest that the members of older people’s interest organisations have ambivalent views of older age. Old age was not categorised as a negative period in the life course. It was however, categorised as a time of uncertainty due to health and current vagaries of the economic system. The chapter elucidates how the cultural thesis defined by Gilleard and Higgs (2000), finding expression via consumption and commodification, does not hold true in the Irish context. Instead the results resonate with arguments made by Young (2000), that identity is a product of both structural and cultural forces, a theme which will be discussed further in the concluding chapter.

The chapter also provides an insight into how an age identity among the members of older people’s interest organisations was salient in the context of health decline, their shared historical past and their collective sense of earned entitlement. To argue that membership affinity is consolidated solely around an age-based identity, however, may be somewhat simplistic. Other overlapping roles such as family member, carer, volunteer, grandparent or activist appeared to be of significance and these non-age-defining roles may be variables which foster affinity ties among members. Furthermore, additional identity and membership defining status were relevant to some organisations, including gender (for
those in women’s organisations), occupational status (for those in occupational pension organisations) and in some instances socio-economic status.

The chapter highlights how at an individual level, the identities of the members of older people’s interest organisations were shaped by different forces; however, at a collective level they shared an identity as citizens with a life-long contractual relationship with the state. This latter identity is of particular salience to older people’s interest organisations. They saw themselves as citizens with a long established relationship with the state – stemming from decades of (tax) contributions they had paid and to a lesser extent their current contribution as carers and volunteers. They did not wish to focus on health deterioration but acknowledged that this facet of ageing cannot be denied – again this is where they looked to the state for the security which would alleviate their anxieties.

Membership in the advocacy strand of an older people’s interest organisation was thus heavily predicated on a notion of maintaining this security and related continuance of a ‘state-determined identity’. However, this identity is not all-defining, indeed, a ‘state-determined identity’ or that of an activist was not of particular relevance to many of the research participants who were members of organisations which focused on recreational and educational activities. Nonetheless, the chapter argues that within the ‘cultural space’ (Gubrium, 1993) of the organisation they recognized the need for the expression of the political voice of older people. Such findings highlight the potential formative influence of older people’s interest organisation membership on ‘non-political’ members. They suggest that organisations whose remit is *prima facie* non-political in nature, such as those focused predominantly on the social and recreational activities of older people, may elicit among their members an interest in a range of policy issues of relevance to older people. If, under particular circumstances, these organisations became even partially engaged in the political process their members are likely to be supportive of their work. This potential was realized during the medical card demonstration, detailed in Chapter 8. Furthermore, the boundaries between the various organisations and their respective group members can also temporarily dissolve as the members coalesce as a unified constituency. Before turning to the issue of the medical card demonstration, policymakers’ perceptions of older people’s interest organisations are first explored.
7: Policymakers perspectives of older people's interest organisations

7.1 Introduction
This chapter seeks to answer question five of the thesis, that is, what are policy-makers' perceptions of older people's interest organisations and how relevant are these organisations to policy-makers' work? This question was motivated by the literature which outlines how policy-makers' interpretations and descriptions of representation can influence how participation is legitimized, who gains access to policy-negotiations and the extent to which these organisations may be able to wield influence (Estes et al, 2003; Barnes et al. 2007). The chapter provides qualitative insights into the perspectives of policy-makers on their interaction and involvement with older people's interest organisations. It reflects the analysis of semi-structured qualitative interviews with 20 policy-makers and five former Junior Ministers of State for Older People. Section 7.2 first examines policy-makers' perceptions of older people's interest organisations. Section 7.3 explores the relevance of older people's interest organisations in the working lives of the policy-makers and the assistance they seek or acquire from these groups during the policy formulation process.

7.2 Perceptions of older people's interest organisations
Interviews with senior civil/public servants and former Junior Ministers revealed that they held conflicting attitudes towards older people's interest organisations. Indicative of these conflicting attitudes were the various arguments they forwarded in relation to how the organisations were beneficial, but at the same time lacked capacity to adequately inform the policy agenda. The analysis revealed policy-makers' often vacillating and ambivalent opinions of older people's interest organisations and the inherent conflict that can exist between the priorities of policy-makers and the priorities/agendas of older people's interest organisations. The following section outlines how policy-makers had a vague understanding of the nature of the various organisations and examines the manner in which they construed the representativeness of the organisations, their members and the relationships across the organisations.
7.2.1 A VAGUE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SECTOR
Policy-makers' discussions of older people's interest organisations elucidated not only how they perceive the organisations but also how they classify them. Apart from instances where they were speaking about the involvement of older people's interest organisations in the Social Partnership process, the majority of the research participants did not refer to them as advocacy or lobbying organisations. Many were not able to distinguish between the different organisations and seemed to have little understanding of how the national organisations operate. Instead, civil servants and Ministers placed greater emphasis on the organisations' capacity to deliver services. The delivery of services, rather than involvement in policy formulation, was more frequently viewed as the domain in which they could excel. For example, praise was given to specific services and initiatives the organisations instigated, such as Fáilte Isteach, the Care and Repair programme and the delivery of services from the Alzheimer's Society of Ireland. Much of the contact they had with the organisations revolved around discussions on continuing or increasing core funding. It appears that the precarious nature of organisational funding can mean that a disproportionate amount of time is spent discussing financial issues. Such an emphasis on funding can detract from substantive discussions on policy development:

A lot of the focus tends to be around finances and there is nothing wrong with asking for more money, I am not saying it is negative but I am saying a lot of the conversations tend to end up in that space, a lot of the conversations in the HSE are about money, not about policy or strategy with the voluntary groups.

(Public servant 1)

It is important to highlight that some civil/public servants had more frequent contact with older people's interest organisations than others, however, those with less contact tended to have regular contact with other non-profit and voluntary organisations, such as disabled groups. In one instance a participant had virtually no contact with the organisations. It is noteworthy that perceptions tended to be quite polarised, either respondents were quite critical of the involvement of older people's interest organisations in the policy-making process or else construed their participation in positive terms.
7.2.2 LACK OF REPRESENTATION

Research participants did not perceive older people's interest organisations to be representative of the general older population. Instead, reference was made to particular sub-populations of older people who were viewed to be excluded from the existent organisations. For example, five civil servants believed that the organisations tended to better represent urban older people and did not interact or engage adequately with rural older people. Research participants became particularly aware of this deficiency when they travelled around the country on official work duties. As a former Junior Minister stated:

I am not sure really how much representation was made for the person beyond the Red Cow Roundabout\textsuperscript{21}..... I remember attending [meetings around the country] as well, and again, these were all groups that were surviving, doing really good work on a shoestring budget, not really affected though by the older people's lobby groups who, in some ways are well funded and don't seem to reach these other groups in rural and remote parts of Ireland.

(Former Junior Minister)

A number of civil servants also held the perception that older people's interest organisations did not represent the population of older people who are more economically secure. These research participants referred to the success of the older people's sector in eliciting the active participation of older retired people in social activities in the community. However, the representation of the younger old age group or those who are still in employment was viewed to be absent. Civil servants were sympathetic towards the difficulties of expressing the 'duality' of the voice of both the young old and older. Only one civil servant believed one organisation had managed to represent this duality successfully, however, as a sector this was not thought to be achieved. This was in contrast with the disability sector that was thought to have succeeded to articulate an overarching argument of disempowerment to advance their demands, something which was believed would not be applicable or appropriate to all older people:

\textsuperscript{21} The Red Cow interchange is a major road junction in Dublin.
When you are looking at older people's issues you do very clearly have to delineate between the younger old and the older old, and that makes it more difficult, in a way you are trying to argue almost two opposing views. You are trying to argue that the majority of older people are well, healthy living in their communities and can fully participate in society, while you are also arguing for the protection of vulnerable older people and it can be very difficult to communicate that double message....And I think generally groups tend to come down on one side or the other.... but it is a very tricky thing to try to communicate, whereas in terms of the disability lobby they convey a very clear focused argument that younger people with a disability are socially disadvantaged and are being excluded and measures need to be put in place to include people with a disability in mainstream society, so it was actually a clearer message to try and communicate, you didn't have that duality.

(Civil servant 13)

Four civil servants argued that older people's interest organisations forward a 'charity perspective', which portrays older people as vulnerable and underprivileged and as dependants on the state pension. This categorisation of older people was not viewed as valid, as one respondent argued:

I think they are a very old style type of representation, possible...Old style, as in older people were poor, am... charity, poor....I don't know what their [older people's interest organisations] background is, but they do definitely seem to have a Vincent de Paul social care services type of view on life...... It seems not much removed from a sort of charitable organisational philosophy as opposed to a political and economic force.

(Civil servant, 17)

The few who spoke about the representation of older people in long-term care, held the perception that older people's interest organisations are not informed about the needs and priorities of high dependency older people, particularly those in residential care. There was an impression that there is much rhetoric about the importance of involvement
of older people in long-stay care, but few practical examples of collaboration and consultation by either policymakers or interest organisations. They believed that the organisations (and policymakers) made little sustained effort to engage with residents and although sentiments of benevolence and sympathy were regularly expressed about older people in long-stay care, serious efforts to consult and elicit their opinions were lacking:

I will always argue that they don't give the voice of older people with a high level of dependency..... when people sit around the table, they will sit there and pontificate around older people in residential care without any evidence. I am not being critical but they have no evidence to back up what they are saying. They think that they know what older people in residential care need, I think I know what people in residential care need. Of course we don't know what they need, so therefore we all sit around and pontificate about them and we don't ever ask them and we have no formal way in this country of finding out what older people in residential care actually want or need, bar a couple of studies that have been done a few years ago.

(Public servant 2)

7.2.3 INCONGRUENCE BETWEEN MEMBERS AND THE WIDER OLDER POPULATION
In the main, civil/public servants and former Junior Ministers believed that organisations' engagement with their membership was adequate. Most research participants believed that older people's interest organisations were successful at communicating with their members, but communication with the broader population of older people was less clear. Despite stating that they may adequately communicate with and represent their members, research participants were vague as to who the members of the various organisations are and therefore if they can claim to be representative of the general population of older people. As one civil servant stated 'you actually don't know who they represent, they all claim to have huge membership'. This lack of transparency can evoke suspicion and a lack of trust, however, as five research participants argued, true representation is virtually impossible to achieve within any organisation and for this reason is not a precondition which organisations are expected to fulfil when meeting with policy officials.
A small number of research participants stated that they believed the organisations were procedurally representative, by having clearly stated trade union-like styles of management structure. However, the majority of both civil servants and former Junior Ministers had a poor understanding of the structure of the organisations and were vague about how they reached their decisions and in turn what policy agendas they pursued. Despite having a vague understanding of the membership of the organisation, a number of participations argued that older people who are members of interest organisations are atypical of the general population and tend to be more politicised. Confirming Barnes et al. (2011) argument that policy-makers leverage the criticism of activists, as the 'usual suspects', to undermine their claims, a former Junior Minister relayed:

It's the nature of interest organisations, I'd say that they attract people with a particular maybe philosophical underpinning and more active older people or more politically driven older people and then there is a clatter of people out there who actually aren't members of these groups. And to be honest with you, you are nearly relying on the political system to pick those up to some extent, through the clinic system—and all of that kind of thing.

(Former Junior Minister)

Thus a distinction was made between older people in the general population and those represented in older people's interest organisations. There appeared to be a perception that older people in the general population are more complacent than members of older people's interest organisations who were thought to be more militant or outspoken. In short, older people in the general population were perceived to be less reactive and more reasonable than the members of older people's interest organisations. In addition, a small number of research participants stated that the agendas and demands of the organisations did not necessarily represent those of the membership but instead reflected the prerogatives and policy preference of the leaders of the organisations:

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22 Elected representatives usually offer a 'clinic service' to their constituents, where on a particular day in the week members of the public can make an appointment to meet the elected representative in their constituency office.
I would have a bit of difficulty subsidizing a group that was making false claims and that is what is always a possibility. Saying who they represent and all they are actually doing is looking into their hearts and saying this is what we think, which is a very easy thing to do. It's the 'ambiguities of altruism' to use a term that I have heard used. You think that a certain situation is true and then automatically suggest something.

(Public servant 4)

This perceived incongruence (between members and the wider older population and members and organisational leaders) provided justification for research participants to discount the demands of older people's interest organisations, particularly when they were in conflict with their own objectives. In such instances, it was argued there was a need to consult with a wider population of older people unaffiliated to an interest group. As one former Junior Minister stated, *'I think the further down you go to communicate the more meaningful it can become'* . It seems this strategy can be used when it is expedient, for example, in the case of the formulation of legislation on the Nursing Home Support Scheme the discrepancy between the demands of the older people's interest organisations were contrasted with phone calls received from the general public, as one civil servant stated:

Well even just to come back to the Fair Deal and I know we have the two interest organisations [on the committee] and all the rest. But from the reps and the actual phone calls we get in here directly from members of the public they all want it, and when is it, and when or why aren't we getting it now. So, you know I am a bit befuddled sometimes at the interest organisations and actually we would have the bones of four or 500 reps each year. This isn't even to talk about the number of phone calls that we actually take in, which we don't record, but I could say it would be that amount and more again, so actually directly coming in and saying when on earth is this going to come in and even just talking to older people that I know myself, I very rarely will come across somebody outside of the interest organisations who actually actively opposes it.

(Civil servant 14)
The opinions of older people were thought to be accessible not just through age-specific groups, but also through the myriad of organisations which represent or work with other groups in the community, for example disability groups, rural initiative groups or women's groups. In the words of one civil servant, 'the elderly constituency gets gathered up in a much broader process'. Such an approach was favoured since organisations such as those listed above were viewed to represent a wider cross-generational spectrum of society. However, examination of the statements revealed much of their interaction with these other groups tended to revolve around the funding of services they provided, rather than the development of social policy.

7.2.4 Fragmentation of the sector
Competition for resources and influence between organisation leaders was thought to exist within the older people's sector. Competition was not thought to be confined solely to the older people's sector and was thought at times to be visible within the community and voluntary pillar of social partnership. The community and voluntary organisations in social partnership were viewed as a pillar of divergent groups who while not openly challenging each other's priorities, rarely reached consensuses or acted as a unified lobby. Outside the partnership process, a civil servant believed that older people's interest organisations were isolated and removed from the general community sector. Explaining that they do not seek to be a part of a wider social movement for justice this respondent stated:

You tend not to see older people's organisations in wider networking, or very visible in wider networking, so to some extent that is evidence of I think being a little bit isolated and specific, you know you won't get change for older people without change for other groups, therefore are they part of a wider social change movement, I am not convinced they are, some of them certainly are on the edges of it alright.

(Public servant, 3)

The perceived fragmentation of the older people's sector provided research participants with an opportunity to question the coherency of the demands of the sector. The
establishment of a new umbrella organisation was welcomed and it was hoped could lead to the ultimate amalgamation of the various groups. However, there was a questioning as to whether or not an umbrella group would be successful, due to previous failed attempts to get the sector to act as a unified lobby and examples of disagreement already within the umbrella body:

And sometimes I would find and they wouldn't be slow in informing me that, the groups such as X, Y and Z, while they might all be members of the umbrella group, they would say they do not represent us on this particular issue...so sometimes I would find there was often a conflict of maybe representation and issues, and prioritisation by the older hierarchical groups, but nothing that we couldn't surmount, but sometimes it was a little bit of politics I believe in between the various groups, a little bit of jostling.

(Former Junior Minister)

7.3 RELEVANCE OF OLDER PEOPLE’S INTEREST ORGANISATIONS TO POLICYMAKERS’ WORK

Both civil servants and former Junior Ministers made contradictory statements in relation to the relevance of older people’s interest organisations to their work. While, on the one hand, very strongly endorsing the requirement to consult with older people’s interest organisations, on the other hand, they were relatively vague as to how the outcome of these consultations is incorporated into policy decisions. The following section outlines both the perceived relevance and irrelevance of older people’s interest organisations to the work of both civil servants and former Junior Ministers. First it outlines policymakers’ endorsement of the existence of older people’s interest organisations, the institutionalisation of consultation which encourages the inclusion of interest organisations in policy-formulation and the political relevance of older people. It then outlines how the priorities of older people’s interest organisations can be in conflict with policy-makers’ long-term goals and policy objectives.
7.3.1 Utility of outside voice and service user perspective

Similar to arguments made by Binstock and Day (1996) the majority of civil/public servants and former Junior Ministers stated that older people's interest organisations can be used as a convenient mechanism to begin consultation with the population of older people. Organisations can act as a sounding board for politicians and civil servants before policy proposals are announced to the general public. They can provide some indication of the possible concerns which may arise in the general public beyond that which was obtainable internally in the various departments. As one civil servant phrased it, 'far better to have at least that voice and that level of information than reaching out into an abyss or sitting in isolation and making it up as you go along'. Similarly, a former Junior Minister emphasised the importance of going beyond one's own personal contacts with older people:

I've been around elderly people for a long time on a personal level, so you see the sort of problems that arise, but that's not a basis for policy making, you need to be in contact with the people who can articulate their needs and have a solution and most of them do and that is the brilliant thing.

(Former Junior Minister)

The contributions of older people's interest organisations were viewed to be particularly valuable in the policy-making process when the opinions and experiences of service-users were required. These perspectives were especially important in the area of transport and community health:

it took me a while to realise that this was a group that if you worked with them in the right way that it was a huge sort of engine for getting work done. Because some of them are very critical of aspects of public transport policy from an accessibility perspective, and that has been generated from their experience with service providers and once you get behind that and you realise and you sit them down and say why is this a problem for you when it is not a problem for someone else, and you realise, it's the nature of the company you are dealing with.

(Civil servant, 11)
Many of the policy suggestions of older people's interest organisations tended to be dismissed by civil/public servants and a small number of Junior Ministers who argued that they were in conflict with the feedback received through constituents and the general public. However, some argued that the provision by organisations of policy suggestions outlining older people's priorities was a more constructive method for garnering this information than attempting to extrapolate it from information received from individual older people. A number of civil servants stated that older people's interest organisations can provide a time-and cost-efficient way of consulting with older people. In contrast to submissions received from older people's interest organisations, requests from individuals were thought to relate to personal concerns and not be of any relevance to the broader policy context:

Certainly when you look at or when you call for submissions, you would get the odd one, but the most effective ones, the coherent ones, the ones that are well thought out are the ones that come through groups, because if it comes through an individual they always have a particular personal interest, it's their bathroom is upstairs and they want it downstairs, or it's a relatively minor thing that they have a fixation on and they can't see why their case wouldn't be prioritised.

(Civil servant, 9)

One public servant also highlighted the importance of the older people's sector within the current democratic process and the need for participation beyond the ballot box. This respondent argued that the electoral system would not result in systematic changes in social policy. Interest organisations, on the other hand, by focusing on policy issues beyond the immediate election period could engage in a more sustained dialogue with policy makers and remain more informed of policy developments:

I think they are crucial, partly because voter influence will just get payoffs, it won't get structural or systematic change, that will only come about through groups articulating a shared perspective of older people that is thought out and that is well led, so otherwise it will be payoffs for the vote.

(Public servant, 3)
To optimise the effectiveness of the sector a number of research participants suggested that the organisations could attempt to seek the perceptions and opinions of a wider population of older people beyond their membership. One respondent suggested they could model the government strategy of seeking submissions to attempt to reach out to a wider population of older people. The suggestion was also made that it would be useful if the organisations tried to coordinate more with local organisations to elicit the opinions of a greater number of older people. Four research participants conveyed the difficulty of funding organisations which later went on to criticise their work, however, in all but a few cases, this was seen as an inevitable and a necessary consequence of the democratic process.

7.3.2 Institutionalization of Consultation

The institutionalisation of consultation in the social partnership process and the publication of numerous policy documents calling for more extensive citizen consultation required civil servants to engage more extensively with older people’s interest organisations in the policy-making process and has legitimated the funding of these organisations. Policy documents such as the OECD review of the Irish Public Service (OECD, 2008) and the government’s response which emerged from this (Report of the Task Force on Public Services, 2008) were regarded by the participants as increasing the emphasis on the necessity for consultation. The publication of ‘Delivering Better Government’ (Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries, 1996) and the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act\(^{23}\) were also viewed as seminal events in the promotion of consultation. Both stipulated that greater transparency and accountability were necessary and mandated civil servants to engage more actively with citizens in policy-related discussions:

I would suggest that in the past when a policy document came out, people just went ahead and tried to implement, or did implement it or whatever the case may be. In our latest formulation you have monitoring performance, all of these things come through, now you have to be engaged with either the recipients or indeed

with both the recipients and the deliverers of a service to be able to follow through on that.

(Civil servant, 9)

The consultations with the voluntary and community sector organisations which were institutionalised through the social partnership were regarded by the participants as facilitating the creation of a space in which 'the big policy' issues could be discussed. The two organisations within the social partnership process, Age Action Ireland and the Senior Citizens Parliament were unanimously perceived by both civil/public servants and former Junior Ministers as the 'heavy hitters,' suggesting that the participants regarded them as engaging in more meaningful dialogues with policymakers. The most recent partnership agreement (Department of the Taoiseach, 2006) and its adoption of a lifecycle model, which positions older people as a priority group provided civil servants with the mandate to consult and work with these two older people's interests organisations:

If it's not in the social partnership agreement or it's not in the programme for government, it won't reach the policy agenda..... I think [membership on social partnership] is very good because it gets them into the table which they never had before...because if you are thinking of representation on a board or something like that, these are the people you have come across, these are the people you worked with at the negotiation table, these are the people you know, and it's back to maybe we are a small country and that individual level.

(Civil servant 10)

Social partnership thus legitimated and extended the inclusion of citizen/community sector organisations in the policy-making dialogue process. Access to expert-meetings convened by the HSE generally had no relation with an organisation's membership in social partnership. Instead organisations that delivered a care service were consulted more regularly by the HSE. Outside the HSE, research participants without regular contact with older people's interest organisations (that is, those outside the Department of Health and Children and Social Protection) stated that if they were required to consult with organisations they would contact the two representative organisations from the social partnerships' community and voluntary pillar (that is, Age Action Ireland and the Senior
Citizen Parliament). This suggests that organisations outside of the community and voluntary pillar may not be invited to consultation forums as frequently as those within the partnership system, potentially resulting in their de-facto exclusion from the process.

The emergence and growth of a 'participatory culture' in wider society through the media and internet was also seen to have contributed to the expectation by the public and acceptance by civil servants and policy makers of a more consultative public service. Social changes, technology and changed media (particularly the radio where talk show hosts encouraged people to express their own opinions and challenge government initiatives) were seen to have contributed to an increased demand by the public to participate in public policy discussions. In the HSE the importance of consultation with citizens and consumer groups was formalised through the creation of the consumer affairs office.

Both civil servants and former Junior Ministers conveyed a willingness to meet with older people's interest organisations as part of their work. Indeed, contact with civil society organisations was viewed by participants as an important part of their job remit, with one civil servant articulating the view that they, 'would never dream of formulating policy without reference to them'. Similarly, another stated:

I don't think there is a civil servant who heads a division who handles policy, who if they were given the task to formulate a new policy in a new area, that one of the first pages they would be filling would be a list of the people that needs to be consulted, or the organisations that need to be consulted.

(Civil servant, 11)

This emerging culture of consultation appears to place interest organisations in a more influential position than has been the case in the past. However, while civil servants and former Junior Ministers are now obliged to engage with outside interest organisations, this does not necessarily translate into influence. At a minimum it appears to lend greater
legitimacy to the representative status of these organisations while simultaneously serving to legitimize the policy making process.

7.3.3 LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF POLICY CHANGES
None of the policymakers stated that they were guided by a particular ideology, instead, the majority emphasised that they attempted to take an objective approach in decisions relating to social policy and forward a viewpoint which encompasses an intergenerational and equitable perspective. An analysis of the statements made, however, suggests that many are guided by the ideology of fiscal conservatism and a rationing and retrenchment of state services, rather than the expansion of public service benefits and supports. This ideology is justified on the basis of the on-going economic crisis - major financial constraints exist within the economic context, setting the parameters within which policy decisions are made. This viewpoint is essentially an affirmation of Walker's (2006b: 72) argument that 'the economic has become preeminent in the policy field'. Social considerations have become subservient to economic ones, and social policy is consequently framed in the context of economic policy. Policies resulting in the retrenchment of state services/benefits were believed to be inevitable. Efficacy and cost containment were underscored as key policy priorities. Policymakers' emphasis on the development of social policy through the prism of an economic framework revealed the paucity of attention accorded to the impact of policy change on the social lives of older people. Within this context, consultation with older people's interest organisations appeared to act as a strategic exercise to test the acceptability of new policy changes.

Discussions on social policy formulation revolved around an economic rather than moral justification, with virtually no civil servants addressing the need to re-adjust services to improve the quality of care for older people or talking specifically about the impact of policies on the quality of life of older people. Despite the frequent use of the terms parity and equity, no elaboration on either was provided. There were hints throughout the interviews with civil servants that equity (particularly in times of fiscal difficulties) was associated with a liberal means-based system whereby state support was only channelled to low-income groups.
The opinions of older people’s interest organisations were viewed to be of little relevance when it came to government decisions on the allocation of financial resources. As one civil servant stated, ‘as far as the hard edge of policy, the financial resource allocation is concerned, the financing of long term care, they certainly are passive’. Indeed, it appeared that the organisations were perceived as having little understanding of the economic implications of the policy changes they advanced. This view is reflective of the rift between the organisations and policy-makers, with older people’s interest organisations generally focused on an expansion of state services/benefits and civil servants on their retrenchment. As such, economic priorities over-ride any decision made in government departments and it appears that consideration is only given to those proposals which align with the prevalent economic strategy. The emphasis on fiscal prudence seems to overshadow any other priorities:

very often, it is not as if people are purposefully sitting down to exclude these [older] people but they can so easily be forgotten because of economy and money and what’s the benefit of this and its all measured, well I won’t say it’s all measured, but we had a tendency in recent years to measure everything in euro.... it is so easy to forget [older] people.

(Former Junior Minister)

Only two research participants were critical of the emphasis on economics as the driver for the reformulation of social policy. According to one of these research participants ‘there is a certain fixation with money’, the needs of citizens are not positioned as central. These two civil servants argued that the focus on economics overrides all policy discussions and prohibits meaningful dialogue on social policy formulation. They both referred to the Minister of Social Protection’s decision to not publish the National Carers’ Strategy on the basis of the economic recession as being indicative of the low priority accorded to social issues by government.24

24 Following an extensive public consultation process the National Carers Strategy was scheduled to be published in 2007, however, in 2008, the then Minister for Social Protection Mary Hanifin announced that due to budgetary restrictions the strategy would not be published since government would not be in a financial position to implement time limits or targets.
7.3.4 Impact of the Recession on Consultation

Kingdon (1995) and Bonoli (2001) argue that an economic crisis can provide government with a window of opportunity to implement publicly unpopular policy changes. This argument was corroborated in the current research where it appeared that the economic crisis and collapse of the Celtic Tiger economy was used as a justification to push forward widespread policy reforms. Economics as a driver for social policy was thought to be of paramount importance in a recessionary period. Participants regarded the economic prosperity of the Celtic Tiger years as having provided older people with increases in many social security benefits demanded by their organisations. It was felt that the impact of a decade of economic liberalism was that discussions between government and the organisations had come to revolve largely around increasing benefits in the immediate to short-term and little attention was given to reformulation of long-term policies. The perception was that this strategy of requesting increases in benefits might be permissible in times of economic prosperity, but would not be feasible in recessionary times. Both civil servants and Junior Ministers stated that organisations would have to accept that benefits could not be extended and cost-saving mechanisms would take precedence:

I think basically over the last ten years, there has not been a need to come up with alternatives, the answer to everything was more resources, and more this and that, and actually there hasn't been a need...it was a lobbying for extra resources and the only issue was how much you were going to get, whereas I think now, it is really coming home to roost that we have to do better, with what we actually have or even attempt to hold on to what we have and I think that is when the gap is really starting to become very obvious.

(Civil servant, 16)

Older people's interest organisations were by and large not seen to readily appreciate the importance of reprioritising resources and redeploying government finances. They were viewed as generally seeking an expansion of benefits, something which research participants regarded as unrealistic:
Every year this department runs what we call a pre budget forum where we would invite all the groups in. Now we had it last year, and we have it every year, they would be looking for increases in the pension rate. I mean completely unrealistic, they would be looking for, things they would have been looking for five years ago, am, extending the eligibility conditions, on the carer’s side, a wage, not a means-tested payment, a lot of it would be down to brass tacks money...but mostly it would be to increase the benefits, increase the payments.

(Civil servant, 12)

Indeed, older people’s interest organisations generally only seemed to instigate contact when new proposals or policy amendments to social welfare services or pensions were made by government. Echoing tenets of defence mobilisation theory (Campbell, 2002), one respondent stated, ‘we would have had very little criticism of any of the work we are doing until we stopped doing it’. The notion of holding on to existing entitlements was therefore emphasised in many of the interviews. Those who mentioned this issue, and the associated perception that organisations were reactive in nature, acknowledged the fact that organisations had to adhere to the agendas and demands of their members. They reasoned that organisations have to be seen to be reactive and responsive to proposed changes in order to justify their existence and maintain the support of their members. Research participants thus acknowledged that it may have been difficult for organisations to adapt to a new type of consultation, which was focused on retrenchment rather than expansion of services.

7.3.5 The irrelevance of ‘Old Age’ targeting

In Chapter 2 it was noted that the public discourse which frames the inclusion and participation of citizens in policy making, can be regarded as either an empowered, a consumer, a stakeholder or a responsible model of discourse (Barnes et al. 2007). In interviews with policymakers and government officials, the ‘consumer public discourse’ emerged as the dominant underlying discourse informing their perspectives. Research participants relayed how they were obliged to be pragmatic in the allocation of resources. They frequently used the language of the private sector, a feature of the consumer public discourse, reiterating the importance of providing ‘value for money’ and ‘rationalisation’ of services. Older people were viewed as one of many of the consumers, for whom the state
was required to cater. They were not given any priority above any other groups in this pragmatic approach, as one respondent stated:

It's no different to a household, you have a certain budget and you have a certain wish list, which you have to prioritise and from that wish list, having heard all the parties involved proposals have to be made as to what priorities we will go with, what is the best value for money and so on and which have the greatest impact. ....... It's the sustainability of all those things going forward, it's not just the older groups and the groups that represent them, its getting that message across to people in the younger age cadres, who have to fund these pensions, who have to get themselves insurance, it's a bigger picture than just a bilateral relationship with government, it's the whole population has to stand back and have this debate on an on-going basis.

(Civil servant, 18)

Research participants thus adopted a discourse which suggested a service oriented mode of operation. Virtually all the research participants argued that older people should not be granted greater privileges than other members of civil society. Few considered older people as experiencing extreme forms of hardship. With the exception of staff in the Office for Older People in the Department of Health and Children, older people were viewed as one group among many, and they did not seem to be accorded any greater priority than other groups. Policymakers regarded and portrayed their work as focusing on all the citizens of the state, rather than a subset of the population, such as older people. The government’s priority, according to research participants, was the ‘fair’ and ‘equitable’ distribution of finances across all the sectors of society and on this basis, a disproportionate amount of finances should not be channelled to any particular sub-group. While they placed an emphasis on the issue of equality, older people as a group were not regarded as suffering from inequality and consequently remedial measures were not specifically targeted at them but were broadly based across the entire general population.
Research participants were unlikely to argue for the need for redistributive policies and instead seemed to endorse a liberal means-based system of benefits. In accordance with Gillearad and Higgs's (2000:23) categorization of advanced liberalism policymakers advocated a residual role for the state, where the state would not 'provide a uniform level of services to the whole population'. Only older people who were severely economically disadvantaged were deemed to be worthy of special dispensation and offered protection by the welfare state. In this residualist model, where no differential treatment of older people was considered necessary, older people's politics appeared redundant. Indeed, a small number of research participants were critical of the number of social welfare benefits granted to older people and argued that the allocation of state finances should be directed into other areas such as education and health:

You know we focus too much on older people. We give too much to older people and actually if you put that money into the younger population, children in particular, you know you could change the whole society by increasing education and participation over a generation. But you see that's back to short-term versus long-term and the fact that your resources are always limited.

(Civil servant, 12)

Policymakers were therefore ambivalent towards older people's interest organisations, since by and large, they did not agree with the categorization of older people as a marginalised, disadvantaged or separate constituency deserving of special dispensation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, older people's interest organisations were at times antagonistic to the work of policy-makers. Policymakers focused on the issue of differentiation and stratification of the older population which was sometimes reduced to a simplistic dualism of vulnerable and non-vulnerable. The state had a responsibility to protect the former. However the 'vulnerable' were an elusive and poorly defined cohort. Their vulnerability appeared to be categorized on the basis of economic insecurity, based on a financial means-test. Similar to the notion of 'the deserving poor' (Thane, 2002) in the pre-war period, those with no other recourse could be offered minimum protection from the state.
Civil servants outlined how they were faced with the challenge of advising ministers and forwarding policy alternatives and it was incumbent on them that they exercise 'objectivity', 'transparency', 'intergenerational equity', 'parity' and 'impartiality'. They argued that it was their responsibility to evaluate all the various proposals received from interest organisations and to suggest the preferable policy option. Proposals received from older people's interest organisations had to be examined in the light of internal expertise and be balanced by opinions and feedback received via other media such as departmental phone lines, media and constituency requests.

... I think the important thing is that you try to sit here, not as a referee, but I suppose to stress test what's being said to you. You know this is what the person says to you and I accept fully they are saying this in good faith, but based on my experience, my knowledge and what I am hearing from all the other players on the pitch what do I think, and how would I assess this and the advice I am given in an honest fair and impartial way and I think that's what you have to do.

(Civil servant, 18)

Despite the many negative statements made by research participants on the current capacities of the older people's sector in the realm of policy formulation, they were all broadly supportive of the concept of voluntary/community agencies and anticipated that the organisations would prosper in the future. While emphasising that their own work required that they place equal value on all age groups within the population, they recognised that certain issues, such as residential care and pensions were age-specific and hence the legitimacy of the need for a particular focus on this sector in policy formulation was justified. As one respondent stated:

There are obviously issues that are specific to older people or more important to older people than other sectors of society and on that basis you could argue for having an older person's representative group. On the other hand, it depends on what you are looking for. If you are looking for an end to poverty, then why aren't you in a group that stops poverty across the ages, so it does depend. But I suspect because of the health issues, because of the pensions issues, there will remain a set of issues that are unique to older people and would justify political representation on that set of issues.

(Civil servant, 17)
7.4 ‘INCLUDED OBSERVERS’

The analysis suggests that the degree of participation in the policy process is limited with older people’s interest organisations perhaps more appropriately classified as ‘included observers’. Corroborating the finding of Quinn (2009) the analysis revealed that a hierarchical and closed system of policy-making continues. A small number of older people’s interest organisations could be labelled ‘privileged’ in so far as they have a right of access to the policy making table through social partnership. This privilege, however, does not equate with influence. A dominant argument which permeated all the interviews was the notion that interest organisations would be granted listening space, but their ability to influence was negligible if it did not align with policy-makers’ economic objectives.

Older people’s interest organisations did not have the ability to place issues on the policy agenda and at best could only hope for modifications to certain aspects of proposed policies. Lukes’ (1974) ‘three faces of power’ as outlined in Chapter 2 which refers to government’s control over the political agenda through decision-making, non decision-making and ideological power appears relevant in the Irish context. The statement made by senior civil servants and former Junior Ministers suggests that many of the issues of relevance to older people’s interest organisations are likely to be kept from the policy agenda. The perceived unrepresentative nature of older people’s interest organisations and irrelevance of old age-targeting facilitates the subjugation of the demands of older people’s interest organisations.

Responses from civil servants and former Junior Ministers to questions regarding the involvement of older people’s interest organisations in policy formulation suggest a resistance, on their behalf, to engage with older people’s interest organisations in the early stages of policy formulation. It appears that organisations were only informed of policy initiatives once all the major issues had been agreed by government, thus there are only two options in the dialogue, agreement or else a questioning of key tenets of the proposed policy, which is inevitably construed by policy makers and civil servants as reactive and unconstructive. Hence, it is conceivable that respondents’ categorisation of organisations as reactive, reflects the one-sidedness of the dialogue process. Indicative of
this were the expressions employed by research participants, such as, 'giving them a hearing'. There was no sense of collaboration, instead they were seen as 'a nuisance' and a 'thorn in the side' when making policy demands, or, 'soft' and 'fluffy' when their focus was on participation. Civil servants and Junior Ministers conveyed no sense that significant policy decisions had been influenced by older people's interest organisations, instead it appeared that the organisations were passive observers, who are brought along to give the appearance of inclusiveness but in fact were just afforded permission to observe. This tendency is visible in the following statements which also suggest that the major policy decisions have effectively already been decided upon before dialogue with the organisations begin:

I think we do certainly try and accommodate them as much as possible. But often if they are just against the underlying principle there is not a huge amount we can do but try and build in the explanatory stuff and all the rest that they would need.

(Civil servant, 14)

Now at the end of the day, the minister has to make decisions, they are not always going to be in line, and I always feel the closer you have these groups with you, it's not that you can tell them everything, they realise you have to keep them at a certain distance, but at the same time you can communicate and explain to them the reasons why you are doing what you are doing, I think if you keep them informed they are much more likely to accept the decision you make.

(Former Junior Minister)

[we aim to provide] 'the fullest possible explanation, the options were placed on the table and that I think helped people's understanding, not only of where we are going, but why we are going, and why we have chosen these options'.

(Civil servant, 17)
[our contact with them] generally involves a lot of kind of us explaining why we are doing things and maybe defending government policy in a particular area, that is mostly what it is.

(Civil servant, 15)

The above statements suggest that policymakers want to control the outcomes of the policy dialogue and there is little space for divergent opinions. Decisions appear to have already been taken by the time there is engagement with representatives of the older people's sector, and these decisions seem non-contestable. Rather than setting an agenda for a process aimed at achieving mutually agreeable policies it seems the process is engineered to ensure the 'right' answers are acquired. One civil servant criticised this culture and the mindset of government and policy-makers which he believed prohibits collaboration and demonizes dissent. This respondent argued that a culture which is disapproving of any form of dissent or opposition to government proposals permeates state departments. This leads to negative perceptions of interest organisations, including older people's interest organisations, given that they are likely to question the equity and rationale of policy proposals:

I think partly the political context that we are in is hostile to community interest organisations, it is hostile to dissent and it must be incredibly angry at the older people's protest about the medical cards, I would imagine, so it is that hostility in a way to dissent to expressions of disagreement, to advocacy, to people exposing their interests in any sort of noisy way.

(Public servant, 3)

However, the suggestion was made by a small number of research participants that the organisations do not provide plausible well-thought out policy alternatives. This was thought to be in contrast with some other professional bodies, such as Nursing Homes Ireland and insurance companies who at times presented well-researched policy alternatives. One respondent commented how much of the material older people's interest organisations cite and use is publicly available data, which offers no new
perspectives. Others outlined their belief that, at times, organisations’ inflexibility is coupled with a resistance to adapt and modify their own policy mandates:

I find that they react to whatever we are doing often negatively, but there is no actual alternative proposed, this has been particularly so in the context of the Fair Deal. Where you know it was in a particular policy context and I as I say part of a long-term funding model, but it was regarded as an interim solution and basically it has just been a case of outright opposition to it, without any real positive or proactive suggestions as an alternative…. [But] the actual people in industry seem to take it beyond we don’t like this, into here is what, you know we will help your cost proposal, we’ll help you do this or the other, so they do come up with more positive alternatives even if you might not be able to accommodate them, but they do come up with alternatives.

\[Civil\ \text{servant, 14}\]

Many of their policy proposals are thought to take a short-term focus. Civil servants argued that in addition to taking ‘the bigger picture perspective’ they must also take ‘a long-term perspective’. This perceived discrepancy can accentuate the divide between the civil servants and older people’s interest organisations and lead to antagonism and frustration. Finally, another inhibitor to dialogue is the issue of confidentiality. The inclusion of interest organisations in the policy making process can introduce a level of complication. Interest organisations, which are answerable to their members and obliged to keep them informed, are no doubt likely to run into difficulty if they are required not to inform their members of the particulars of policy discussions with civil servants. However, the leaking of this information can have dramatic implications for the policy process and may inhibit the development of collegial working relationships.

7.5 Conclusion
This chapter suggests that older people’s interest organisations operate in an environment which prima facia appears to be responsive to their participation but on closer inspection reveals itself to be replete with suspicion, scepticism and rigidity. Consultation with older people’s interest organisations was viewed as a precondition of

168
policymakers' work. However, only in a small number of cases when service users' perspectives were sought did consultation appear to influence the outcome of decisions. By categorising the work of organisations as reactive, un-representative, poorly researched and short-term focused, policymakers were able to provide justification for discounting many of the claims and demands made by the groups. The potential of older people's interest organisations was not seen as their ability to inform or influence policy but instead to develop services and community supports for older people and encourage their active participation as volunteers and active citizens in the community.

The chapter highlights the fact that policy-makers hold a perspective which has much in common with the ideology of individualization. Old-age as an identity defining characteristic was not seen as valid. The chapter argues that policy makers held a policy perspective which aligns with Gilleard and Higgs (2000) characterisation of 'advanced liberalism' and advocated a residual role for the state. In this discourse the state did not have a role in providing welfare supports to all older people. Instead, older individuals were viewed as being responsible for their own health and economic welfare. The state's responsibility lay only with those who, on the basis of a financial means-assessment, were deemed vulnerable. Employing a 'consumer public discourse' (Barnes et al. 2007), the language of the private sector was invoked by the government. Priority was placed on seeking 'value for money' and 'accountability'. 'Equity' and 'parity' were sought by the state acting as an arbitrator of the various demands of interest organisations. Given the government's predominant focus on welfare rationing, the priorities of the organisations were viewed to be in conflict with civil servants' long-term work goals and policy objectives.

The findings outlined in the chapter suggest that the system as it currently operates does not facilitate the meaningful participation of older people's interest organisations. The current State structures lead to and perpetuate a paternalistic style of policy-making towards older people's interest organisations. They are not conferred with an effective right to participation. It is argued that their current status could be regarded as 'included observers', rather than active participants, in the policy process. They are not viewed as partners. Consultation in many instances may be used as window-dressing to give the
appearance of citizen engagement. It can potentially be used as a smokescreen for the promotion of ideas which policy-makers and politicians wish to adopt. The current treatment of the organisations as policy-making observers rather than effective participants in the process, appears to grant civil servants and politicians free reign to endorse and implement policies more aligned with their own priorities, biases and interests than those of the people whom they purportedly aim to serve. The case of the medical card demonstration as perceived from older people’s interest organisations’ and policy-makers’ perspectives is addressed in the next chapter.
8: FINDINGS IV: THE MEDICAL CARD PROTEST: A CASE STUDY OF AN EPISODE OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM

8.1 INTRODUCTION

During the course of the fieldwork for the thesis, 'the medical card protest' unfolded. The actions of older people's interest organisations and their members took on, arguably, the greatest relevance since their inception. Taken at face value the success of the medical card protest confirms the 'senior/grey power model', however, as discussed below, other crucial mediating factors influenced the relative success of the campaign. This chapter provides an account of older people's interest organisations' involvement in the protest and policy-makers' perspectives on the event and lessons learnt. By providing an account of organisations' and policy-makers' reflections on the event, the chapter considers whether the reversal of the government's decision signified the coming of age of the older people's movement and their representative groups in Ireland or was an isolated incident of mobilisation. The medical card protest occurred during the thesis fieldwork, hence, the analysis relates to interviews and focus groups that were conducted after the protest started (interviews with two organisation directors, nine focus groups with members and staff of the older people's interest organisations and interviews with 20 policy-makers and five former Junior Ministers of State for Older People). Section 8.2 provides a brief background to the granting and subsequent withdrawal of a universal medical card to all persons aged 70 years and over. Following this discussion Section 8.3 provides an account of the perceptions of the members, staff and directors of the medical card protest and Section 8.4 outlines policy-makers' perceptions of the event.

8.2 BACKGROUND

In his 2001 Budget speech, the Fianna Fáil Minister for Finance, Mr Charlie McCreevy, stated that the Government wished to recognise 'the part played by the workers of yesterday in laying the foundation for so much of our current economic success' (Humphries, 2000) and granted all persons aged 70 years and over an automatic entitlement to a medical card. The government decision was announced before any negotiations had taken place with GPs on how much they would be paid for treating the
new over-70s card holders. The number of beneficiaries was also grossly underestimated. The Irish Medical Organisation demanded that GPs treating the new beneficiaries get treble the payment for those who previously held medical cards.

The medical card offered beneficiaries free GP services, prescribed drugs and medicines (with some exceptions), in-patient public hospital services, out-patient services and free medical appliances and dental, optical and aural services. Seven years later, on 14 October 2008, the Fianna Fáil Minister for Finance, Brian Lenihan, presented the Irish Parliament with the government Budget for 2009. In an effort to save public money he announced that the automatic universal entitlement for people aged 70 years and over to a medical card would be abolished. Instead, he proposed that a means-based system of assessment would be introduced.

The print and television media dedicated a significant amount of time and resources to covering this controversial measure. The two largest older people’s advocacy groups in Ireland, the Senior Citizens Parliament and Age Action Ireland, immediately issued press releases condemning the move and called for an immediate reversal of the decision. They organised two public meetings, one of which was attended by over 2000 older people and another by approximately 15,000. At both these demonstrations Ministers who attempted to address the crowds were heckled and jeered and forced to cut short their speeches. The demonstrators were supported not just by the general public but by the opposition political parties. Support was even garnered from Dublin city taxi drivers who provided free taxis from Dublin’s main train station to the protest demonstration at Leinster House, while Insomnia, a coffee chain, provided free coffees to all persons aged 70 and over who attended the march. There appeared to be few opponents to the organisations’ call to reverse the decision; nursing home representative groups and even doctors, as mentioned above a group who had been critical of its introduction in 2001, were now critical of the move to remove the automatic entitlement to the medical card.

Over the course of ten days the campaign gained momentum. Serious tensions and fissures emerged not just within the coalition Government but also within rank and file members of the Fianna Fáil Parliamentary Party. The full extent of these divisions was laid bare when first a Fianna Fáil T.D. resigned from the Party and then an Independent T.D. withdrew his support from the coalition government. To placate the voting electorate the Minister for Finance moved quickly and announced five different eligibility thresholds.
The protests resulted in significant changes to the means-test limit but did not result in a complete reversal of the decision. The automatic entitlement to a medical card for all persons aged 70 and over ended on 31st December 2008. Under the Health Act 2008, everyone aged over 70 who applies for a medical card is subject to a means-test. People with a weekly gross income above €700 for a single person or €1400 for a couple would no longer be entitled to a medical card.

8.3 Older people's interest organisations' perspectives of the medical card protest

8.3.1 Laying bare the irrelevance of consultation
The manner in which the decision to remove the automatic entitlement to the medical card was made and subsequently relayed to the public provided confirmation to the organisations that policies which have a direct impact on older people are implemented without adequate consultation with them. The government's actions lend support to statements made in Chapter 5 that the social partnership process gives only lip service to the priorities of attendees, particularly where decisions with important financial implications are involved. According to the staff of three organisations the removal of the medical card was mooted at a government social partnership meeting more than a year prior to the announcement of the eligibility change in Budget 2009. The organisations representing older people in attendance at this meeting conveyed their disapproval of any such action. However, their attempts to safeguard the universal nature of the benefit were not sufficient.

8.3.2 A groundswell of anger among the older population
Research respondents relayed how the members of the older people's interest organisations and the older population in general were angry at the government's decision to remove the universal entitlement to the medical card for persons aged 70 years and over. The action was seen as being symptomatic of the administrations' general disregard and lack of respect for older people. The medical card was viewed as a key enabler which provided for the better long-term health of older people and provided a sense of security since it alleviated any worries people may have had about prospective...

173
escalating health costs. Research participants argued that the older population had felt betrayed by the government and older people were unfairly targeted in Budget 2009. The notion of entitlement as discussed in Chapter 6 was invoked, they had earned the right to the medical card and the government’s decision to end universality threatened their sense of personal security.

Statements made in the interviews suggest that the groundswell of anger emerged from the general public’s own reaction to the announcement rather than from the actions of the interest organisations. Directors and members of the organisations indicated that they could not claim to have aroused the palpable anger and frustration among the over 70s population but indicated that they sought to be a conduit of this anger by providing formal structures to channel the frustration of both members and non-members alike. As one focus group attendee stated, ‘it was a spontaneous thing, we didn’t even contact our federation of associations, we didn’t have to, it was spontaneous’. Directors outlined how their phones were inundated with members of the public incensed at the actions of the government. The following words from an organisation Director provide an insight into the nature of the calls and the sense of alienation and betrayal felt towards the government:

We didn’t organise the anger, there was an absolute avalanche of calls. And the general message we were getting from people was that politicians don’t understand what they are doing, they don’t know what they have taken from us, and they are not listening to us, we cannot get through to them.

(Director, organisation 10)

The media attention given to the removal of the medical card was regarded as being instrumental in the success of the campaign. The mass media provided the general public with a medium to relay their frustration and agitated the older population into action. The director of one organisation explained how, unlike other advocacy campaigns, the issue gained national prominence in the media with little effort. Corroborating Down’s (1972) thesis that policy issues gain prominence as a result of ‘euphoric enthusiasm’ among the general public, the media placed the medical card as a central news item.
8.3.3 The organisation of a public demonstration

Organising public demonstrations was a tactic used infrequently by the interest groups, but took on important significance after the government's announcement that it would end universal availability of the medical card. Due to the unprecedented public outrage two of the organisations decided to hold a public demonstration, to which they invited public representatives to address attendees. On the 21st of October Age Action Ireland, anticipating an attendance of 300 people, scheduled a meeting at O'Callaghan Alexander Hotel in Dublin city centre but, due to an unexpectedly high turnout, moved the venue to Saint Patrick's Church where almost 2000 attended the event. The following day, the Senior Citizens Parliament organised a demonstration rally outside government buildings on Kildare Street with an attendance of approximately 15,000 people.

Age Action Ireland provided a microphone at Saint Patrick's Church to any attendees who wished to express their frustration. Older people attending took to the stage to voice their anger at the perceived inequitable allocation of resources and made repeated calls for retribution at the ballot box. Referring to a participant who made her way to the public platform and pulled the microphone from a TD to condemn his actions, a director explained that it is not the organisation's duty or responsibility to temper the frustration of the people they represent. Instead advocacy organisations have to allow for the passionate expression of frustration and anger, even if at times the manner in which it is communicated does not align with the usual more rational and dispassionate method of public policy discourse:

As an advocacy organisation, we said we would set up a venue, a microphone, you can come and we will invite all the politicians, TDs, every TD and senator was invited. We get them in one place, and the danger is like what happened with Minister John Malloney, having his microphone snapped from him, and how you then control or try and censure a room full of very angry people, but that's what an advocacy organisation does, enables people to have their voice heard by those they want to speak to.

(Director, organisation 10)
While Age Action Ireland and the Senior Citizen Parliament were to the forefront of the campaign, other organisations took an active role in rousing members and eliciting their participation at the public demonstrations. Respondents in all but one of the membership organisations relayed how they received calls from members calling for the organisation to become politicised and actively involved in the protest. According to the research participants in the focus groups, the organisations made concerted efforts to get their members to attend one of the two public demonstrations. Activities included scheduling local meetings, coordinating travel arrangements for members, petitioning local politicians collectively and partaking in national and local radio interviews. The communication effort involved in the pre-organisation of the event spanned a number of days. The logistics involved in organising a mass mobilization event necessitated national groups liaising with local organisations which would in turn cascade information to other local groups in order to increase awareness and garner the support and participation of their members and the public in general.

8.3.4 Mobilization and Participation of Organisation Members

Chapter 5 refers to the importance of the affiliation of local networks to the national organisations. The importance of this affiliation revealed itself during the medical card protests when these networks were utilized to facilitate the mobilisation of older people to attend the protest demonstration. Comments made by an executive committee member of one organisation provide an insight into the efforts made by organisation members to rouse the participation of older people at the local level:

We had to have a meeting here in Dublin and we just spent the whole meeting on how we were going to organise it. I went back over to Galway with the list of the affiliated groups in Galway and rang all of them to start with and then within the city almost visited each one, some of them, if I knew the chairperson well because you knew them from meetings and things, I knew that I could leave it to them to organise their group. Groups that were less active I had to go and say look we are having this meeting and please get some of your people to come, and I went on local radio and then onto Joe Duffy [talk show] and local papers, county councillors you name it. And others did exactly the same in their area, and rung every older
friend they had in Dublin and said please come cause we need people and I don't care whether you are interested or not I want you there.

(Executive committee member, organisation 1)

A number of research participants in the focus groups relayed how they participated in local and national radio talk shows. Media coverage on RTÉ radio 1 prime time radio programme Joe Duffy\textsuperscript{25} was regarded as highly relevant in rousing public anger. The importance of this media publicity before the scheduled protest march was relayed by the respondent above:

We were blessed we got in at the time it was taken up by Joe Duffy on Liveline and everyday for a week Joe Duffy was giving us publicity that you couldn't buy, we got that for nothing, and he was slightly whipping it up and encouraging them, and luckily enough we had announced we were going to have the protest that day.

(Executive committee member, organisation 1)

The large numbers of attendees at the protest march were not anticipated. The protest revealed how unaffiliated and perhaps formerly apolitical older people could join in solidarity to demonstrate against the government. It also highlighted the ability of older people's organisations to collaborate successfully. The significance of this was expressed by a number of research participants including committee member who stated 'it was a watershed, because it unified all the groups on an issue' and another who noted 'there wasn't a political division, it was political unification'. The events in October 2008 relating to the medical card thus lend support to Street's (1999) and Campbell's (2003) argument that universalism elicits solidarity, that it provides greater legitimacy to benefits and raises the perceived deserving nature of recipients. The removal of the medical card represented the loss of a very clear tangible entitlement to the population of older people. The implications of the change were immediate, long-term and easily understandable. All

\textsuperscript{25} Joe Duffey is the presenter of RTÉ Radio 1's Liveline, which is broadcast on Radio 1, Monday - Fridays between 13:45 and 15:00. After RTÉ Radio 1 Morning Ireland programme (464,000 listeners) it is the most popular programme with 424,000 listeners (Cullen, 2010).
persons aged 70 years and over had a vested interest in the preservation of the benefit and thereby a reason to collaborate together to agitate for the preservation of the benefit.

The participation of formally apolitical members of interest groups, particularly those who engaged more in the social or recreational strands of the organisations was viewed as significant. The extent to which formerly non-politicized older people became empowered and found the courage to voice their anger was captured in the following statement made by an organisation director:

I am still shaking, [when I think of] that meeting, the church meeting, these little old ladies, whispered to me, this is the first time I have ever spoken in public, and I want to say well for Jesus sake why wouldn't you pick a less daunting place, but they felt too strongly about it and that is fine, and they walked away 6ft tall of course, that is the important thing.

(Director, organisation 10)

The vigour with which the demonstrators vocalised their anger was insightful for the organisations since it revealed the latent political responsiveness of the population of older people:

It was a historic day, because there was people there, that I met too, that didn't belong to any association, had almost withdrawn, finished with it, but they were there protesting.

(Member, organisation 2)

Only one organisation did not get involved in the medical card protest since they questioned the fairness of the medical card benefit in the first place, stating that it was an example of the administration's 'unplanned giving and unplanned taking' and the ineffectual manner in which policy is enacted in Ireland. Members of this organisation, however, changed their assessment of the importance of the medical card when they
witnessed the response from the general population of older people to the announcement that it would be means-tested.

Directors and members believed that the timing of the event was fortuitous. The change to the medical card eligibility benefit preceded a successive wave of social security cuts and income levies to other segments of society. As the first victims of the austerity measures, older people were seen as being unfairly targeted. Focus group attendees also believed support was generated across families with older family members. The importance of this intergenerational support was viewed to have been an important facilitating factor in the success of the campaign.

8.3.5 'Political awakening' and empowerment
The prominence of older people's issues on the national political agenda was thought by the directors and all the focus group attendees to have increased following the medical card protests. There was a widespread belief that the mobilisation of older people in both public demonstrations ensured that other benefits were not subsequently removed. For example, in the 2010 Budget, funding for the Rural Transport Programme was continued despite calls from the Department of Finance in June 2010 to cease funding this programme (Pobal, 2010). Following a concerted lobbying campaign by the umbrella organisation Older and Bolder the state pension escaped a cut in Budget 2011 while a cut to weekly payments was made to jobseekers', carers', disability, illness, lone parent and maternity or adoptive benefits. Focus group attendees attributed the government's decision to leave pension payments untouched to government's fear that older people would protest again and would vote against government, as one respondent stated:

I think they [government] probably didn't expect a backlash, I think they thought that was for younger people, getting out there and protesting, I don't think they ever would have thought people of our age would bother doing it and I'd say they saw votes floating away.

(Committee member, organisation 1)
The public protests were thus thought to have empowered and politicised older people. While the medical card protest was seen as a vindication of older people’s rights and a highly significant display of the latent political power of older people, some of the research participants acknowledged that the protest was ‘a limited success’ because the principle of universal entitlement to health care benefits was revoked. Nonetheless, a hint of optimism could be detected in the statements made by research participants, for example, the comment below made by an organisation director who outlined that members have acquired a new sense of anger and entitlement which was particularly evident in their annual meetings:

And people will be more vociferous and they are at our AGM. The nature of our AGM is changing because people feel they have the right to speak at the AGM and they say all sorts of daft things sometimes, but, they are there and we need to give them the confidence.

(Staff member, organisation 10)

This director viewed this as a positive development, which it was hoped would elicit greater participation of older people in the organisation. While statements were made by focus group attendees that similar demonstrations would take place again should benefits be reduced, the manner in which an equivalent response could be orchestrated was unclear. Overall, however, it appeared that organisations were unsure how best to tap into this political awakening. While research participants indicated that older people could orchestrate a similar protest if required, they acknowledge that this would only occur if it was something that would have negative and immediate consequences for the majority of older people, as one respondent stated, ‘it would have to anger in an extreme way the vast majority of people’. It was suggested that a removal of the travel pass, a universal entitlement to persons aged 66 and over which provides free transport on all state public transport, could elicit the same anger. However, when probed about the lack of response to significant policy changes like the Nursing Home Subvention Scheme (see Chapter 5) research participants relayed how older people are unlikely to take action on policy issues which do not impact upon them in the short-term. Furthermore, another respondent relayed how activism is typically in response to a proposed reduction in benefits. Echoing sentiments expressed by policymakers in Chapter 7 that organisations tend to respond to
a perceived threat or reduction in welfare benefits, one respondent stated, 'if the threat recedes they [older people] usually recede too'.

8.3.7 Retribution at the ballot box
Chapter 5 highlighted how organisations placed emphasis on reminding older people of the political influence they can wield at the ballot box. In something akin to Binstock’s (2005) thesis of ‘electoral bluff’, research participants relayed that their greatest means of effecting change was through the voting behaviour of their members and older people in general. The perception that older people are more likely to vote than younger cohorts appeared to be the anchor to which focus group attendees tied most of the power of older people and older people’s interest organisations. The interviewed members of the interest organisations hoped that electoral retribution would be exercised in instances where older people’s benefits were cut. As the member of one organisation argued, unlike employed individuals who could threaten industrial action, older people were constrained by their lack of economic activity and had few means by which to elicit a response from government:

What can I do, what can we say? We will all go and fire our pension books across the desk at the post office person? We have very few weapons we can use, except the vote.

(Member, organisation 1)

The removal of the universal entitlement to the medical card was thought to be a watershed in the voting allegiance of older people. By and large, research participants in the focus groups believed that politicians became more aware of the ‘grey vote’ as a result of the medical card protests. However, some voiced a concern that government could make additional policy changes which would negatively impact on the less vocal marginalized older people. While the anger that motivated people to become involved in the protest demonstrations was thought to have dissipated somewhat, anger at the government was thought to be pervasive and would be expressed through retribution at the ballot box. Older people’s traditional political allegiance to political parties, often
based on post-civil war ideologies, was considered to have been weakened, forcing politicians to give greater consideration to older people's issues:

In terms of political advocacy last year for the first time, certainly in my experience, all the political parties made commitments about older people and all of them either had separate papers or substantial sections in their Manifestos about older people and that is the first time that that has ever happened and also the programme of government gave much greater attention to older people.

(Director, organisation 4)

8.4 Policymakers' perceptions of the medical card protest

8.4.1 Removing an inequitable benefit
All but four research participants (who were public servants, that is, employed in public government agencies), were supportive of the removal of the automatic entitlement to the medical card from persons aged 70 and over. Those against the decision, communicated the importance of the medical card for older people's sense of security and argued that older people may experience more health deficits than younger people. The dominant perspective from the remaining research participants was that universality of the medical card to all persons aged 70 and over was 'over generous' and not a fair distribution of resources. To illustrate the inequities of a universal medical card for the over 70s, research participants made extreme statements in which older medical card beneficiaries, who were described as 'millionaires', were pitted against younger low income people who were ineligible to a medical card. Responses also revealed an assumption that the provision of universal health care to older people in the light of the predicted demographic changes in Ireland was impractical and unsustainable.

8.4.2 An unexpected protest
Both former Junior Ministers and civil/public servants expressed surprise at the rapid mobilisation of older people and the extent of the reaction to the removal of the automatic entitlement to the medical card. The anger engendered among older people was described as a 'cold anger'. Former Junior Ministers (N=3) who were in situ at the time were most affected by the scale of the response. These Ministers relayed how they received 'hundreds of phone calls' from angry constituents, some of whom were calling for their resignation.
unique aspect of the response was that it seized the attention of all age groups and was cross-generational. They relayed how younger family members were incensed that their parents were losing an entitlement and lobbied politicians to reverse the decision. The public outrage was described as unprecedented, the atmosphere in Leinster House on the announcement of the Budget was relayed by a former Junior Minister in the following statement:

As we left the Dáil that Friday evening, for what I can remember there was a most unusual sort of air, people not sure what was happening and some people thought we were staring an election in the face, so the reaction to it from people. I don’t think there was anything ever created such a reaction and it wasn’t all older people, you had younger people ringing up on behalf of their parents saying this is not right.

(Former Junior Minister)

Similar to respondents in the older people’s interest organisations all the interviewed policy-makers suggested that timing and the media coverage were important to the success of the campaign. In the words of one respondent, ‘these things they build a dynamic of their own that you could never replicate, it’s a certain series of events’. Older people’s interest organisations were also credited to have played an instrumental role. However, one civil servant and one former Junior Minister were more circumspect about the organisations’ involvement. Returning to the notion of the unrepresentative nature of older people’s interest organisations discussed in Chapter 7, the former Junior Minister argued that attendees at the protest march did not mirror the general population of older people:

And older people’s interest organisations do not do older people the service that is deserving of them, because they become too political and they allow themselves to be used by RTÉ, namely, Joe Duffy, I don’t mind mentioning him and others to keep churning the machine while older people really need the services, they are often sidelined for another cause really, just to keep people in jobs, and I would be conscious of that very much.

(Former Junior Minister)
These two participants also held the somewhat unusual opinion that the media was involved in a subversive political smear campaign and that the interest groups had been hijacked by the media.

8.4.3 A FLAWED COMMUNICATION STRATEGY & SHAPING THE PUBLIC POLITICAL DISCOURSE
The manner in which changes to the medical card entitlement were announced was regarded by all as a public relations catastrophe. Two civil servants stated that the removal of the automatic entitlement to the medical card had been raised previously without significant organisational or public outcry. The public outrage which followed the announcement of Budget 2009 was thought to have stemmed more from a failure to communicate the need and rationale for the removal of the automatic entitlement to the medical card than from any objective calculus regarding the end of universality of medical cards to the over seventies. As one respondent phrased it, ‘it wasn’t sold very well’, similarly another civil servant argued:

> It was an absolute disaster in terms of communication, that’s without a doubt. If it had actually been done properly in terms of what they wanted to achieve which was to get rid of the universality and only to focus on those who had sufficient resources to pay for their own medical card, you know, I don’t think that was unreasonable, it was certainly floated a number of times in advance of the budget, rumoured in the papers, and there was no outcry.

(Civil servant, 17)

Supporting the arguments made in Chapter 7 that senior civil servants and Junior Ministers emphasised explanation over deliberation, policy-makers spoke about informing the public of preconceived policy plans rather than entering into an authentic dialogue with the public to ascertain their policies preference a priori. Statements made in relation to the medical card revealed a tendency to focus more on how they failed to adequately alter public opinion, to persuade the public of the acceptability of the changes relating to the medical card entitlement. Again echoing statements, made in Chapter 7.
emphasis was placed on building in explanations rather than consultation, as one former Junior Minister commented:

and certainly the manner in which it was communicated, left a lot to be desired, now have we learned from it...that if you are going to make a decision such as that you have to be very sure your communications are in place. You have your figures correct, very common sense approach which just was not there at that particular time. ....And if it is going to be painful let it be painful, but at the same time we have to make it very clear, why we are doing this.

(Former Junior Minister)

Emphasis was placed on shaping the public political discourse or narrative to persuade the public of the need to reduce government spending due to the economic climate. Public opinion was consequently argued to have changed since the medical card protests. The possibilities of a repeat scenario were therefore thought to be low, since as in the words of one respondent the public has been 'softened up':

...having gone through a whole period where the whole mantra on everybody's lips was well everybody has to share the pain, you would probably find much greater acceptance now [if announcement to end universality of the medical card occurred now].

(Civil servant, 10)

Paternalistic attitudes towards older people were discernible across a number of the interviews and contributed to the perception that older people were unlikely to protest again in such numbers. These research participants held the view that the opinion of the older population was malleable and could be persuaded of the validity of policy-maker’s policy preferences. An example of this is in the following comments made by a former Junior Minister who relayed how older people in general are quite accepting of policy change once explanation has been built in:

I think that older people above all are most reasonable and so full of common sense because they have the years of wisdom and experience, and I think once it is
explained properly to people and not just talking about older people, because that might sound condescending, but people are very good to accept situations’

(Former Junior Minister)

In addition, one senior civil servant relayed how organisations’ attentiveness to policy issues is frequently limited. For example, changes made to pension policy since the medical card protest, which would have significant negative economic implications for future constituencies of older people, were implemented without any protest from older people or their representative groups:

You never take anything back from those who already have it, you make the change but it affects the new people, you know the same with pensions systems, typically if you change a pension scheme, you change it for the new people coming in, it’s virtually impossible to take something back, because people have a sense of ownership and they’ve been given it and they expect to have it for the rest of their lives, so, you know, they would have been much better off saying yes we are changing it, from here on out.

(Civil servant 12)

In a similar vein another civil servant took the cynical view that policy-makers have a far more ambitious and long-term policy agenda than older people’s interest organisations. The following comment lays bare the extent to which this respondent believed policy-makers can essentially bide out their time, and given the economic climate will be in a position to justify whatever policy changes they see fit. Speaking condescendingly of the medical card protest march the respondent relayed how a decrease in public attentiveness provides policy-makers with greater autonomy to implement policy changes which may not find approval with older people’s interest organisations:

I would see that as a very peripheral and short-term impact because you know it’s facts drive events and the fact is that the government has to sit down sometime this year and secure four billion according to its own targets and at that point the
level of protection that is afforded by a squabble last year and it is unlikely that you are going to get a group of people that are exempted from the impact of it. Now on the other hand, it is still fresh enough in the mind, you know it might have an impact for year or so....I don't know how older people's interest organisations operate, but we operate on a very long-term basis (laughter).

(Civil servant, 17)

8.4.4 Long-term impact
Policymakers held a similar perception to the directors and members of older people's interest organisations. The believed that older people had become more politicised as a result of the medical card protests and that a greater sense of empowerment had emerged among the older population. However, the extent to which this politicisation has been sustained or built upon was questioned. Despite the relative success of the medical card protest, they believed that given the economic climate where all members of society were experiencing welfare or tax cuts, older people may not be so quick to mobilise as was the case with the medical card. Indeed, responses from policy-makers suggest that the medical card protest did not provoke any greater fear of or respect for older people's interest organisations in the long-term. The reasons why interest groups were not seen as a new force to be reckoned with revolved around the uniqueness of the medical card issue, as one civil servant phrased it, 'it was a one card game in a way...and it was really well played but they had nothing to follow it up with'. The general public sympathy towards the issue was also highly salient and was unlikely to be repeated in a climate where cuts were being imposed across all segments of society, another civil servant commented:

It was the first in several steps cause we had the first budget, the series of reductions and expenditures, then a second budget and I think it was the first tangible act where it brought home to people, that yes, we are now going to have to retreat from the expansionary decade we had. For all groups it had been good, and I think this was the first pull back on the reins and there was obviously going to be a shock effect....I'm just wondering if the sequence had been different would we have had another group out on the street.

(Public servant, 3)
8.4.5 Political lessons

The impact of the medical card, however, was more significant for former Junior Ministers than civil and public servants. This perhaps reflects politicians' focus on their own political gain and associated short-term implications of policy change on their electoral success. In the European and local election in 2009 Fianna Fail lost 84 seats. According to an RTÉ exit poll 65 per cent of people aged 70 and over indicated that their vote was influenced by governments removal of the medical card as an autonomic entitlement. Perhaps as result of these elections all civil/public servants stated that an outcome of the medical card protest was that politicians would be loath to make further cuts to the current population of older people's benefits in the short-term. In the words of one respondent, 'I think politicians will be looking over their shoulder at certainly everything we put in front of them for policy decisions with regard to the elderly.'

This attitude was corroborated by former Junior Ministers who stated that they and their fellow political colleagues had become more aware of the 'grey vote'. The extent of older people's anger towards the government in the medical card protests was thought to illustrate older people's changing political affiliation and the fact that partisanship or party loyalty cannot be assumed. Party attachment was undermined and it was incumbent on politicians to appease the demands of their constituencies:

I think because historically older people are one of the core groups that vote Fianna Fáil, I think there is a very clear electoral reason why they rolled back on their decision to change the eligibility entitlement to the medical card. They are not a constituency that they wished to anger to that extent. I think they didn't expect that level of outrage and I think it took elected politicians aback hugely and I think they were concerned about votes.

(Former Junior Minister)

The need to focus greater attention on older people’s issues was also raised by another former Junior Minister:

Well certainly from a politician’s point of view, I would say it is not something that will be forgotten. ...and it brought home the necessity for political parties to have very clear policies for older people, all parties, I don’t think we were very clear and we certainly didn’t give priority to older people in establishing policies....and older people weren’t given the type of priority that they deserved, so I would say it was a wake-up call for the parties who saw the reaction and I would say from the point of view of giving - most people would look now and say there are a lot of older people are voters as well, and certainly they can’t be ignored. Apart from their entitlements but it is very necessary that if you want to be successful it is important that you have clear policies that people can understand.

(Former Junior Minister)

Similarly the sentiment of protecting older people’s benefits was reiterated by another former Junior Minister:

We have made it clear as a government that the vulnerable people will be the very last to be considered, and they would obviously be pensioners and carers... And I think pensioners, if we could leave them untouched, as well as the carers, freeze it, it won’t be increased that is for sure this year, but if we can retain what we are giving them, both the carers and the pensioners, I think we will be doing well.

(Former Junior Minister)

8.5 CONCLUSION

The rapid mobilization of older people in the wake of the announcement to end the universality of the medical card clearly illustrates how policy design affects the political participation of older people. More specifically, it illustrates how the structure of social policies can create large constituencies of older people who have an incentive to defend or campaign for policies that are of relevance to them. The mobilization of older people in relation to the proposed medical card changes supports arguments made by Weaver
(1986) that individuals’ ‘negativity bias’ makes people more sensitive to real or potential losses than they are to gains. The findings detailed in this chapter also support arguments made by Pierson (1996, 2001) and Campbell (2003, 2007) that policy changes in welfare states with universal systems of benefits are more difficult, due to the fact that universal systems foster greater levels of solidarity and cohesiveness among constituents. An end to the automatic entitlement to the medical card had an immediate negative impact on all persons aged 70 years and over. Not only did the universal nature of the benefit eradicate the stigmatising effect of means-tested benefits (Campbell, 2003), it also had the result of incorporating middle class interests (Esping Andersen, 1990). The medical card protest revealed ‘policies’ interpretative effects’ (Pierson, 1996) on interest group mobilisation. In the absence of such policies, the influence of older people’s interest organisations is likely to be diminished since the constituency of older people is undermined by the absence of unifying welfare benefits.

The chapter reveals how organisational activity was instrumental in mobilizing people to participate in the protests. The organisations provided older people (members and non-members) with a means and mechanism for mobilizing. However, the success of the campaign cannot be divorced from a number of other variables, including the timing of the event and the fact that the scale of the economic downturn had not revealed itself. Older people were the first casualties of the government’s attempted austerity measures; the wider public had not, as yet, incurred the tax increases and government pay-related levies. This was fortuitous for older people’s interest organisations since it ensured greater support from the general public than may have been the case had similar policy changes been imposed on the wider population.

Policymakers’ assessment of the medical card incident lends further support to the arguments made in Chapter 7 about a lack of transparency in policy-making in the Irish context as it relates to older people. The findings in this chapter reveal how policymakers emphasised the importance of framing the public political discourse in a manner which prioritized conceptions of the common good as perceived by government rather than the public through consultation. Averting public scrutiny appeared preferable. It was therefore unsurprising that these research participants, reflecting on the medical card
protest, surmised that in retrospect changes to the medical card were overzealous and should have only pertained to future prospective beneficiaries and not current constituents. They conveyed how public scrutiny is likely to be diminished or diffused in situations where existent beneficiaries are not impacted by the policy change. Altering the public discourse seemed particularly easier in the context of the economic recession where it appears that as a result of the budgetary crisis unpopular policies can be justified on fiscal grounds.

Finally, the findings in this chapter suggest that elected representatives may focus greater attention on the impact of policy changes on older people than civil/public servants. This focus is not related to any moral or ethical assessment of the needs of older people, but instead on the electoral impact of unfavourable policy changes. Placating older voters was advanced for politicians' own political gain. Politicians eager to avoid the 'politics of blame' (Weaver, 1986), realized that they had to appease their older constituents and revise the eligibility thresholds for the medical card. Former Junior Ministers, however, also placed emphasis on the strategy of deferred policy change which is seen to deflect public scrutiny and thereby minimise voter antagonism. The issue of policy-incrementalism thus becomes highly relevant in the politics of old age, a topic which is given further attention in the final chapter of the thesis.
9: CONCLUSIONS: THE FUTURE POLITICS OF OLD AGE AND OLDER PEOPLE’S INTEREST ORGANISATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis began with the broad objective of exploring the work of older people’s interest organisations in twenty-first century Ireland. Adopting a critical gerontology approach, the thesis aimed to examine how members, staff, directors and policy makers view older people’s interest organisations. It sought to explore the intersection of 1) the work and internal dynamics of older people’s interest organisations, 2) older people’s ‘identity politics’, and 3) policy-makers’ perspectives on older people’s interest organisations and their impact on participatory policy making space. This final chapter aims to address the impact of organisation dynamics, identity politics and policy makers on the politics of old age in contemporary Ireland.

Section 9.2 examines the interplay between the discourse employed by older people’s interest organisations with regard to their constituency and the potential for policy-makers to exploit this. Section 9.3 explores the intersection of the internal dynamics of older people’s interest organisations and older people’s ‘identity politics’. Section 9.4 discusses the benefits of looking beyond influence when conducting research on older people’s interest organisations. Section 9.5 argues that older people’s ‘identity politics’ is not a politics based on chronological age, but rather a politics of marginalisation and perceived stigmatisation. Inspired by the writing of Young (2000), Section 9.6 suggests that older people’s ‘identity politics’ is delegitimized by policy-makers’ constructions of older people’s interest organisations as deviant, reactive or ‘Other’. It argues that policymakers’ positioning of older people’s interest organisations as self-interested essentially eliminates any chance that the inclusion and participation of older people’s interest organisations in the policy process will be meaningful. Section 9.7 reflects upon the methodological approach adopted in the thesis and the key learning’s emerging from the thesis which are of relevance to an international readership. Directed by a critical gerontology perspective, Section 9.7 looks ahead to surmise how the work of older
people's interest organisations may develop in the coming decades of the twenty-first century.

9.2 Defining their Constituency: 'Older People' and 'Vulnerable Older People'

Chapter 1 and 2 noted the fundamental role of discourse in the construction of concepts such as old age, representation and participation. Underlying normative constructions of old age are discursive practices, which have significant implications on how social policy as it relates to older people is legitimized and subsequently institutionalised (Biggs & Powell, 2001; Estes et al., 2003). Of central importance to the 'politics of old age' are the labels attributed to the older population within a particular socio-historical context. The discourses that older people's interest organisations adopt to define their constituency are highly relevant in the politics of old age. Jönson and Nilsson (2007) argue that older people's interest organisations may adopt a discourse which portrays the population of older people as 'frail', 'isolated' and 'needy' in order to bring about improvements in policies to the general population of older people.

The notion of 'vulnerable older people' was evoked by the directors of older people's interest organisations. However, a degree of ambiguity existed as to the constituents of this group which lacked a precise definition. Chapter 5 argues that such a tactic may be advantageous to appease a diverse membership and possibly secure benefits to a larger constituency. In the right economic circumstances (for example during the Celtic Tiger era), a certain level of ambiguity can be constructive in helping to ensure that a broad base of the older population are afforded improved welfare protection (such as, increases in pensions payments). However, the directors' ambivalent use of the term 'vulnerable' older people, unless critically unpacked, may in the current economic climate, inadvertently provide policy-makers with an opportunity to impose their own restrictive definition on the term, limiting its application exclusively to economically impoverished older people. Such a categorization would in turn serve to legitimize targeted means-tested programmes, restricting hitherto accessible benefits to a sub-set of the older population. In such a scenario, thousands of low to middle income older people may find themselves no longer eligible for publicly funded services, for example community care. The
implications of this type of a residual model of welfare supports, which funds long-term care services only for the most economically vulnerable, is observable in the United States (Doyle & Timonen, 2007). Rather than exclusively relying on the broad and imprecise label of ‘vulnerable’ to categorize their constituents it may be in the long-term interest of organisations, and those of the older population in general, to be more explicit in relation to which segments of the population they represent and wish to target by particular policies. Doing so would challenge policy makers to justify any decisions they make with regard to who the vulnerable in society are on grounds that extend beyond a certain minimum income threshold.27

9.3 ASCERTAINING THE PRIORITIES OF THEIR CONSTITUENCY
Chapter 5 alluded to the difficulties that older people’s interest organisations confront when attempting to engage with their constituency. Sustaining the commitment and involvement of members is difficult given that only a the small pool of people are willing to commit themselves to time intensive voluntary advocacy work. In such a context, the tendency towards centralization of decision-making is arguably inevitable. Indeed, it could be argued that the assumption that older people have the time or the inclination to engage as unpaid volunteers in protracted policy meetings is ageist28 and embedded in it is an implicit devaluation of older people’s time vis-à-vis that of other members of society such as for example the (paid) policy-makers with whom they engage. However, contexts in which older people are not allowed to actively participate in the decision-making functions of the organisation can lead to situations where knowledge and power become privileged and are not conferred on older people or interest group members. In the worst case scenario, where the decision-making capacity lies within a small group of professional paid staff, it could obscure the lines of consultation and reify perceptions of older peoples as unable to advocate for themselves. As Vincent (1999) argues, it can lead to a situation where advocates, acting as brokers or middle men, have the ability to set the agenda in line with their own vested interests.

27 For example in the context of long-term care functional status would not be considered.

28 Doyle and Timonen (2009) draw similar conclusions in the context of participatory research with older people where they found that most research participants did not seek involvement in all aspects of the research project, but instead sought to be informed of research developments.
Resource constraints limit the extent to which older people’s interest organisations can engage with their members and the broader constituency of older people. Affiliating with local organisations was an important tactic for the majority of the organisations, but in the absence of resources this affiliation is tangential. The finding that public funding of political advocacy was extremely limited suggests that organisations receive little support to build upon the networks they have at their disposal. A national organisation’s potential to act as a representative advocacy body for local constituents is consequently compromised. Through no fault of the organisations, their capacity to be representative and inclusive of those from remote rural areas, or the large body of non-politically active ‘young old’, is curtailed. This only serves to perpetuate policy-makers’ perception (discussed in Chapter 7) that the organisations lack legitimacy to represent the mass of older people in local constituencies.

9.4 Looking beyond influence

Chapter 1 advanced the argument that the analysis of factors impacting on the effectiveness of older people’s interest organisations should go beyond a consideration of macro-level variables. It also held that research needs to extend beyond policy-specific case studies. Expanding on the latter point, this concluding chapter argues that grounding an analysis of older people’s interest organisations in isolated policy-specific case studies results in a heightened tendency to over- or understate the influence these organisations exercise on the policy-making process and their effectiveness in general (Dür, 2008). Furthermore such an approach is overly restrictive as it fails to contextualize their work in light of the operational constraints and challenges they face and ignores important issues relating to their on-going maintenance and survival as well as activities they engage in outside of political advocacy. Broadening the scope of enquiry concerning older people’s interest organisations beyond policy-specific case studies, while also considering micro-level variables that affect them, offers the potential to provide a more comprehensive insight into the manner and areas in which older people’s interest organisations seek to effect change and into issues of salience to their members.

The findings in Chapter 5 reveal that many national older people’s interest organisations may not seek to become involved in policy negotiations, preferring instead to work at the
community level, either with community groups or local organisations to effect attitudinal change, combat ageism and empower older people. An organisation's desire to distance its work from the formal political arena may be influenced by a) the organisation's historical evolution, b) its funding security, c) its membership base, d) synergies with other organisations in the older people's-sector and e) the stipulation by government that charity organisations would lose their tax-exempt status if they engaged in lobbying. The findings reveal that engaging in lobbying can be counterproductive to an organisation's on-going maintenance and its very survival. For many organisations, it appeared that the disincentives against engaging in policy advocacy work were becoming greater than the incentives to do so.

The findings in Chapter 6 shed light on the important roles which older people's interest organisations can play in the lives of their members. Membership can provide individuals, who before retirement were social activists, with an avenue to continue their work in the arena of social justice. It can offer new friendships and provide an important social outlet for those whose personal networks are negatively impacted by retirement or bereavement. For others membership affords both intellectual stimulation and enhanced autonomy. In addition, membership in an older people's interest organisation facilitates interpersonal interaction and provides a forum for the exchange of ideas, opinions and life-stories. The fora can constitute a 'discursive' (Barnes et al. 2007) or 'cultural' (Gubrium, 1993) space for members to interact, discuss issues of importance to them, receive validation and gain an insight into social issues of concern to their contemporises. While not effecting political change at the macro level, this interaction can effect political change, enlightenment and empowerment at the individual level. In so doing, membership in older people's interest organisations can evoke an 'identity politics'.

9.5 Identity Politics

Chapter 2 outlined the debates that revolve around whether or not older people are more likely than younger people to form a collective identity. Inspired by the work of Young (2000) this concluding chapter argues that such an examination ignores the complexity and multidimensionality of an individual's personal identity. Instead of seeking out an 'old age identity', a more constructive approach to the study of older people's interest
organisations would focus on members' perceptions of the structural inequalities they and their age contemporaries encounter. 'Identity politics' is then categorised, as Young (2000) advocates, as the interaction of cultural and structural forces and individual agency. To reveal the nature of this 'identity politics' an examination of older people's perceptions of the impact of cultural and structural forces on their experiences of growing older is required. Questions of importance then centre around people's subjective experience of growing older and how that is influenced, by society, the state, one's own personal life experience and personal relationships.

In this study, the 'identity politics' as seen through the eyes of the representatives of older people's interest organisations centred around the institutional and societal ageism which older people encounter. Old age on a personal level was not viewed negatively by organization members, however, within the wider society, it was perceived to be stigmatised. This was compounded by de facto discrimination against older people. They were unfairly disadvantaged in the area of health care where access to services was reduced either due to unavailability, or lack of mainstreaming of services. Older people also felt disadvantaged by the perception that they needed less income than the general public. The 'identity politics' of members of older people's interest organisations consequently revolved around a quest for social justice; they wanted to be as equal and visible as other members in society. A central component of the recognition they sought was that their former (economic) contributions and current contributions to the community and within the multi-generational family be recognised. As a result of their retirement status they viewed themselves and their contemporaries to be socially, economically and politically marginalised. The 'state-determined identity' which they had assumed would offer protection and security in their retirement was perceived to be under threat. Similar to the call by critical gerontologists, the respondents called for an emancipatory vision of old age; a vision in which the dominance of one's economic and productive status as a defining and legitimising construct is challenged (Phillipson & Biggs, 1998).

Contrary to arguments made by Gillear and Higgs (2000), I believe that the issue of older people's 'identity politics' will remain highly relevant in the coming decades, but not in a
narrow way premised on the assumption that increasing chronological age can foster greater bonds of affinity with one’s contemporaries or create a subculture of old age (Blakie, 2003). Instead, studies of older people’s ‘identity politics’ will need to be constructed, as Young (2000) proposes, by giving due consideration to a form of politics which is conditioned by the outcome of institutionalised practices, but also closely connected with individual responses to and perceptions of the position in which they find themselves. It is not a politics separated from the dominant cultural milieu, but one which is closely connected to it. For example, this thesis suggests that, in the past, the dominance of the Catholic Church and the related promulgation of a non-confrontational acceptance of the status quo contributed to a politics of disempowerment of older people in Ireland. The decline of the dominance of the Church has weakened this culture of unquestioning acquiescence and allowed for an enhanced sense of entitlement, self-belief and empowerment among the older population.

I further argue that older people’s ‘identity politics’ will remain relevant as long as the medical-industrial complex dominates how care policies are framed, security in old age is controlled by private pension insurance companies, and long-term care is categorised differently from other health care services. Indeed, the ‘identity politics’ of older people is likely to take on increased relevance if the individualisation approach, as outlined in Chapter 1, becomes a dominant policy response to population ageing. A realignment of the relationship between the state and the individual, in accordance with the ‘individualization of the social’ philosophy, will not necessarily have the effect of reducing the relevance of older people’s interest organisations. Arguably, it will place greater importance on the need for such organisations. This is particularly the case given that the individual’s negotiation of such an arrangement cannot be divorced from the cumulative structural forces or ‘structurally constituted decisive differences in life chances’ (Baars, 2006: 38). In the absence of state support in retirement, the possibility of increased income disparities within and across generations seems heightened – those who were disadvantaged in earlier life will be significantly more so in older age.

In the Irish context, the findings of Chapters 7 and 8 suggest that policymakers hold a perspective which aligns with an advanced liberalism one. In their view older people were
not a legitimate target group to whom welfare supports should be directed. Instead, older people, like all other age groups, were responsible for ensuring their own economic and health security. Policy change was needed in the area of health (for example, the medical card) and pensions to ensure older people were not the beneficiaries of a disproportionate amount of the welfare budget. The preferred manner to implement these policy changes was on an incremental basis, something which was reinforced in the aftermath of the medical card protest. The combination of these two stances, a) that old-age targeting was not appropriate and b) that policy changes to pension and welfare benefits will occur on an incremental basis in the coming years, suggests that older people's identity politics will remain highly salient in the Irish context. More particularly, if old-age security is left to the exigencies of private health and insurance markets, the likelihood of new cohorts of older people with minimal social protections in old age is increased. An old age 'identity politics' premised on marginalisation and discrimination seems even more probable and relevant.

9.6 Self-interest in interest groups
The findings in Chapter 7 suggest that policy-makers want older people to bracket their own self-interest – in something akin to the ideals of classical deliberation theory (Habermas, 1984). The expectation is that participants in policy-discussions should assume a position of neutral rationality. The arguments made by policymakers give the impression that they practice a neutral rationality and aim to achieve a 'common good'. However, this concept of the 'common good' does not seem to be the same one that emerges in the context of consultation with the public to whom it relates. While the focus of the current study was older people's interest organisations, it is highly probably that similar findings would be revealed if consultation with women, disabled, youth or lesbian and gay groups was explored. It is likely that in the context of service development, their experiential knowledge might be given some acknowledgement, but in the context of wider policy reform, their input would be limited.

In policymakers' view, older people's interest organisations were not useful because they held insufficient appreciation of the economic consequences of the policy issues under discussion and were driven by self-interest which precluded consideration of other
groups. Self-interest was not seen as legitimate. Deliberative theorists, however, contest the argument that self-interest should be construed in negative terms and that through a process of rationality, all parties will reach a universal consensus over the 'common good' (Mansbridge et al., 2010; Young, 2000). Young (2000) argues that policy-makers, by criticising self-interest, are complicit in constructing social groups as the 'deviant Other'. This, she argues, obscures structural power and can perpetuate inequalities. So too in the current study, with some exceptions, the members of older people's interest organisations were viewed as more militant, demanding and self-interested than the wider population. Older people's interest organisations thus enter policy-discussions, not as equals (as is necessitated in the ideals of deliberative democracy), but as participants who should be involved, to give the appearance of consultation. The perception that they are not an adequate reflection of the older population, that is perceived to be less self-interested, means that their ability to wield influence is negligible. Policymakers are unlikely to pay sufficient attention to the demands of older people's interest organisations, even if these demands are based on a situation of unfair structural inequalities.

9.7 Methodology and Research Project Reflections

The outcome of every research project is determined by the literature within which the study is located and contextualised, the methodology which is adopted to acquire an understanding of the topic and the analytic method applied to analyze the data. This study was informed by literature in the area of critical gerontology (Phillipson, 1998; Estes, Biggs & Phillipson, 2003; Baars, Dannefer, Phillipson & Walker, 2006; Bernard & Scharf, 2007) and political science (Young, 2000; Pierson, 1996, 2001; Campbell, 2003). Alternative theoretical perspectives could have been explored within which to contextualise the study. For example, social movement theory is of particular relevance to analysis of data pertaining to identity politics and organisational dynamics. The work of Tarrow (1998) could have been used to frame the analysis of members' identity politics. Melucci's (1996) writings on collective action, may also have provided a useful lens through which to explore the political opportunity structures within which older people's interest organisations have developed and the way in which the claims and objectives of such organisations are framed. This literature was not incorporated in the study primarily as a result of the author's lack of awareness of its potential relevance until data analysis had been completed.
It is also possible that alternative research methods may have yielded a somewhat different perspective on the study findings. Qualitative methods were deemed the most appropriate method for ascertaining the opinions and perspectives' of organisation directors, staff, members and policy makers. In the case of organisation members, focus groups were conducted instead of one-on-one interviews. The reasons for this were largely pragmatic, resulting from time constraints and the fact that gatekeepers, who arranged the focus group meetings, did not pass on the individual contact information of their members. In chapter 4 it is argued that the focus group method, however, brought with it a number of advantages. The suggestion is made that the format of the focus group provided an insight into the group dynamics which may occur within typical interest organisation meetings and thereby revealed how members converse critically, debate, reflect and persuade each other within such fora. Focus groups, however, have a number of potentially significant drawbacks. By not conducting in-depth one-on-one interviews with organisation members it could be argued that the possibility of capturing individual biographies was reduced. As a result the interviews did not explore in detail the unique life stories of interest group members. Individual interviews would have provided the opportunity to examine in greater detail the salience of the organisations to the member's biographical histories and whether or not membership in an interest organisation is reflective of a lifetime of activity or a source of a new form of identification in later life. Taking such an approach would have provided a nuanced insight into how individuals' biographical identities interact with the generation of collective identities within organisations.

One of the central contributions to knowledge which this thesis provides is that it reveals the impact of social policy design on the collective identities of individuals. It illustrates how universal social policies foster a collective sense of entitlement among their beneficiaries which transcends socio-demographic categories and in times of economic retrenchment are facilitative of collective action. In countries, such as Ireland, where social policy in relation to older people is poorly defined and many social services for older people are provided on an ad-hoc basis, the discourses which organisations, members and policy makers employ to legitimize or criticise the roles and objectives of older people's interest groups become highly relevant.
The thesis also reveals the tensions which lie within the construct 'older people' and the challenges which older people's organisations face when attempting to represent older people as frail and needy on the one hand, and as active agents on the other. This is a problem which is not unique to the Irish context but relevant across all countries where civil society organisations strive to represent the diverse and heterogeneous population of 'older people'. To surmount this difficulty the current research findings suggest that organisations adopt an inclusive and broad approach to their work and their membership and, in so doing, attempt to build cohesion across such diversity. Finally, the findings of the thesis also focuses attention on normative and theoretical understandings of 'representation'. They reveal how policy makers' categorisation of the organisations as depoliticised, or the members of such organisations as deviant, constitutes a justification for them to question the representativeness of older people's interest organisations and the legitimacy of their demands. These findings are of particular importance in the current global economic context where assaults on universal benefits affecting older peoples across the developed world appear more likely to occur.

9.8 LOOKING FORWARD

Chapter 4 elucidated how the notion of 'looking ahead' (Holstein & Minkler, 2007) and a value committed approach to research are central to the critical gerontology approach. With this in mind, this final section of the thesis seeks to look forward and explore the future potential of older people's interest organisations.

9.8.1 DEFINING THEIR CONSTITUENCY

In addition to continuing the fight for the alleviation of institutional and cultural ageism, a legacy of the twentieth century, older people's interest organisations are likely to confront complex new challenges in the twenty-first century. Among these will be the quest to preserve the benefits accumulated in the previous century. Another challenge which may take on greater significance is the unravelling of the definition of 'old age' and associated implications this may have for the legitimacy claims of older people's interest organisations. More specifically, older people's interest organisations may have to critically explore the relevance of the identity-defining labels they apply to older people. In the findings of this thesis, the 'state-determined identity', based on a reciprocal life-long
contractual relationship with the state, was regarded as acceptable, but whether this will be the case for older people in the future is uncertain.

In a period of late modernity, where it is argued that age stratification will become redundant (Jones et al. 2007), older people’s interest organisations will also need to examine critically the implications of forwarding an identity of productive ageing. In the findings of this thesis, the members of older people’s interest organisations did not place emphasis on paid employment, but instead emphasised that they would like recognition for the other multiple contributions they had made. In order to prevent the possibility of disregarding the multitude of non-economic contributions of older people and perhaps the right for individuals to stop working when they see fit, older people’s interest organisations will need to attend to the emphasis placed on ‘productivity’ in old age. Otherwise, as Biggs (2006:114) argues, an emphasis on ‘current input to economic processes’ may serve to devalue the past contributions of older people and the possibility of obtaining a ‘well-earned rest’, if desired.

The findings of Chapter 8 suggest that policymakers, eager to avoid blame, will not seek to implement policy changes that have a significant negative impact on current beneficiaries. Instead, policy changes will be applicable to prospective beneficiaries. Non-transparent, deferred policy changes with lengthy implementation or transition periods have potentially drastic implications for future cohorts of older people. Older people’s interest organisations appeared to be unable to focus sufficient attention on policy changes which would impact upon future retirees; this works to the advantage of policy makers, but has potentially drastic negative consequences for the pre-retired. The absence of representation for the pre-retired (or ‘young old’) in older people’s interest organisations is a significant shortcoming. The implications of current policy changes for future cohorts are highly relevant given that the current inequalities in the younger age groups are likely to contribute to even greater levels of inequality in future cohorts of older people (Vincent, 1999).
Older people's interest organisations should become more attuned to the implications of policy change across the life course and for future generations of older people. They need to instil in the wider population an appreciation that security in old age does not only take on relevance when one ceases to be economically active in later life. They can play an important role in educating wider society that security in old age is shaped by policy changes which are occurring at the present moment and that these policy changes are of salience to those in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s. Put simply, security in old age is conditioned by and the result of what happens across the life course and in this sense is cross generational.

9.8.2 Ageing as a cross-generational issue

Unless older people's interest organisations strive to routinely engage with younger cohorts there is a danger that their work will be viewed as marginal and irrelevant to wider society. As Phillipson (1998:134) states, 'ageing is an issue for generations, but it is one to be solved with generations'. The emergence of neo-liberal ideologies from the 1980s onwards contributed to a perception that the politics of old age negatively overlaps with generational politics. In the selective, misguided and at times sensationalist neo-liberal discourse 'the theme of zero-sum trade-offs between the young and old' (Binstock, 2010: 577) is articulated. The lifecourse is atomized with cohorts pitted against each other. Recognition is not given to the fact that patterns of social relations are not rigid and that 'there is a complex, dynamic, pattern by which the lifecourses of different cohorts affect one another' (Vincent, 1999:12).

Vincent (1999:117) provides a useful commentary on how generational politics can be aligned to the advantage of all members of society. In particular, drawing on the work of Kohli (1986) and Cole (1992) he emphasises a focus on the 'moral lifecourse', where there is a communitarian ideal of social justice which holds that all people have a right to live a life free from poverty. Emphasizing the fluidity of the life course this communitarian ideal

29 For example, Vincent (1999:119) argues, those of the radical right have concentrated their arguments on intergenerational equity 'on the cost of state pensions as opposed to the long term cost to future generations of, for example, disposing of nuclear waste.
is relevant to all citizens; the young one day shall be old, as Vincent (1999: 118) phrases it, 'deceased members of the community (the ancestors) and the yet to be born members of the community therefore stand as particularly powerful symbols of the nature and continuity of the community'. Vincent (1999) refers to Tönnies ([1885] 1955) distinction of *Gesellschaft*, solidarity of a communitarian nature, as opposed to *Gemeinschaft*, solidarity premised at the individual contractual level. To avoid a politics of resentment across the generations, older people's interest organisations should strive for the solidarity evoked in *Gesellschaft*. However, the finding in Chapter 5 that members' 'state-determined identity' is closely bound to their previous productive status, suggests that solidarity may be evoked on the basis of a contractual relationship rather than a communitarian vision of how society should be organized. This approach has more in common with *Gemeinschaft*; benefits are defended on the basis of the individualized reciprocal relationship between the state and citizen. The implications for those who cannot work, for example the ill, disabled, and long-term carers and for those on low income or disrupted work contracts, are likely to be negative. Solidarity across generations is likely to be undermined if it revolves around one's productive contribution to the state. The young, the unemployed, even carers may not fit neatly into the 'productive' category.

9.8.3 Representing the Old in Institutional Care
The findings of this thesis point to a lack of sustained dialogue with older people in residential care. The distancing between older people in the community with significant health needs and those in residential care revealed in Chapter 6 underscores the work that needs to be done to destigmatize ill health and dependency in old age. In Ireland, instances of abuse and neglect in nursing homes have been uncovered in the last decade. In the interviews conducted for this study, the staff and members of older people's interest organisations spoke about the need to work with and represent older people in institutional care, but, in all but a few instances, interaction with this group of people was minimal or limited to once-off initiatives. I argue that representation of this group has to become one of the key priorities for older people's interest organisations in the twenty-first century. The deinstitutionalisation of mental health services from the mid-twentieth century revolutionised the manner in which mental health sufferers were conceptualised and questioned clinical practices used, such as psychosurgery, electroshock and aversive conditioning (Brown, 1985). A similar revolution, I argue, is required in the realm of care.
of older persons in institutional care, where rates of malnutrition are as high as 50 per cent (Russell & Elia, 2007) and practices such as PEG-feeding\textsuperscript{30} and the administration of anti-psychotic medication for the treatment of agitated behaviour to dementia sufferers persist, despite evidence of their potential harmful and even lethal consequences (Kales, Valenstein, Kim, McCarthy, & Al, 2007; Kuo, Rhodes, Mitchell, Mor, & Teno, 2009; Sampson, Candy, & Jones, 2009). Older people's interest organisations alone will not be able to bring about change to these practices. However, as part of a 'discourse community' (Foucault, 1972) they can play a central role in vocalising the needs and rights of those in residential care and enable them to articulate their 'identity politics'.

9.8.4 A POSITIVE FUTURE FOR OLDER PEOPLE’S INTEREST ORGANISATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH
The findings of this thesis paint a somewhat pessimistic picture of older people's interest organisations' ability to alter the politics of old age in a period of late modernity. However, late modernity and associated realignment of the politics of ageing from that of the preserve of the nation state to a wider globalised world hold out some optimism for the future of older people’s interest organisations. As Phillipson (2001) argues, in the future international 'corporations will shape aging as much as [national] governments'. This undoubtedly will radically change the work of older people's interest organisations who will have to develop international networks to play a more central role in global civil society. As Phillipson's (1998) hypothesis suggests, older people's interest organisations in the future may have to enter into major debates with international bodies such as the World Bank and the World Health Organisation.

Given the seemingly limited influence of older people's interest organisations at the national level, the suggestion that they may hold influence at the global level seems highly improbable. However, the globalization of social policy may have positive implications for their work and strengthen their ability to advance favourable policies for older people and alleviate age discrimination (Phillipson, 1998). The positive impact of global organisations

\textsuperscript{30} Percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy involves inserting a PEG tube into an individual's stomach through the abdominal wall to provide a means of feeding when problems occur with oral intake.
on older people's interest organisations in Ireland was discernible in the findings of this thesis. For example, Chapter 3 notes how one of the largest advocacy organisations, the Senior Citizens' Parliament, emerged from The European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations in 1993. Similarly, the United Nations International Year of Older People in 1999 provided all of the organisations with an important financial stimulus. European Union policy on dementia also had positive ramifications for an organisation focused on Alzheimer's sufferers.

Another example, which casts the potential of globalised social policy in a positive light, is the recent call by the United Nations for a new international convention on the human rights of older persons. Peter Townsend (2007) alluded to the potential of an international rights-based approach in safeguarding the protection of older people in the twenty-first century. He makes specific reference to the ability of older people's interest organisations to raise awareness of the infringement of human rights. Writing prior to the proposed convention on the human rights of older persons, he points to the relevance of international and European acts and charters, such as the European Social Charter, 1988 (Article 4), the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He provides the example of the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in as many as 191 countries as an indication of how a rights-based approach to older people may successfully be applied. The development of an international convention on the human rights of older people is only at the early stages of development, but should it materialize, it offers huge potential to legitimate the work of older people's interest organisations at both national and international levels.

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31 In December 2010, the General Assembly established an open-ended working group open to all Members States of the UN with the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights for older persons and identifying possible gaps and how best to address them. A subsequent convention on the 21 of April 2011 discussed the possibility of legislating a new international convention on the human rights of older persons.
9.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of the greatest achievements of the twentieth century is the extension of the human life span. It remains to be seen how the consequences of this achievement will be harnessed during the twenty-first century. The findings of this thesis suggest that older people's interest organisations can play an important role in providing social, creative, cognitive and physical activities to a wide spectrum of the older population. The findings, however, do not augur well for the extent to which the old and young will be granted the opportunity to discuss how policies should be adapted to the changing demographics. The notion of the participation of civil society organisations in the policy-process has been advanced in policy documents at the international level since the late 1980s and in Ireland from the 1990s. Participation is legitimated on the grounds that open and inclusive policy making will lead to the development of social policies which better serve the people to whom they relate. The findings of this thesis suggest that participation is meaningless unless equality of status is granted within policy deliberations. Equality of status can only be achieved when discursive practices legitimate the expression of self-interest. By dismissing self-interest, the possibility of appreciating the impact of social policies on the day-to-day lives of those on whom they impact is compromised. Older people's interest organisations can provide an appropriate and convenient forum to advance the interests of the older population if they engage in a meaningful way with the constituents they claim to represent. Their potential lies in harnessing the individual strengths of their members and the support of the wider society by emphasising the vested interest we all have in an age-friendly society.
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223


mental health units. Redditch: British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition.


APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INVITATION TO RESPONDENTS

DIRECTORS/CHAIRPERSONS OF OLDER PEOPLE'S INTEREST ORGANISATIONS

Address

Dear X,

Re: Research Project on Older People's Interest Groups in Ireland

I am a Research Fellow and part-time PhD student in the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre (SPARC) of Trinity College Dublin. The topic of my PhD is the evolution and influence of older people's interest groups on ageing policies and practices in Ireland. I chose this area of study, as I believe, older people's interest groups have a crucial role to play in helping to resolve the challenges and concerns of current and future ageing generations.

As part of the research I am hoping to speak with representatives of each of the national older people's interest groups and a small number of their affiliate members. I am writing to you in order to inform you about the existence of the project and to advise you that I shall shortly be contacting you to discuss further particulars of the study and your willingness to participate in a one-to-one interview with me. All information provided will be anonymous with all references to the organisation and personal details removed. It is anticipated that the interview will last approximately one hour. The interview shall seek to acquire an understanding of the following four issues:

1. The main activities and structural characteristics of the organisation.
2. How the organisation has evolved over time and what factors have contributed to its growth or decline.
3. Involvement and perceived influence on age-relevant policies and practices.
4. The existence of affiliate members and their involvement in the activities of the organisations.

As part of the project SPARC will produce a summary of the findings of the research which perhaps you may find useful. For further information on SPARC and my academic profile please visit the SPARC website at http://www.sparc.tcd.ie. If you have any immediate questions please feel free to contact me at 01 896 2911 or martha.doyle@tcd.ie. I hope you share my enthusiasm on the importance of the research topic and shall be most grateful for you cooperation.

With best regards,

Martha Doyle
Dear X,

Re: Research Project on Older People's Interest Groups in Ireland

As you recall, we met last September when I interviewed you as part of my PhD thesis on the evolution and influence of older people's interest groups on ageing policies and practices in Ireland. Thank you very much once again for participating in this interview. I very much appreciate the fact that you set aside time in your busy schedule to help me. As part of the second and final phase of my data collection I intend to conduct separate follow-up focus group interviews with the ten older people's interest groups I have previously interviewed. I would be much obliged if you could help me to identify a small number of representatives (3 or 4) from your organisation to take part in one of these focus groups.

The representatives could include members of staff currently involved in representing the organisation or committee/Board members (present or past). I understand that committee/Board members may not routinely meet and arranging a meeting may be somewhat troublesome. However, if the committee/Board were meeting sometime in the coming months and it were possible for me to hold a meeting with some of these attendees before or after the committee meeting I would be much obliged. The focus group would last approximately 60 minutes. As with the previous round of one-to-one interviews, all information obtained in the focus groups will be presented in an anonymised form in the final thesis and any publications emanating from the study.

As part of the project SPARC will produce a summary of the findings of the research which perhaps you may find useful. For further information on SPARC and my academic profile please visit the SPARC website at http://www.sparc.tcd.ie. If you have any immediate questions please feel free to contact me at 01 896 2911 or martha.doyle@tcd.ie. If you wish, you can also contact my PhD supervisor, Dr Virpi Timonen, at 896 2950 or timonenv@tcd.ie. I shall contact you in the coming weeks to see if it will be possible to arrange a focus group as indicated above.

I believe older people's interest groups have a crucial role to play in civil society and trust that you share my enthusiasm for the importance of mapping for the first time the evolution of older people's interest groups in Ireland.

With many thanks in advance for your assistance and co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Best Wishes,

Martha Doyle
Address

Dear X,

Re: Research Project on Older People’s Interest Groups in Ireland

I am a Research Fellow and PhD student in the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre (SPARC) of Trinity College Dublin. The topic of my PhD is the evolution and influence of older people’s interest groups on ageing policies and practices in Ireland.

As part of the research I am hoping to speak with representatives of each of the national older people’s interest groups and a small number of policy-makers about their perceptions of older people’s interest groups in Ireland. I am writing to you in order to inform you about the existence of the project and to advise you that I shall shortly contact you to discuss further particulars of the study and your willingness to participate in a one-to-one interview with me. It is anticipated that the interviews will last approximately 45 minutes and all information obtained in the course of the interviews will be made anonymous in the final thesis and any publications emanating from the study.

I believe older people’s interest groups have a crucial role to play in civil society and hope that you share my enthusiasm for the importance of mapping for the first time the evolution and development of older people’s interest groups in Ireland. I am very aware of the many demands on your time and would be extremely appreciative of your participation in this research.

If you have any immediate questions please feel free to contact me at 01 896 2911 or martha.doyle@tcd.ie. If you wish, you can also contact my PhD supervisor, Dr Virpi Timonen, at 896 2950 or timonenv@tcd.ie.

With best regards,

Martha Doyle

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For further information on SPARC and my academic profile please visit the SPARC website at http://www.sparc.tcd.ie.
Appendix B: Information Sheet

Information Sheet: Directors of Older People's Interest Organisations

Research Project on Older People's Interest Groups in Ireland

I am a Research Fellow and part-time PhD student in the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre (SPARC) of Trinity College Dublin. The topic of my PhD is the evolution and influence of older people's interest groups on ageing policies and practices in Ireland. I chose this area of study, as I believe, older people's interest groups have a crucial role to play in helping to resolve the challenges and concerns of current and future ageing generations.

As part of the research I am hoping to speak with representatives of each of the national older people’s interest groups and a small number of their members. I am writing to you in order to inform you about the existence of the project and to advise you that I shall shortly be contacting you to discuss further particulars of the study and your willingness to participate in a one-to-one interview with me.

Participation in the research is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw from the interview, you may do so at any time without giving a reason or explanation for doing so. The interviews will be transcribed and the information you give us will be kept strictly confidential. All information provided will be anonymous with all references to the organisation and personal details removed. It is anticipated that the interview will last approximately one hour. The interview shall seek to acquire an understanding of the following four issues:

1. The main activities and structural characteristics of the organisation.
2. How the organisation has evolved over time and what factors have contributed to its growth or decline.
3. Involvement and perceived influence on age-relevant policies and practices.
4. The existence of affiliate members and their involvement in the activities of the organisations.

As part of the project SPARC will produce a summary of the findings of the research which perhaps you may find useful. For further information on SPARC and my academic profile please visit the SPARC website at http://www.sparc.tcd.ie. If you have any immediate questions please feel free to contact me at 01 896 2911 or martha.doyle@tcd.ie.
I am a Research Fellow and PhD student in the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre (SPARC) of Trinity College Dublin. The topic of my PhD is the evolution and influence of older people’s interest groups on ageing policies and practices in Ireland. The research aims to map for the first time the evolution and development of older people’s interest groups in Ireland. I chose this area of study, as I believe older people’s interest groups have a crucial role to play in helping to resolve the challenges and concerns of current and future ageing generations.

As part of the research I am hoping to speak with the directors of each of the national older people’s interest groups, a small number of representatives (3 or 4) from each organisation and a small number of policy-makers about their perceptions of older people’s interest groups in Ireland. It is anticipated that the interviews will last approximately forty-five minutes. The interviews shall seek to acquire an understanding of the following:

♦ The perceived role of older people’s interest groups in Ireland;
♦ The involvement and perceived influence of older people’s interest groups on age-relevant policies and practices;
♦ The lessons that can be learnt from the public’s reaction to the proposed medical card reforms;
♦ Thoughts on the reasons people join older people’s interest groups and future of these groups in Ireland.

Participation in the research is completely voluntary. Should participants wish to withdraw from the interview, they may do so at any time without giving a reason or explanation for doing so. The interviews will be transcribed and the information given will be kept strictly confidential. All information provided will be anonymous with all references to the organisation and personal details removed.

On conclusion of the project SPARC will produce a summary of the findings of the research. For further information on SPARC and my academic profile please visit the SPARC website at http://www.sparc.tcd.ie. If you have any immediate questions please feel free to contact me at 01 896 2911 or martha.doyle@tcd.ie. If you wish, you can also contact my PhD supervisor, Dr Virpi Timonen, at 896 2950 or timonenv@tcd.ie.
I am a Research Fellow and PhD student in the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre (SPARC) of Trinity College Dublin. The topic of my PhD is the evolution and influence of older people’s interest groups on ageing policies and practices in Ireland. The research aims to map for the first time the evolution and development of older people’s interest groups in Ireland. I chose this area of study, as I believe, older people’s interest groups have a crucial role to play in helping to resolve the challenges and concerns of current and future ageing generations.

As part of the research I am hoping to speak with the directors of each of the national older people’s interest groups, a small number of representatives (3 or 4) from each organisation and a small number of policy-makers about their perceptions of older people’s interest groups in Ireland. It is anticipated that the interviews will last approximately one hour. The interviews shall seek to acquire an understanding of the following:

♦ Perceptions of older people’s interest groups in Ireland;
♦ The perceived role of older people’s interest groups in Ireland;
♦ The involvement and perceived influence of older people’s interest groups on age-relevant policies and practices;
♦ The future of older people’s interest groups in Ireland;
♦ The lessons that can be learnt from the public’s reaction to the proposed medical card reforms.

Participation in the research is completely voluntary. Should participants wish to withdraw from the interview, they may do so at any time without giving a reason or explanation for doing so. The interviews will be transcribed and the information given will be kept strictly confidential. All information provided will be anonymous with all references to the organisation and personal details removed.

On conclusion of the project SPARC will produce a summary of the findings of the research. For further information on SPARC and my academic profile please visit the SPARC website at http://www.sparc.tcd.ie. If you have any immediate questions please feel free to contact me at 01 896 2911 or martha.doyle@tcd.ie. If you wish, you can also contact my PhD supervisor, Dr Virpi Timonen, at 896 2950 or timonenv@tcd.ie.
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM
FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre (SPARC)
School of Social Work and Social Policy
Trinity College Dublin

I agree to be interviewed and tape recorded by the researcher.

[] I understand that the information that I have given will be treated with complete confidentiality and anonymity.

[] I understand that the information I provide will be incorporated into a PhD thesis completed by Martha Doyle and other publications emanating from the research.

[] I have been given a copy of the information sheet and any queries I have had have been satisfactorily answered.

[] I understand that I am free to withdraw from the interview at any time, without giving a reason.

[] I understand that any details recorded will be treated in complete confidence and stored in a secure place.

Name of Participant      Date      Signature

Name of Researcher       Date      Signature

If you need any further information, please contact: Martha Doyle at the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, 3 College Green, Dublin (Tel: 01 896 2911; Email: martha.doyle@tcd.ie)

239
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE: ORGANISATION DIRECTORS/CHAIRPERSONS

Before the interview the information sheet will be distributed and read to respondents who will then be asked if they have any queries and are willing to sign a consent form.

Background

(1) Could you briefly tell me about the background of the organization and when and how it originated?
(2) How would you describe the general goals of the organisation?
(3) Since the founding of the organization have the goals or objectives of the organisation changed or stayed relatively consistent?

Organizational structure and staff profile

(4) Could you tell me about the organizational structure of the organization and whether or not the organisation has many paid or unpaid employees/volunteers?

Membership

(5) Could you tell me about the current membership of the organisation?
(6) How do you communicate with members – emails, newsletter, face to face meeting – frequency?
(7) How are members involved in the activities of the organisation?

Financial resources

(8) How is the organisation supported financially?
(9) Could you give me a rough estimation of the organisation's annual budget?

Involvement in policy development and recommendations

(10) What would you say are the 3 central policy issues of interest to the organisation?
(11) What techniques do you use to influence governmental decision makers?

(12) Could you give me an example of a specific issue where you think your organization has been effective in influencing the course of public policy during the past two years? Reasons why?

(13) Could you give me an example of a specific issue where you think your organization has been ineffective in trying to influence the course of public policy during the past two years? Reasons why?

(14) How often do you have the opportunity to consult with policy makers to inform them of your organization's views on policy matters?

Liaising with other older people's groups

(15) Have there been instances when the organisation has had joint activity with other older people's interest groups?

(16) Are they are any factors than enable or prevent collaboration with other older people's interest groups?

Expectations for the future

(17) How do you anticipate the organisation will develop in the next five years?

(18) How do you foresee the future role of older people's interest groups in influencing policy makers in the future?

(19) Do you think older people's interest groups at the national and local level will work in closer collaboration in the future?

Additional Comments

(20) Are there any other issues relating to your organisation that we have not discussed that you believe may be important?
INTERVIEW GUIDE: FOCUS GROUP ORGANISATION MEMBERS/STAFF

Before the focus groups the information sheet will be distributed and read to respondents who will then be asked if they have any queries and are willing to sign a consent form.

1. What do you think is the role of older people’s interest groups in Ireland?

2. Why do you think older people become members of older people’s interest groups?

3. Why do you think currently such a small proportion of the older population in general are members of an older person’s interest group?

4. What group of older people does (insert name of organisation) represent?

5. How does the organisation try to ascertain the opinions and policy concerns of this population?

6. What strategies does (insert name of organisation) adopt to influence age-specific policies and practices?

7. In instances where the organisation has been successful can you tell me what the reasons are for this success (and vice versa - unsuccessful)?

8. Are there other interest groups who frequently take an opposing view to your organisation or older people’s interest groups in general?

9. Thinking over the past x years of the organisations existence do you think that ‘older people’s politics’ has changed in any way?
10. What do you see for the future of [insert name of organisation]?

11. What do you see for the future of older people’s interest groups in general in Ireland?

12. I am very interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the reaction to the proposed medical card reforms in October 2008 and the consequent response by government.
   a) Why do you think there was widespread reaction?
   b) Can you tell me if [insert name of organisation] responded to the announced reforms or was involved in any lobbying campaigns to reverse the decision?
   c) In what instance do you think a similar reaction on the part of older people’s groups could take place again?
   d) Why do you think the government responded to the demand to reverse the cutback?
   e) Do you think this incident will have any impact on politicians and policy makers when making future age-related policy changes?

13. Finally, I am hoping to conduct a small number of interviews with policy makers to ask them about their perceptions of older people’s interest groups. To help me identify the relevant people could you tell me what agencies/Departments you interact with most frequently?

14. Are there any issues that we have not addressed that you think may be relevant?
Interview Schedule
Policy Makers and Junior Ministers

Before the interview the information sheet will be distributed and read to respondents who will then be asked if they have any queries and are willing to sign a consent form.

1. Can you tell me about the contact you have with older people's interest groups as part of your work as a policy-maker/civil servant?

2. Would you classify the involvement of older people's interest groups as reactive (responding to proposed issues) or proactive (bringing new issues to the table) and provide examples?

3. Apart from older people's interest groups are there other interest groups that feature prominently in age-specific policy discussions (prompt: frequency, nature of contact etc)?

4. (If relevant) Do these other interest groups have different agendas to older people's interest groups? And if so, are older people's groups and these groups in competition with each other for influence? (Prompt: how do you reconcile these opposing opinions?)

5. Do you think that older people's interest groups adequately represent the views of the older population in general?

6. Do you think consultation with older people and their representative groups could be improved in any way?

7. Do you think that these organisations should receive financial assistance from the State?

8. What are your thoughts on the reaction to the proposed medical card reforms in October 2008 and the consequent response by government?
   a) Why do you think there was widespread reaction?
   b) Why do you think the government responded to it?
   c) Do you think older people's interest groups played an important role throughout the process?
   d) In what instance do you think a similar reaction by older people could take place again?
   e) Do you think this incident will have any impact on politicians and policy makers when making future age-related policy changes?

9. I am interested in the evolution of older peoples' interest groups in Ireland and wonder if you could reflect on whether or not the involvement of older people's interest groups in the policy-making process has changed over the past twenty years since the inception of many of these groups?

10. What do you see for the future of older people and their representative groups in the Irish policy making process in the coming years?

11. Are there any issues that we have not addressed in relation to older people's interest groups in Ireland that you think may be relevant?