Community empowerment and democratic innovation

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Why public participation?
(Involve 2005)

• Addressing **complex problems** drawing on untapped knowledge, experience and perspectives
• Making **better policies** and ensuring effective implementation
• Improving public **service design and delivery**
• Building **legitimacy and trust** in public institutions
• Developing **citizens’ skills, confidence and ambition**
• Enabling **active citizens and communities**
Participation in local decision-making in Scotland

• 96% of the Scottish population said that people should be involved in making decisions about how services are planned and run
• 80% said that people should be involved in deciding how money is spent on services
• 86% said that people should be able to volunteer alongside paid staff to provide public services

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2015
Policy context for community empowerment and democratic innovation

- Open Government Partnership
- Relaunch of the National Standards for Community Engagement (2016)
- Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015
- Participatory Budgeting national programme (2014-2017)
- COSLA Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy (2014)
- Parliamentary Local Government Committee (2013, 2014)
- National Planning Framework 3
- Christie Commission on Future Delivery of Public Services 2011
Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 [CEA]
Key developments in CEA (regarding community planning and engagement)

• Formalises CPPs and places new duties on a range of partners
• Strong focus on ‘improving outcomes’, tackling inequalities, and involving ‘community bodies’
• SOA > Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) + Locality Plans
• Participation Requests
• Participation in Public Decision-Making
International trends in participation
Evolving role of citizens: 2 stories can be told

**Story of decline**

- Declining...
  - Voter **turnout** in elections
  - **Trust** in & **legitimacy** of traditional institutions of public life (e.g. government, media, parties, unions, community associations, etc)
  - **Social capital**: community ‘ethos’ & networks

(Dalton 2005; Putnam 2001)

**Story of progress**

- What’s happening is that citizens are becoming:
  - better educated, more knowledgeable and critical;
  - less deferential to traditional authority and elite-driven / hierarchical forms of governance;
  - dismissive of conventional channels and engaged in alternative mechanisms of political expression;
  - The **myth of public apathy**

(Norris 2002; Castells 2012; Eliasoph 1998)
Debunking the myth of apathy:
Civic participation in Scotland

• Record-breaking participation in the independence referendum
• A growing, vibrant civil society / third sector: social enterprises, development trusts, housing associations, transition towns, etc
• Civic participation on the rise:
  – 55% in 2009
  – 61% in 2013
  – 69% in 2015 (Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2013 and 2015)
But is all participation good?

• Paradox of growing participation and growing inequalities (Walker, McQuarrie & Lee 2015)
  – proliferation of traditional consultation and de-politicised forms of participation

• Inequalities in health, income, wealth, education... stemming from inequalities of power and influence?

unless corrective measures are taken “participation of all varieties will be skewed in favour of those with higher socioeconomic status and formal education” (Ryfe & Stalsburg 2012)
In the last 12 months, have you participated in a forum to discuss policy or community issues?
Stay standing if at that forum there was a reasonable...

• ...gender balance
• ...mix of personal and professional backgrounds
• ...range of perspectives and opinions
• ... age range (i.e. 3 generations)
• ... income range
• ...sense that most participants felt included and influential
• ...sense that most participants enjoyed it
• ... sense that their participation would have a clear impact
Key challenges in organising public participation processes

- **Impact**: clear link to decision making
- **Inclusion and diversity**
- **Quality of dialogue and deliberation**
What Works in public participation?

Democratic innovations around the world
3 components of ‘what works’ in public participation

- Multi-channel
- Inclusive & deliberative
- Empowered & consequential
Multi-channel

- Accommodating a variety of forms of participation:
  - online, face to face, combined
  - light-touch vs. intensive
  - The power of ‘crowdsourcing’: tapping into ‘the wisdom of the crowds’ (Surowiecki 2005)
Inclusive AND deliberative

• **Inclusion and diversity** are crucial for meaningful, legitimate and effective participation
  – demographics AND perspectives
  – lowering barriers to participation

• **Public deliberation** is about:
  – learning about the issues
  – hearing & discussing different views
  – then, making informed decisions

• **Examples –‘mini-publics’:**
  – Citizens’ Juries on health inequalities and policy (UK)
  – Citizens’ Dialogue on Public Health Goals (Canada)
  – National Public Policy Conferences (Brazil)
  – Melbourne Citizens’ Panel on Finance (Australia)
Empowered and consequential

- Participation thrives when important issues and resources are at a stake, and citizens feel their contribution can actually make a difference

- Example:
  - Participatory Budgeting, from Porto Alegre (Brazil) to 2,700 localities around the world
Civic organisations must ask:

• Are we harnessing the power of combining online and face-to-face platforms for public participation and action?
• Are we creating opportunities that accommodate the variety of ways in which people may want to participate?
• Are we creating inclusive processes where everyone has an equal chance to participate and influence?
• Are we creating deliberative spaces where participants can learn, hear different views, and engage in dialogue to offer informed opinions and considered judgements?
• Are we fostering empowered processes, where people know that their participation can make a difference?
Thank you!