Closing the participation gap: developing the mind-sets and skills for participatory governance in Scotland

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Outline

• Three key ideas
  – The myth of public apathy
  – Increasing participation and the participation gap
  – Participatory governance

• The Scottish context

• Methodology notes

• Findings - CPOs survey

• Local area partnerships- mind-sets and skills

• Conclusions – closing the gap

• Find out more- whatworksscotland.ac.uk @wwscot
• A four-year project led by researchers at University of Glasgow and University of Edinburgh 2014-2018

• Funded by the ESRC and the Scottish Government

• To support and improve public services in Scotland

• Worked in partnership with 4 local community planning partnerships and 9 national agencies

  • Glasgow Centre for Population Health
  • Healthcare Improvement Scotland
  • Improvement Service
  • Inspiring Scotland
  • Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Sciences
  • Scottish Community Development Centre
  • NHS Education for Scotland
  • NHS Health Scotland
  • Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
International trends in participation

**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 2000)

**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)
The myth of public apathy

Civic participation in Scotland

• Record-breaking participation in the Scottish independence referendum

• A growing, vibrant civil society / third sector: social enterprises, development trusts, housing associations, transition towns, community anchor organisations (see Escobar et al 2018; Henderson et al., 2018)

• Survey data suggests that civic participation is on the rise: 55% in 2009; 61% in 2013; 69% in 2015 (Marcinkiewicz et al., 2016; Reid et al., 2013)
Participation in local decision-making in Scotland: deficits and aspirations

(Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2015 + Ipsos Mori 2014)

- 35% of Scottish citizens feel part of how decisions affecting their community are made
- 77% would get more involved in their community if it was easier to participate in decisions that affect it
- 80% said that people should be involved in deciding how money is spent on local services
- 96% said that people should be involved in making decisions about how local services are planned and run
Representative Democracy
- Electoral dynamics
- Party politics
- Delegating to representatives + bureaucrats/technocrats

Participatory Democracy
- 1960s onwards
- ‘invited’ or ‘uninvited’ publics participate

Deliberative Democracy
- 1990s onwards
- Emphasis on (i) communication + (ii) new ways of ‘making publics’
International trends in participation

http://participedia.net
Deliberative innovations
Participatory Budgeting around the world

Thousands of PB processes have taken place around the world since the 2001 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre
Multi-channel

• Developing a variety of channels for participation:
  – online, face to face, combined
  – light-touch vs. intensive
  – crowdsourcing
  – Open Government
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
The participation gap

‘a widening gap between
‘the politically rich and the politically poor’

‘changes in the methods of political action over time in affluent democracies may actually increase the size of the participation gap’

(Dalton, 2017: 8)
Explanations for the widening gap
(Dalton 2018)

• **Social status** (education, occupation and income) - the ‘standard model’ of political participation
  — The **double effect of income inequality** - lowers participation overall and widens the participation gap across income groups

• The relative **centralisation/decentralisation** of political authority

• Feelings of **efficacy**

• **Civil-society activity, social groups and welfare regimes** are potential correctives

• **Institutional context** - mixed results on which aspects of institutional context affect participation
Participatory governance

‘governance through partnership between the public and third sectors, as well as meaningful and consequential participation by citizens and community groups’

(Escobar et al 2017)

Across the world.. partnership and participation are used as strategies to..

– deal with complex issues, increase problem-solving capacity, foster social capital, improve public services, counter democratic deficits and restore legitimacy to governance processes (Rogers et al 1999; Stevenson 2002; Sinclair 2008; 2011)

– close the participation gap
The Scottish Context (post-crisis)
A ‘silent crisis’ of local democracy?
(Bort et al 2012)

- Scotland has the largest average population per basic unit of local government of any developed country (Keating 2005)

- Average population per LAA:
  - Finland=15,960; France= 1770; Germany= 7,080; Spain= 5.680; EU average= 5,630
  - Scotland= 163,200

- Alongside England, Scotland has some of the lowest voter turnout at local elections in the EU

- Ratio Elected Members/ Citizens represented:
  - Finland= 1/500; France 1/125; Germany:1/400; Spain 1/700; UK= 1/2860
  - Scotland = 1/4270
“50 years of centralisation has not tackled the biggest problems that Scotland faces
For a country with Scotland’s wealth and strength, the level of inequality is intolerable, and has huge social and financial costs
There is a link between the absence of strong local democracy and the prevalence of inequalities”
Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

- Extends community ‘right to buy’
- Easier for communities to take over public land and buildings
- Formalises community planning partnerships and places new duties on a range of partners
- Strong focus on ‘improving outcomes’ and locality plans
- Participation Requests
- Participation in Public Decision-Making
- **Explicit emphasis on tackling disadvantage and inequality**
Community planning partnerships

CPPs - a useful context in which to examine participatory governance

• 32 CPPs in Scotland
• Set up by Local Government in Scotland Act 2003
• Community Empowerment Act – strengthens the role of CPPs
• - a ‘game changer’?
WWS research on participatory governance

- The **WWS Community Planning Officials survey** - first survey in Scotland (Escobar et al 2018)
  - Managers and officers working at local and strategic levels
  - **2016 Wave 1** 107 responses (62% response rate)
  - **2018 Wave 2** 95 responses 41.3% response rate.
  - **Limitations**: mapping the workforce + changing census; small sample for statistical testing; categories not clear cut (e.g. local/strategic)

- **WWS case study of a single CPP area** which established 5 local area forums/action partnerships in 2016
  - **Methods** - focus groups; semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation
  - Analysis using a participatory governance framework derived from WWS evidence reviews

- **Observations from WWS national programme of Facilitative Leadership training**
CPO Survey 2018

How do CPOs feel about Community Engagement in their CPP work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Important</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>3%</td>
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</tbody>
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2018 CPO survey, n = 70
CPO survey 2016-2018

What Community Engagement activities do Community Planning Officials organise?

*Data from WWS Community Planning Officials surveys, 2016 (n = 102) and 2018 (n = 70)
Challenges in community engagement

From CPO open responses:
- Mistrust from community that voice will make a difference
- Consultation fatigue
- Usual participants

Related feeling of ambivalence from CPOs when asked whether they believe CE influences policy

Little engagement with elected members (both in power/opposition)
Insights from CPO survey

- **Community Planning Officials** - community engagement activities are a very important aspect of their work

- There has been an **increase in hybrid activities** - a mix of representatives from established groups and non-affiliated community members
  - E.g. participatory budgeting, citizen’s juries and community forums

- **Challenges remain**
  - predominance of usual participants and associative activities where participation is limited to those from established groups
  - lack of impact - need for improved engagement with elected members / decision-makers
Participatory Governance in local area partnerships

- Local area partnerships of forums are a form of democratic innovation (see Elstub & Escobar, 2018, The Handbook of Democratic Innovations)

- Operating at the sub-authority level - closer to local communities than the CPP board or Council and therefore often regarded as important sites for community participation

- to a greater extent spaces for collaborative decision-making, than CPP boards
There are still a lot of people who would not get involved ... people with mental health issues, substance misuse and poverty. A lot of these people just feel a lot of the time that they aren’t good enough. They have low self-esteem. From what I’m seeing, it’s still very much exclusive.’

(Third sector member, focus group)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional mindset</th>
<th>Facilitative mindset</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participatory model</td>
<td>associative model - community representatives and intermediaries - ideally elected</td>
<td><strong>hybrid model</strong> - emphasis on increasing diversity and inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of elected members</td>
<td>decision–making - only democratically elected representatives have the legitimacy and credibility to take decisions</td>
<td><strong>encouragement</strong> - supporting community representatives and citizens to participate and lead on decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>adherence to established procedures and ‘due process’</td>
<td>emphasis on the <strong>quality</strong> of deliberation, scrutiny, and informed judgement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting style</td>
<td>prefers a formal style - led and controlled by a Chairperson</td>
<td>dynamic, interactive meetings with <strong>a skilled and impartial facilitator</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>transfer assets, control and responsibilities from local government to local communities</td>
<td>an agenda for <strong>deepening democracy and increasing participation</strong></td>
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</table>
‘It’s about the ground work - that initial engagement that we do with communities... the soft stuff, the cup of tea and a biscuit and having a blether [informal chat], getting to know somebody and asking - have you thought about getting involved?

(officer, interview)
Conclusions – closing the gap

• **Recognise the local and national context:** participatory governance is still in its infancy; competing perspectives on community empowerment; and a wider context of uncertainty.

• **Scale:** organise participation at a scale and geography that is meaningful and practical for decision-making.

• **Incentives:** develop and strengthen democratic innovations - PB; mini-publics; online participation and digital dialogues; provide support with financial costs, childcare and transport.

• **Institutional mindsets and skills:** support elected members with a clearer definition of their role; engage public participation professionals skilled in facilitation.
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)
Acknowledgements

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Find out more!

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Resources

Community engagement

‘Hard to reach’ or ‘easy to ignore’? Promoting equality in community engagement

Evidence review exploring the intersection between community engagement and inequality. It examines evidence, from Scotland and the UK, on what is being done to overcome inequality in community engagement.

Blog: Facilitative Leadership: Involving citizens and communities in local decision-making

Development of training for a new era of community participation in local democracy which requires public services staff to develop skills for collaborative engagement.

What do citizens want?

Research report that reveals the profound effect of formal and informal relationships on people’s wellbeing as seen through the experiences of users of housing services.
Participatory governance
Community Planning after the Community Empowerment Act: The Second Survey of Community Planning Officials in Scotland
Report and executive summary of the findings from the second survey of community planning officials in Scotland, conducted in 2018. It compares the results to those from the 2016 survey and offers an overview of key dynamics, challenges and accomplishments over those two years, with a particular focus on the Community Empowerment Act.

Community Planning Officials Survey: Understanding the everyday work of local participatory governance in Scotland
Findings from the first survey of community planning officials in Scotland focused on their role, their work and implications for community planning partnerships and community engagement.

Pluralism and Democratic Participation: What Kind of Citizen are Citizens Invited to be? Article exploring how different understandings of democracy deal with pluralism and the meaning of democratic life. The focus is on three prominent models in contemporary democratic theory and practice: representative, participatory and deliberative. (Open access)