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Strategies for empowering disadvantaged rural communities

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University for the Common Good

Recent policy changes

- EU and UK policies encourage service co-production through community engagement, empowerment, asset ownership, capacity-building and enhanced community resilience
- EU and SG interventions through LEADER



Policy directions

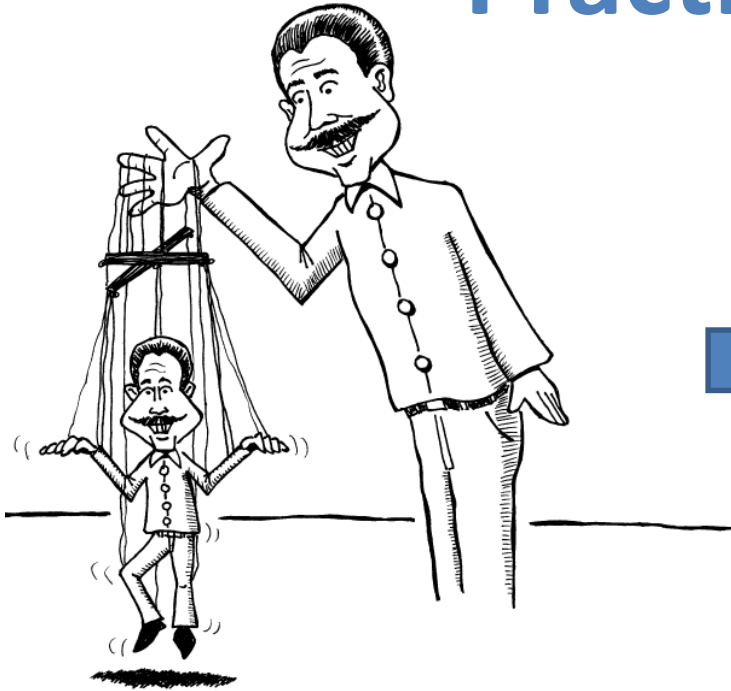
- The 'reform agenda will **empower communities** to come together to address local issues... **giving new powers** and rights to neighbourhood groups' (Conservative Party, 2015).
- One of the National Outcomes: 'We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where **people take responsibility for their own action** and how they affect others' (Scottish Government, 2014).
- Community Empowerment Bill: 'communities are a rich source of talent and creative potential and **the process of community empowerment** helps to unlock that potential. It **stimulates and harnesses the energy of local people** to come up with creative and successful solutions to local challenges' (Scottish Government, 2014).

Meaning of Empowerment

- A process of **transition from** a state of **powerlessness to** a state of relative **control** (Sadan, 1997).
- A united and **systematic effort by a group to** gain **control** over **and improve** their aggregated **lives** by defining problems, assets, solutions, and the processes by which change can occur (Reininger et al., 2006).



Practical concerns



How does the transition from state dependent to empowered should happen?

Practical concerns

- Are all communities equally empowered?
- What do we do with communities that are less capable and *do not engage*?



‘It can only be expected that **community-based strategies for self-help will increase the division and inequality** in rural towns by empowering a small, fairly powerful minority who are better positioned to mobilise themselves’ (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000).

The movement from the '*hierarchically organised intervening state*' towards the '*cooperative state*' needs to be better understood (Margarian, 2011).

Empowerment approaches

Endogenous - having an internal cause or origin, growing or originating from within.

Exogenous - having an external cause or origin, growing or originating from outside.



Capacity for Change Programme



C4C = Capacity for Change

What is the driving force of the C4C initiative?

- To build community capacity and enable less-resourced communities to become empowered and resilient

Why should we work with less-resourced communities?

- Current LEADER approach might not be efficient
- Support goes to 'capable' communities
- Less-resourced communities miss out on potential support



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Process of C4C development

- Identification of communities that meet all inclusion criteria
- C4C publicity and community engagement activities
(Community meetings, face to face and one to one meetings, leaflets and notice boards information)
- Verification community readiness and willingness
- Supported community action (communities working with a project officer, financial support to develop local projects)
- Selection of a project idea
- Project implementation and service co-production



Research questions

Overarching research objectives:

- How effective is the overall C4C intervention?
- What difference does C4C make to the participating communities?
- What improvements could be made to the C4C programme to make it more effective?

Community empowerment questions:

- How does the community empowerment process begin?
- Who should be responsible for the process of empowerment?

Methodology of the study

Stage 1

Initiation of the research process

- Development of C4C hybrid evaluation model
- Baseline data collection
- Quantitative & Qualitative info

Stage 2

Exploring C4C processes

- In-depth interviews with C4C stakeholders
- Interviews with C4C project manager
- Exploring How? Why? and Who?

Stage 3

Finalising the study

- Final data collection
- Quantitative & Qualitative info
- Longitudinal data
- Measuring change

Data collection

7 villages were invited to take part in the programme and 6 of them accepted the invitation

- **Stage 1** involved conducting 178 face-to-face, semi-structured interviews
- **Stage 2** involved over 30 in-depth interviews
- **Stage 3** involved conducting 137 face-to-face interviews

C4C results

- C4C communities identified diversified priorities and different local needs inducing:
 - Community garden
 - Kitchen project
 - Heritage project
 - Community sculpture
 - Community path linking two villages
- 3 out of 6 villages successfully completed the project



Actors involved

Phases of the process

Data example

Exclusion/exit from the programme

Empowerment source and type

C4C project manager

Phase 1

- Identification of communities that meet all inclusion criteria

'... we knew which communities needed our support' (PM1)

Communities that do not meet criteria excluded from the list of potential C4C

C4C project manager
C4C communities

Phase 2

- C4C publicity, community engagement activities, verification of community readiness and willingness

'...we organised community meetings to promote C4C... everybody was invited' (PM1)
'...I liked the idea of this community project' (C5-4)

A community chooses not to engage and do not participate in the initiative

C4C communities
C4C project manager

Phase 3

- Supported community action and selection of a project idea

'...when people are together they tend to bond and they come up with ideas' (C1-1)
'...I was checking on them to see how they're doing' (PM1)

A community does not reach agreement on a project

C4C communities

Phase 4

- Project implementation

'...It's a facility...it's a good thing for the community, it facilitates quite a lot of things' (C1-13)

A community fails to develop and deliver selected project

Exogenous

Exogenous
with
elements of
Endogenous

Endogenous
with
elements of
Exogenous

Endogenous

Project successfully completed

Engagement

- **Funding source as a platform for community engagement:** *‘We got something for nothing didn’t we?...I think the idea’s excellent...the fact that there is finance available’.*
- **Supported community action and work of a project manager:** *‘Obviously we didn’t know what we were doing and we had somebody to guide us. You definitely need somebody that knows how the project works to help you work through it.’*

Participation

- **Being part of a region programme as a trigger of community participation:** *'We often feel that we are neglected. So to be part of this project was great'.*
- **Confidence as an essential component building community empowerment:** *'People will be interested and perhaps that will encourage, just even if it's half a dozen people, to get more involved...so that's a real advantage'.*
- **Development of social capital through community involvement:** *'it forced people to work together who normally wouldn't, so that was a positive. It led within the village to an opening of communication channels which was also positive'.*

Empowerment

- **Development of new and appreciation of existing resources:** *‘We've actually got to the end...there is a tangible result now. And it got the village talking... it's an extra facility’.*
- **Citizen power:** *‘now we're looking into ways to raise money separately to try and get a carpet put in the hall to make it nicer so that if we are having people hiring the hall for a café...so from the kitchen it's spawning other ideas to make the hall more useable’.*

Phase of the process	Observed Empowerment Practices	Observed Community Empowerment triggers and outcomes	Community development (based on Philips and Pittman, 2009)	Progression from engagement and participation to empowerment (EPE)	Key actor/s
Phase 1	Exogenous	Triggers <i>Funding as a stimuli of initial engagement</i> <i>Support of a PM and the development of interests in running a local project</i>	Capacity building	Engagement (E)	Project manager
Phase 2	Exogenous with endogenous	Outcomes <i>Being part of a regional programme as a trigger of community participation</i> <i>Confidence as an essential component building community empowerment</i>	Social capital	Participation (P)	Project manager with increasing power of community members
Phase 3	Endogenous with exogenous	<i>Development of social capital and integrated leadership through community involvement</i>			
Phase 4	Endogenous	<i>Development of new and appreciation of existing resources</i> <i>Citizen power</i>	Community development outcomes	Empowerment (E)	Community members

Observations

Empowering communities that *do not engage* includes:

- **Engagement** (run by a community development officer)
- **Participation** (which involves collaborative work and transfer of power, resources and control from the development officer to community members)
- **Empowerment** (a stage in which communities take ownership of the project and run the community development initiative)

Conclusions

- In relation to communities that do not engage, community empowerment **needs to be facilitated** and should **start with building the capacity** of communities.
- The research highlights a need for **tailored structural support**.
- The assumption that all communities might be ready to do things for themselves is unrealistic.

Conclusions

- **Elements of endogenous and exogenous empowerment are necessary** for empowerment of communities that have little apparent history of government-induced civic engagement.
- **Exogenous agencies could add value** by providing an enabling environment where endogenous development occurs.

Thank you for your attention

C4C publications:

Steiner, A. and Farmer, J. (2017) Engage, participate, empower: modelling power transfer in disadvantaged rural communities *Environment and Planning C*.

Steiner, A. (2016) Assessing the effectiveness of a capacity building intervention in empowering hard to reach communities. *Journal of Community Practice*, 24(3), 235-263.

Steiner, A. Woolvin, M. and Skerratt, S. (2016) Measuring community resilience over time: developing and applying a 'hybrid evaluation' approach. *Community Development Journal*.

Steiner, A. and Markantoni, M. (2014) Exploring Community Resilience in Scotland through Capacity for Change. *Community Development Journal*, 49(3), 407-425.

Skerratt, S. and Steiner, A. (2013) Working with communities-of-place: complexities of empowerment. *Local Economy*, 28(3), 320–338.

Key statistical results

1. C4C *successfully* completed projects
 - The overall level of resilience increased (change statistically significant)
2. C4C villages that did not *successfully* complete their projects
 - The overall level of resilience decreased (change is not statistically significant)



Advantages and Positive Changes

- Funding source as a platform for community engagement
- Being part of a regional programme as a trigger of community participation
- Development of social capital through community involvement
- Knock-on effect and added value
- Confidence as an essential component of the community resilience process
- Development of new and appreciation of existing resources



C4C Challenges

- Lack of sufficient information about C4C
- Misunderstanding of the C4C concept
- Admin & Management issues
- Suspicions and scepticism
- Diverse community needs
- Hesitance to change
- Timelines & Deadlines
- Personal agendas, disputes and conflicts
- Financial accountability
- Keep C4C going

