

Empowerment and Deliberative Governance : action research for a model

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Seeking to gain insight into how to develop more empowerment and equal partnership processes this paper reports on an ongoing programme of action research, analysed through a community development process framework. Initial work identified the importance of forms and levels of power, and processes around building and mobilising grass roots trust and social capital (Bourdieu). This has then been further refined and explored through action research to develop the beginnings of a strategic model. At the present stage of development this involves an interactive framework that can confront levels of power to encourage diversity and participation in decision-making from bottom-up initiatives. Suggestions highlight conventional community development process models using power negotiation and the importance of distinctive community knowledge in a networked strategy to mobilise influence and embed change in the development of a common and unified vision among stakeholders.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on an empirical research programme of participatory action research in search of a strategic model of effective action in social change. In that sense it is almost empiricist – yet at the same time seeks to be built upon an effective theorisation of the issues.

The first part of the paper is about the need for theory and dissatisfaction with current substantive social theory. It seeks to provide the basis for the development of a response and for a coherent empirical study, which can lead to strategic action for social change.

The detail of this response, on the basis of what could be called an ‘alternative’ or ‘empowerment’ theory then has led onto an action-research programme through case studies and the development of an emergent model.

II. TOWARDS THEORY

The major social movements of the later 20th and early 21st centuries – feminism, environmentalism and anti-racism have led to a general loss of faith in the “answers” of the three main traditional approaches to social theory – Liberal, Social Democratic and Socialist. In this post-modern, post-Foucauldian period there has also been a widespread questioning of growth arising from the misuse of science. Detailed historical studies have clearly shown the way knowledge and power is ‘constructed’ to achieve certain outcomes and notably to exclude those knowledges - cultural, spiritual- and the like in favour of the religion of progress. Yet conventional traditional responses –are still trotted out by passé politicians – despite the fact that, overall, people have lost faith in big magic bullet / reductionist “answers” to the worlds problems and are seeking an holistic view of material production which includes people currently excluded. It claims to be the SHE approach (sane, healthy, and ecological development), also a pun on the exclusion of women, which proposes a view of development, which is based upon a total perspective where all the population (paid and unpaid labour) is involved. There is no doubt that the social and

ecological limits to growth, economic crises and peak oil, mean the end of the exploitative world capitalist system – the issue is whether what we replace it with is better or worse.

We have been left a yawning gap in terms of substantive theory which seem to have been replaced for progressives by simplistic prognostications of “risk” and/or “liquid” societies seemingly developed so that academics can construct themselves, in their ivory towers, as legitimate by providing ‘answers’ to the great unwashed.

While it must be conceded that this is a better option to being unthinking research spin doctors for those with the money to buy the answers they want, neither option is going to solve our critical world problems. Indeed, if the relativism and historical contingency of recent thought are to be taken seriously then of course the very legitimacy of any ‘answers’ is to be questioned.

Post hoc descriptive accounts of “risk society”, “liquid reality” and the like are all, inadequate for dealing with the increasingly urgent task of attempting to save our world (unless you regard Tony Blair as an effective response). When the ice caps are liquid and the sea boils perhaps we will realise too late we inhabit the “age of stupid” as well as that of risk. Despite superficial appeals to the social movements cited above, the ‘risk’ and ‘liquid’ approaches remain locked in simple binary and dichotomous categories with an incapacity to deal with agency, presenting a purely passive view of human actors with risk imposed upon them.(Walklate and Mythen 2010) They also ignore ongoing and indeed worsening inequality and injustice. The problem with descriptive ‘risk’ and ‘liquid’ analyses is that they go nowhere. The real question, is how contingency can be the basis of a realisation of society which gives us some hope in the age of global catastrophe and wars on terror.

There is an urgent need, especially in “action” research, to be concerned with and focused on human action. The approach here will be to suggest a structurally adequate substantive constructionist theory of empowerment as a process, which provides both a way out of the impasse and a realistic strategy for transformative action. A first point however must be concerned with the foundation assumptions for all theory.

III. ASSUMPTIONS : ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY.

As many have stated before, a major issue in the post-modern intellectual world is that of the philosophical underpinning of thought and the clear implications of relativity within constructionist approaches.

At the level of ontology – the contrast between realism and idealism has been complicated by the almost pathological anxiety of academics in the face of not being able to believe in knowledge of reality(transcendental or otherwise). History is full of the tragedies perpetrated on the basis of the ‘absolute truth’ supported by various intellectuals and academics. That does not seem to inhibit them at all. The reason of course lies in their ‘constructions’ of themselves and their roles. If they cannot give us the “truth”, at least potentially, what role can they play?

However, assertions or denials of ontological reality by fiat are, of course, largely irrelevant. The real issues are epistemological, whether or not we can know reality directly – not whether or not it “exists” independently of us.

I clearly choose an idealist position –but it is not one, which leads to absolute relativity. It is clear that the criterion must be the utility and usefulness of analysis – not its “truth” or “closeness to (unknowable) reality” People do ‘construct’ their social realities but do so embedded in social relationships – so the ‘realities’ they construct are embodied and imbedded in group or community constructions. Thus constructionist approaches to social reality see it in terms of the ability of groups to have their constructions embodied as dominant in social institutions in the face of competing groups and the negotiation of such ‘realities’ This in turn leads to pragmatic, utility-based criteria rather than those of

absolutism. It also leads to a relational analysis away from the inherent social science tendency towards reification.

IV. THINKING REALITY AND LOGICS.

This then leads us to consider how we “think” social reality and the process of social construction in helping us break out of simplistic binaries or contradictions.

What I have found most helpful here is Kelly and Sewell’s (1988) portrayal of logics. Their list of five covers all the usual suspects – heuristic, binary, dialectic [dialogic?], synthetic [Marxian dialectic] – but then adds a fifth – trialectic. The first four are often espoused in the search for the “answer” although not always accurately, as with so-called “dialectics”-which are often used merely to indicate indecisiveness without any transformative potential (surely both Hegel and Marx would revolve in their graves!)

The fifth logic however involves a much different way to view ideas – as the shifting, linking, interacting, negotiating relationships between stakeholders. Logically this ‘trialectic’ form of thought differs from binary, dialectic and synthetic thinking in eschewing the search for the correct, permanent and fixed answers preferring a contingent, open and shifting response depending upon the balance of relationships. The key is not the answers but the social process- rejecting the reifications of traditional theories- in favour of a return to social relationships – the basis of social science and social life.

“The challenge of trialectic logic is to hold all three separate factors in tension and, simultaneously, to view them as whole - without letting go of one or making synthesis of just two.” (Kelly and Sewell 1988:23)

No easy solutions in trialectic logic – answers are unstable, changing, contingent and shifting. There is no “final solution” of absolutism here.

Thus the two key points are our knowledge of social reality as socially constructed around community-based criteria of utility and the social negotiations of differing constructions to come up with working compromises. These can form the basis for a new substantive theory of society.

V. SUBSTANTIVE CONSTRUCTIONIST THEORY: PARTICIPATION IN MEANING CREATIONS.

We argue that the above forces and tendencies coalesce into a new, emerging perspective. While still fragmented, this can be seen to draw both on older ideas of social action and more recent ideas of the social construction of knowledge through language which gives power and credibility to non-western modes of thought, indigenous theory (Eketone, 2006) and sustainable development.

This view of theory sees the world as socially constructed, with dominant views of social phenomena as the result of the imposition of meanings. In this approach society and communities are constructed by implicit socially shared meanings that take time to form (Midgley et al., 2004: p89). The use of traditions and history is essential and provides a forum from which a community gathers and operates, so that the good of the community comes before the good of the individual. The focus of this model is the social virtues and duties taking precedence over individual rights. Shannon and Young (2004: p33) observe such ‘empowerment’ or ‘alternative’ theory to start at the point of holism - where social life is seen as a group or collective in relationship, in essence, community. In this way it is proposed that co-operative, reciprocal social systems be developed which seeks first and foremost to meet human need. The whole social system, the way production is organised and the way its wealth is distributed, must be geared to human welfare over and above private profit. What is produced, what work is done, to whom, and how social resources are to be distributed are to be governed by that consideration. This approach sees the so-called economy as made up of institutions, which are networks, organised around information and intermediate forms of control emphasising reciprocity.

It is at this level that need is to be defined. Everyone must have an equal part to play in that definition process. Social justice is recognitive justice,(Humpage and Fleras, 2001) the emphasis is on the power of participation in decision making to regenerate community cohesion and a commitment to genuine community participation (echoing the socialist values of equality of all but not restricting it to purely economic class forms of power). Need definition is to be based on democratic and participatory control. The maximum possible participation must be provided for each individual citizen. Co-operative control for socially useful purposes (as defined by public participation) clearly involves the major devolution of decision-making to the lowest possible level. Experts exist, not to direct such planning, but to serve it.

Shannon and Young see the “mechanism of social development and change as reciprocal participation and control of decision-making” (2004: p33).

Midgley et al (2004) categorise three elements to this approach:

1. Participative Democracy – local small-scale participation so it is meaningful and manageable i.e. empowerment - everybody involved in decision-making.
2. Historical ‘Communitarianism’ – need to know community values, the way the community has been before. Whose views are dominant, how they became dominant and how that can be changed.
3. Politics of Ecology - This looks at the idea of sustainable communities, to live within the means of the ecology. The view here is that capitalism has destroyed social values and led to exploitation and destruction of our environment. There is also a need to have strong communities to save the world’s ecology as well as morality.

Its starting point is a holistic view of social life as based on the group or the collective – the community. The mechanism of social development and change is reciprocal participation and control of decision-making. Participation means that power and decision-making should be taken to the lowest possible level with all persons involved and participating in the community unit to which they relate and wish to belong. All decision-making is to be made at the lowest level, except on those issues, which the local levels deem to be appropriate to more regional, national or global levels (principle of subsidiarity).

Decision-making should be ‘bottom-up’ reversing the current ‘top-down’ process in a system of deliberative democracy (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003). The merging of the systems at the local level means that people join voluntarily into the unit to which they relate and all are involved in all decisions about the control of the resources at the local level. Matters they deem appropriate can be referred to the next level. The national level is likely to be left with few responsibilities (perhaps national defence), and international levels (both regional and global, such as the European Community and other supra-national groupings) should also be part of the system, as they can work both to protect minority rights (often infringed within nation-states) and to develop global responses to global problems. However, while the levels interact, the basic dynamic of the system comes from participation in decision-making– deliberative or direct democracy.

This theory is the positive response to Postmodernism.¹ Postmodernism, includes many perspectives, truths and sees knowledge as contextually based, subjective and uncertain. Postmodernism, thus fits with seeing people as co-creators of differing knowledges and of interpretations of knowledge or ‘discourses’. The ideal is that all take part. Power, in the Foucauldian sense is the use of a resource open to all, definable by all. In being able to identify the technologies of power (i.e. analyse the power dynamics) it is easier for people to then bring about change and affect this in their lives.

Moving to trialectic analysis and contingent analysis of social constructions in terms of power relationships clearly foregrounds an open definition of power as the key concept. The basic and central

¹ Sometimes the looser (non-Frankfurt) use of ‘critical theory’ comes close to the suggestion here but it never seems to go beyond vague references to power which are not concretised or operationalised in specific contexts and patterns of relationships.

relationship is power – and the ongoing process of power relationships. In substantive terms – the overall theory statement is very open-ended. It is of course built up out of many fragments – from Gramsci to Bourdieu - but going beyond them to state both why and how. We have attempted to take a contemporary approach to the issue using both the traditional Weberian conceptualisation of power resources along with the more recent Foucauldian insight of power as process and an achievement.

VI. OPERATIONALISING POWER.

A. *Power resources.*

The term ‘capital’ is a useful conventional term for power resources. Using it as short hand for the conventional power resources possessed by social actors – ‘capital’ in all its economic senses (human, financial and material) and ‘authority’ (political capital) in the sense of legitimated political authority – we also identify ‘social capital’ as a power resource which might be especially relevant in community/partnership/network contexts. Social capital is difficult to define and ‘count’ as it refers to those intangible resources, friendships, networks, trust and shared values. Relationships are an asset and can be seen as both ‘bonding’ people together and ‘bridging’ across social divides – creating relationships of reciprocity and trust. Note that such mechanisms are common in non-Western societies – as the basis of social life (Maori “utu”). Trying to build such community networks has long been a major dimension of social work practice – as community work.

While some descriptive approaches to social capital have become popular, as with the American political scientist, Putnam, who sees America is failing because people do not join groups and go ‘bowling alone’(2000), this is very superficial.

It does not examine the basis of networks, how different groups relate to each other it is not clear what these networks are supposed to be based on, nor how they operate or how one group’s social capital affects that of another.

Most usefully the sociologist Bourdieu (1994) seeing social networks as a resource alongside financial, physical, human and political capital. used the idea (as well as ‘cultural capital’) to indicate how the middle class have been able to dominate the schooling system. He sees the idea of social capital as closely linked to (class) ‘cultural capital’ and ‘actual capital’. He, in fact often sees it as negative – the way some groups – especially the middle class – maintain their power, status and influence versus that of other people. However, if they can do it – so can other groups who are currently excluded –and social capital can also be a resource for people to move out of problems and poverty. What seems important is adopting a more positive and systematic approach is relating it to the basic issue of power resources, for Bourdieu class power and for us a broader definition of power based on a wider range of resources. Here we have found the work of (Healey, de Magalhaes et al. 2003) useful. They have extended the definition of social capital into a formulation of three major forms of resources – knowledge, relational and mobilization (political) capacity – as three forms of ‘social capital’.

They define these resources in detail as follows:

- Knowledge resources are the range of knowledge resources to which participants have access; the frames of reference that shape conceptions of issues, problems, opportunities and interventions. The extent to which range and frames are shared among stakeholders, integrating different spheres of policy development around place qualities; the capacity to absorb new ideas and learn from them (openness and learning).
- Relational resources are the range of stakeholders involved in the issue or in what goes on in an area; the morphology of their social networks, in terms of the density (or thickness) of network interconnections; the extent of integration of the various

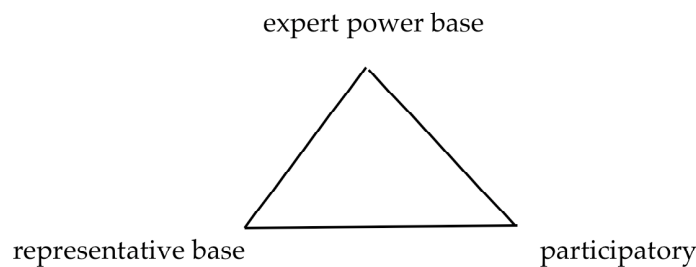
networks; the location of the power to act, the power relations between actors and the interaction with wider authoritative, allocative and ideological forces.

- Mobilisation capacity is the opportunity structure; the institutional arenas used and developed by stakeholders: the repertoire of mobilization techniques that are used to develop and sustain momentum; the presence, or absence, of critical change agents at different stages. (Healey et al 2003: 65)

These then are power resources alongside other such resources. However, as Foucault has drawn to our attention – power only exists in its exercise.

B. Power Process.

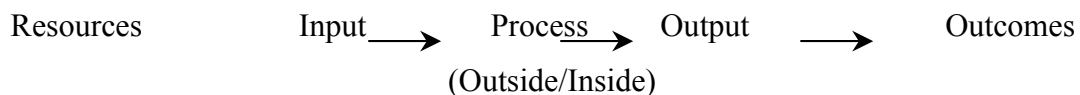
Of course, the work of Foucault and the mere mention of mobilisation does, of course, highlight the importance of power as process. It remains only potential until it is used and exercised. Partnerships, if they are anything, are interactive sites so we must pay attention not only to the resources or rules or outcomes – but the processes through which they are developed. Here we wish to adopt the trialectic perspective of the “transaction sociale” approach that sees social forms (embodied discourses) as arising out of the interaction and power relationships between social actors (Smith and Blanc 1997). Smith and Blanc for example conceptualise the interaction between actors in governance in terms of their sources of legitimacy in their “trialectic” model of the decision-making.



(Smith and Blanc, 1997)

C. Process model

Usefully we can view the resource/process interaction within the framework of the influential ABCD model of community development evaluation developed at the Scottish Community Development Centre (Barr and Hashagen 2000). This simple framework (inputs, process, outputs and outcomes) is superior to simple input-output or outcome models as it explicitly identifies the process as worthy of investigation and distinguishes between the obvious tangible ‘outputs’ of a process (often misnamed as outcomes) and the longer term and more substantial changes – defined in the model as (overall) outcomes.



A focus on process also builds in some of the attention to complexity and feedback left out of some of the more simplistic approaches. It does still look linear without the interaction and feedback, which is an essential part of any process – but it does provide an heuristic tool through which we can examine events.

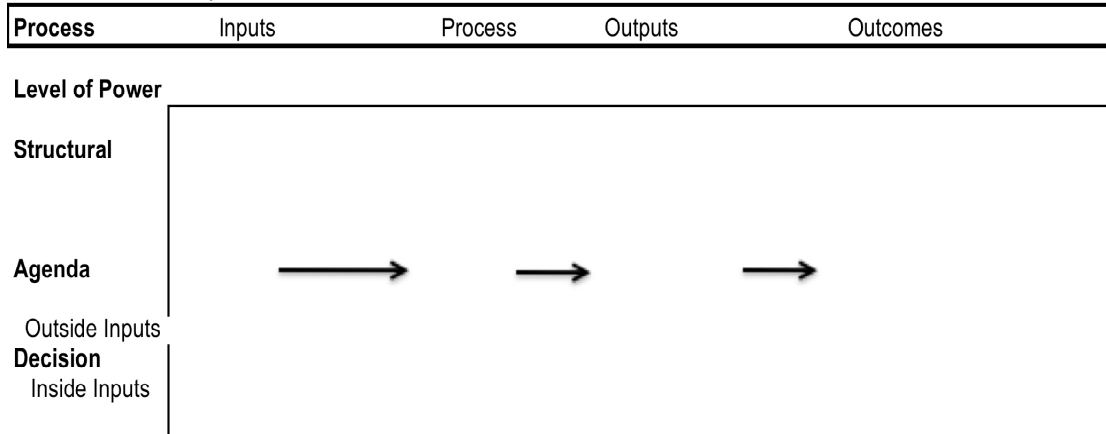
D. Levels of Power.

Finally, in the task of operationalising power, as with Lukes’ seminal discussion of the concept (Lukes 1974, 2005), we seek to operationalise power as operating at a series of levels – vulgarised at our hands into the :

- Decision-level: the lowest level where decisions are actually taken
- Agenda level: where the ‘agenda’ for options to be considered at the decision-level are set
- Structural level: the background conditions governing the agenda level.

This produces a table of levels and process of power which can be used to chart development .The inputs are the power resources.

Levels/ Process Analysis Framework



Although this is an heuristic device rather than a simple description, in terms of the study of government/community power relationships we see the level of the network/partnership operation as the decision level, the rules/protocols for the partnership as the agenda level and government “third way” policy as the structural level.

In summary therefore we attempted to analyse a selected number of cases of community level partnership efforts in terms of a conception of power defined both as a range of resources, and, an interactive process, operating at a range of levels and evaluated through a sophisticated input – outcome model, attempting to develop a theoretically based ‘how to’ strategic model for change.

VII. CONVENTIONAL RESEARCH DESCRIBING PARTNERSHIP OUTCOMES.

Prior conventional descriptive research in the overall programme of studying five government/community (VCO) partnerships showed that while the inputs and power from inside the community were initially weaker in resource terms, they were, in three of five cases, based upon a strongly unified vision at local/decision level and were able to create changes at the agenda level. However, in at least two of the cases these did not lead to major sustained implementation of a wider vision – as that of the agenda setters (typically government actors) was re-imposed.

The tentative conclusion from the analysis of these cases is that one pole of the stakeholder triad, if strongly developed, can have significant influence but the resource on which it is based is dependent both upon process and the development of power relationships with other stakeholders and the persistence, nurturing and retention of its resource base.

The central issues from these for a “how to” model embodying power relationships seemed to be :

1. The importance of each stakeholder group identifying and developing its power resources in process terms –for social capital the distinctive knowledge(s), networks and mobilisation –seem to be important elements in making a resource effective.
2. The central place of developing goals and objectives through a planning visioning/negotiating process whereby stakeholder differences are worked through for a

common vision (issues of exclusion /who is “in “ or “out” seem important – the most inclusionary process possible seems recommended)

3. the ability of local level visions to achieve sustainable change at its own level depends upon the persistence and maintenance of the power relationships established locally.
4. the ability of local level visions to achieve sustainable change at the higher agenda levels also depends upon the persistence of the power relationships established locally a

For the leverage of social capital, where the differing knowledges are built into a common vision and plan – through relationships – trust needs to be achieved. The nature of trust is rarely analysed in detail but, in the business field Das and Teng (1998, 2001) have produced a two-fold typology of trust within a partnership relationship, goodwill and competence trust. Goodwill trust is one’s good faith, good intentions and integrity prior to entering into a relationship, reducing a partner’s perceived relational risk. Competence trust, is based on the various resources and capabilities of an organisation, which reduces performance risk. This becomes important in government/VCO partnerships as these elements come from differing stakeholders – human capital from the VCOs and financial capital (and legitimation of its use) from government. This process seems therefore to involve at least two steps:

- i. identifying relevant stakeholders in terms of the relevance of their resources to achievements of outcomes (competence trust)
- ii. building relational trust in terms of those outcomes

Thus it would seem that direct engagement in the planning/visioning process and the negotiation over resources within that process are key factors in a strategic model. We sought to develop these insights further through action research into community agency, government relationships, seeking to experiment and ‘test’ the ideas and processes in a range of settings.

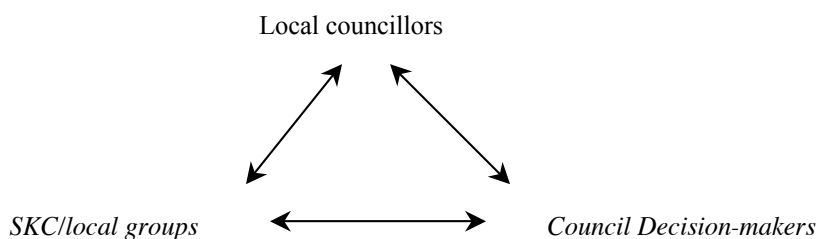
VIII. BEST PRACTICE FOR EQUALITY? “HOW TO” CASE STUDIES

These cases were a series of four action-research projects, the development of governance input in a low income suburb in Dunedin (South Dunedin), extension of Safer Community Council activities into developmental crime prevention (Timaru Safer Community Council) , user involvement in a disability services organization (CCS/Disability Action) and the development of family support services(Hokonui Horizons). In all of these the four above lessons served to structure the action. In all of these the AR approach taken was the simple action/reflection model.

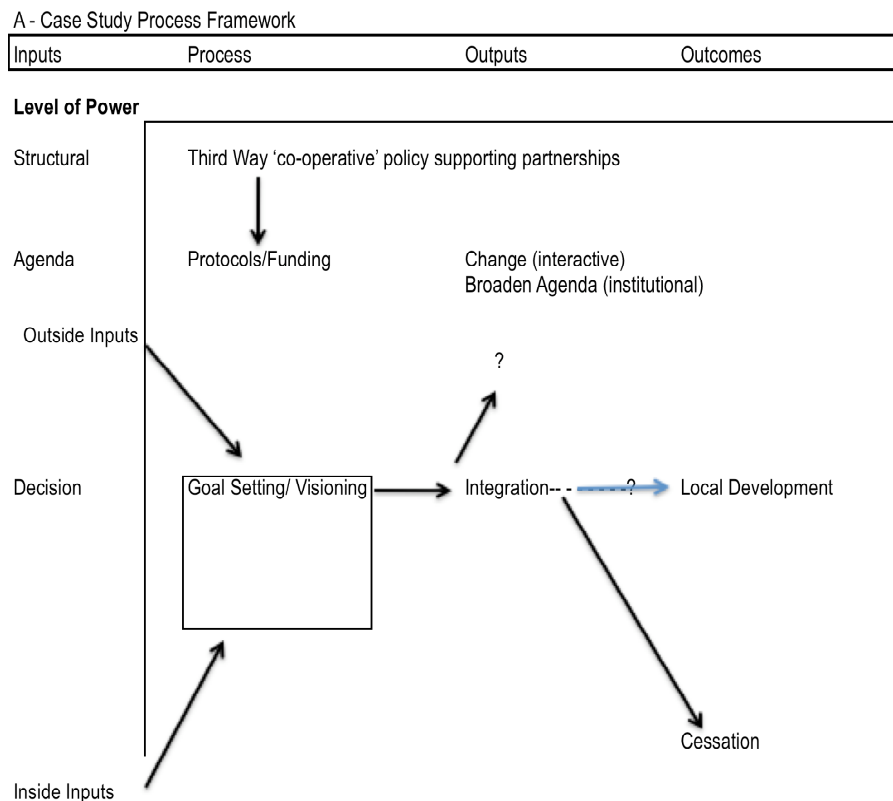
IX. SOUTH DUNEDIN

This was a University initiated project (Participation Action Research Team [PART]) in conjunction with a strong local organisation (St. Kilda Community Club) in a low-income area lacking any formal systems of input into governance. (Perry C., Shannon P., Chilcott J. & Maykind M. 2003). The goals were especially to build a strong local shared vision to build and institutionalise local governance in city decision-making.

Stakeholders



While the visioning/ trust process was effective, this did not seem inclusive enough (Maori and Pacific Island communities did not participate), other less organised groups were disadvantaged in the process and the new umbrella group developed failed to exercise any effective leverage on the Dunedin city council.



Identified problems/failures included:

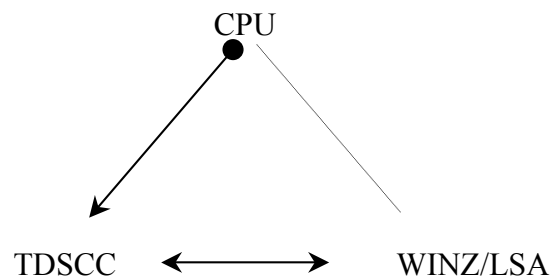
1. inclusiveness not getting Maori / PI involved nor, despite the Councillors, council officers, not getting the actual decision makers
2. Readiness – although some groups took part not so well organised as others
3. The new peak group – the Vision South Umbrella were unable to develop any meaningful relationships at agenda level, CEO the City Council organization itself simply ignored the group and refused to support it.
4. While several new services were developed at community level (decision level) by individual local stakeholders, the failure to develop effective leverage on the council led to the eventual demise of the umbrella group after three years.

Lessons around this were then learnt and attempted to be put into practice in a second piece of action research – with the Timaru District Safer Community Council.

X. TIMARU DISTRICT SAFER COMMUNITY COUNCIL. (TDSCC)

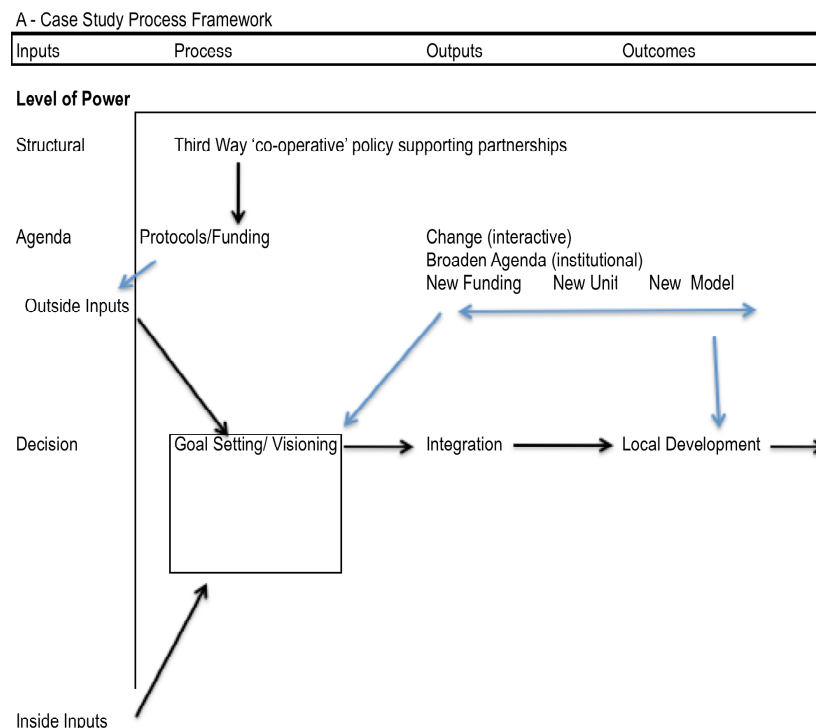
The TDSCC is a 'partnership' focusing on crime prevention in the Timaru provincial district (South Island of New Zealand). Funded by the central government Crime Prevention Unit (CPU) - a unit of the Ministry of Justice - its board of governance is drawn from significant stakeholder groups within Timaru including the Police, the Timaru District Council, local service and government agencies and a range of community-based organizations (Shannon and Walker 2006). It sought help to develop its community preventive action in the face of opposition from the funding government department.

Stakeholders



Lessons from South Dunedin were put into practice:

1. Inclusiveness – a reference group, individual interviews with key informants and individual visioning processes were undertaken with over 150 stakeholders from social service organisations, Mana Whenua, the Police, the business community and outlying rural areas. These were prior to the overall or final “community-level” visioning process.
2. Group Preparation. Rather than merely inviting mana whenua participation, an hui (community visioning meeting) was held with the local marae Arowhenua but also with a strong non-tribal Maori group around mental health. These were conducted on the basis of individual key-informant interviews and sought to build group engagement, cohesion and a ‘readiness’ to participate prior to a visioning process.
3. It sought to build on existing power resources in terms of knowledge, relational and political capital with a wide active stakeholder input. Then bringing the outcomes of these processes in an overall visioning seemed to improve the outputs of the process so that the final outputs had much wider involvement and ‘buy-in’ both to the outputs themselves but also to support for the TDSCC which is now even more widely/deeply embedded within the Timaru area.
4. This then seemed to provide the increased leverage being sought.



The first two objectives were achieved, the inclusiveness was much more successful as Arowhenua Maori and other Maori remained fully involved throughout. In addition, the TDSCC although facing the refusal of its funder (the CPU) to cooperate, escalated the issue to the agenda level and the new strength of the TDSCC was able to exploit the seeming structural weakness in 'siloed' central government to achieve new outputs, through obtaining funding from other central government departments.

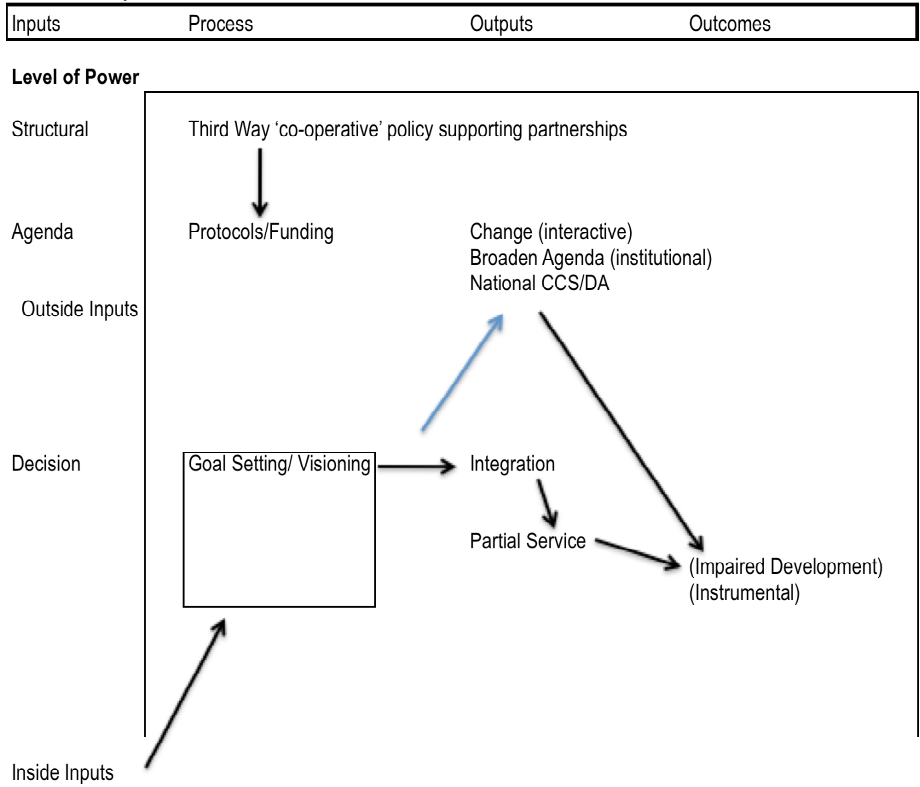
The outcome of the TDSCC partnership is the deepening and extension of a safer community in Timaru based on local defined community preventative action. In terms of stakeholders the restrictive two-way relationship (TDSCLC/CPU) was broadened to include other central government units (WINZ/LSA). A useful subsidiary lesson, in the face of the dismal failure of all the very extensive and expensive efforts to create 'joined-up' government, the project was even able to deliver new and innovative knowledge, a serendipitous outcome, on the power effectiveness of using central government's structural weaknesses against it! (Shannon and Walker, 2006)

By this stage – the elements of the model in the beginning phase had been reinforced but the later organizational issues from the descriptive studies – of building a longer-term organization able to both renew itself and continue leverage – had not been addressed.

XI. CCS/DISABILITY ACTION

A traditional VCO in the disability sector, sought to develop user/client involvement in quality control and management. The model's lessons learned earlier were put into practice:

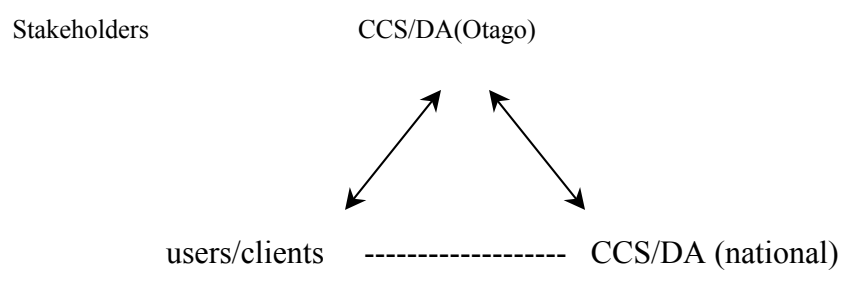
- A reference group of clients and staff were brought together
- Extensive publicity was given to the Visioning process and expressions of interest in involvement were requested. In the event these did not cover all the various stakeholder and interest groups defined so invitations were offered to selected clients and families.
- Given the various levels of functional limitations of some clients individual interviews/opinion assessments were conducted with high needs clients who might not be able to be involved in a visioning process due to functional limitations that inhibited easy communication. (These required the skilled use of specific communication techniques). The results of these consultations were then fed into the visioning process.
- In that process client wishes went beyond issues of quality control to embrace claims for user involvement in governance which staff and, as an initial output, a client-based working party was set up from the forum to develop the lines of action suggested with branch management (Mierzjewski, Shannon and Walker, 2007)



While successfully implemented locally, the vision led to a negative reaction from the national governing body of the agency at agenda level (above), which felt challenged, both in its overall (centralised) governance role and around the critical issue of whether service users could be full members of the organization (with a role in governance). Such roles were very limited in any event,

In this respect it reproduced work elsewhere with respect to the integration of user involvement in disability services (Beresford & Croft, 2004; Robson et al 2003).

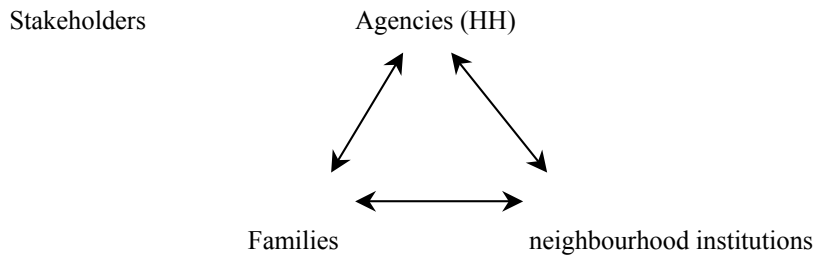
Work by committed users and staff, especially local management, is continuing and attempting to seek ways of imbedding the process of client participation more fully and effectively within both the national organization and in the (critical) funding decisions being made by both government funders and the VCO services branch. Much better and more effective working relationships seemed to have been achieved at local branch level between users and staff which seemed to meet the quality control goals of local management . However, paradoxically this did not translate to input into governance, which was highly centralized and fiercely resisted by the current CEO and board of management.



Finally, the same goals of organizational persistence and strength were developed in a community level process in the small town of Gore (pop 11,000)

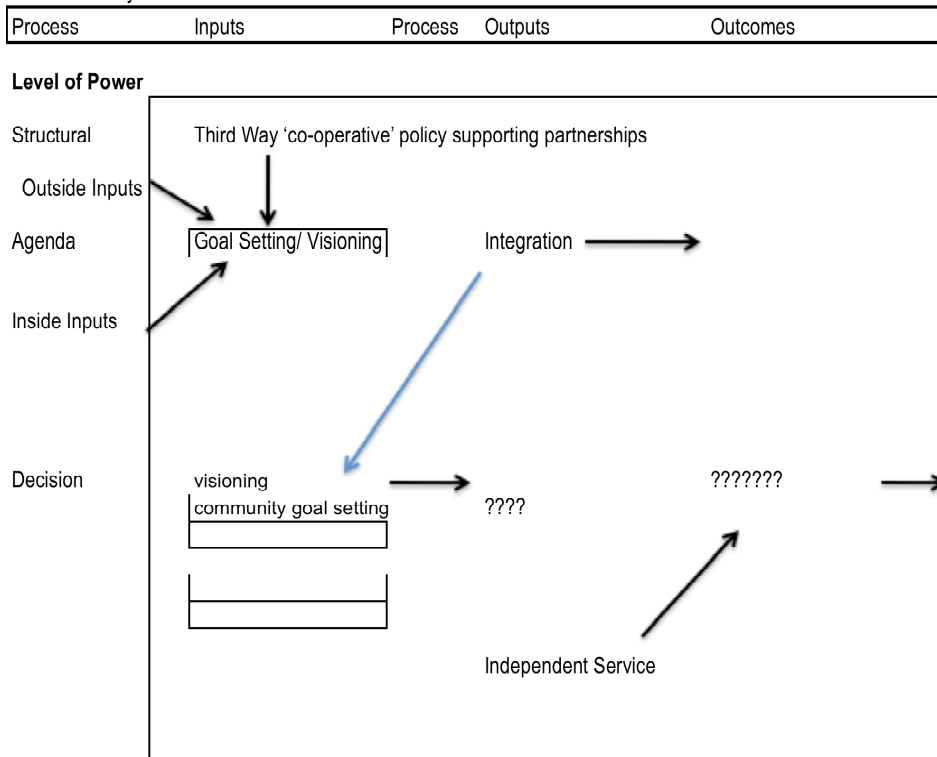
XII. HOKONUI HORIZONS

This was a community wide collaboration of agencies in a provincial town (pop.) which was seeking ways to develop family support programmes in community, in the light of growing problems around forensic child protection intervention. Thus, unlike the others it was an intervention at the Agenda level>



The visioning and planning process facilitated by PART, joining social service agencies with school representatives, which identified the need for both neighbourhood school based and interest group initiatives. However this group is currently working to develop relationships with local neighbourhood schools as a way of deepening the process. At this stage there has been little or no engagement and the town level action has failed to penetrate to the neighbourhood level (Shannon, 2008) and it is presumed that some local “decision-level” visioning would be required.

A - Case Study Process Framework



XIII. PROGRAMME AHEAD

CRN Waihemo Wastebusters : PAR Proposal

The New Zealand/Aotearoa Community Recycling Network (CRN) is a group of 30 community enterprises (13 in North Island/ 17 South Island) and 15 associated groups involved in recycling and resource recovery at community level. While hi-tech, capital-intensive private sector conglomerates dominate the waste management industry, especially in major metropolitan areas, members of CRN have shown competitive effectiveness in provincial and regional areas. At the same time, as ‘non’ or “more than” profit groups, they have advanced the social goals distinctive of social enterprises, with emphasis on Zero waste (waste minimisation), ecological education and local employment creation. As a network they have been effective as an environmental lobby pressure group and, while the sizes of the enterprises differ widely, the collaborative operation of the network has led to the successful mentoring and development of new groups.

Nationally CRN and specific organisations have worked effectively in terms of the key values of social enterprise (risk taking, competitiveness, innovation and social inclusion) and traditional community development principles of self-help, collective action, equity, participation and empowerment. While the organisations vary in terms of the breadth of their goals, they are well placed to deepen and extend local development and self-sufficiency in the face of global changes, both in terms of local stakeholder engagement and an overall national supportive framework. As noted earlier, the major successful members of the CRN network have been social enterprises which have developed services in minor provincial centres – typically localities with populations around 10-12,00

However, they have also not developed many organizations in the towns and hamlets of up to 2000 people away from bigger centres. Here locality identification is often very powerful and was until recently the basis of territorial governance.² Yet if the network is to be significantly embedded throughout the country – resource recovery also needs to operate in smaller centres under local community ‘ownership’.

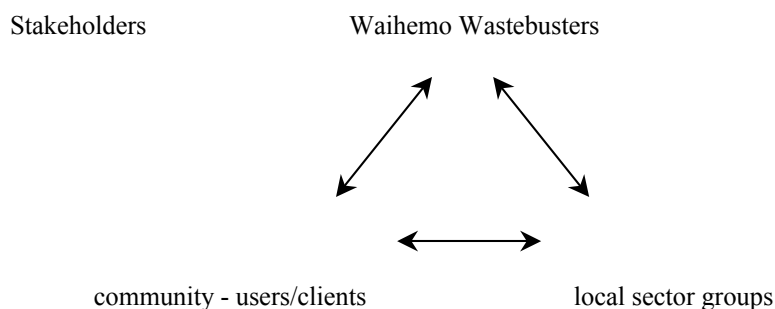
It is this issue, which is shaping the strategy of the latest attempt at AR in a small new member of the CRN network in a situation where the line of commercial viability is unlikely to support the establishment of a commercially successful operation as a base for community engagement and development.

The task is to attempt to build back and deepen the engagement of community stakeholders in a local Wastebusters group at an early stage of its development in a somewhat deprived small rural community of approximately 1200 people. Waihemo Wastebusters is an eight-month old incorporated society, created via a public meeting, with a small elected executive committee and some 50 formal members.

It has a very broad development goal as its mission:

To encourage a more secure, self-reliant and vibrant community, which is better prepared to retain and develop its own resources and meet the essential needs of future generations. (WW Constitution, 2008:1)

In its small scale local focus it seeks to meet most of the conditions identified for successful local action: definable boundaries with the resource controllable locally, difficulties for substituting outside operations (distance costs) a small population with some thick networks of operation and a participatory mode of operation.(Jackson, 2005). Instead of seeking to deliver a wide range of services for the community, maximising the growth of the organization then developing broader engagement, it seeks instead at the outset to develop user involvement and stakeholder commitment to sustainable resource recovery and local development process. The aim is to develop an organization only to the extent required to facilitate the outcomes sought by the community.



² Local body reorganisation in the 1980's abolished smaller county councils and absorbed them into larger district councils – the relevant area for that discussed here is over 100km in length

XIV. INCLUSION/VISIONING : WAIHEMO 20/20 : VISION FOR CHANGE.

Proposal for an action-research/educational programme for sustainability adaptation.

This proposal is to develop a community-wide sustainability Action Plan for the Waihemo District (1500 pop – 3 towns). The Plan will be developed by using specialist experts, by involving the local High School, by seeking the assistance of existing clubs and interest groups and together, identifying rational responses to global sustainability challenges that will better meet the future needs of the community.

A. *Inputs.*

The main inside inputs will be involvement of as full a range as possible of all local stakeholders. Some will already be involved in organizations and ready to take full part, while others will require some preparation to become ‘participation ready’.

B. 2. *Visioning Process.*

Secondly, a sustained process of inclusive and open interaction is required if partnerships or other relationships are to be equal and autonomous and this is to be the major strategic approach taken. Major attention will be given to creation of a shared community/network vision involving explicit knowledge development, relational building and mobilisation action. As in conventional community development, successfully building of a community vision is to be achieved by an inclusive involvement of all available stakeholders in a transparent process which deals with and works through power/knowledge conflicts, builds group relationships and can mobilise local resources.

C. 3. *Control and Empowerment.*

The goal here is to give major attention to building power through bringing together local knowledge, community networks and mobilisation (political) capacity. The criterion for trust and working together must be those of the community, the timeframe that of the community and the results “owned” by the community. This will not necessarily be easily conceded by current powerholders or the TLA so this must become an actual strategy to empower the community. In all of this, however, as in the many other studies, community action works better when power disparities and conflict is brought out into the open and confronted, this model provides guidance on how this might be done.

D. 4. *Relationship Building.*

The establishment of trust can be defined as based upon goodwill between participants and a mutual confidence in one another. This trust takes time to develop and depends upon a mutual belief in a shared vision, interaction and the proven competence to deliver.

E. 5. *Interactive Change.*

While this model and the whole project seeks to enhance ‘bottom-up’ participation, it is not naively suggesting that this can happen in a vacuum. What it does seek to suggest is possible is effective engagement in power and decision-making. The leverage here is that the window of opportunity exists mainly because the old system simply did not and probably cannot deliver. In that sense, the “centre” requires deliberative governance more than the community margins and it is also clear that “added value” is delivered in the process

We have some confidence in this strategy based on the validity and relevance of

We have some confidence in this strategy based on the validity and relevance of ‘community’ knowledge, the importance of networks, trust and confidence in each other, thus developing enough support to mobilise influence. What can be achieved, and is most important, is flexibility and responsiveness, which comes from being ‘owned’ by and responsive to the community.

XV. CONCLUSION.

Methodological conclusions – the action/reflection cycle of AR is a little misleading as in the real world, at least in the one project, there is a limit to the trial and error approach – errors made can often not simply lead to trying another option as the errors themselves have their effects. Is AR any better – does a trial and error approach only lead to more error? We have found errors difficult to recover from and have tended to learn from, them and correct action serially across projects.

Overall strategic model. Not recipes but principles.

It is of course one of the major weaknesses of conventional research that it does not lead to cumulative development of knowledge – is AR any better here? Does a strategic model lead to what managers call “best practice?”

This paper has traversed the development of a programme of research into empowerment (both conventional and AR) and the question is whether it is worthwhile and any lessons can be learned for other situations. + In many respects what it has established is not new. Conventional community development process models are confirmed as are the general identification of community development principles of empowerment (Laverack 2005).

Analysis towards a Strategic Model.

However some general principles have been established and there seems now to be thriving industry of development and small town ‘consultants’, which promote community, change and use tools and techniques developed elsewhere to bring about changes – sometimes successfully, sometimes less so. In the projects reported here it suggests that the principles of the earlier work here needs to be retained and effective local action must be build upon the building of strong social capital – defined in terms of the mobilisation of local knowledges and that this can lead to progressive change – even at times change at government level.

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