CoLab EVIDENCE REPORT

Community governance and place-based initiatives: Fruitful frameworks and directions

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ABOUT COLAB:

CoLab brings together families, clinicians, educators, policy makers, other practitioners and researchers to provide evidence to improve service delivery and community capacity to meet the needs of children, families and communities who are experiencing vulnerability. Our vision is that young children in Australia develop, learn and thrive so they can build a better future for themselves and their communities. CoLab has three priorities, including: providing better support to families experiencing adversity; advocating for place-based approaches to improve the ways that families, services and communities work together, and; advancing the economic understanding of early childhood, with a focus on where the best early investments can be made. CoLab was launched in 2017 through a partnership between Telethon Kids and the Minderoo Foundation, made possible by Minderoo's founding commitment to ensure every Australian child gets the best possible start in life.

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HIGHLIGHTS

- A place-based approach seeks to address the **collective problems of families and communities** at a local level.
- Before embarking on a place-based initiative, it is necessary to consider **key contextual factors and local understandings of communities,** specifically reflecting on: definitions of community; community governance; empowerment; social capital, and; community capacity.
- **Definitions of community** characteristically focus on a defined geographic area, however, alternative notions of community may focus on the importance of relational and psychological elements.
- **Community governance** is community-level management and decision-making that is undertaken by, with, or on behalf of a community.
- **Community empowerment** is a process that involves relatively powerless people working together to increase control over events impacting their lives and health. that can better meet children's needs.
- **Social capital** is seen as the power base of the community, and refers to the level of social networks and local associations promoting knowledge sharing.
- **Community capacity** encompasses the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community.
- Ensuring place-based approaches are **contextually-relevant** can increase the impact of these initiatives, and in turn, **better support children, families and communities** to realise their potential.

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Community governance and place-based initiatives: Fruitful frameworks and directions

Introduction

Place-based approaches to health and social program and service delivery have seen growth in Australia as community services and government departments seek to address the geographical concentration of long-term, complex problems (Hamilton, 2016). At the same time, communities have recognised the importance of collaboration and service integration to better meet individual, family and neighbourhood needs. By mobilising local action, knowledge and resources, place-based approaches seek to provide coordinated, locally-relevant responses to issues that are seen to be too complex and long-term to have simple solutions (Laidlaw, Fong, Fry, & West, 2014).

Following a review of initiatives world-wide, Moore (2014) found that place-based approaches have certain features in common. Broadly, these are: a focus on a defined geographic area; coordinated efforts of many agencies to address agreed goals; actions adapted to local conditions and needs, and; a governance mechanism to facilitate joint planning. However, many place-based approaches may have different characteristics, according to the extent to which the processes of the initiative were controlled by government departments or associated NGOs or donor agencies, rather than involving the community in engagement and partnership (Moore, 2014). Likewise, Moreno, Noguchi, and Harder (2017) argue that agencies embarking on community development projects often fail to align the aims of their projects and their thoughts about developmental change in those communities with their practice. Thus, they act on assumptions that may not be contextually relevant to a community. Additionally, because the content or aims of projects tend to respond to donors' agendas and pre-exiting outcomes, ''beneficiary" communities can be at risk of having little or no ownership of the capacity-development process (Diamond, 2004).

Eade (2007) argues that failure to take contextual factors and local understandings into account can reinforce, rather than challenge, existent power relationships. As such, lack of careful examination of local perspectives and priorities in place-based projects, however well-intentioned, can be detrimental to community social networks and empowerment capacity (Simpson, Wood, & Daws, 2003). Thus, before embarking on a place-based initiative and before approaching a community to petition their involvement, it is obligatory to determine their position in relation to a number of underpinning issues. The philosophical stance taken will influence all aspects of place-based initiatives.

This Evidence Report outlines concepts of community that are fundamental to planning place-based initiatives. This discussion aims to provide guidance to agencies undertaking place-based initiatives to help examine and articulate their assumptions about communities, including how communities are:

- ***Defined***, from an insider and outsider perspective;
- ***Governed***, and roles and responsibilities delineated; and
- ***Empowered*** to participate in decision-making.

In addition, this Evidence Report discusses the importance and implications of considering:

- Existing levels of ***social capital*** within communities, and how this can be strengthened;
- Existing levels of ***community capacity***, and how this can be improved.

Defining a community

Place-based initiatives characteristically focus on a defined geographic area and refer to it as a *community*. Increased complexity, changing technologies, and increasingly varied and mobile life styles have, however, affected the meaning of what is meant by a community. Indeed, community-based initiatives, particularly related to public health programs present challenges, in part because community has been defined in such ambiguous and contradictory ways (MacQueen et al., 2001). In particular, the operationalization of the concept of community is problematic, with many program initiatives framed without an understanding of the meaning of the term, or assume the meaning is self-evident (Brodsky & Marx, 2001; Chappell, Funk, & Allan, 2006; Sonn, Bishop, & Drew, 1999; Talò, Mannarini, & Rochira, 2014).

Commonly community is thought of in terms of geographic boundaries associated with a geographical place with borders that are administratively defined. From that perspective, community is tied to a physical location and the people in that area (Jamal, Bertotti, Lorenc, & Harden, 2015). This makes sense to the extent that most people live in one locale. Physical limitations, however, no longer have the relevance they once did. Ease of transport and multiple channels of communication mean that individuals can have multiple identities and roles, and connect them to multiple communities, many of which are independent of locale.

An alternative notion of community focuses on the importance of relational and psychological elements— in particular, bonds and feelings based on affinity, similarity and belonging, rather than spatiality. From this perspective, shared attributes and interests designate individuals as collectives regardless of their geographic proximity (Chappell et al., 2006). This approach suggests communities arise out of shared concerns and interpretations about problems and solutions. Wiesenfeld (1996) suggests that defining community as a set of individuals who have built an identity from shared experiences and processes implies shared characteristics, actions, and perspectives. Viewed in this way, it refers to homogeneous groups that have few internal discrepancies and little intra- and inter-individual difference (Neal & Neal, 2014). In such cases, community identity is constructed in ways in which differences are minimised and diversity is not valued. In this way, not everyone in an area is likely to be recognised as part of a defined community.

Both spatial and non-spatial understandings of community are combined in many definitions. In these definitions, communities incorporate both a common geographic locale as well as some combination of shared values, goals, perspectives, or interaction. For example, the World Health Organization (1998) defined community as a group of people with as shared culture, values, norms, or identity and who are often living in a defined geographic area. Similarly, MacQueen et al. (2001) defined community as a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings.

Incorporating both definitions of community is advocated, because the boundaries between geographic and affinity communities can differ greatly. However, blurring these two aspects into one definition complicates analyses and poses problems for operationalizing community boundaries, especially given that subjective and symbolic meanings are relatively intangible constructs. Communities based on relational or psychological elements such as belonging do not necessarily coincide with geographically defined communities, despite this assumption being frequently made (Talò et al., 2014). Despite conceptual and definitional complexity, there has been a tendency to operationalize community geographically, based on administrative boundaries, no doubt because of the difficulties of doing otherwise (Chappell et al., 2006).

Additionally, there appears to be a fundamental gap between the conceptualisations of community in the academic literature and the way in which community is used in policy and practice (Bertotti et al., 2015), illustrating an important difference between the meanings for 'members' and 'non-members'. Non-spatial, affinity-based conceptualizations of community are consistent with the meanings of community for members. For non-members, geography is the main consideration and shared values are often assumed. Internationally, there has been a shift in the relationship between government and citizens, placing welfare at the 'community' level (Jamal et al., 2015). While the term 'community' has been adopted and appropriated by those working in policy and practice as a tool and metaphor for an improved way of life, the meaning of the term in the academic literature is highly contested and continuously changing (Bertotti et al., 2015).

Further inquiry into meanings of community thus needs to be prefaced by the question: community constructed by whom? (Jewkes & Murcott, 1996). Pursuing this notion, Jewkes and Murcott (1996) report that a misplaced assumption about the nature of community may have contributed to the failure of community participation projects in health and strongly suggest recognition of the differences in the construction of communities by members and non-members is essential. This view is supported by MacQueen et al. (2001), who suggested that a 'cookbook' approach to community based initiatives will not work because the experience of community differs from one setting to another. Those driving community participation programs must reconcile the differences and similarities among the participating communities.

Community Governance

Place-based initiatives are characterised by a governance mechanism that entails community participation, engagement and decision making in public matters. This has come to be known mainly as community governance but has also been referred to by such terms as local governance, social governance, network governance and participatory governance (Totkidis, Armstrong, & Francis, 2005). Although there appears to be no universally accepted definition of community governance (Beer, 2014), the definition suggested by Totkidis et al. (2005) reflects most viewpoints. Community governance is seen as community-level management and decision-making that is undertaken by, with, or on behalf of a community, by a group of community stakeholders. The focus on community rather than on a corporation, organisation, local government or the public sector is the distinguishing feature of community governance as opposed to other forms of governance. Community governance is a move away from the formal structures of government to the incorporation of a wider range of interests in decision making (Whitehead, 2003), partnerships with range of actors from the market, state and civil society (Herbert-Cheshire, 2003). It is essentially the self-governing aspects of the community performed by residents for the collective benefit of the community (Clarke, 1998).

The underlying assumptions that are core to the concept of community governance are that communities:

- have a 'sense of place';
- are homogeneous;
- can distribute benefits and burdens equitably;
- can build and sustain social capital;
- have natural organisational forms that relate to government and market
- are accountable; and
- can plan, manage, deliver and coordinate better than governments or markets (Adams & Hess, 2001).

It is thought that communities can sometimes do what governments and markets fail to do because their members have crucial information about local behaviours, capacities, and needs. Members use this information to uphold community norms (Bowles & Gintis, 2002).

Although there is general agreement that the purpose of community governance is community participation, there is little agreement about how it should be done. Governance takes different forms across different counties and different communities. In Australia, different forms have been identified in rural and urban areas (Herbert-Cheshire, 2003; Murdoch & Abram, 1998). Marked differences are also identified with both structure and process (O'Toole & Burdess, 2004).

Structure focuses on the organisational and institutional arrangements of state (government) and non-state (public or community sector) actors and the formal partnership arrangements between these actors. While the instruments of government are readily defined and identified, describing the community sector is more problematic. As well as the non-profit organisations (NPOs) and non-government organisations (NGOS) there is debate about how it includes community workers from the public sector, community and family groups and the wider community (Totkidis et al., 2005).

Processes are the range of managerial activities involved in delivering services. It is these that reflect the degree of delegation of power and resources and indicate where the decision making resides in a structure (Beer, 2014). Community governance is typified by both horizontal connections but also hierarchical interaction. Complex networks of connections and interactions may develop which have positive and negative outcomes. For example, initiatives that purport to promote decentralisation may result in very little actual transference of power and resources.

A critical question in community governance impacting both structure and process is therefore the degree to which community members are to be involved in decision making (Totkidis et al., 2005). Participant selection, methods of communication and decision making and intended influence are fundamental things to consider (Fung, 2015). Assumptions about the nature of the community involved and the membership of the public sector will influence the approach taken (Totkidis et al., 2005).

Community governance is about community management and decision making, but also has the aim of focussing on specific community needs and consequently building community capacity and wellbeing. Governance is effective to the extent that governance arrangements are capable of solving the problems that they are set to address (Fung, 2015). Successful governance requires functioning networks capable of identifying goals, mobilising consent, integrating intervention and reconfiguring resources.

There is, however, doubt about whether the groups retained to speak on the behalf of the community can be representative in nature and thus fulfil the broader democratic functions of community governance (O'Toole & Burdess, 2004). Where group membership is the result of individual choices relying on volunteers, the group is likely to be culturally and demographically homogeneous. This has the function of depriving decisions and actions of valuable diversity. Additionally, it may lead to insider–outsider distinctions, effectively excluding sections of the community from decisions being made about the wellbeing of the community. As Bowles and Gintis (2002) point out, communities work because they are good at enforcing norms, and whether this is a good thing depends on the nature of these norms.

Before implementing place-based initiatives relying on community governance approaches, issues of control over decision making and community empowerment must be addressed.

Empowerment

Empowerment is broadly concerned with the ability of people to gain understanding and control over the forces, personal, social, economic, and political that influence their life circumstances (Israel, Checkoway, Schulz, & Zimmerman, 1994). Community empowerment is a process that involves relatively powerless people working together to increase control over events impacting their lives and health. An empowered community provides enhanced support for one-another, addresses conflicts within the community, and gains influence and control over the quality of life in the community (Israel et al., 1994). Most definitions give the term a positive value and focus on increases in sense of self-determination and self-esteem gained by those who seek it, and is one of the aims of community governance (Laverack, 2006; Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001).

Government agencies and other stakeholders seeking to enable change at a community level use the term empowerment in two ways. It is used to suggest the benefits to the community for activities ranging from providing local services to developing community governance. On the other hand, empowerment is presented as a solution to dependency on the state and on other non-government organisations for social services (Steiner & Farmer, 2018). Such bodies are endeavouring to use community empowerment to engage community members in finding local solutions to local problems (Eisen, 1994; Fawcett et al., 1995; Fraser, Dougill, Mabee, Reed, & McAlpine, 2006). As a consequence, emerging community development projects are intended to be community-led and area-based, aiming to develop local people to have capability to respond successfully to change.

Garofoli (2002) makes the distinction between endogenous and exogenous approaches to understanding empowerment. This is similar to a perspective taken by Laverack and Wallerstein (2001) who describe top-down and bottom-up approaches. Endogenous or bottom up empowerment emerges from within the community, independent from the influence of external bodies and is linked to social capital and community governance. Endogenous power is what members of the local community use in decision making associated with community development and is understood as the capacity to govern social change at a community level.

Exogenous or top down empowerment, on the other hand, refers to stakeholders from outside the community who may have control over the locus of the decision making about the allocation of assets. Taking this perspective, Bailey and Pill (2015) describe community empowerment as a transfer of power in decision-making or the re-allocation of resources. Exogenous empowerment then is seen as a systematic effort to enable people in a community to gain control over and improve their lives by enabling them to define problems, identify and apply assets, as well as design solutions. (Steiner & Farmer, 2018).

This suggests that a feature of empowerment is about receiving power and to act by mechanisms of participation. In this way, empowerment is not a neutral, entirely liberating, or directionless process. It is possible to be empowered to do certain things and not others (Laverack, 2006; Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe, & Weffer-Elizondo, 2005). Additionally, to be empowered, community members and the groups and networks they form, particularly those disadvantaged and relatively powerless, need to act. This requires stimulating a relationship of governance which encompasses desire, interest and a will to participate (Steiner & Farmer, 2018).

The degrees of empowerment are described by the IAP2's (2014) public participations spectrum which illustrates levels empowerment that may be experienced by communities.

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Receive information regarding agencies' opinions of the problem and possible solutions.	Provide feedback to agencies about decisions proposed.	Work directly with agencies to ensure community concerns are understood and considered.	Form a partnership with agencies in all aspects of decision making and identification of the preferred decision.	To make the final decision to implement the community's preference.

(Adapted from International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), 2014)

Steiner and Farmer (2018) caution that although the notion of community empowerment has wide appeal, the reality may be different. Rhetoric on community empowerment often fails to reflect the degree of participation achieved. The community empowerment that external stakeholders purport to facilitate may be experienced differently by the target community groups (Laverack, 2006). Additionally, there is a possibility that there may be communities with people that are impossible or difficult to activate for making the kinds of changes wanted by external stakeholders (Bailey & Pill, 2015; Steiner & Farmer, 2018). It is likely that there are communities in which the necessary skills and receptivity for rational self-management are not present. Empowerment from involvement in community development may be unevenly distributed, with those of higher social status tending to participate more actively, further contributing to the powerless state of some groups (Fraser et al., 2006; Sampson et al., 2005). Despite the very positive slant in much of the literature towards community empowerment, unresolved problems still exist for both the powerful and the powerless.

Before implementing place-based initiatives decisions must be made regarding the degree of empowerment considered desirable and appropriate.

Social Capital

The concept of social capital has a long history, dating back over a century. Since then, many disciplines have adopted the concept, which, broadly speaking, identifies how involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for the individual and the community (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Ansari, Munir, & Gregg, 2012; Portes, 1998). Although social capital is a widely used concept, there is lack of consensus regarding its definition and dimensions (Agampodi, Agampodi, Glozier, & Siribaddana, 2015).

Woolcock and Narayan (2000) suggest that the basic idea of social capital is that a person's family, friends, and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called on for action and leveraged for material gain. What is true for individuals also holds for groups within a community. Communities with well-developed social networks and local associations promoting knowledge sharing are in a stronger position to confront crises, resolve disputes and take advantage of new opportunities. Equally, the absence of social ties can have an important impact. When an individual or a particular group in a community is not a member of, or may even be actively excluded from certain social networks, they can be significantly disadvantaged (Bowles & Gintis, 2002) Social capital thus consists of all the networks, norms, structures and institutions which facilitate social interaction (Bolin, Lindgren, Lindström, & Nystedt, 2003) and the quality and quantity of those social interactions (The World Bank Group, 2011).

Social capital is perceived as having different dimensions. The World Bank Group (2011) described "bonding" social capital where a group may be close-knit and members rely on each other to manage. This is different from "bridging" social capital where groups have access to other groups in the community and hence their knowledge and influence, that can be leveraged in order to pursue particular interests.

More recent approaches (for example Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Younsi & Chakroun, 2016) describes social capital in three distinct forms, namely "bonding", "bridging" (horizontal) and "linking" (vertical) social capital. Adding "linking" social capital, explains the relationships between people across power or authority gradients in a society. Different combinations of bonding, bridging and linking social capital can lead to range of outcomes which may change over time.

Another perspective conceptualises social capital as having two different dimensions; cognitive and structural (Agampodi et al., 2015; Berry & Welsh, 2010; Hawe & Shiell, 2000; Mayer, 2003). Cognitive social capital are the norms, values, and beliefs of people that drives participation in a community and is related to shared language, identities, family ties, friendship, business relations and community leadership. Structural social capital refers to externally observable behaviour, the social interactions that reveal network ties.

The difficulty of measuring social capital has been identified by many authors (Agampodi et al., 2015; Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Berry & Welsh, 2010). Although numerous approaches have been used, there is no universally standard tool. Difficulties relate to the definition of the concept and the problems in operationalising the variables.

Aldrich and Meyer (2015), following a review of the literature summarised the approaches to measuring social capital. One approach used proxies built on attitudinal and cognitive aspects. Trust, for example, is used in relation to others and definable formal and informal community groups. Another measurement approach investigated the behavioural manifestations of social capital in daily life, exploring issues like volunteerism, community association membership, participation in community projects and feelings of belonging to a community. Other approaches have included anthropological observations and case studies.

Community participation has emerged as a surrogate for social capital (Maass, Kloeckner, Lindstrøm, & Lillefjell, 2016; Mayer, 2003; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Bolin et al. (2003) described three categories of participation. Informal social connectedness includes contact with family, friends and neighbours, civic engagement involves volunteering and joining community groups and political participation encompasses local activism and political protest. The number and strength of these participatory relationships are thought to indicate levels of social capital.

Taking a social capital approach to implementing change at a community level is not without concerns. For example, poor or marginalized communities may struggle establish norms, create networks or accumulate and manage assets for combating poverty and isolation (Farr, 2004). Hawe and Shiell (2000) also caution that that an emphasis on relational elements of social capital can dilute the political and material aspects that drive service provision. They go on to argue that the relational aspects may promote psychological empowerment, but this is not the same as real empowerment.

Maass et al. (2016) also argue that uncritically seeking to enhance social capital at a community level may lead to unequal distributions of social capital, further increasing inequality. Regardless of estimated levels of social capital, issues of power and unequal access to resources may precipitate adversarial situations not addressed by the social capital perspective. As Mayer (2003) pointed out, social networks shaped by trust, cooperation and shared values, promote the notion of harmonious relations both within the community and between the community and the 'outside' world. This harmony is unlikely to persist where there are real or perceived disparities.

This raises issues for community leadership. Leaders can find themselves in the uncomfortable position of being between the structures of the state on the one hand and representing the interests of often quite excluded elements of civil society on the other (Mayer, 2003; Purdue, 2001, 2005) This tension is especially difficult for new community leaders emerging as a consequence of active community engagement in the development of social capital and community governance.

Nevertheless, the elements of social capital and the social interaction that it entails is important to understanding a community. A community builds social capital from individual to group levels through the learning interactions of its members, establishing links between learning, change, economic and social well-being, the common good and a civil society (Ansari et al., 2012; Bolin et al., 2003; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). From this perspective, social capital becomes an integral component of community governance to the extent that Bowles and Gintis (2002) argue that social capital and community governance are synonymous terms.

Before implementing place-based initiatives, decisions must be made regarding the ways of understanding social capital and the influence this with have on project implementation and maintenance.

Community Capacity

Community capacity is frequently used interchangeably with other, similar concepts such as community empowerment, community governance, social capital and competence. All of these concepts may contribute to community capacity, but using them interchangeably minimizes important differences that each concept contributes to community driven initiatives (Goodman et al., 1998).

Chaskin (2001), following an extensive literature review, found that definitions of community capacity agreed on a number of elements. A community is seen as having access to resources, including the skills of individuals, the number and strength of its organisations and access to financial capital. In the community there are networks of relationships that are involved in collaborative action with leadership at a community level. Generally community capacity encompasses the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community (Simmons, Reynolds, & Swinburn, 2011).

It is proposed that these elements can be leveraged to solve collective problems and contribute to the well-being of a given community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or organized effort (Hargreaves, Pecora, & Williamson, 2017). There is support for some kind of mechanisms for participation by community members in collective action and problem solving. The literature however, is less clear on how these elements relate to one another in practice, how they are mobilised, and how they are channelled toward particular ends, and the methods that exist to promote or build a community's capacity.

Authors like Labonte, Woodard, Chad, & Laverack (2002) treat community capacity as a unitary thing, a generic attribute of a community. Others like Diamond (2004) argue that it is only appropriate to consider capacity in relation to specific projects or change objectives. From this perspective, an assessment of community capacity is seen as a necessary precursor to any project dependent on community participation.

An extension of the notion of community capacity is that of community capacity building, the idea the assets and attributes of a community can be enhanced, developed and broadened (Diamond, 2004; Jin & Lee, 2013; Labonte et al., 2002; Mills, Rosenberg, & McInerney, 2015; Moreno et al., 2017; Simmons et al., 2011; Simpson et al., 2003). Building community capacity involves efforts across several domains, described in various ways (Simmons et al., 2011), but generally includes the development of knowledge, skills, structures, resources, and commitment. The underlying assumption is that community-based programs need sufficient levels of community capacity to be effective (Millar et al., 2013).

Capacity building may be seen an end in itself. Deliberate effort can be invested simultaneously in capacity building in general while at the same time having goals related to a specific project. Capacity building is then both a process and an outcome (Diamond, 2004). Nevertheless, it resides in a community's people, formal organizations, and the relational networks tying them to each other and to the broader systems of which they are a part. Strategies for building community capacity must therefore focus on these components (Moreno et al., 2017). Community capacity can be a useful construct for guiding and understanding community social change efforts (Diamond, 2004; Goodman et al., 1998; Labonte et al., 2002) but the translation from broad concept to social action is more difficult.

The need to measure community capital is driven by several imperatives. Prior to the implementation of a new initiative, community capital is part of the situational analysis directing planning. Additionally, the efficacy of community capacity building endeavours need to be assessed by the community, by the implementers of programs and perhaps also by the project funders.

The issue, however is what to measure. Following a review of capacity building literature, Simmons et al. (2011) identified 87 characteristics.

Hargreaves, Verbitsky-Savitz, et al. (2017) identified numerous conceptual and technical challenges to defining and measuring community capacity:

- The concept of community capacity is complex;
- Capacity is changeable, influenced by many factors not the least being shifts in network membership;
- Different models define community capacity differently, using closely-related terms interchangeably;
- Measures do not differentiate conceptually between coalitions, networks, and communities and assume single community organisations with one goal; and
- Community capacity is also difficult to measure for technical reasons evidenced by the scarcity of empirically validated instruments.

Some authors are critical of the consequences of attempts to measure community capacity. Mowbray (2005) argued that funding is frequently made available only to communities with pre-existing well-established structures. Communities considered to have low levels of capacity are less likely to attract funding. In this way, community capacity is based on the notion of communities being deficient in skills, knowledge and experience. Perceived deficits in community capacity may also be used as a convenient explanation for failed projects (Diamond 2004). The need for capacity building is, therefore, defined by those who have labelled particular communities as 'lacking social capital'. Given the difficulties in measuring community capacity, the deficit model may only address certain elements and not consider elements which may be of significance (Craig 2007). For example, the 'invisible' capacity that may exist in less tangible areas, including strong networks of voluntary support or a well-established 'informal' economy.

Before implementing place-based initiatives decisions must be made regarding the anticipated relationship between the planned project and the community and how this relates to the understanding of the capacity of the community.

Conclusion

Inherent in the concept of place-based initiatives is the development of solid partnerships between a community and external agencies, frequently the funders of the proposed social change. The expression of this partnership is infinitely variable but must entail mutual accountability. This necessitates shared decision making, flexibility, and a willingness from both sides to respond to feedback. It is also a continuous process, involving long-term commitment rather than short-term interventions True participation is driven by both need and awareness, and is dependent on knowledge and genuine skill acquisition – processes that may take considerable time and application, and which may need ongoing support.

Agencies embarking on place-based community development projects may fail to align the aims of their projects and their thoughts about developmental change in those communities with their practices. They may act on assumptions that are not contextually relevant to the realities of a community. The conflict between stated aims and the actions of some such external agencies may be influenced by the audit-oriented direction of projects in terms of funding requirements, deadlines, and the need for efficient and measurable results, none of which may be relevant to the target communities.

Because the content or aims of projects usually aligns with donors' agendas and pre-established outcomes, 'beneficiary' communities can end up with little ownership of the capacity development process (Diamond, 2004) Moreover, framing place-based initiatives within restricted terms of reference, prescribing systematic approaches with anticipated outcomes, can fail to grasp the dynamic nature of community life which is often less ordered and this can have unanticipated outcomes (Gilmore et al., 2016)

Failure to take prior assumptions, contextual factors and local understandings of the process into account may lead to reinforcing rather than challenging, existing problems and associated power relationships (Eade, 2007). Lack of careful examination of world views and local perspectives and priorities during community capacity building projects places risks efforts being reduced to little more than rhetoric.

Before undertaking a place-based initiative, agencies driving change should examine and articulate their assumptions about:

- The characteristics of the target community from an insider perspective;
- Roles and responsibilities in governance at a community level;
- The level of community participation in decision making;
- The attributes the of engagement with communities with recognised high and low social capital; and
- The scope of capacity building in relation to the current project.

Because local communities are at the core of place-based initiatives, it is important that such approaches are contextually relevant. Ensuring that projects are aligned with the contextual realities and reflect local views of the community, solid partnerships between a community and external agencies are possible and these can facilitate better outcomes for children, families and communities.

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