Pathways through participation
What creates and sustains active citizenship?

Report of the Leeds Learning and Action Workshop

2 March 2011; 13:30 to 16:15

St George's Crypt, Leeds

Introduction

Pathways through Participation is a major national qualitative research project on participants, funded by the Big Lottery Fund and carried out by NCVO, the Institute for Volunteering Research and Involve. The research takes a broad definition of participation, looking at everything from volunteering to voting, and campaigning to ethical consumption.

The project is seeking to address four research questions:

- How and why does participation begin and continue?

- Can trends and patterns of participation be identified over time?

- What connections, if any, are there between different forms of participation and what triggers movement between them?

- How can we improve opportunities for participation?

The team has conducted an extensive literature review, mapped sites of participation and conducted 101 interviews in 3 fieldwork areas: Leeds, Enfield and Suffolk.

During the month of March 2011, the Pathways through Participation team are holding a series of workshops in the three field work areas, in order to present the emerging findings, generate feedback and responses to the research, uncover local and national implications, and develop local actions within the field work areas.

This report summarises the discussion of the first workshop, held at St George's Crypt in Leeds on 2 March, 2011.

The workshop

The workshop was attended by thirty representatives from local public sector and voluntary organisations and from local communities, as well as members of the project team. An attendance list can be found in appendix 1.

As attendees arrived at the workshop, they were asked to write their first experience of participation, and why they did it, on a post-it. Their responses can be found in appendix 2.

The workshop began with a welcome and introductions by Richard Jackson (Director of Voluntary Action Leeds and chair of the Leeds Local Stakeholder Group) and Simon Burall (Director of Involve and lead facilitator for the workshop). This was followed by a presentation by Tim Hughes (Pathways through Participation Research Officer at Involve), which provided an overview of the findings emerging from the research.

Figure 1: Screenshot of Presentation

The presentation[1] themed the factors found to affect participation by whether they related to the individual, close relationships, other relationships and organisations, the local environment, or wider factors.

The presentation was followed by a lively Q&A session, where a number of valuable points and challenges were raised. These included:

- What about issues of diversity, power and inequality? These are key reasons why people do or do not participate. The research team responded that these have been key issues for the research, and may need to be brought out more clearly in summaries of findings.

- What prevents people from participating, what stops them? The presentation covered how and why people participate. Are there cultural trends that prevent people from volunteering? Is there a long-term trend towards the decline of participation? The team and other audience members responded that there's an assumption that volunteering is declining but that's actually not true. It's changing but it's not declining.

- Why were the law and legal requirements not included in the outside circle? Terrorism laws and things like CRB checks have an impact on participation. For example, have terrorism laws stopped people participation in oppositional politics in Leeds? The team responded that legal issues were only raised a relatively small number of times by interviewees, which is something that will be addressed further in the future.

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[1] The presentation can be found at:
http://prezi.com/_etyiweoko5s/what-creates-and-sustains-active-citizenship/

- Are people genuinely consulted? Some consultation tries hard but people felt thwarted in putting across their views. People can be turned off by that process because it's not true consultation and not recorded and don't get taken notice of.

- The fieldwork area in Leeds is very specific. The findings would be very different in a different area. The team responded that the research was not focused on the area, but on individuals and their experience. The areas were simply the places where people with different types and levels of experience of participation (from very little to real activists) were recruited.

- Volunteering needs support. Good volunteering support impacts on people's experience of it.

Important issues from the research for participants

The following sessions were based around group discussion, facilitated by members of the project team. The first of these asked participants to reflect on what the most important and relevant research findings were for them. Issues raised by the participants both in plenary and in the small group discussions included the following:

The image and perception of participation

Comments and questions from participants included:

- Altruism versus self interest. It is more powerful to say "come together and meet people" than it is to say "it's a good thing to do".
- How people view volunteering – are people happy being labelled a volunteer or is a person just being kind and caring (part of human nature) or is it to do with a passion they hold?
- How individuals view themselves and how this impacts on whether they participate or not.
- Identity is an important an interesting factor. It would be helpful to develop a more sophisticated understanding of this, as this research is beginning to do.

- Often people don't class themselves as 'volunteers' – it's a label, and can be a negative one at that.
- The positive and negative implications of how volunteering and participation relate to identity could be empowering but could be too inward looking and exclude others.
- For some types of participation, self-confidence is really important – not everybody will feel they can have a voice.
- Some voices are stronger than others. Resentment can build as a result.

Why people do or do not participate

Comments and questions from participants included:

Triggering

- How do you get people to give up their free time? Maybe by emphasising the potential spin-offs from joining something, or the other benefits beyond the immediate activity of the group (e.g. meeting useful people, etc).
- Formalised participation can put people off.
- Personal motivations - participation can be maintained through good experience and good process.
- Making people feel interested but not obliged is important, and a turn off for other participants can be when it seems like someone is on a personal crusade.
- Enlightened self interest can be a motivation.
- The importance of having spaces where people can meet that are cheap and accessible should never be underestimated.
- Burley Lodge is an anchor and visual demonstration of volunteering. It's been around for 18 years. It's known through the generations – people who attended the under-5s group are now coming back as volunteers – and it's stable – it's a known structure which helps to get people involved.
- Lynchpins can be barriers as well as ways in. It can be very personality based. There's a danger of becoming dependent on those people.
- Conflicts can prevent people from participating – many groups have no process for dealing collectively with conflict; groups may be based on a shared purpose but conflicts can happen and groups are not always able to address the issue.
- How we can get others involved (beyond the usual crowd) and how can it be sustained?
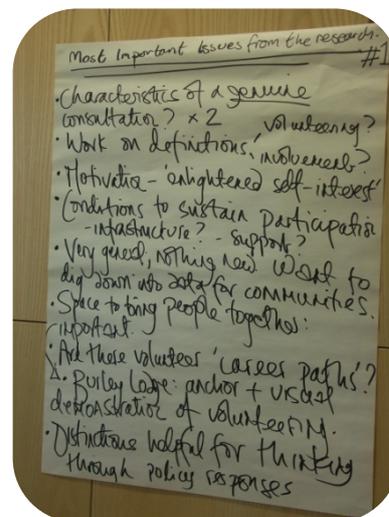
Sustaining

- What are the conditions needed to sustain participation?
- Are there volunteer "career paths"?
- The key thing is how do you <u>keep</u> people engaged? What are the conditions that sustain engagement? What relationships enable that to happen? Good co-operative movements spend time on 'process' to have a real focus on relationships. We are not good at "doing relationships".
- Why and how do people drop out? How can we keep our members involved? Who has the most staying power? And Why?
- Thinking about where things work and how to resolve conflict. There is experience in networks and how they work: trust, reciprocity, moving at different pace at different times. Good networks pay attention to really understanding people's motivations.
- Organisations need to address the main barriers to participation, particularly in terms of access, and particularly for hard-to-reach groups. But it's misleading to think that all people of a particular community are the same (who's representing who?)
- There's a lack of real consultation – people's attitudes towards consultation are based on people's past experience of consultations. What are the characteristics of a genuine consultation?

The complexity of factors affecting participation

Comments and questions from participants included:

- How do you generate the social conditions that encourage participation? It's about the individual but it's also about the wider environment.
- How do the different factors that shape participation move over time and how do they vary according to social groups?
- Participation changing depending on people's life stage – So how do we engage different age groups?
- Importance of understanding that people engage differently at different points.
- When engaging people you have to do it in completely different ways according to the target group (e.g. the differences of appealing to young people and older people).
- There is a 'magic moment' when all elements come together to allow participation to happen really well.
- People don't like to engage in draughty church halls. Need to bring in lots of different techniques for engaging people. Linking social media (e.g. Facebook) and real world participation.
- The research findings suggest that you need to offer a bit of everything to everyone, but that's really difficult. This could be a barrier to encouraging participation.
- There is a mismatch between volunteers' desires for short-term opportunities and organisations' desires for longer term involvement – organisational barriers and individual barriers can be different.

Why it's important to get young people involved, and how to do it

Comments and questions from participants included:

- How important are young people's previous experiences of participation in terms of shaping future participation? (e.g. does it help for them to take part in some kind of community service/volunteering opportunity through school?).
- If you volunteer as a kid, you'll probably volunteer as an adult.
- Schools need to get kids participating in their local community.
- The non-participation of young people is an issue.
- There has been an attitude change and today's young people don't want to work for nothing. Young people are turned off when nothing positive comes of a volunteering experience.
- It depends what you're offering younger volunteers.
- May not get them there in the first place because of financial constraints. How to encourage students to volunteer.
- Young people get turned off by slow pace of change. How do you get intergenerational energy, young and old people working together?

- When young people feel they can't get involved, they start things up on their own through social media. How do you get young people who are involved in social media into action in the local community - and not just licking stamps? How to get young people to take things on?
- Some children are very positive, but this wanes after 10 - 12 years old. The role of schools is very important.
- Where's the <u>fun</u>? Need to stress that side of it.
- Role of close relationships is important. A way to get students involved is to say 'everyone else is doing it'.

The research and presentation

Comments and questions from participants included:

- The key thing about the research is that it is an "<u>objective</u> look at participation". We all look at part of the picture and no-one looks at the whole picture. This is a "fresh pair of eyes."
- The key words from the presentation are 'triggered', 'shaped', 'conditioned' and 'maintained'. The question is how?
- It seems as though the research was focusing on activists. Need to be clear that a range of people was interviewed?
- The assumption in the research is that there is a "problem" (e.g. that participation needs improving).
- Participation generally considered as a good thing, but consensus fragments when you break down into what people do. Is all participation good (e.g. right wing groups)? Even if you can learn a lot from how these groups organise.
- There was too much information in the presentation to take in.
- Need to know more about the methodology of the research (e.g. can generalisations be made from the findings?)
- The research made sense. Most of it was common sense.
- The circle framework is helpful to see all the factors that are important to participation when you're working in a community.

Implications, challenges and opportunities

In the last session, participants were asked to reflect on the implications, challenges and opportunities for themselves, their organisations, the local area and national policy. Issues raised by the participants included the following:

Broadening participation

Comments and questions from participants included:

- Need to find ways by which participation could be made easier and more attractive to

hard-to-each communities.

- Need to bring the old and young together, break down barriers and build up relationships and trust. Create intergenerational projects.
- The drive towards social media is matched by cynicism about social media. Need to limit activity on the web. Young people will set up own structures but need to move into direct action too.
- Need to consult more effectively (especially involving hard to reach groups) and feedback to people better. Ideally move from consultation to co-design
- Lynchpins can <u>exclude</u> certain groups (e.g. students). Need to bring lynchpins together and "open the doors". Beyond confrontation and activists.
- Can participation be forced (e.g. requirement to do census)?
- Overcoming the negative side of participation: who ever shouts the loudest gets things done.

Understanding people's motivations

Comments and questions from participants included:

- Need to recognise people have different aspirations.
- Need to understand the individual through a range of different angles and get this message across to officials.
- Need to understand motivation (e.g. some people volunteer to look good on their CV).
- Recognition matters – even if people do a little, it's worth something and they need to get positive feedback and reward.
- Need to find the level that people want to get involved.
- Need to consider and assess the reasons people leave organisations.
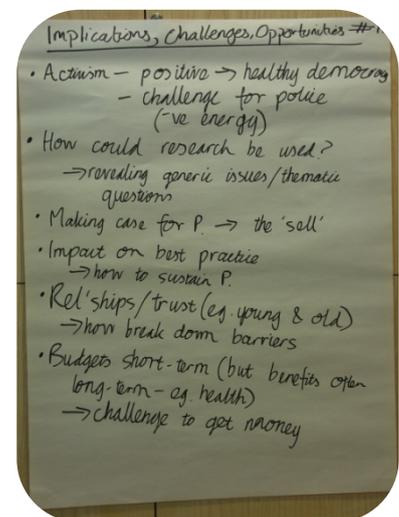
New approach to and understanding of participation

Comments and questions from participants included:

- Need to reconsider the definition of volunteering so that it's not too restrictive and can appeal to a wider range of people
- Need to think about the implications of using certain terminology; labels can exclude. For example, what does the word volunteering mean to people? Some don't want to be labelled as such.
- Has there ever been a positive depiction of volunteering in mainstream media? People don't want to be a 'do-gooder' – it's seen as a term of abuse – why is that?
- Some people's perspectives about who participates are very negative (e.g. student politics in the Union and lots of stereotyping about particular types of students, e.g. medical students) which can create barriers to getting new participants.
- Need to get people to understand what participation is and make the case for getting involved.
- Need to tailor what you do to appeal to lots of different types of people.

- We are much busier now, so models of engagement and involvement might need to change.
- If people get involved with a certain issue, how do we broaden their involvement?
- Need to place specific issues in a wider context so that people don't necessarily limit their involvement to the issue that may have triggered their participation in the first place.
- Opportunity to sustain and widen involvement by linking initial interest to other issues; use issues to frame and contextualise people's involvement to the wider environment and broaden their perspective and outlook.
- Need to avoid over-formalising volunteering and making it difficult for people to join. Often people aren't aware that they are participating. Also need fun-type activities.

Collaboration

Comments and questions from participants included:

- Need to create link between classroom and community to encourage young people to volunteer, starting from school.
- Need to collaborate across organisations, but working in partnership is difficult.
- Need to create organisational networks. Opportunity to support and learn from each other.
- Finding the time to reflect and evaluate processes in order to identify and develop good practice.

Strategy, funding, training and administration

Comments and questions from participants included:

- Organisations need to realise that participation is important! Institutions need coherence on the value of participation, not just what they want.
- How to connect potential volunteers to organisations?
- Finding the resources to involve people is difficult. Budgets are short term, but the benefits are often long term (e.g. health). This creates a challenge to get money.
- It takes time to develop volunteers (e.g. ongoing staff training around volunteer engagement and development).
- Need to make it easier for people to participate (e.g. CRB checks, bureaucracy, costs, red-tape).
- Activism is positive for a healthy democracy, but creates a challenge for the police.
- How to work with volunteers better without putting people off? In the context of cuts, need to professionalise volunteers in organisations, but not overly, as they will have a bigger management role in professional voluntary organisations.

Conclusion and next steps

The comments and questions raised at this workshop will help to inform the focus and content of the Pathways through Participation final report, as well as feeding into a second workshop to be held in Leeds on 30 March 2011.

This workshop will revisit and further explore the local and wider implications of the Pathways through Participation research findings, identify specific actions that participants agree to undertake in Leeds, and identify wider actions that are needed to support participation.

There are lots of useful resources on the memory sticks distributed at the workshop, which can also be found on the resources page[2] of the Pathways website. For a quick introduction to the project and for a summary of its early findings, we recommend reading: 'Strengthening Participation: Learning from participants'. [3]

We look forward to seeing you on the 30 March, and in the meantime, don't forget to join the Our Society group![4]
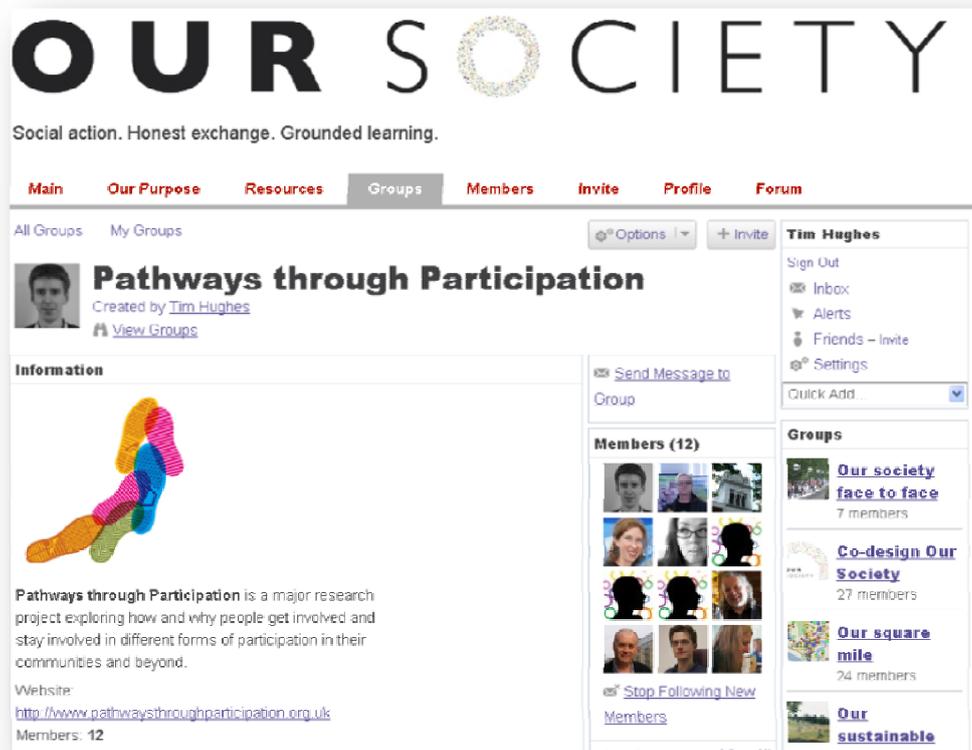
For more information on the Pathways through Participation project or to subscribe to our newsletter, visit the website: http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/

Alternatively you can email: tim@involve.org.uk

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[2] http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/resources/
[3] http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Strengthening-participation-final.pdf
[4] http://oursociety.org.uk/group/pathwaysthroughparticipation

Appendix 1: Attendees

Participants	Organisation
Adam Perry	Community Channel
Amanda Jackson	University of Leeds
Andrew Coley	Tenant and Residents' Association and Community Activist
Andrew Kirk	Red Sky Media
Ann Crossland	Voluntary Action Leeds
Carlos Chavez	Leeds Community Foundation
Claire Henly	Leeds University Student Union
David Reid	Leeds City Council
Emily Wragg	Leeds Link
Gerry Andrews	Cre-8-ive Connections
Ian O'Brien	Police - North West Leeds Division
James Robertson	Leeds University Student Union
Jenny Hill	Leeds Initiative
Jo Jobling	Burley Lodge Centre
John Cummins	Groundwork
John Popham	
Joy Fisher	Leeds Link
Julie Lewis	Leeds Council
Kate Sibson	Leeds City Council
Kathryn Winterburn	NHS Yorkshire and the Humber

Laura Elson	Leeds University Student Union
Leah Black	Groundwork
Nasreen Akhtar	Hooner Kelah
Penny Bainbridge	Cardigan Centre
Rebecca Malby	Centre for Innovation in Health Management
Richard Jackson	Voluntary Action Leeds
Stacy Jones	NHS Leeds
Stephanie Lloyd	Healthy Living Network
Steve Crocker	Leeds City Council
Taira Kayani	Burley Lodge Centre

Project Team	Organisation
Simon Burall	Involve
Diane Warburton	Involve
Tim Hughes	Involve
Veronique Jochum	NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations)
Ellie Brodie	NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations)
Nick Ockenden	IVR (Institute for Volunteering Research)
Sarah Miller	IVR (Institute for Volunteering Research)

Appendix 2: What was your first experience of participation? And why did you do it?

Attendees at the workshop were asked to write their first experience of participation, and why they did it, on post-its. This is what they said:

- Delivering collections from the harvest festival to old people in my village.

- My parents putting a "Vote Labour" sign in the front garden and giving me stickers to give to my friends.

- Cubs. Friends went!

- I helped out at a girls youth group. Someone asked me to help.

- Delivering harvest festival gifts. Why? School asked me.

- Being told to participate in a fancy dress party.

- Being taken to indoor cricket nets by my P.E. teacher.

- Volunteering when I was 10 at an animal sanctuary. Liked animals.

- Volunteering for a local conservation project as part of a school project.

- Helped with a Blue Peter bring and buy sale at school. Wanted a Blue Peter badge!

- Joining my father on a picket line.

- Doing the pledge plod with Brownies!

- Playing games as a child for fun!

- Volunteered to work in hospital radio – to further my career – it didn't!

- I was a girl guide and when we did our conservation badge we joined the local woodland group on a couple of their workdays and I carried on going.

- Volunteer at a playgroup. Child was attending.

- El Salvador solidarity march. My dad carried me on his back.

- Encouraged to by a friend in the same situation (local authority consultation).

- Poll tax demo with my mum, aged 4.