

# Governance and Place-based Initiatives

THE FIRST STEPS

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## Key messages

Place-based initiatives seek to address the collective problems of families and communities at a local level, usually involving a focus on community strengthening.

Place-based approaches are characterised by a focus on a defined geographic area, coordination of the efforts of a number of agencies to address agreed goals, implementation of planned actions adapted to local conditions and needs and operation within a governance mechanism that facilitates joint planning. Public participation is a key feature.

Place-based projects are influenced by the degrees of control by government departments or associated NGOs or donor agencies over the engagement with the community and the nature of the partnership.

Before undertaking a place-based initiative, agencies driving the change need to 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 of engagement with communities with recognised high and low social capital; and
- The scope of capacity building in relation to the current project.

## Executive Summary

A place-based approach seeks to address the collective problems of families and communities at a local level. Place-based approaches focus on a defined geographic area and the coordination of the efforts of a number of agencies and community groups to address agreed goals. Actions implemented are particular to local needs and conditions and operate within a governance mechanism that facilitates joint planning. Public participation is a key feature.

Place-based projects take on different characteristics influenced by the degrees of control by government departments or associated NGOs or donor agencies over the engagement of the community and the nature of the partnership.

Before embarking on a place-based initiative and before approaching a community to petition involvement, it is obligatory that the change agent examine and determine their position in relation to several underpinning issues.

Place-based initiatives characteristically focus on a defined geographic area and refer to that area as a community. An alternative notion of community focuses on the importance of relational and psychological elements. Shared attributes and interests are used to designate individuals as a collective entity regardless of geographic proximity. Members and non-members may have very different understanding of community. A misplaced assumption about the nature of the community can contribute to failure in community participation projects as 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.

Place-based initiatives are characterised by a governance mechanism that entails community participation, engagement and decision making in public matters. Community governance is community level management and decision-making that is undertaken by, with, or on behalf of a community. The focus on 'community' rather than on a corporation, organisation, local government or the public sector is the distinguishing feature.

Managerial processes are involved in integrating the activities of the community and other involved agencies delivering services. These processes manage the degree of devolution of power and resources and roles in decision making. In both horizontal and hierarchical connections complex networks of connections and interactions develop. Initiatives to promote decentralisation and fulfil the broader democratic functions of community governance may lose emphasis. Where community group membership is the result of individual choices relying on volunteers, the group is likely to be culturally and demographically homogeneous, depriving decisions and actions of valuable diversity.

Community empowerment is a process that involves relatively powerless people working together to increase control over events impacting their lives and health. Most definitions give the term a positive value and focus on increases in sense of self-determination and self-esteem. Community empowerment is used to describe benefits to the community for activities ranging from providing local services to developing community governance. Alternatively, community empowerment is presented as a solution to a problematic dependency on the state and on other non-government organisations for providing social services. Stakeholders from outside the community have control over the locus of the decision making about the allocation of assets and community empowerment can be seen as transfer of power, with the outsider determining the degree of control delegated.

Social capital is the idea 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. Social capital is seen as the power base of the 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.

The harmonious relations in social networks shaped by trust, cooperation and shared values underpinning the social capital model is unlikely to persist in a situation of disparities in power and unequal access to resources. Community leaders are caught between the requirements of external stakeholders and representing the interests of excluded elements of the community and those of powerful local associations.

Generally community capacity encompasses the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community. It is proposed that through informal social processes and/or organized effort these elements can be leveraged to solve collective problems and contribute to the well-being of a given community.

Based on the assumption that community-based programs need sufficient levels of community capacity to be effective, building community capacity involves the development of knowledge, skills, structures, resources, and commitment. Capacity building may be long term development of a community as a whole or may focus on a particular project and be seen an end in itself.

The need to measure community capital is driven by many 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 needs to be assessed by the community, by the implementers of programs and by the funders of the project. Funding may be 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. The philosophy of the funding bodies will influence which communities and their problems are attended.

Furthermore it is the funding bodies that will influence the impact the of the target community on project related decision making.

## Introduction

Place-based approaches to service delivery have seen growth in Australia as community services and government departments seek to address the geographical concentration of long-term, complex health problems (Hamilton, 2016). Concomitantly, communities have recognised the importance of collaboration and service integration to better meet the needs of individuals, families, and neighbourhoods.

Place-based approaches mobilise local actors, knowledge and resources 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 core features 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.

Many projects however took on different characteristics in both the way in which the projects were conducted and the resultant outcomes. Essential to these differences was 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.

This view is supported by Moreno, Noguchi, and Harder (2017) who argued 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 practices. Thus, they act on assumptions which may not be contextually relevant to the realities of the communities. Additionally, because the content or aims of projects tend to respond to donors' agendas and pre-established outcomes, "beneficiary" communities may be in danger of ending up with little or no ownership of the capacity-development process (Diamond, 2004)

Eade (2007) argues that failure to take contextual factors and local understandings of the process into consideration reinforces rather than challenging, existent power relationships. Lack of prior and careful examination of local perspectives and priorities during place-based projects, however well-intentioned, may be detrimental to pre-existent community social networks and endogenous capacities (Simpson, Wood, & Daws, 2003).

Consequently, before embarking on a place-based initiative and before approaching a community to petition their involvement, it is obligatory that the change agent examine and determine their position in relation to a number of underpinning issues. The philosophical stance taken will influence all aspects of place-based initiatives. This paper will consider concepts fundamental to planning place-based initiatives.

## Defining a community

Place-based initiatives characteristically focus on a defined geographic area and refer to that area as a community. Increased complexity, changing technologies, and increasingly varied and mobile life styles of today, however, have affected the meaning and understanding of what is meant by community. Community based initiatives, particularly related to public health programs present many challenges, in part because community has been defined in ambiguous and contradictory ways (MacQueen et al., 2001). The operationalization of the concept of community is problematic and many program initiatives are 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 its physical location and the aggregate of individuals in that defined area (Jamal, Bertotti, Lorenc, & Harden, 2015). This makes logical sense to the extent that most people live in only one locale. Physical limitations however, no longer have the relevance they once did. Ease of transport and multiple channels of communication means that individuals may have multiple identities and multiple roles, and these identities and roles connect them to multiple communities, many 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 are used to designate individuals as a collective entity regardless of geographic proximity (Chappell et al., 2006). This approach suggests that community arises around shared concerns and interpretations about problem definition and solutions.

Wiesenfeld (1996) suggested that defining community as a set of individuals who have built an identity from shared experiences and processes tend to describe a group similar in terms of characteristics, actions, and perspectives. A community, from this perspective, is a homogeneous group in which no internal discrepancies and no intra- and inter-individual differences are recognized (Neal & Neal, 2014). A community identity is constructed in which differences are simplified and diversity is not valued. In this was not every human group is recognised in the defined community.

Both spatial and non-spatial understandings are combined in many definitions of community. In these definitions, communities incorporate both a common geographic locale as well as some combination of shared values, goals, perspectives, or interaction. For example World Health Organization (1998) defined community as a group of people who share a common culture, values, norms, or identity and are often living in a defined geographic area. 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 dimensions is advocated precisely 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 as 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 complexity at the conceptual and definitional level, there has been a tendency to simply 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'. Nonspatial, affinity-based conceptualizations of community are consistent with the meanings of community for its members. For non-members, geography is the main consideration and the notion of shared values is 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, but not outsiders, have crucial information about other members' 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 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 wide range of managerial activities involved in delivering services. It is these processes that will manage the degree of devolution of power and resources and indicate where the decision making will reside in the 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 outcome. For example Initiatives that purport to promote decentralisation may result in very little devolution of power and resources.

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

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 each other, address conflicts within the community, and gain increased influence and control over the quality of life in their 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 be 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 a dependency on the state and on other non-government organisations providing social services (Steiner & Farmer, 2018). Such bodies are endeavouring to use community empowerment in order 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 a similar 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, means external stakeholders from outside the community 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, 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 IAP2 (2014) Public Participations Spectrum [https://www.iap2.org.au/Tenant/C0000004/00000001/files/IAP2\\_Public\\_Participation\\_Spectrum.pdf](https://www.iap2.org.au/Tenant/C0000004/00000001/files/IAP2_Public_Participation_Spectrum.pdf). Accessed 17/08/2018

Steiner and Farmer (2018) cautioned that although the notion of community empowerment has wide appeal, the reality may be something different. The rhetoric surrounding community empowerment often fails to deliver the degree of participation anticipated. 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 more actively participate, 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, multiple 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 in many fields, there is lack of consensus regarding its definition and dimensions (Agampodi, Agampodi, Glozier, & Siribaddana, 2015)

Woolcock and Narayan (2000), after reviewing the literature suggested 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 some concerns. Building social capital may be an imperative in some communities. Poor or marginalized communities struggle establish norms, create networks or accumulate and manage assets for combating poverty and isolation (Farr, 2004). Hawe and Shiell (2000) however cautioned that that a dominant emphasis on the relational elements of social capital, dilutes the political and material aspects which underpin and 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) argued 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 in a situation of disparities, real and perceived.

This raises an issue for community leadership. Leaders find themselves in an uncomfortable position 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 will 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 definitions of community capacity agreed on a number of broad 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, or what methods exist to promote or build a community's capacity.

Some authors (for example Labonte, Woodard, Chad, & Laverack, 2002) treat community capacity as a unitary thing, a generic attribute of a community Others (for example Diamond, 2004) argue that

it is only appropriate to consider capacity in relation to a specific project or objective for change. From this perspective, an assessment of community capacity is seen as a necessary precursor to any project dependant on community participation as capacity assessment is particular to that project.

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 an process and an outcome (Diamond, 2004). Nevertheless it resides in a community's individuals, 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 a number of 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 also probably by the funders of the project.

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

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 do not consider other elements which may be of significant importance (Craig 2007) The 'invisible' capacity that may exist in less tangibles 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 the community and the external agencies, frequently the funders of the proposed social change. The expression of this partnership is infinitely variable but must entail mutual accountability. This participation necessitates shared decision making, flexibility a willingness on 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 take considerable time and application, and thus require 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 the communities. 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 tend to respond to donors' agendas and pre-established outcomes, 'beneficiary' communities end up with little or no ownership of the capacity development process (Diamond, 2004) Moreover, framing place-based initiatives within restricted, terms of reference prescribing systematic approaches with anticipated outcomes, fails to grasp the dynamic nature of community life which is much less ordered and may well 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 the associated power relationships (Eade, 2007). Lack of prior and careful examination of world views and local perspectives and priorities during community capacity building projects places efforts of being reduced to little more than rhetoric.

Before undertaking a place-based initiative, agencies driving the change needs to 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.



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