

Communities in control?

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General themes

- There is a general crisis in democracy that needs to be addressed
- Local government faces a particular and significant challenge given the complexity, diversity and mobility of the communities it serves
- Given emerging forms of local governance community and voluntary sectors need to rethink their role

Triumph of democracy?

- Democracy now the established form of governance across the globe
- Yet evidence of disengagement: turnout, party dealignment , opinion survey indicators in decline
- Matched by disappointed activists
- People retain an interest in politics but want to engage in different ways

Explaining the problem

- Politics has become unaccountable: lobbies decide rather than citizens
- Culture of politics worn thin by the demands of mass media and adversarial style
- Lack of civic culture: the decline of collective institutions
- People misunderstand politics

A realist understanding of participation

- Politics is not a top choice activity for most people
- People are prone to cynical, naïve and unrealistic understandings of politics
- Normative case: participation a right or duty?
- Cognitive issues: fear of being taken for a sucker, shutting out divisive voices, dislike of group conflict, mixing emotive and intellectual reasoning
- Practical issues: time, complexity, need for trust and division of labour

citizens and the government decision-making

- We need to design a democratic governance for amateurs
- Not too time consuming: against the deliberation obsession
- Participation sometimes, not always
- Engineers have a technical term for system designed without feedback systems: stupid
- Being realistic about what politics is about and what it can deliver : collective decisions when we disagree

IT'S CLEAR WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Factor	Audit check	Policy Response
Can do	The resources that people have as well as confidence to use them	Capacity Building aimed at individuals or communities
Like to	A sense of involvement with the public entity that it the focus of engagement	Sense of community, civic engagement, social capital and citizenship
Enabled to	The civic infrastructure of organizations that organize participation	To support the civic infrastructure: a set of viable civic institutions
Asked to	Mobilizing people into participation by asking for their input can make a big difference	Public participation schemes that are diverse and reflexive
Responded to	Participate if they are listened to and able to see a response	A public policy system that can show a capacity to respond

Citizens Doing It For Themselves

- There are always going to be limits to working through government
- Finding solutions beyond government
- Spreading the power of democracy to other fields
- Building community and user capacity
- Developing the capacity for community control?

The role of local government

- Institutions can often get in the way and local government often does
- It shapes participation in an unhelpful way
- What do we really want local government to do?
- The diversity, complexity and mobility of our current society
- Our systems designed for 1960s not 21st century

What we need of local government

- We need it be both local and government
- We need it to be more community-focused and more strategic
- We need both city region and neighbourhood governance
- We need a local government with a capacity to deal with issues that people care about

The government's plans for local governance

- An emphasis on an enabling role for local government
- City regions by voluntary agreement to give strategic capacity
- A diverse framework for neighbourhood governance
- New roles for non-executive councillors
- Building the capacity for community asset-owning and trigger-action

A partial and insufficient response

- Functions are the key
- Finance remains a big issue
- Calibre of councillors and roles of political parties remain to be addressed
- Central control still far too prominent

Coping with a half way house

- Challenge to community and voluntary sector considerable
- Coping with service delivery and partnership dilemmas
- Providing support for an emerging neighbourhood governance
- Creating the conditions for civic engagement
- All this built on realistic understanding of participation