

Divergence in community participation policy: Analysing Localism and Community Empowerment using a Theory of Change approach

Steve Rolfe, Urban Studies, University of Glasgow G12 8QQ
s.rolfe.1@research.gla.ac.uk

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Abstract

The last two decades have witnessed a significant turn towards community participation in public policy around the globe, raising concerns that states are resorting to 'government through community', shifting responsibilities onto communities. In order to unpack the ambiguous rhetoric of policy statements, this article employs ideas from evaluation methodology to develop a generic theory of change for community participation policy. The model is then utilised to analyse and compare the UK Coalition Government's Big Society/Localism agenda and the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment approach, demonstrating the ways in which these represent a clear example of policy divergence, and potentially significant alternatives to state-community relations in the context of austerity. The article also demonstrates the potential wider applicability of 'Theories of Change' methodology for policy analysis.

Keywords

Austerity, community involvement, policy divergence, policy evaluation, theory-based evaluation.

The double helix of community participation policy: Applying a Theory of Change approach to analysis of the Big Society and Community Empowerment

Introduction

Concern with community is nothing new in public policy, stretching back to the 18th century colonial use of 'community development' techniques to maintain social control (Somerville 2011). The last two decades, however, have witnessed a particular burgeoning of interest in community participation at different levels of government, from the global shift towards community involvement in 'development' (United Nations 2008), through European local development policy (European Union 2011), to a plethora of national and sub-national policies.

Prime Minister David Cameron's 'Big Society', and the accompanying Localism Act 2011 exemplify this in current UK Coalition Government policy, ostensibly designed to give power, opportunity and responsibility to people and communities (Cabinet Office 2010, DCLG 2010, UK 2011). Thus communities in England are being given rights to undertake Neighbourhood Planning, instigate new house building, bid for local assets, and challenge and take over public services. Meanwhile, since the Scottish National Party's election in 2007, the Scottish Government have developed their 'Community Empowerment' agenda. Since 2011, the opportunity of majority government has enabled the introduction of legislation, giving communities rights to request participation with public agencies, and increased rights to buy or control assets (Scottish Government 2014a).

Some have argued that this growth in community-focused policy represents a move towards 'government through community', shifting responsibilities from government onto local communities (Rose 1996, Raco and Imrie 2000, Hancock, Mooney, and Neal 2012), a trend reinforced by budget cuts. Moreover, Cooke and Kothari (2001) argue that participation can become a form of tyranny of governments or agencies over communities, over-riding democratic systems to serve the interests of the powerful, reinforcing concerns that 'community' is stapled onto numerous policies for ideological purposes (Barnes et al. 2003). It is important, therefore, to analyse such policies in depth, to assess the extent to which they may be shifting responsibility onto communities, or whether the rhetorical promises of devolving real power to communities are fulfilled.

Analysing community participation policies is complex for three reasons. Firstly, policy statements contain apparent contradictions, painting communities as both problem and solution (Hancock, Mooney, and Neal 2012). Secondly, the rhetoric often blurs 'procedural' justifications, that participation is a fundamental democratic right, and 'substantive' justifications, that it delivers improvements in services or communities (Burton, Goodlad, and Croft 2006). Thirdly, communities are enormously diverse, as reflected in the contested definitions of community (Plant 1974, Taylor 2003, Somerville 2011), and inherently complex, operating at 'the edge of chaos' as self-organised, dynamic networks with limited structure (Gilchrist 2000). It has been argued that a 'theory-based' approach is necessary to address these complexities in evaluating community participation programmes (Barnes, Matka, and Sullivan 2003). This article takes this approach in a new direction, utilising ideas from theory-based programme evaluation methodology to analyse policy. Given this focus

on policy, the article does not grapple with the debates around the nature of community directly, though it does highlight some areas where policies focus on particular forms of community.

This article presents a theoretical model for understanding community participation policy, drawing on Theory of Change (ToC) evaluation methodology (Connell et al. 1995, Fulbright-Anderson, Kubisch, and Connell 1998), extending these approaches beyond the evaluation of specific community initiatives. The ToC approach is defined as 'a systematic and cumulative study of the links between activities, outcomes and contexts of the initiative' (Fulbright-Anderson, Kubisch, and Connell 1998, 16). In evaluating programmes, a ToC approach develops 'logic models', defining pathways which are 'plausible, doable and testable' between interventions, outputs, and outcomes, setting out the theories that programme participants believe will deliver change. The approach starts with long-term outcomes, explores the interim outcomes necessary to achieve them, identifies actions to generate these interim outcomes, and lastly articulates and questions the assumptions linking actions, outcomes and context (Anderson 2005) to enable reflection and identify 'plausible' success indicators.

Applying this approach to community participation policy facilitates a critical understanding of policy intent and implications for practice, deconstructing hidden assumptions about the nature of communities and expectations on them in a context of austerity. Methodologically, this article aims to demonstrate and examine the value of ToC approaches for policy analysis, focusing on policy intentions, since it is too early to assess the impacts of either policy agenda.

Alongside this, the article aims to contribute new perspectives to the Big Society/Localism debates and emerging discussions around the Community Empowerment legislation. There are three key reasons for examining and comparing the Big Society/Localism and Community Empowerment agendas. Firstly, in the context of the independence/devolution debates, reinforced by the narrow 'no' vote in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and subsequent proposals for greater devolution, there has been considerable discussion about 'policy divergence' since the Scottish Parliament was (re)established in 1999¹ (Keating 2005, Scott and Wright 2012). Given the rhetorical similarities between the two policy agendas, detailed exploration is necessary to assess whether community participation policy is diverging or converging. In particular, this comparison may elucidate different conceptions of localism and community empowerment at play (Evans, Marsh, and Stoker 2013, Adamson and Bromiley 2013).

Secondly, the contention that the Big Society is being used to justify austerity policies (Clarke and Newman 2012), suggests a need to explore the turn to community in the context of reducing public sector budgets, particularly given evidence of divergence in approaches to austerity (Scott and Wright 2012). This article therefore aims to utilise the ToC approach to analyse the extent of divergence or convergence in community participation policy, and the differing ways in which communities are being expected to take responsibility for gaps left by shrinking state provision.

Thirdly, Big Society/Localism and Community Empowerment represent examples of community participation becoming a cross-cutting policy agenda, rather than being confined to particular service areas, with implications for the nature of government in the 21st century.

The first section of this article identifies three sets of outcomes as targets of community participation policy over time and, drawing on an overview of the literature, builds these outcomes into a generic ToC model. The second section outlines the current policies in England and Scotland. Introducing the particular policy interventions into the generic model enables detailed analysis of their political intent, in the third section. Lastly, the conclusion summarises key lessons in relation to English and Scottish community participation policy, returning to the concerns regarding responsabilisation to examine the issues relating to policy divergence and austerity.

Setting out a generic theory of change for community participation policy

This section develops a generic ToC model for community participation policy, to provide an analytical frame against which to compare current policy intentions. The starting point for developing this model is to identify the long-term outcomes which are the ultimate policy aim (Anderson 2005).

Governmental concern with community has been driven by a combination of perceived problems within communities, such as lack of cohesion or organisational capacity, and the sense that communities can act to address wider social problems, so communities are somewhat paradoxically presented as both problem and solution (Hancock, Mooney, and Neal 2012). On the one hand, fear of unrest has driven policies focused on social cohesion, such as New Labour's response to the 2001 riots in three English cities, significantly attributed to ethnic segregation, whilst a pathological view of 'failing' communities has engendered a range of policies from the Community Development Projects of the 1970s through to the 'Big Society', built on David Cameron's 'broken society' rhetoric (Conservative Party 2009). Some communities are more often presented as 'problematic' than others, so it is important to examine how the policy language typifies different communities. On the other hand, community and service user participation has been posited as a solution to inadequacies in public service standards, and a response to the perceived democratic deficit created by falling and unequal levels of political participation (Beetham, Blick, and Margetts 2008). It should also be remembered that policy has been driven by demands from communities themselves, from 19th century working class activism, through to 21st century community sector lobbies, evident in the shaping of Scottish Government policy (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009, 2, Scottish Government 2013, 5).

Hence, as Imrie and Raco (2003) suggest, communities have become both objects and subjects of policy. On the one hand, concerns around failing communities lead to policies treating them as objects, to be strengthened and improved, whilst on the other, interest in what communities can achieve leads to them being treated as subjects, to be activated to tackle wider issues. Hence community participation policy has three core policy goals – stronger communities, activated communities, and

wider social outcomes which strong, active communities can affect, such as crime levels, educational attainment, health and wellbeing.

Combining these outcomes into a ToC which captures the complexity of community participation requires careful consideration of the literature, to examine what each outcome means in practice and, importantly, how they relate to each other. Whilst it seems reasonable to suggest that wider social outcomes are the ultimate goal, the outcomes relating to strong and active communities need particular exploration.

The literature regarding community strength identifies three key elements, loosely defined as resources, organisational capacity, and 'community wiring' (Somerville 2011, 10-11, Taylor 2003, 17). Firstly, strong communities tend to have financial resources, physical assets and human resources in the form of skilled, knowledgeable, confident members (Brodie et al. 2009). Secondly, they need organisational capacity in effective organisations (Kearns 2003). Thirdly, they need a positive blend of 'community wiring' – the connectedness, inclusiveness and cohesion often connected with social capital.

Crucially, these characteristics of strong communities are inter-related. Not only do strong communities have resources, organisational capacity and good community wiring, but some strengths can reinforce others in a 'spiralling up' process (Emery and Flora 2006). For example, community members' skills can build effective organisations and inclusive networks, whilst strong networks can build organisations and draw in a range of skills. In a generic model of community participation policy, therefore, the different aspects of community strength can be presented as a 'virtuous circle' (Putnam 2000, 138-9), or perhaps more usefully, a 'virtuous helix', since different elements can be used to generate growth in each other. Though it should be remembered that spiralling up is not guaranteed, since feedback may be negative as well as positive (Taylor 2003).

The forms of community action can also be loosely grouped into three categories. Firstly, communities can improve service quality through influence, either by 'voice', where service users' experience augments or challenges service providers' knowledge (Needham 2002) or through 'choice', evident in the shift towards individual consumer choice in social care (Brodie et al. 2009). In practice there is often considerable overlap between voice and choice, since individuals may exercise choice, alongside individual or collective use of voice to influence services (Simmons, Birchall, and Prout 2012).

Secondly, there are activities characterised as community self-help, ranging from the informal assistance of neighbours to formal service provision by community organisations. This connects with ideas of strong communities, since communities with more resources, organisational capacity and connections will have fewer needs, and be more able to address members' needs through mutual support (Brodie et al. 2009).

Lastly, there is the notion that community participation may address the democratic deficit and re-engage people with democracy, either through strengthening engagement in representative democracy, enhancing legitimacy of decisions and

systems (Barnes et al. 2003), or through participative democracy, complementing representative systems.

These three forms of community activity are clearly inter-related and overlapping. For example, communities exercising voice to improve services may engage with the political process, whilst communities helping themselves may be concerned with how their activity relates to public services and political agendas. Moreover, the notion of 'co-production' opens the possibility of services being jointly designed and delivered by agencies and communities. Hence, the different forms of community activity form a second 'virtuous helix', although the mutual reinforcement within it is less straightforward, since communities' activities are partly tactical choices influenced by political opportunities (Simmons, Birchall, and Prout 2012, Maloney, Smith, and Stoker 2000).

From this exploration of the outcomes of community participation policy, a generic theory of change can be constructed (Figure 1). At its heart are the two 'virtuous helices' of community strength and community activity (presented here as circles for graphical simplicity). The suggestion is that governments react to community-related problems by attempting to generate positive growth in these two helices, impacting upon a range of wider outcomes.

Figure 1 – Generic theory of change for community participation policy

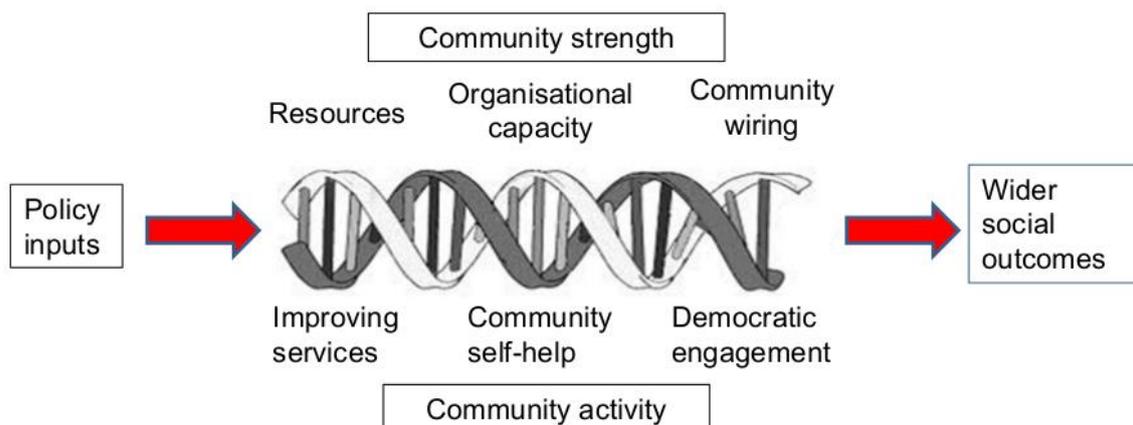


The twin helices of community strengths and activity are shown with inter-connections, since they are clearly related in policy. Some policies aim to enhance

the community strengths to facilitate action, such as the Scottish Government’s Community Capacity Building (CCB) (Scottish Government 2007), and the Coalition’s Community Organiser programme (Locality 2014). Conversely, the Scottish Government highlight evidence that ‘community empowerment’ activities develop skills and confidence (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009, 7), whilst the Coalition’s localism rests on the belief that, ‘communities are strongest when everyone has a free and fair say in the decisions that affect them’ (Conservative Party 2009, 2).

The model suggests, therefore, that just as community strengths and activity can be usefully conceptualised as virtuous helices (however far from reality this may be), the two helices are potentially mutually reinforcing. Hence it is graphically and intellectually more succinct to envisage the core of the model as a double helix (Figure 2). The key message of this double helix is one of interaction and non-linearity, although with an overall direction of travel. Thus the model highlights the importance of feedback loops between elements of community strength and forms of community activity, which can lead to stronger, more active communities, creating impacts on wider social outcomes.

Figure 2 – The double helix of community participation



This model specifically addresses the concern that linear theories of change gloss over the complexity of many processes (Barnes, Matka, and Sullivan 2003, Mackenzie and Blamey 2005), particularly those which involve community change. Linear models have an attractive simplicity and have the advantage of suggesting clear causality, making goals seem achievable and credit easily attributable. However, communities are self-organising open systems, constructed by active agents who respond to and learn from changes as they happen (Barnes, Matka, and Sullivan 2003, 276), so modelling how policies attempt to influence community participation requires a complex, interactive model.

Having established the double helix of community participation as a generic theory of change for community participation policy, the remainder of this article applies it to a detailed analysis of current UK Coalition and Scottish Government policy.

The Big Society and Community Empowerment – an overview

Prior to the 2010 UK election, the Conservative Party developed a critique of state centralisation which they blamed for the 'crisis of our broken society' (Conservative Party 2009, 2). This entered Coalition policy as the Big Society/Localism agenda, implemented through the Localism Act 2011 and associated programmes. Notably there are considerable continuities between elements of this agenda and that of the previous New Labour administration, such as directly elected mayors, local petitions and support for 'neighbourhood councils', though also significant disjunctions, such as the repeal of the public sector 'duty to involve' communities.

There are three main themes within the agenda. Firstly, a number of 'community rights' were introduced, including: the Community Right to Challenge, enabling communities to challenge and take over public services; the Community Right to Bid, enabling communities to bid for local assets; Neighbourhood Planning, enabling communities to control planning for their own area; the Community Right to Build, enabling communities to lead and benefit from local house building; and Free Schools, enabling parents, teachers, charities or businesses to establish new schools. These rights are supported by programmes including the Community Organiser initiative, which trains and supports individuals, 'to listen to concerns of people in their area, build relationships and networks and help people take community action on the local issues that matter to them' (Locality 2014). Secondly, there are measures to reduce bureaucracy and devolve power to local government, including the removal of regional strategies, simplification of service commissioning requirements, and support to establish new Town and Parish Councils. Thirdly, measures aiming to 'strengthen accountability' of public sector organisations, including an increase in directly elected mayors, the creation of elected Police and Crime Commissioners, increased data transparency, and referendums on 'excessive' Council Tax increases and other issues. The key documents of this policy agenda, are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Key documents of the Big Society/Localism agenda

Reference	Title
Cabinet Office (2010)	Building the Big Society
Conservative Party (2009)	Control Shift Green Paper
Department for Communities and Local Government (2010)	Decentralisation and the Localism Bill – an essential guide
Department for Communities and Local Government (2011)	A plain English guide to the Localism Act
Department for Communities and Local Government (2013)	You've got the power – a quick and simple guide to community rights
UK (2011)	Localism Act 2011

Additional information on the implementation of a number of elements in the Big Society/Localism agenda is drawn from the voluntary sector organisations contracted to deliver them – Locality for the new community rights and the Community Organiser programme, and the Community Development Foundation for the Community First funding programme.

The Scottish Government's Community Empowerment agenda has evolved from guidance and support when the Scottish National Party (SNP) was a minority government (2007-2011), to legislation during its second term as a majority, though with a continual focus on changing public sector culture towards a more participative ethos. The legislative approach has enabled the introduction of new powers, giving communities rights to participate in service improvement, and extended rights relating to control and ownership of land and assets. The legislation will also introduce new duties on public sector agencies to proactively participate in Community Planning², including community engagement, and to provide sufficient developmental support to communities through Community Learning and Development (CLD). The key documents are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2 – Key documents of the Community Empowerment agenda

Reference	Title
Scottish Government and COSLA (2009)	Community empowerment action plan
Scottish Government (2011a)	Achieving a sustainable future: Regeneration strategy
Scottish Government (2011)	National Performance Framework
Scottish Government (2011)	Renewing Scotland's public services: Priorities for reform in response to the Christie Commission
Scottish Government (2012a)	Consultation on the proposed Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill
Scottish Government (2012b)	Strategic guidance for Community Planning Partnerships: Community Learning and Development
Scottish Government (2013)	Consultation on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill
Scotland (2013)	The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013
Scottish Government (2014)	Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill – as introduced to parliament
Scottish Government (2014)	Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill: Policy Memorandum

By considering the two policy agendas in detail, the next section attempts to explore where they diverge, and the extent to which they represent different responses to austerity.

Deconstructing the double helix in current policy

Using the double helix model as a framework, the ToC approach outlined earlier can be applied to Scottish Government and Coalition policy to delineate their implicit theories of change, starting from policy aims/outcomes, before moving on to explore inputs and logical assumptions.

In terms of policy drivers and goals, there are limited, but nevertheless significant differences. For the Coalition Government, the 'broken society' rhetoric ties together a critique of failing public services, a sense of lost community, and concern about the democratic deficit (Conservative Party 2009, DCLG 2010). Hence community is both part of the problem and the proposed solution (Hancock, Mooney, and Neal 2012) – a paradox best illustrated by David Cameron's response to the 2011 riots, blaming the 'broken society' and community failings for rioters' behaviour, whilst simultaneously calling for communities to provide solutions (Cameron 2011). Thus, although fear of unrest was not initially cited as a reason for the Big Society agenda, it has been readily recruited to the cause.

Much Scottish Government rhetoric around Community Empowerment sounds similar to the Big Society, with the notion that, 'communities doing things for themselves can sometimes be the best way of delivering change' (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009, 6). There is concern about the democratic deficit, and since the Christie Commission's review of the future of Scottish public services, an increased emphasis on the link between Community Empowerment and improving public services (Scottish Government 2014b). The most obvious differences in policy drivers between the two agendas are firstly, the lack of Scottish Government concern about social unrest despite an emphasis on social cohesion, perhaps reflecting the absence of rioting in Scotland in recent decades, and secondly, the direct influence of communities on Scottish Government policy (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009, Scottish Government 2013), contrasted with limited participation in the development of Coalition policy.

More importantly, there are significant differences in understandings of 'lost' community, and analysis of public service failings. The Big Society rhetoric manages the paradox of communities being both problem and solution by blaming excessive state intervention for creating 'welfare dependency' in certain communities, whilst also placing the responsibility for tackling poverty and inequality onto families and communities (Conservative Party 2008, cf. Hancock, Mooney, and Neal 2012). Thus some sections of poor communities are particularly problematised, whilst other communities are implicitly idealised. By contrast, the Scottish Government present an analysis of all communities facing difficulties, with some being particularly 'vulnerable', rather than at fault (Scottish Government 2011a), together with an approach to public service reform built on partnership between central government, local government and communities (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009, Scottish Government 2011b).

Exploring policy inputs and intentions

These differences in drivers translate into divergences in policy goals and underlying theories of change. To elucidate these, the next analytical stage is to utilise the double helix model to explore key policy levers, set out in Table 3, as inputs to the community participation process.

Table 3 – Policy inputs and their relation to the double helix model

Double helix element	Scottish Government policy inputs	Coalition policy inputs
Strong communities		

Resources – human	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Learning and Development (CLD) • Community engagement training for officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Organisers
Resources – physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for asset ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Right to Bid
Resources – financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct funding • Support for asset ownership to create funding streams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding (Giving White Paper)
Organisational capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLD • Community engagement training • Support to Community Councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Organisers • Support for staff mutuals in the public sector
Community wiring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLD • Principles within National Standards for Community Engagement • Community engagement training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Active communities		
Influencing services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory requirements to engage/consult • Monitoring and evaluation (esp Best Value 2 regime) • Community engagement training • Participatory budgeting pilots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Right to Challenge • Data publication • Community budgeting
Community self-help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for asset ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Right to Challenge • Free Schools • Neighbourhood Planning
Democratic engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement training for Councillors • Support to Community Councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referenda • Directly elected mayors, Policy and Crime Commissioners

Exploring how these inputs relate to the elements of community strength and community activity throws light on policy assumptions, revealing each government's theory of change.

Resources – human

The Coalition's Community Organiser programme appears similar to the Scottish Government's commitment to building skills and confidence through the Community Capacity Building (CCB) element of CLD. However, whilst CLD is coordinated through local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships (Scottish Government 2007, 2012b, Scotland 2013), the Community Organiser programme is delivered through voluntary sector organisations, separating it from public sector community development services, and reflecting the Coalition's ambivalence about the 'managerial' localism which devolves decision-making power to the local state

(Evans, Marsh, and Stoker 2013). Moreover, there is a significant disparity in scale. Whilst the Coalition has provided temporary funding for 500 Community Organisers, intended to encourage a larger number of unpaid voluntary Organisers (Locality 2014), the Scottish figures for 2010 show nearly 4000 paid CLD staff, of whom at least 400 are focused exclusively on CCB, for the much smaller population of Scotland (Lifelong Learning UK 2011).

Resources – physical

Both governments promote community asset ownership, although for somewhat different reasons. The Scottish Government view asset ownership as a means for community organisations to gain financial sustainability, confidence and influence (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009), whereas the Coalition's 'Community Right to Bid' is presented as a means for communities to, 'save local assets threatened with closure', countering market failure (DCLG 2010). Moreover, the Scottish Government arguably gives more power to communities by opening the possibility of compelling private sector owners to sell neglected and abandoned land (Scottish Government 2014a).

Resources – financial

On both sides of the border there is governmental concern around finance for community participation, but significant differences in detail. Whilst the Scottish Government lists a range of funding streams in the Community Empowerment Action Plan mostly related to skills development or asset ownership, totalling £180m of funding over three years, the Coalition require significant match funding, echoing the idea of responsibility being shifted onto communities. Thus the £30m Neighbourhood Match Fund must be matched by funds or contribution in kind, whilst the larger Endowment Match Challenge is initially focused on raising donations of £100m, to make the fund self-sustaining, shifting responsibility entirely away from government (Community Development Foundation 2012). Whilst it could be argued that this match funding requirement is an incentive for community action, the evidence regarding lower levels of charitable giving in more disadvantaged communities (Mohan 2011) raises questions about its impact in terms of equality.

Organisational capacity

In Scotland, the Government's approach to developing communities' organisational capacity is largely through CLD, including an emphasis on the CCB element of this service (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009), leading to a 50% increase in dedicated public sector CCB staff between 2008 and 2010 (Lifelong Learning UK 2011).

By contrast, the Community Organiser programme is less targeted at organisational capacity, being focused on networks and leaders rather than organisations (Re:generate 2009). Moreover, the support for 'co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises' (Cabinet Office 2010), and the Community Right to Challenge, which gives 'communities' a right of challenge to run public services (DCLG 2010) are both focused mainly on staff mutuals, rather than community or service user organisations (HM Government 2011). Indeed, the fact that this broad list of organisations are lumped together under 'community' raises questions about whether such policies have anything to do with communities. Whilst the notion of community is eternally

disputed (Somerville 2011, Plant 1974), the inclusion of staff mutuals and large voluntary sector organisations stretches the definition well beyond common usage.

Community wiring

The Coalition's policies are relatively silent on 'community wiring' – the issues of connections, cohesion and inclusiveness. Whilst the Community Organiser programme aims to support disadvantaged communities to build networks, it is relatively small and does not emphasise inclusion issues within or between communities. By contrast, the definition of community empowerment in Scottish Government policy is tied to building connections and social capital (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009), and explicit links are made between community empowerment and wider policies to tackle inequality (Scottish Government 2012a). Perhaps more interestingly, the shift of responsibility onto communities gains a new form, with community organisations expected to tackle inclusion, alongside public sector bodies:

We must be aware and help overcome the barriers and difficulties that some people face in getting involved in their communities. This means that community groups must look very closely at how inclusive and welcoming they are being (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009, 9)

Influencing services

In terms of influence, the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment agenda is largely focused on 'voice' mechanisms, emphasising the importance of communities having a role in shaping public services (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009, Scottish Government 2012a), and the equal importance of public services becoming more responsive to service users (Scottish Government 2011b), reflecting a perspective that community empowerment is a two-way process (Adamson and Bromiley 2013). This is arguably a continuation of previous Community Planning requirements, but legislative reinforcement through the new 'Right to Participate' (Scottish Government 2014a) reflects concerns that community participation has often been overshadowed by inter-agency partnership duties (Sinclair 2008).

This contrasts strongly with the Coalition's approach. Whilst there are elements of voice, such as piloting 'community budgets' and referendums for 'excessive' Council Tax increases, there is a stronger emphasis on choice through 'diversifying the supply of public services' (DCLG 2010, 8-9). Indeed, whilst the Open Public Services White Paper does refer to making public services accountable to users, the key message is that, 'wherever possible we will increase choice' (HM Government 2011, 8, cf. also Corbett and Walker 2013). Moreover, the Community Right to Challenge is arguably more concerned with opening public services to the market than empowering communities, since any challenge would lead to an open tendering process.

Community self-help

Alongside community voice, the Scottish Government is explicit about the importance of communities helping themselves, suggesting that this may be more effective than public services in some instances:

This is about all of us recognising that communities doing things for themselves can sometimes be the best way of delivering change. (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009, 6)

Moreover, the idea of communities taking responsibility for meeting some of their own needs is connected to the SNP's nationalist agenda:

Our approach to governing Scotland is underpinned by the belief that the people of this country can, and should, take increased responsibility for the issues that affect our nation. (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009, 2)

Similarly, the Coalition aims to 'empower communities to do things their way', through options such as the Community Right to Bid, Community Right to Challenge, and Free Schools (DCLG 2010, 7-9). However, the Coalition's approach arguably shifts more responsibility onto communities, since communities are offered the power to take over assets and services, but without the option to influence services through voice.

Furthermore, whereas the Scottish Government is clear that communities, 'must decide the level of empowerment they want and how to get there themselves' (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009, 10), the level of responsabilisation implied within Coalition policy has been questioned by the Communities and Local Government Committee:

To roll back the state on an assumption that civic activism will fill the vacuum would be a leap of considerable optimism...there are limits to the responsibilities that communities can be expected to take on... The Government must acknowledge that the 'Big Society' already exists to some extent, and therefore must be realistic about how much further it can grow. (Communities and Local Government Committee 2011, 77)

Democratic engagement

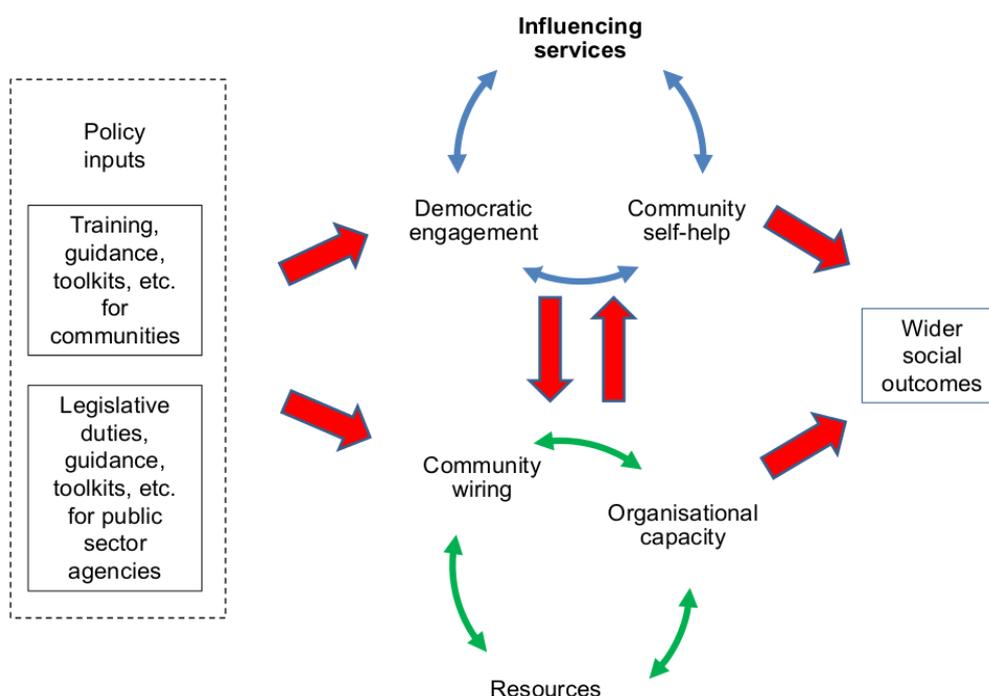
The Scottish Government views enhancing democracy as integral to community empowerment, arguing that local participation complements representative democratic systems and increases engagement with those systems (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009). Again, there are links to the SNP's nationalist agenda, since increasing participation at community level has strong parallels with increasing control at national (i.e. Scottish) level.

The Coalition approaches democratic renewal through an emphasis on market choice and communities taking on responsibility for services, tied to the notion that, 'the most accessible form of government is self-government' (DCLG 2010, 11). Thus, the individual consumer operating in the democracy of the market place is promoted as an ideal. Alongside this are electoral reforms, including more elected mayors, Police and Crime Commissioners, and powers to instigate local referendums. As Lowndes and Pratchett (2012, 28-9) have argued, such individualised, aggregative approaches preclude the educative element of deliberative approaches. Indeed, there is a clear affinity between the market-based elements of localism and these individualised, consumerist forms of democracy.

Theories of Change for the Big Society/Localism and Community Empowerment agendas

Having explored how the two policy regimes relate to each element of the generic ToC model, it is possible to redraw the double helix as manifest within the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment agenda, and the Coalition's Big Society and Localism approach, illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 below.

Figure 3 – The Community Empowerment theory of change

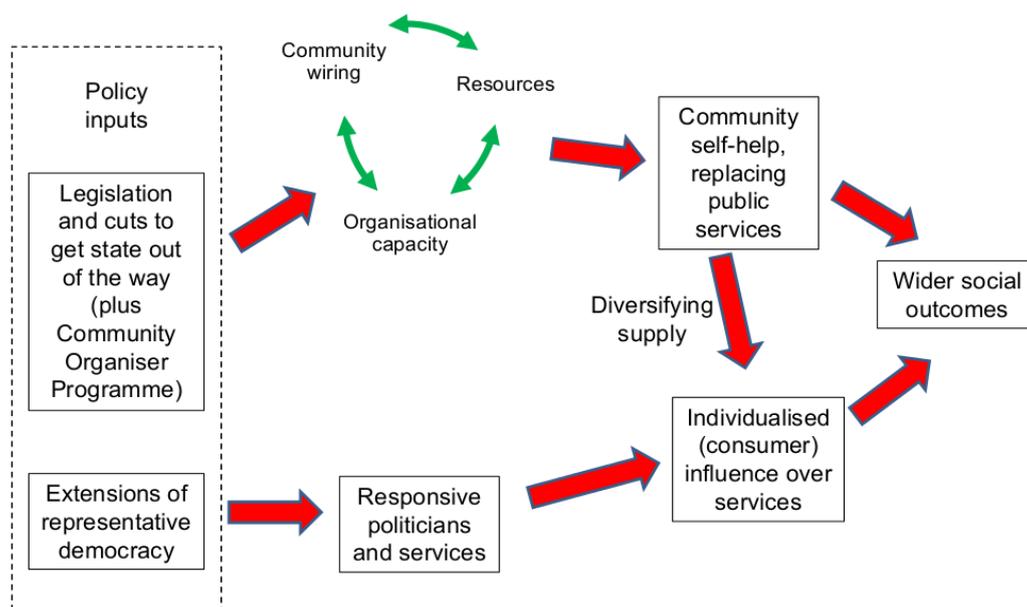


In Scottish Government policy, the double helix remains intact, with policies targeted at developing community strengths and all three elements of community activity. Moreover, explicit links are drawn between the elements within each helix, and between the two helices. For example, the central role for CLD relates to all three elements of the community strength helix, and connects them by linking collective empowerment, individual skills and community wiring. Similarly, the language around Community Empowerment connects voice mechanisms for influencing services, community self-help and democratic engagement, and moreover, suggests that such activity is supported by and supportive of community strength. Thus, the Community Empowerment agenda is underpinned by a theory of change similar to the generic double helix model.

The only significant alteration from the generic model is a somewhat greater emphasis on influencing services through voice mechanisms within the community activity helix (indicated in bold), than on community self-help and democratic engagement. Crucially, this is based on a positive sum view of power, assuming that

communities and the state can both be stronger if they work together, whereas the Coalition, being generally more critical of public services and state intervention, appear to take a zero sum perspective (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012), assuming that communities can only gain power at the expense of the state. Though, of course, there are questions which will need to be answered through the implementation of the Community Empowerment agenda, as to how realistic a positive sum view of power is in practice (Hickson 2013).

Figure 4 – The Localism/Big Society theory of change



Unlike the Scottish Government's approach, the assumptions underpinning the Coalition's Big Society/Localism agenda explode the basic double helix model to create a markedly distinct theory of change. Whilst there is some interest in community strength, given the 'broken society' diagnosis, Coalition policies are more concerned with getting the state out of the way. Thus, the limited nature of the Community Organiser programme, emphasis on match funding, and minimal attention paid to organisational capacity or community wiring reveal a Coalition belief that communities will strengthen themselves in the absence of state interference:

The best contribution that central government can make is to devolve power, money and knowledge to those best placed to find the best solutions to local needs (DCLG 2010, 2)

This raises significant questions of the Coalition's view of communities, since this is clearly more likely to benefit communities which already have significant resources, rather than those communities which are presented as the worst elements of the 'broken society' (Hancock, Mooney, and Neal 2012, 348). Indeed, evidence suggests that more affluent areas have more neighbourhood-level organisations, volunteering and charitable giving, and organisations with less dependence on state funds (Clifford, Geyne-Rahme, and Mohan 2013, Mohan 2011). Moreover, as noted earlier, some of the 'communities' that the Coalition aims to support are not really communities at all, but a range of bodies including mutuals and social enterprises, many of them closer to private sector companies than to community organisations.

Furthermore, inasmuch as Coalition policy expects communities to strengthen themselves, the aim is largely to enable communities to take responsibility for helping themselves, including taking over services no longer delivered by the state, and developing markets in services by diversifying supply, completely dismantling the community activity helix. Community self-help remains a key element of the ToC, but largely in place of public services, rather than the Scottish Government's conception of self-help augmenting and working alongside public services. Meanwhile, both democratic engagement and influencing services are replaced by largely individualised, consumerist mechanisms, which arguably have little relation to community participation, and far more connection to a neo-liberal agenda of marketisation and commodification.

Conclusion

Having set out a generic theory of change for community participation policy, this article uses the model to identify significant differences between the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment approach, and the UK Coalition Government's Big Society/Localism agenda, offering another example of policy divergence since devolution (Keating 2005, Scott and Wright 2012).

In Scotland, the substantially collaborative approach offers a variety of approaches for agencies and communities within the double helix of community participation. Moreover, there is some attempt from the Scottish Government to limit the danger of agency power turning participation into manipulation (Cooke and Kothari 2001), by providing communities with legal powers around voice and asset transfer (Scottish Government 2014a). Though clearly this legislative intent remains to be tested, with considerable questions about whether the two-way, positive-sum conception of empowerment will be deliverable in practice, or whether the Community Empowerment agenda will be stymied by the public sector intransigence that has restricted community participation in Community Planning.

By contrast, agencies and communities in England are diverted away from partnership towards market-based solutions in which communities act as 'market-makers', opening public services to competition. This hidden marketisation could be seen as a new form of localism – a kind of 'market localism' where power is devolved to local markets, rather than to professionals, elected representatives or communities (Evans, Marsh, and Stoker 2013).

Notably, though, some of the most market-focused elements of the Big Society programme have been little used, perhaps due to established local partnership

relationships (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012), sophisticated political analysis amongst community activists, or practical complexity – for instance, after nearly two years of the Localism Act, there have been just two successful challenges under the Community Right to Challenge (Locality 2013).

Such differences also have implications in terms of whether and how community participation policy is shifting responsibility from the state to communities in the context of austerity. Whilst the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment agenda can be seen as shifting some responsibility for tackling social issues and improving public services onto communities, it also explicitly states that communities need to choose their own approach to empowerment (Scottish Government and COSLA 2009).

In the Big Society the situation is very different. On the one hand, communities are being asked to take responsibility for creating new markets in areas of public service, whilst on the other hand their influence routes are increasingly individualised and marketised (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012). Hence the 'Big Society' can be seen as an attempt to make communities responsible for their own demise, and the warm, homely rhetoric of community is largely a smokescreen for a profoundly neo-liberal reform programme – the sheep's clothing obscuring the lupine shock doctrine of austerity. Indeed, as Clarke and Cochrane (2013) have argued, the Coalition's localism can be seen as form of 'anti-politics' where the market and the individual consumer replace pluralistic debate.

However, it should be recognised that this article's analysis is focused on policy intent, rather than evidence of outcomes or implementation, which are only slowly emerging. Hence future empirical work will need to examine the extent to which the Coalition's approach is resisted or amended by communities, and whether the Scottish Government can maintain its ostensible collaborative intentions in the face of greater financial constraints and the temptations of more power devolved from Westminster. Moreover, such empirical analysis will need to explore the practical interactions between the different forms of public sector retrenchment on each side of the border and the differing community participation policies.

Finally, this article demonstrates the potential applicability of Theories of Change ideas to policy analysis. As well as providing a generic theory of change for community participation policy, which could be utilised as an analytical framework for other such policies in the UK or elsewhere, it suggests that such an approach can provide a useful perspective on other areas of policy where the links between rhetoric and intent are less than clear. Although further work would be necessary to compare this ToC approach with other forms of policy analysis, it seems reasonable to suggest that it provides a useful focus on intent and underlying assumptions which less structured analyses may struggle to capture. Further work is also necessary, given this focus on intentions, to explore whether the models provide useful tools in assessing implementation or outcomes of the Big Society/Localism and Community Empowerment agendas, and whether they supply a basis on which to apply the ToC approach in its natural territory of programme evaluation.

Notes

¹ In 1999 the Scottish Parliament was established, with a range of powers devolved from the UK Government. Devolved matters include education, health, local government, law and order, and housing. Other policy areas, including benefits and social security, employment, defence and foreign policy were reserved to the UK Government.

² Community Planning is a statutory process which aims to ensure coordination between public service agencies at a local authority level. Community Planning Partnerships are expected to jointly plan services to achieve shared outcomes, and to engage with communities.

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