

Social Empowerment and Innovation in Participatory Budgeting: The Case of You Choose, Tameside

Steve Corbett, University of Sheffield

s.corbett@sheffield.ac.uk @StevenCorbett

Overview

- Models of PB
- Social empowerment
- Case study: You Choose
- Democratic innovations
- Towards social empowerment in PB



Participatory budgeting

- From deliberative & participatory to consultative models
- **Porto Alegre model:** Social justice, inclusion of the 'unorganised' and poor, redistribution of wealth and resources, core budgets, citizen control
- **World Bank Model:** Participation as tool for good local governance, in UK: discretionary funds
- PB in the UK – 'radical innovation' or 'technical fix'? (Blakey, 2007)

Social empowerment and democratic participation

- **Social quality theory:** people participating in social relationships that enhance individual well-being and the quality of the social (Beck et al., 2012)
- **Social empowerment:** ‘the degree to which the personal capabilities and the ability of people to act are enhanced by social relations’ (Herrmann, 2012, p.202)
- Participatory democratic innovations, such as PB, could enhance social empowerment

Case study: 'You Choose' Tameside, Greater Manchester

- Pop. 215,000
- Labour council since 1968
- 57th most deprived area out of 354 local authorities (2007)





- Funds voluntary and community groups
- 8 voting events in local areas
- 3 minute presentations
- Voting scorecards - 4 questions, generates a score. Must vote for each group
- £2,500 max per group (£440,000 total funds in 2012)
- Attendance: 90-150 people

Innovation in You Choose



Reflective voting process:

Scorecards encourage reflection on the value of groups, critical engagement

‘the main thing was about benefit to the community. I was thinking in terms of how many people are going to be affected’

Equality: formal voting process, also relational equality between participants

‘it didn’t feel like you were begging for humble pie from the Councillors. You were talking to peers, friends and neighbours. In this scenario it felt as if we were equal participants’

‘everybody is in the same boat, you’re not competing against each other, you can support each other’

Innovation in You Choose



Self-development: confidence and assertiveness

‘the young personal I presented with, she is in foster care and really didn’t want to do it, but she did, and you can see a little bit more confidence, little bit of a swagger in her walk, as if to say “if I can stand there in front of all them and do that, I can do anything”’

Awareness and community participation

‘I did not realise just how much was going on in my own town. That was remarkable’

‘I felt a buzz about it. It inspired me to sign up for some courses’

You Choose

- **Potential for social empowerment in the institutional design**
- **But:**
- Unequal access (smaller groups excluded)
- parochialism
- Limits to participation and social empowerment

- Requires citizen ownership, autonomy and control of the process as a whole to be a more socially empowering process

Innovation in PB: Deepening a participatory culture?



- Tangible link between everyday actions (recycling household waste) and council money
- Sense of ownership over You Choose funds
- ‘It’s *our* money... we should be able to say where it’s going’

References

Beck, W., Van der Maesen, L.J.G., & Walker, A. (2012) 'Theoretical Foundations', in Van der Maesen, L.J.G. & Walker, A. (eds.) *Social Quality from Theory to Indicators*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.44-69.

Blakey, H. (2007) 'Radical Innovations of Technical Fix? Participatory Budgeting in Bradford: How Latin American Participatory Traditions are Reinterpreted in the British Context', Paper presented at the *57th Political Studies Association Annual Conference, Europe and Global Politics*, 11-13 April 2007, University of Bath.

Herrmann, P. (2012) 'Social Empowerment' in Van der Maesen, L.J.G. & Walker, A. (eds.) *Social Quality from Theory to Indicators*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.198-223.