

evaluating the benefits of community engagement

AES Lunchtime seminar

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**or why we shouldn't hold those
benefits to be self evident**



**how a victorious Ephraimite was
able to spot a defeated Gileadite
trying to cross the River Jordon**

**or how a true believer in the
goodness of community
engagement can spot a closet
Popperian**

**why are there so few evaluations
of the benefits of community
engagement?**

conceptual confusion
theoretical dispute
practical uncertainties

conceptual confusions

what are the benefits of participation?

how do we select participants?

what is the scope of participation?

what form of participatory relationships?

benefits of participation

Developmental

- Dignity and respect
 - Self awareness
 - Identity
 - Educative
- Social cohesion

Instrumental

- Managerial efficiency
 - Political legitimacy

selection of participants



**Do we really
mean
everyone?**

**I don't care to belong to a club that
accepts people like me as members.**

self selection
capacity
representativeness
randomness

scope of participation

strategic
programmatic
individual

participatory relationships

**anywhere on Arnstein's ladder,
which has no moral dimension**

**combinations of positions these
provide foundation for specific
evaluatory frameworks**

theoretical disputes

**mainly qualitative tales of woe &
interesting but depressing
practice stories**

**very few empirical studies of
impact, even fewer experimental
designs**

mixed method as the way forward?

**practice stories provide context
for empirical impact studies
linked to specific benefits**

practical uncertainties

- Self esteem
- Greater knowledge
 - Self interests
 - Personal identity
 - Social citizenship
- Wider range of views
 - Reality check
 - Legitimacy
- Self esteem scales
- Surveys of knowledge & awareness
 - Measures of civic engagement
 - Surveys of public opinion on governance
 - Records of participatory events

we may well treat the right to participate as a fundamental human right...but to be able to exercise it effectively we need to know more about what works, in what circumstances and why.

Contact

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paper on this topic available in vol 13, no 3 of
Evaluation

see also

Burton, Goodlad & Croft (2006) 'How would we know what works? Context & complexity in the evaluation of community involvement, *Evaluation*, 12(3), 294-312