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Participation and Local Urban Regeneration: The Case of the New Deal for Communities in the UK[1]

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Participation and Local Regeneration: The Case of the New Deal for Communities in the UK

Abstract

The contention of this paper is that the policy discourses of 'community' and of 'participation' underpinning area-based regeneration programmes are overly simplistic, and their use in regeneration policy is, as a consequence, highly problematic. Based on an analysis of a regeneration partnership in the north of England, this paper will demonstrate that, while partnership members share the same levels of access in decision-making structures, the members of partnership boards have such different understandings of the purpose of participation and the role of residents in the regeneration process that it has created conflict serious enough to affect delivery of regeneration.

Key words

New Labour; NDC; regeneration; participation; community; discourse.

JEL Classifications

D7: Analysis of collective decision-making; I3 Welfare and Poverty; O18: Regional, Urban, and Rural Analyses; R: Urban, rural and regional economics

Introduction

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Since poverty was 'rediscovered' in the 1960s, Western democracies have sought to find solutions to the poverty problem (ATKINSON, 2000). Area-based initiatives (ABIs) have proved to be an enduring policy instrument, providing time-limited, spatially-bounded sources of funding to address the intense forms of deprivation found in many urban areas. ABIs are now designed and utilised by all levels of government, from the local (e.g. Going for Growth in Newcastle, England) to the supra-national (e.g. EU Structural Funds).

ABIs have always had some measure of community involvement. The early schemes of the 1960s and 1970s typically engaged local people as the *subjects* of regeneration, attempting to tackle deprivation by changing the personal and social characteristics of those living in deprived areas through community development projects. Since the late 1980s, however, residents of deprived areas have increasingly been involved as the *managers* of regeneration, participating in decision-making structures including partnership boards. 'Community participation' is now an established feature of area-based regeneration, and is often seen as a panacea to regeneration 'failure' (DARGAN, 2007).

A closer examination of the discourses of community and of participation built into contemporary regeneration policies reveals that communities are perceived to be united and consensual entities with a shared understanding of the participation process. However, the experience of recent regeneration initiatives in the UK would suggest that community participation is a difficult and contentious process, and that the failure of policy discourses to recognise the realities and complexities of

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participation can have a serious impact upon relationships within communities and on the delivery of regeneration.

The paper examines the participation process through the case study of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) in the UK, a regeneration initiative that was designed to be a 'showcase' for community-based regeneration (SEU, 1998), but which has suffered problems of community in-fighting, underspend, delays and hostilities. The paper will argue that it is the specific discourse of community participation built into the NDC programme which has undermined the successful execution of NDC. The paper will first examine the discourses of community and of participation which underpin the programme, before examining their implications for both the way in which NDC was constructed as a policy, and the way in which it has been implemented in practice.

The specific case study for this paper is NDC Newcastle West Gate, which is based in the west end of Newcastle upon Tyne. The programme is managed by a partnership of 23 people, including residents, councillors, and representatives from the public and voluntary sectors, which was set up in June 1999. The fieldwork for the case study, based on semi-structured interviews with partnership members, was undertaken between December 1999 and March 2001. This incorporated both the development of the partnership and early delivery phases, when local actors were engaged in the task of defining the nature of the problems in the area and devising their agenda for change.

Theoretical framework

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The theoretical framework of this paper is informed by a discourse analysis approach. The use of discourse analysis in urban research is a relatively recent development, emerging in the late 1990s (HASTINGS, 1999). A special issue of Urban Studies demonstrated the use of discourse in understanding partnership processes, government policy on participation and the process of urban policy change (for example, HASTINGS, 1999; and ATKINSON, 1999).

Discourse theorists argue that language is structured into discourses, and are a means by which people make sense of the world (MILLS, 1997). They are frameworks for interpreting and understanding reality in particular ways. Each discourse presents different perspectives of the same issue, highlighting some facets of debate and marginalising others. As discourses define problems within the framework of a discourse, so they also posit solutions. Discourses define what is thinkable or possible, and steer action and debate in a way that is compatible with that discourse (ATKINSON, 1999). As such, discourses frame particular facets of a problem, legitimising and de-legitimising certain practices and actions. Discourses are not simply a means of describing or viewing the world, but they serve to structure action in a manner congruent with that discourse (ATKINSON, 1999; MILLS, 1997).

A discourse analysis approach presents a useful theoretical framework for this paper for a number of reasons. It provides a tool for identifying how policy discourses of community and of participation affect the design of regeneration programmes. It also enables an exploration of the ways in which different actors within an NDC partnership understand the process of participation, by exploring the language and the terms of reference that they use to describe and analyse their own role within the

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process. Once identified, it is possible to explore how these local discourses of participation affect the ways in which people participate in regeneration; and the ways in which the interplay of different discourses affects the nature of partnership work.

A history of participation in regeneration

In the aftermath of the Second World War, many Western democracies attempted to address issues around poverty and deprivation using mainstream policy instruments, such as the provision of social housing and welfare support. Such was the faith in these measures that one UK observer was moved to remark that "the Welfare State has feverishly increased its responsibilities until no-one is ill-clad or hungry, and no-one experiences real want or poverty" (MACCALMAN, quoted in SODDY, 1955: 57). However, in the 1960s it became clear that poverty still thrived within many cities (ATKINSON, 2000; LAWLESS, 1989), and increasing levels of urban unrest prompted many governments to rethink their approaches towards tackling deprivation. This lead to the creation of area-based initiatives (ABIs) such as the Community Action Program in the US, and the Urban Programme and the Community Development Projects (CDPs) in the UK. These initiatives provided discrete packages of funding to address poverty in particular areas. ABIs have since become one of the principal policy instruments through which governments intervene to deliver urban regeneration.

From the very outset ABIs have involved and engaged local residents, but their role in the regeneration process has changed significantly over the last four decades. The regeneration programmes of the 1960s and 1970s involved residents as the *subjects* of

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regeneration. The dominant understanding of poverty at that time, social pathologism, deemed that poverty was the fault of the poor themselves for failing to make good of the opportunities presented to them by the welfare state (ATKINSON and MOON, 1994). The object of regeneration was to re-socialise the poor, bringing them into line with the mores and values of the day. It intended to instil a work ethic and teach them to better manage their finances, their children, and their lives. In the 1980s, residents were largely excluded from the regeneration process. Urban regeneration strategies adopted market oriented approaches that aimed to increase private sector investment (MARINETTO, 2003), an approach embodied in the UK's Urban Development Corporations (UDCs). Community development was not part of the remit of the UDCs, so residents were not targeted for assistance (IMRIE and THOMAS, 1992), nor were they consulted on many of the decisions that were taken (PARKINSON and EVANS, 1990).

It was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that residents took a much more active role in ABIs. While the market-led approaches of the 1980s had effected major physical changes in the inner cities, they had failed to substantially alter the circumstances of the poor. In the case of the UDCs, this failure was blamed on the lack of resident participation (PARKINSON, 1993). At the same time, the nature of government in many Western democracies was changing. The state shifted from assuming sole responsibility for the management and delivery of services, to engaging the public, private and voluntary sectors in service provision. This was said to be broadly indicative of a shift from govern*ment* to gover*nance* (GOODWIN AND PAINTER, 1996). This shift was clearly reflected in the changing management structures for regeneration in the early 1990s, which involved partnerships between local

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government, public institutions and voluntary organisations (BULL AND JONES, 2006; GOVERNA AND SACCOMANI, 2004; JONES, 1997). These changes in the nature of government opened up space for the participation of local residents in regeneration. Residents became involved in initiatives such as Denmark's Urban Regeneration Programme (PLØGER, 2001) and the UK's Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), not only as the subjects, but also as the managers, of regeneration (WARD, 1997). Resident participation is now firmly established in the regeneration process, and is not only viewed as an inherently necessary practice, but as a panacea to regeneration failure (DARGAN, 2007).

Critiquing participation

Despite such a longstanding tradition of involving residents in regeneration, the participation process remains fraught with difficulties. Many studies have shown that residents are frequently excluded and disempowered in a process that is meant to be empowering. One of the first studies to explore the problems around participation and power was Sherry Arnstein's seminal work "*A Ladder of Community Participation*" (1969), which has formed the basis of many subsequent analyses of participation. She criticised the blanket acceptance of participation as an inherently 'good thing', and questioned what exactly could be understood by the term citizen participation. Arnstein argued that participation should not simply be concerned with involving people in decision-making. For Arnstein, participation was about *power:*

> My answer to the critical *what* question is simply that citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power… In short, it is the means by which they

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> can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society (*ibid*.: 216, emphasis in the original).

Without the redistribution of power, Arnstein argued that participation was an empty experience. She developed an eight-point typology of the participation process (Figure 1), depicted as rungs on a ladder, with each rung representing the particular degree of power of the participants to determine the end product.

Figure 1: Arnstein's ladder of public participation

Much subsequent research into participation has been based on Arnstein's work, modelling participation (FREEMAN et al., 1996; WILCOX, 1994), and exploring issues around access, power, and the extent to which residents are genuinely involved in regeneration programmes. Such research has demonstrated that, despite a rhetoric of empowerment, residents are rarely afforded the same status at the negotiating table as their professional and political counterparts (FOLEY and MARTIN, 2000; GEDDES and BENINGTON, 1995; HEALEY, 1997; MURDOCH AND ABRAM, 1998). Residents' perceived lack of skills and resources means that other participants do not always treat them as equals, as it is felt that they come to the negotiating table empty-handed (GEDDES and BENINGTON, 1995; PLØGER, 2001). MABBOTT (1993) and PLØGER, (2001) found that the partners with the greatest power and influence within partnerships were those who made a significant *financial* contribution to the process and were able to control resources. They were then able to act as 'gatekeepers' with the ability to control access to the decision-making process, which allowed little scope for resident participation. Moreover, a survey by the UK's

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Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions revealed that one fifth of local authorities surveyed stated that citizen participation merely confirmed decisions that had been taken in their absence (DETR, 1998). Finally, the lack of experience of the community partners means that their concerns and values can more easily be subsumed within the agendas of other partners. HASTINGS (1996) states that "the strong imperative which many partners feel to try to persuade others of their own virtues, undermines the apparently democratic nature of the structure" (*ibid*.: 266).

The UK Government's approach to community participation

Despite the difficulties of securing effective community involvement, it remains a key feature of urban regeneration initiatives. In the UK, successive regeneration programmes have attempted to address the criticisms surrounding participation and give residents a more powerful voice in management and decision-making processes. This drive to improve participation assumed a new urgency in 1997 with the election of the Labour government. 'Community participation' is a defining feature of Labour's regeneration agenda, which was articulated as a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) (SEU, 1998; 2000; 2001). Within the NSNR, the Government argues that active citizen participation is key to ensuring success and the sustainability of regeneration programmes, and states that one of the major failings of previous ABIs is that they lacked quality participation. Almost all of the regeneration schemes emerging from government since 1997 have stipulated that they must be managed in partnership, and must include local residents in all aspects of decision-making (HALL and NEVIN, 1999; MARINETTO, 2003).

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The Government's rhetoric of participation was given substance after the publication of a detailed guidance manual: *Involving Communities in Urban and Rural Regeneration: A Guide for Practitioners* (DETR, 1997). The manual provides a comprehensive guide to the complexities of the participation process, including establishing participation, capacity building, and involving minority groups in regeneration.

While the very existence of the manual demonstrates the strength of the Government's commitment to participative processes, it reveals a commitment to a particular *type* of participation which appears at odds with the rhetoric of empowerment openly espoused. First, the manual is not written for local people but provides advice for officials in partnerships on how to foster local participation, indicating that the manual is addressed to partnerships which have already been formed in the absence of community participation (ATKINSON, 1999). Thus, the community will become involved in an organisation which already has its own hierarchy, with its own rules and operating procedures (*ibid.*). The members of this partnership act as gatekeepers to participation, with the power to determine who can become involved in the regeneration and in what capacity.

Second, in spite of a strong rhetoric of 'empowerment', the manual positions members of the community in an *advisory* capacity to the partnership. Although the wishes and views of the community are important, they are subordinate to the interests of the partnership as a whole. Community members are placed in the position of 'mediator' between the partnership and the wider community, and have the responsibility of explaining difficult decisions to residents and attempting to deal with

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their grievances. As such, community members are placed in the position of representing the partnership to the community, rather than representing the community to the partnership.

The manual also articulates the Government's vision of 'community', a concept which is central to the 'New Labour'[2] project (MARINETTO, 2003). It has not only been used to distance the 'New Labour' from the Labour party of old, but has also formed the basis for a critique of the individualism of neo-liberalism, and more specifically, of Thatcherism. Whereas Thatcher argued that "there is no such thing as society", the current Labour Government believes that individuals are created by society and form their identities through their relationships with others. Furthermore, while Thatcher argued that it is through the pursuit of the individual's self-interest that society benefits, the Government argues that it is in pursuing the interests of the community that the individual benefits. Thus, for Labour, the notion of community is reciprocal, imbued with the idea of both rights and responsibilities.

The decline of good communities is often cited by the Government, and especially by Tony Blair, as the cause of criminality, social exclusion and the breakdown of society. During his leadership campaign, Blair argued that "the break-up of family and community bonds is intimately linked to the breakdown of law and order" (quoted in RENTOUL, 1997: 368). The solutions to these problems, therefore, lie in the rebuilding of community:

> The only way to rebuild social order and stability is through strong values, socially shared, inculcated through individuals, family, government, and the

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institutions of civil society (Blair, quoted in DRIVER and MARTELL, 1998: 29).

In this sense, the Government views community as an entity in which people are interdependent, and have shared values and a moral obligation to one another. This shared morality is central to the Government's vision of community. Community is presented as a tightly-knit unit, in which members are loyal, committed and responsible to each other (LEVITAS, 1998).

The guidance manual on involving communities in regeneration (DETR, 1997) argues that communities are made up of people with similar or common characteristics including age, ethnicity, and interest. Individuals may belong to multiple communities at the same time, and their involvement in particular communities can change over time.

Although recognising that communities are complex and difficult to define, in the context of regeneration, communities are defined spatially. Furthermore, these spatial communities are imbued with the sense of togetherness and shared purpose that defines the Government's more general vision of community as outlined above. The manual acknowledges that there may be some conflict between members of a regeneration community, and that partnerships should not expect an immediate consensus within a community. However, these conflicts are portrayed as being only temporary.

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> Given the diversity of interests and of people living in an area, do not expect a consensus to emerge as a result of involving the community in regeneration. *At least initially* there may be divergent opinions and conflict (*ibid.*: para. 2.15, emphasis added).

The implication is that partnerships will be able to develop a consensus amongst community members shortly after they become involved in the regeneration process. Thus, while the guidance accepts that members of communities may have differing opinions, there somehow remains an underlying sense of shared-ness that can be uncovered through dialogue. Community participation is founded on the belief that people will pull together to raise their area out of poverty. It is this sentiment which underpins Labour's ABIs which seek to involve 'the community'.

New Deal for Communities

The flagship of the Government's approach to participative area-based regeneration was the New Deal for Communities (NDC). The programme, "a showcase for state of the art intensive regeneration" (SEU 1998: 55) was developed by several government departments, including the then Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), the Treasury and the newly established Social Exclusion Unit (SEU). It formed the cornerstone of New Labour's regeneration agenda, and had the Government's discourses of community and participation at its heart.

NDC was launched in 1998 when 17 'pathfinders' were awarded funding under Round 1 of the programme (a further 22 areas were given funding the following year

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in the second, and final, round of the programme). It was designed to fund projects operating within a clearly identified urban neighbourhood of not more than 4,000 households over a ten year period. Each eligible area was chosen by central government using the Index of Local Deprivation (ILD), which was used to identify districts suffering from intense and multiple forms of deprivation. These districts were then invited to apply for NDC funding. Central government provided approximately £50 million over the lifetime of each individual NDC programme, and additional funding was levered in through the private, voluntary and other public sectors. Programmes were managed through multi-sectoral partnerships.

NDC was more flexible than previous initiatives insofar as its aims were not too prescriptive, requiring only that bids focused on poor job prospects; high levels of crime; a rundown environment; and poor neighbourhood management and lack of co-ordination of the public services that affected it. This allowed bids to be tailored to better suit local needs. The guidance for NDC gave example projects, listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Round 1 bidding guidance suggestions for projects under NDC

One of the key features of the NDC was its strong rhetoric of participation. Bids had to demonstrate that local residents were involved at every stage, from selecting the NDC area to the design and management of projects. The Government promised to reject bids or withhold funding from those partnerships which did not sustain good quality participation throughout the life of the programme. The rationale for this participative approach was to allow the community to feel it had ownership over the

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decisions which were taken, which would in turn improve the sustainability of the programme when the funding came to an end (DETR, 1997; SEU, 1998).

Critiquing the design of NDC

Despite a strong rhetoric of community participation and empowerment, NDC was beset by delays, hostility and in-fighting, particularly in its early years. Problems have included in-fighting and unresolved tensions between residents, local authorities and public sector agencies; and clashes between local authority schemes and projects funded by NDC (HALL, 2003; PRESS ASSOCIATION, 2004). Board meetings at the Aston Pride partnership in Birmingham were described as "poisonous and anarchic" (WEAVER, 2004). The NDC programme in Finsbury experienced conflict amongst residents and between residents and the council, and had its funding suspended due to allegations that the board was undemocratic (WEAVER, 2002c; 2002d). NDC Shoreditch clashed with the local authority over housing plans, and had funding withheld by the Government because its plans were deemed inappropriate (WEAVER, 2001; 2002a; 2002b). All in all, WEAVER (2002c) estimated that by February 2002, NDC partnerships failed to spend two thirds of their budgets due to mounting tensions.

It is the contention of this paper that the community participation element of the programme played a significant role in undermining the success of NDC. This was not a failure of partnerships to properly execute the process of participation, but rather a design flaw in the NDC programme itself, resulting from the specific discourses of community and of participation built into the NDC programme.

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First, the discourse of community underpinning NDC is problematic suggesting as it does that communities are united entities seeking to pursue the same goals. This idealistic notion of community was, for some time, a feature of many analyses of the participation process. Arnstein's work, for example, arguably homogenised participants on the ladder of participation into one consensual citizen. However, recent research has identified that communities are composed of diverse, sometimes competing, groups. FOLEY and MARTIN (2000: 486) state that "community aspirations are nowhere near as homogenous as government pronouncements frequently imply", and SHIRLOW and MURTAGH (2004: 58) challenge the assumption "of community as a distinctive stakeholder with a shared set of values".

Despite practical evidence that communities do not speak with one voice (FOLEY and MARTIN, 2000), and despite the Government's acknowledgement that communities are both complex and diverse (DETR, 1997), NDC was founded upon the notion of community as a united, consensual and spatial entity. Implicit in this is an assumption that the people who live within a shared space will have a common set of goals and priorities, and will work towards a collective vision of how their 'community' should develop. This is reflected in the timetable for NDC. All NDC partnerships were given a maximum of eighteen months in which to develop and prepare to deliver a multi-million pound regeneration strategy based on the needs of the 'community', as articulated by that community. During this eighteen month period, bidders were required, in consultation with local people, to select an area of not more than 4,000 households; to formulate a working partnership involving local residents, the public, private and voluntary sectors; to ascertain the type and causes of

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problems to be addressed by the initiative based on a sound locally-developed evidence base; to submit an outline bid after three months; to put in place a constitution and guidelines for good working practice including, for example, an equalities policy; to develop management and support structures to assist delivery (including a staff team); and to develop a detailed plan for delivering a ten year multi-million pound community-led regeneration programme which would succeed where all others had failed, all in constant dialogue with local residents, including traditionally hard-to-reach groups.

There was no scope within this time frame for conflict or delay, but conflict was not anticipated. While the Government guidance on participation accepts that members of communities may have differing opinions and viewpoints, it also argues that there remains an underlying sense of shared-ness that can be uncovered through dialogue. The time-scale for developing an NDC partnership and a programme for regeneration reflects this presumption of consensus. No time was given to resolve conflicts or to find a way forwards if different groups expressed different opinions as to how they would like the regeneration to proceed.

Crucially, this assumption of uniformity also extends to the participation process. While acknowledging that there are different *levels* of participation (such as 'information', and 'citizen power'), government policy does not tend to distinguish between the different *strategies* that people might use to participate at these levels. In other words, everyone who participates at the level of 'deciding together' is understood to be participating in the same way, according to the rules set by the gatekeepers of the participation process. Therefore, not only does the Government

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presume that people think alike, but it also assumes that they will participate using the same methods according to the same code in order to achieve their common goals. These issues are not confined to government policy alone. The differences in the ways in which people participate are rarely addressed in academic analyses of participation, which tend to favour issues of access and power. However, as this paper will demonstrate, the methods people use to participate can have a significant impact upon their experiences of participation and on the success of regeneration.

The contention of this paper is that the discourses of community and of participation underpinning ABIs are overly simplistic, and their use in regeneration policy is, as a consequence, highly problematic. Based on an analysis of an NDC partnership in the north of England, this paper will demonstrate that participants in NDC do not act as a homogenous unit and do not always participate using the same methods in order to achieve their goals. While partnership members share the same levels of access in decision-making structures, the members of partnership boards act more as individuals than as a united community, and have such different understandings of the purpose of participation and the role of residents in the regeneration process that it has created conflict serious enough to affect delivery of the programme

In order to examine the process of 'community' participation at a local level, the paper will examine a New Deal for Communities partnership in Newcastle upon Tyne (NDC Newcastle West Gate), a Round 1 pathfinder invited to bid for NDC resources in 1998. NDC West Gate was managed through a partnership of 23 people, which was responsible for developing the bid and managing the programme once funding was awarded in April 2000. This body was called the Interim Steering Group (ISG), which

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became a fully constituted Board in 2002. The methodology for the study was based around semi-structured interviews with partnership members undertaken during the first 3 years of the programme. These interviews explored, amongst other things, the role of residents in the regeneration process; what individuals understood by the term participation; and their experiences of participating in NDC. This information was supplemented by document analysis and observations of partnership meetings.

Defining the role of residents

The ISG was designed to operate as a partnership with multi-sectoral interests represented on the Board. The ISG had 23 seats, 12 for local residents (three from each local political ward covered by the scheme), four councillors (one from each ward), a voluntary sector representative, a private sector representative, and five partner agency representatives. The residents, known as community reps, either volunteered themselves at a special meeting, or at ward sub-committees.

Although many local actors involved in the partnership felt that participation was a highly skilled task, none of the ISG members interviewed received any training prior to their involvement in NDC. Furthermore, none of those members had been given a 'job description' or any explanation as to what their role on the ISG would be. In the absence of any training or guidance as to how they should participate, the members of the ISG carved out their own roles within the process and established their own ideas as to the purpose of their participation. Both residents and agency partners alike agreed that the principal role of the residents was to articulate the needs of their communities. However, the process of using this local knowledge was described in

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three very different ways by the participants, in terms of directing; advising; and controlling.

First, the majority of the residents (often with prior experience of partnership or voluntary work), saw themselves as *directing* the programme. They described themselves as integral members of the partnership, communicating the needs of their community, and judging whether or not the solutions proposed by partners and residents would work. They were confident of their role in the partnership, and considered themselves to be on an equal footing with the professionals at the table. These residents were confident of their role on the ISG and felt their local knowledge was a valuable asset to the partnership. They felt that they were respected and important members of the Board.

> Participation means sitting around a table and bringing to it the skills that you have acquired from living and working in a place twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for umpteen number of years. And I mean that is a huge, a *huge* gift to bring to anybody's partnership… that is as valuable as somebody saying I can bring £50 million (Resident).

Second, while the agency partners also viewed local knowledge as a highly valuable asset for the partnership, and they agreed that participation was about residents identifying problems, unlike the residents above they understood that this would be undertaken in an *advisory* rather than directorial capacity.

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> I am very happy with the concept of *with* people, engaging people, letting them have their say and making sure that you take their views and wishes into account (Government Office North East).

> I think they should be providing the information, because otherwise we don't know what people want or what they think they need. I also think they have to have a say in what's being done, or what's being agreed. They have to feel confident that what they are saying will be listened to (Partner representative).

Although the residents and the partners both valued the contribution of local people, the process of contributing that knowledge was described in two different ways. Whereas the residents placed themselves at the *head* of the partnership, the professional participants placed the residents more at the *periphery*, *informing* the Partnership Board rather than *directing* it. Their view was that residents were there to provide information to the partnership, because "we don't know what people want". This information would then be "taken into account". As far as the professional participants were concerned, therefore, the residents were not there to direct the process but to provide information for the partners to consider when they made decisions.

Finally, a small group of local residents[3] with little prior experience of regeneration or partnership working believed that their role in NDC was to steer the regeneration and participation as they saw fit. They drew very clear distinctions between the residents on the one hand, and the partners and local authority on the other. When they used 'we' in their speeches, they were referring only to themselves, and not to the wider

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partnership, which suggests that they did not see themselves as working in partnership with the other members of the ISG.

> When we got on board, we couldn't believe what was happening. And when we sussed it all out, we thought 'yeah, well, it's going to stop'. We know what we want and we want this done right (Resident).

They were of the view that, once they had articulated local needs, these needs should then be met without question or negotiation. Their own role, therefore, was not simply to inform the process or even to direct it, but to *control* it.

The local actors involved in the partnership clearly had very different ideas about the role of residents within the process. Furthermore, NDC's strong rhetoric of participation gave them the confidence to participate as they chose, and the other members of the ISG were reluctant to challenge them. The members of the ISG subsequently followed their own beliefs about how they should participate. What was particularly interesting (and, as it transpired, rather problematic) was that participants did not share a single, unified vision of the participation process. This is significant given that the Government acknowledges different *levels* of participation but does not make mention of different *strategies* for participation, presuming that participants all participate in the same way. This uniform approach to participation was not evident in NDC West Gate. Instead, participants viewed the participation process through the lenses of two very different and conflicting discourses – the collaborative and the confrontational – and it is to these that the paper will now turn.

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Discourses of participation

The collaborative discourse of participation was employed by the agency partners and the majority of residents on the ISG. This group believed that there was a 'right way' to participate (WHITE, 1996), which involved replicating professional practice, particularly in terms of the ways in which people communicated at ISG meetings. They argued that there were specific ways in which it was acceptable to communicate in meetings, and that residents should be made aware of these if they were to participate effectively and make a valid contribution. They advocated calm, clearly articulated and rational forms of communication.

> I'm all for free speech and I'm all for individuals having their voice heard, but in the right forum and in the right way and in a constructive way (Partner representative).

> People shouldn't shout. People shouldn't swear. I'm not saying you shouldn't get irritated and frustrated and annoyed, but there are ways to behave and there is a social etiquette (Partner representative).

Effective participation was equated with *constructive* participation: working with the process not against it; compromising; and reaching consensus. Participation was viewed as a process of discussion and negotiation in partnership with other local stakeholders, in which individuals should subordinate their own personal agendas to the greater good of the partnership in order to reach consensus.

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> [Residents] have just got to say "well look, I can hear what you're saying, I don't agree what you're saying, my idea would be this. But if eight out of twelve people say yes, then I'll go along and I'll support you wholeheartedly", you know? (Resident).

The dissident residents, however, advocated more *confrontational strategies* for participation, and did not subscribe to the view that individual needs should be subordinated to the needs of the majority. Rather than viewing participation as a process of compromise, they viewed it as a process of control. This was born of their own fears of being excluded from regeneration. They came into the NDC process expecting that they would be excluded and disempowered. They viewed participation as a battle in which they tried to forcibly exercise their rights, which they believed would be taken from them. They described participation by employing war-like metaphors, portraying participation as a *battle*, a *struggle* against authority. They described themselves as *fighting* the partnership board, *fighting* for their rights, and *fighting* to be heard. They perceived themselves going to meetings as "lambs to the slaughter", of having to speak out and get angry "otherwise we're just colluding with our own oppression" (personal interviews).

> Our energy has been sapped by the process and we're losing the will to fight. In a lot of so-called deprived areas, you know what's right and what's wrong and know that things are being done very underhandedly, you become anaesthetised. Your fight goes out of you… That fight, that action seems to have been very cleverly sucked out of us (Resident).

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> This NDC is like you've been through World War One, World War Two and you're trying to stop World War Three… I'm fighting for our lot (Resident).

This view of participation as a battle was reflected in the ways in which these residents expressed themselves. Their arguments, while valid and often insightful, were not always clearly articulated or expressed in a calm and rational fashion. These residents often had an aggressive tone of voice; they frequently raised their voices; and used abusive language.

> Why shouldn't we act like that? If we want to get angry, if we want to swear, it's in every document about participation and NDC that people will be angry because they haven't got anything, and after 30 years of spending money on the West End you can't see the benefits. So of course people will be angry (Resident).

Their interactions with other participants were also confrontational, and they made personal comments about and to other participants, and their speeches, when directed at others, were punctuated by sighs, hostile looks and short, jabbing hand gestures.

For this group of residents, the issue of control was paramount and to subordinate their views to the greater good or to hold their counsel was tantamount to being silenced. When they were asked to go along with the majority view, and when their demands for projects and funding were not met, they argued that they were being excluded and disempowered.

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They were, furthermore, firmly of the belief that residents on the partnership should vote as one, and those who did not vote with them were considered to be somehow 'against' them. As a consequence, this group sought to undermine other residents. They accused them of being unrepresentative, of being afraid of the local authority, of collaborating with the local authority, of abusing their position and neglecting local people. Participation for them was less of a process of *partnership*, than one of *control*. However, the aggressive tone and the continued anger and suspicion of these residents led some members of the ISG to simply dismiss their contributions as emotive or irrelevant. As these residents did not have access to the linguistic capital that would allow their utterances to be accepted as legitimate by other members of the ISG (ATKINSON, 1999), they were unable to control the regeneration in the way that they might have liked.

Feeling unable to exercise their power through debate, these residents used their role and identity as a weapon to achieve a particular end. SCOTT (1985) examined strategies of 'everyday resistance' amongst peasants in a village in the Muda region of Malaysia. He suggested that the ordinary weapons of powerless groups generally required no co-ordination or planning, and included foot-dragging, false compliance, feigned ignorance, slander and sabotage. The dissident residents on the ISG used similar weapons as a means of achieving their goals and protesting against decisions with which they did not agree. They employed tactics such as deliberately delaying and drawing out debates; continuing debates after votes had been taken; demanding re-votes if decisions went against them; (all examples of foot-dragging), and walking out of meetings (sabotage)[4], as a means of exercising power. The use of gossip and slander, also identified by Scott (*ibid.*), has proved to be an important tactic by both

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the dissidents and other partnership members as a means of undermining the credibility, and the confidence, of their opponents. Although the dissidents were not able to achieve their positive ends (pushing a particular project through, for example), they were able to damage NDC, by delaying progress, drawing out meetings, and pushing items off the agenda for discussion when the ISG ran over time in meetings.

As the tactics of the dissidents were not accepted as legitimate, those who subscribed to the collaborative approach subsequently employed counter strategies as a device to silence or undermine the 'troublemakers'. Some members of the ISG argued that this was necessary to protect the ISG and ensure that the regeneration progressed. The members of the ISG employed four counter strategies against the confrontational residents. The first was to simply *ignore* the 'troublemakers' by allowing them to make an argument and then not responding to it, either by moving on to the next item of business, or by continuing a discussion as though the argument had never been made. The second strategy was to *rebuff* the residents, allowing them to express themselves and afterwards flatly stating that their arguments were not valid or true. The third was to *cajole* the residents. This initially involved them being accused of being troublemakers, of delaying the process, of threatening the bid, of letting down their communities. They were told that should the Phase 2 bid for funding fail, they would only have themselves to blame. A code of conduct was later used as a means to silence more vocal expressions of dissent. The fourth strategy was employed outside meetings, where members of the ISG sought to *undermine the credibility* of the 'troublemakers'. The members of the ISG called into question the representativeness of the residents, their motivations for participating and their *ability* to participate.

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Members described them as "not very intellectually sound", "barking mad", and "difficult" (personal interviews).

The dissident residents were not swayed by efforts to undermine or exclude them, and remained a dissenting voice on the ISG. Similarly, the residents who employed more collaborative strategies failed to be persuaded of the virtues of the alternative approach. Indeed, the conduct of the confrontational residents persuaded other residents to become *less* confrontational, for the sake of progressing the regeneration. However, the more that the other members of the ISG rebuffed or ignored the dissenting residents, the more likely they were to become confrontational. The two different approaches became locked in a struggle for dominance. As a consequence of the hostility and what was described as 'aggressive' and 'intimidating' behaviour, ISG meetings were frequently fraught, characterised by arguments and enmity. As a result, the partnership gained a bad reputation amongst local people for its lack of progress and in-fighting. The unwillingness of residents, local groups and agencies to become involved was attributed to this poor reputation. Furthermore, many of the Board members found participating in NDC very stressful. They held almost wholly negative associations of the process because the ISG was so hostile and confrontational. Some of the Board members described how they disliked and, in some cases, dreaded going to the ISG. Participants across the board felt that the experience had affected them personally and, for some, the experience had seriously affected their mental and physical health.

> [My predecessor] talked me through the difficulties and the political difficulties of what was happening, around the fact that the meetings were

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> meetings from hell, to put it like that. I mean, really, that he found the ISGs extremely stressful. And I may be wrong, but I suspect that's part of the reason he took early retirement. I think NDC was the final straw for him (Partner representative).

> We've never gained nothing but a bad head, sore feet, tireless nights, depression. Sometimes, I feel like hanging myself outside that Civic Centre, hanging myself literally, with a big plaque around my neck, you know? Because I've got that depressed. She has been in tears before, I've been in tears. What have we got ourselves into? (Resident)

The ISG was accused of being little more than a talking shop, and the partners, public and Government Office North East expressed their frustrations at the lack of visible progress. One of the consequences of this lack of progress was an underspend in their first year of some £1 million. Now in its seventh year, NDC West Gate has become significantly less adversarial and has made better progress in meeting spending targets. However, this required several years of hard work with residents and local agencies in order to change NDC's image and persuade those outside the Partnership that the programme was worth becoming involved in.

Discussion

Clearly, this level of conflict within partnerships was not what the Government envisaged when it described NDC as a "showcase for state of the art intensive regeneration" (SEU, 1998: 55). It is the contention of this paper that one of the critical

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factors in creating problems in the Newcastle case was the existence of two conflicting discourses of participation, and that this situation was itself the result of a series of complex interconnected issues.

First, the naïve sociology of community underpinning NDC served to structure the programme in a particularly problematic way. The Government's vision of community supposes that individuals within spatial communities share a common mindset; that they share a vision for their area, and that they will work together, pulling in the same direction, to see that vision realised. Conflict and division were not anticipated, leading to a very tight timetable for NDC, in which bidders had 18 months to establish functioning partnership boards that would prepare and deliver a multi-million pound regeneration strategy based on the needs of the community, as articulated by that community. There was no scope within this timetable for any form of mediation or conflict resolution between disparate factions within partnerships and communities.

This situation was then compounded by the simplistic conception of participation underpinning the programme. Assuming that people would engage in the process in the same way in order to achieve their common goals, the Government focused on resolving issues of access to decision making structures rather than on the strategies that participants would use to participate. As a result, none of the participants in NDC received a 'job description', and the partnership did not have time to meet to negotiate their roles, expectations or their understandings of participation prior to beginning their work in the area. Participants were, therefore, left to carve out their own roles in the process, and the strong rhetoric of community-led regeneration meant that many

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participants were unwilling to compromise their approach, leading to the existence of multiple, conflicting discourses of participation.

The policy expectation that residents would choose to participate in the same way, as a united and homogenous community, was arguably naïve. The participants in NDC West Gate acted as individuals, rather than a collective. The very fact that no single discourse of participation dominated NDC West Gate created a situation in which the advocates of different discourses of participation were locked in a struggle for power and authority that threatened the progress of the regeneration. This failure to recognise the realities and complexities of community participation, and to account for them in policy, compounded the inherent difficulties of regeneration work. There is clearly a need for policymakers to be more circumspect about the almost uncritical use of 'community' and 'participation' in policy and to try to make better allowances for the realities of human nature, particularly in the timetabling of initiatives.

Conclusions

For many years, 'community participation' was viewed by academics and policymakers as an inherently 'good thing', like spinach (ARNSTEIN, 1969: 216) or apple pie (PECK and TICKELL, 1994: 251). It has long been considered a 'benign' process and a solution to regeneration failure (DARGAN, 2007; JONES, 2003). However, recent academic research into regeneration has begun to question the uncritical use of 'community' in policy, both as a response to its pervasiveness in the Government's regeneration agenda, and overwhelming evidence that communities do not speak with once voice (FOLEY AND MARTIN, 2000; MEEGAN AND

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MITCHELL, 2001; SHIRLOW and MURTAGH, 2004; WILSON, 2005). Building on that work, this paper has critiqued the concept of 'community', arguing that it is far more complex than the idealistic vision underpinning many area-based regeneration programmes. Simply living within the same neighbourhood is not enough to foster a sense of shared-ness – of community – amongst the people who live there. The reality of working in deprived urban areas is that the sense of abandonment and exclusion felt by residents has fostered a sense of suspicion and mistrust of those outside of their community (be that a spatial or social community), and of those in authority. This is particularly true in those areas with a long history of involvement in regeneration, in which residents have competed with each other for scarce resources, and have come into conflict with statutory agencies when regeneration has failed to significantly alter their quality of life. This type of suspicion helped to promote the confrontational discourse of participation in NDC West Gate, where residents were so distrustful of those in authority that they viewed all of their interactions within the partnership as a fight to protect the interests of their community.

However, no *real* allowances are made within regeneration programmes for the difficulties inherent in working with, and fostering participation in, fragmented, excluded, and what some may even argue are 'abandoned' communities. To merely acknowledge the existence of these problems and the difficulties of partnership working is insufficient to surmount the age-old tensions and hostilities which have been a feature of previous ABIs. The true complexity of deprived communities has yet to be reflected in policy, but perhaps the difficulties experienced by NDC partnerships will provide a catalyst for change.

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Finally, this research has highlighted the complexities of the participation process, and the difficulties that occur when participants adopt different understandings of the function of participation and their own role within that process. Traditionally, research on participation has focused on issues of access, representation and power. These remain important subjects for research, as residents continue to be disempowered in a process that is meant to be empowering. However, a more thorough examination of the different strategies of participation employed by participants is also required. Just as research has recognised that communities are complex and do not think with one mind, so it must also recognise and reflect upon the complexities of the participation process. There has been a tendency in some research to 'homogenise' participants, and although the different needs and expectations of participants are recognised, there is an assumption that people participate in regeneration in the same ways. However, this research has shown that participants do not act as one unit, but instead understand the participation process in very different ways, holding divergent opinions about what participation should aim to achieve, and what they themselves hope to get out of the experience. These differences can create serious conflict and division within partnership structures. Research must look beyond the issues of access first raised by Arnstein, and critically examine the strategies employed by participants which, as this paper has demonstrated, can reveal much about the nature of relationships and struggles for authority within partnership structures.

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[1] Although the author was involved in the national evaluation of New Deal For Communities on behalf of The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit in the Office Of The Deputy Prime Minister, the research for this paper took place before the evaluation began in late 2001 and is in no way based upon material from that evaluation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

[2] The term 'New Labour' refers to a political brand name, used by a small group around Tony Blair prior to the election of 1997, in order to signal that the Labour Party had undergone a process of change and reform.

[3] These residents will be referred to as the dissident residents, as they frequently represented a dissenting voice on the partnership.

[4] Until July 2000, residents had to be in the majority on the ISG before any vote could be taken. The Board could not take any major decisions unless meetings were quorate. By walking out of meetings, residents could render the ISG inquorate, thereby preventing any decisions from being taken.

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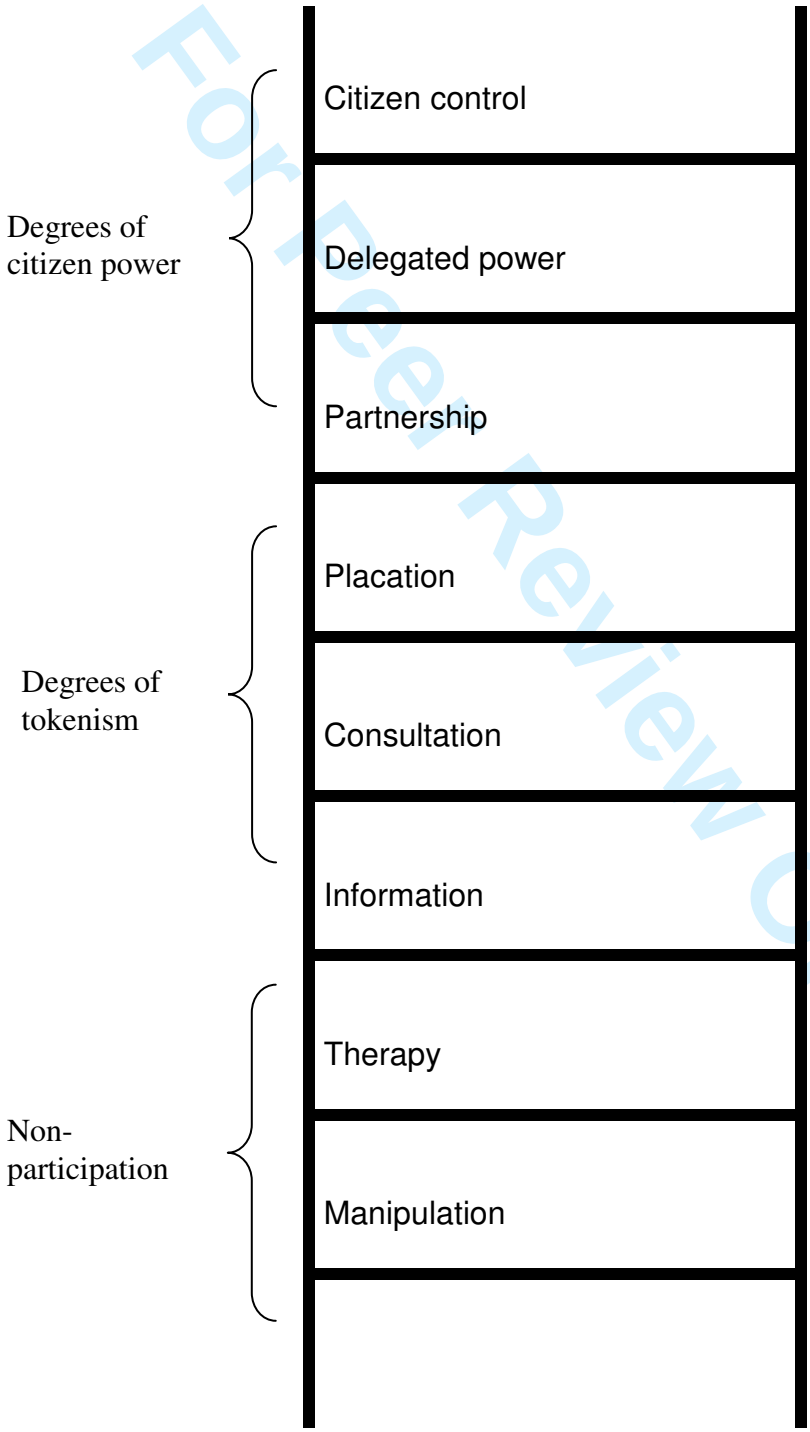
"Participation and Local Regeneration in the UK: The case of the New Deal for Communities"

Figure to accompany text

Figure 1: Arnstein's ladder of public participation



From Arnstein (1969).

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"Participation and Local Regeneration in the UK: The case of the New Deal for Communities"

Table to accompany text

Table 1: Round 1 bidding guidance suggestions for projects under NDC

Aim	Project Suggestion
Housing	Refurbishment
Neighbourhood management	Employing neighbourhood wardens to co-ordinate services
Encouraging enterprise	Business start-up, co-ops, community businesses
Crime and drugs	Work with crime and disorder partnerships
Education	Links with schools, adult education
Health	Improving access to services, health promotion and education
Families	Providing health visitors, childcare, early learning programmes
Access to services	Providing transport to outside services, encouraging services to relocate within the area
Access to information	Providing access to IT
Community building	Cultural and sports programmes
Worklessness	Training, skills, encouraging employers to create jobs in the area

Adapted from DETR (1998).

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