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LDnet webinar series

From Arnstein's ladder to Co- everything

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Maximum feasible participation had been introduced in the 1964 Economic opportunities act which was part of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society Program which had launched 1000 Community Action Programs and Community Action Councils.

Arnstein worked at HUD Housing and Urban Development and particularly with the 150 model city programmes from 1966

The ladder has some weaknesses

- Too normative, citizen control is not always desirable or appropriate

- Context specific, particularly to working in poor and mostly African American neighbourhoods

Non Participation: manipulation and therapy

- “Their real objective is not to enable people to participate but to enable power holders to educate or cure the participants
- “These bodies (neighbourhood Councils) frequently have no legitimate function or power, but are used to prove that grassroots people are involved in the program”
- “Tenant groups are used as vehicles for promoting ‘control your child’ or cleanup campaigns” ...they are diverted from dealing with arbitrary evictions, segregation, or repairs
- It should be noted that manipulation can exist at all rungs in the ladder

Degrees of Tokenism

- Informing: an important first step, but informing is often one way, audiences are often baffled by responses to questions, use of jargon
- Consultation: inviting citizen opinions can be a legitimate step, but needs to be accompanied by assurances that concerns and ideas will be acted on. (how many attended meetings, answered a questionnaire)
- Placation: Citizens have some influence but tokenism is still apparent. Citizens are still being planned for/ Local worthies are coopted onto public boards but are not seen as representatives and are in a minority

Degrees of citizen power

- Partnership: shared planning and decision making. But the community must be adequately resourced and have technical assistance. 15 of the first 75 Model cities reached this level. Mostly taken by the citizens, not offered by city hall
- Delegated power. Citizens have dominant decision making authority over the plan or program. This can be through a majority or a veto (e.g. Merseyside Pathways)
- Citizen control. Local groups are given the budget to manage and invest for the community (e.g in schools, community centres, housing coops, enterprise). But fears over separatism, balkanisation of services, and hustlers/Napoleons from local community.

Renew Lea View



- 1938 Lea View House London opened 'Heaven in Hackney' in press
- 1970s Lea View House in the top ten worst 'sink estates'
- May 1980 I am appointed as community development worker on the estate
- Late 1980 Creation of stakeholder 'steering group'
- 1981 Renew LeaView Campaign to include Lea View in municipal budget
- 1982 Work starts on site
- 1988 Prince Charles reopens Lea View



Lea View, from Bingo halls to a place at the table

- Tenants associations had become quiescent – operating as social clubs for elderly ex tenants
- Lea View had become unmanageable - teenagers, rubbish, repairs
- A community project was set up, 2 years later Architects were appointed
- A steering group was appointed with reps from the tenants association participating alongside Council officials and architects
- New plans were accepted by tenants, but funding for modernisation was to be cut.
- Tenants mobilised in Renew Lea View to win funds
- But, months later the architects facilitated a coup to replace the chair of the tenants association in order to protect their contract for implementing the works

Co-everything - some definitions

- Co-production is a collaborative approach to the development and delivery of services, where people with lived experience are involved at every stage. It can be used in public services, healthcare, and media production.
- Co-design is often used as an umbrella term for participatory, co-creation and open design processes. This approach goes beyond consultation by building and deepening equal collaboration between citizens affected by, or attempting to, resolve a particular challenge. A key tenet of co-design is that users, as 'experts' of their own experience, become central to the design process.— Design for Europe
- The key ingredient is involvement of users, citizens, as equal participants in the design, production, or management process.

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Some conclusions on real participation

- The ladder of participation is a useful starting point for discussing the different types of participation
- Much of what passes for participation is what Arnstein would call non-participation or tokenism.
- It shows how an animation – in this case a ladder can have great communicative value
- But it was of its time and things have moved on.
- Participation can also have a darker side – Nimbyism, people pursuing sectoral interests, local Napoleons