GoWell
GLASGOW COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLBEING RESEARCH AND LEARNING PROGRAMME

Briefing Paper 13

Community empowerment in transformational regeneration and local housing management in Glasgow: meaning, relevance, challenges and policy recommendations

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GoWell is a planned ten-year research and learning programme that aims to investigate the impact of investment in housing, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. It commenced in February 2006 and has a number of different research components. This paper is part of a series of Briefing Papers which the GoWell team has developed in order to summarise key findings and policy and practice recommendations from the research. Further information on the GoWell Programme and the full series of Briefing Papers is available from the GoWell website at: www.gowellonline.com

Community empowerment is a key aspect of public policy, particularly in the fields of regeneration and housing and in the context of social deprivation. There is, however, a lack of clear explanation of its meaning and there is very little evidence of the benefits of community empowerment policies. We have studied community empowerment in various ways through GoWell to contribute to its understanding and utility as a policy objective. In this paper we outline the focus of community empowerment in policy. We have developed a framework for community empowerment that informs our work, and a model of the factors that influence it. We identify the key findings from our research, making policy recommendations.

Although the research studies on which this briefing paper is based (see boxes 1-3) all focused on areas where the Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) is the major housing provider and regeneration agency, this paper does not represent an evaluation of GHA policy and practice. It is recognised that Glasgow City Council (GCC) and others also have a responsibility for community engagement about public services and planning issues in these areas. Furthermore, GHA itself is active in many regeneration areas across the city, and we have only studied a small number in-depth, including some of the most challenging areas – due to conflict and uncertainty about the future of the dwellings in question, and due to the ethnic diversity of the resident populations (which is much higher than in other areas of the city). Approaches to community engagement are developing all the time and may have evolved further since our research was conducted. However, we believe that the general points from our research which we highlight here are of relevance to future community engagement and empowerment policies at a national and local level.

WHAT COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT CAN MEAN

Community empowerment has been understood in many ways. It can be about communities gaining *control*: the specific meaning of 'control' varies with the context, but the term generally implies increasing choice and freedom of action for those affected, helping "to place residents in a position where they can choose their own way forward".[1]

In the context of our work we define community empowerment as a community's *"capacity to make effective choices, and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes".*[2] Such a process may enable communities to feel more in control, leading to other positive changes such as enhanced quality of life[3] and improved health and wellbeing.[4] Potentially there are individual as well as collective benefits.

Community empowerment strategies can either start with the agenda of a public organisation and seek residents' involvement (top-down), or be based on a community development approach which starts with people's concerns then works to enable them to improve their own conditions through their own activities and by influencing public agencies (bottom-up).

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IN POLICY

Community empowerment is a key element of public policy in the UK, particularly within housing and regeneration and in the context of area deprivation and social disadvantage.

Since the late 1990s, the role of the community has been increasingly emphasised as a core element of public policy. It was a feature of New Labour's 'neighbourhood renewal' agenda which was "committed to ensuring that communities' needs and priorities are to the fore in neighbourhood renewal and that residents of poor neighbourhoods have the tools to get involved in whatever way they want".[5]

This community-focused policy approach is particularly prominent in Scotland. The first post-devolution, coalition government's regeneration policy statement *Better Communities in Scotland: Closing the Gap* prioritised action in two main areas: public services to disadvantaged areas, and the social capital of communities. By these means communities would have an enhanced "sense of power", through being able "to develop and put into practice solutions to local challenges" and "to do more for themselves".[6]

The Local Government in Scotland Act (2003) established a statutory duty for stakeholders to engage with communities in "community planning" to improve services and to meet community aspirations.

Linked to community planning and regeneration policies, a *Community Learning and Development Strategy*[7] was developed which intended to improve the knowledge, skills, confidence, motivation, organisational ability, networks and resources of communities.

The *National Standards for Community Engagement*[8] were launched in Scotland in 2005 by the former regeneration agency Communities Scotland, and developed as a practical tool for use by those involved in community engagement.

In 2008 the Scottish National Party (SNP) minority Government launched a *Joint Commitment to Community Empowerment* with local government followed by an Action Plan a year later[9] which provided a definition of community empowerment as "…*a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them*". The key was "building community capacity" to "contribute to community empowerment" through such means as: people working together to effect lasting change in their communities; and, influencing decision-making and service delivery. To this extent the SNP government's aims are very similar to those of its Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition predecessor. The document also identified benefits from community engagement for individuals and communities including increased confidence and skills, better quality of life, greater commitment and pride in local communities, and stronger community cohesion.

Locally, GHA (and other local agencies) have policies about community engagement and empowerment. GHA has described community engagement as the most important aspect of transformation.[10] It has developed strategies, action plans and tool kits to support this approach within local areas, reflecting the national promotion of standards and good practice in community engagement.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT?

As a principle, community empowerment is inherently good, and there are democratic reasons for involving local people in the decisions that shape their communities and that may lead to them being happier and healthier. At a wider level, and as a value orientation, community empowerment is about increasing social justice, equity and emancipation for disadvantaged and socially excluded groups.[11]

Despite the policy focus and the wide-ranging strategies and resources on community empowerment, there is little evidence that such policies make a difference to people's lives.[12,13] This is partly to do with the complex nature of community

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empowerment, and the difficulty in evaluating the processes and measuring the outcomes.

From an academic perspective, policy approaches to community engagement and empowerment have been much criticised. Much of this criticism centres on the imbalances in power relations between communities and stakeholders, particularly in 'top-down' policy initiatives where there is seen to be a lack of community development activity. Without community development, there can be a considerable resource and capacity imbalance between communities and their partners with fundamental inequalities in the bargaining positions of the different parties. Community voices can be excluded by the 'rules of the game' and 'traditional routines' that are taken for granted by other partners. If people are not aware of their real interests, simply creating greater opportunities for involvement and participation will not be sufficient to empower them to argue for or make necessary changes.[14,15,16] Furthermore, questions have been raised about whose interests are served by the emphasis on engagement, partnership and empowerment. The literature in the field suggests that, in some circumstances, communities can be easily recruited into empowerment initiatives where they gain little or no benefit, but those who are initiating such processes may use participation for their own ends.[17]

Despite the evidence, in communities in Scotland and beyond there are examples of initiatives designed to engage with, develop capacity and empower communities in a wide range of ways.

GOWELL STUDIES ON COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

As part of the GoWell Research and Learning Programme we have studied community empowerment in the context of transformational regeneration and local housing management in Glasgow (2006-2009). The four studies that inform the findings in this paper are:

● Community empowerment in the planning of transformational regeneration in three neighbourhoods in Glasgow: we assessed the role of communities in influencing the regeneration of their areas, both through involvement in development groups and within the wider community. [see Box 1]

● Progress in implementing transformational regeneration plans: using a case study approach we compared progress and approaches between three areas and what this says about community empowerment. [see Box 1]

● Perspectives of community empowerment: focusing on a transformational regeneration area we considered how community empowerment plays out in different ways for three of the parties involved – Registered Tenants' Organisation (RTO), GHA and the wider community – asking who really benefits. We

acknowledge that other partners (e.g. Glasgow City Council) should feature more prominently. [see Box 2]

- Community empowerment in the context of the Glasgow Housing Stock Transfer: through discussions with members of local housing organisation (LHO) management committees and staff, we explored community empowerment in the context of housing management and community ownership of housing. [see Box 3]

BOX 1: Community empowerment in the *planning* of transformational regeneration in Glasgow, and the *progress* made towards *implementation*

[Ref: Lawson L, Kearns A. Community engagement in regeneration: are we getting the point? *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 2010; 25: 19-36]

Following the housing stock transfer in Glasgow in 2003, Glasgow City Council's (GCC) housing stock was sold to the Glasgow Housing Association (GHA). The two partners agreed a strategy of 'transformational change' for eight housing estates across the city. We have studied processes taking place in three of these areas – Red Road, Sighthill and Shawbridge. During 2006 GHA in partnership with Local Housing Organisations appointed teams of consultants to undertake development studies of the areas undergoing transformational regeneration. The consultants 'recruited' residents to work alongside them to form a community group or forum to develop local regeneration plans. Three such consultative groups were formed, one in each area. Community engagement was identified as a priority for each area.

The aim of our initial study was to examine how local communities have been involved in the *planning* of major regeneration in their areas, and to assess the 'added value' of community engagement in 'area transformation'. A qualitative methodology was applied using interviews and group discussions with key informants from the three study areas. Initially some aspects of community empowerment were evidenced through inclusion in the process, capacity building, and involvement in making decisions. However, we found there were weaknesses in relation to: community empowerment beyond the initial planning process; community cohesion; and, effective implementation in particular. This study illustrated that community engagement focused more upon governance and policy objectives than upon wider community objectives or impacts.

The aim of our second study was to assess the progress made towards *implementing* the plans, to examine how residents had been involved and the extent to which we could say there had been community empowerment. Here

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we focused on the wider community and not those involved in more intensive community engagement activity.

Using a case study approach, we compared community empowerment across the three areas. In one area a series of community consultations did little to empower the community or progress the regeneration plans, because of the complex nature of the community and the lack of commitment from key stakeholders. In another area, the community had input into the new neighbourhood and the plans were progressing, but many felt a community was being developed for 'others', not them, which raises questions about engagement in such a context. In the third area the focus was on providing clear information about demolition and rehousing rather than on securing community input into regeneration plans: there appeared to be little resistance to this strategy and many reported positive outcomes due to the changes they were experiencing (e.g. moving away from the flats to a new house in a nicer neighbourhood). The main finding is that strategies for community empowerment should have greater relevance to residents' everyday lives, the local and neighbourhood context and wider plans for regeneration.

BOX 2: Community empowerment in neighbourhood regeneration: a case study
[Not yet published]

This study considered the extent to which community empowerment had been achieved in one of our study areas. We sought to address the extent to which community empowerment had been achieved through the regeneration process to date; whether community empowerment is valued and treated as an end in its own right, or more as a means to other ends; and what institutional and policy factors enable or inhibit the achievement of community empowerment in this context. We used a narrative approach and comment on three key players' perspectives about the role of the community in decision-making for the future of the area: Glasgow Housing Association (GHA), the Registered Tenants Organisation (RTO) and the wider community.

We found that the two main actors involved – GHA and the RTO – who between them negotiated an outcome for the estate, both felt able to claim that they had empowered the community, whilst the wider resident group did not feel any sense of empowerment. Hence the community is the 'piggy in the middle' of area regeneration. The main actors each used the available community engagement processes to garner support for their preferred outcome at any point in time. In GHA's case this shifted from a preference for full demolition of the estate to a preference for partial retention. The RTO similarly shifted from opposition to any demolition, to acceptance of retention of only a small part of the estate. Community empowerment has been used to legitimatise these shifting positions. We argue

that the focus of policy and practice is too narrowly placed on community engagement and this needs to be broadened out if community empowerment is to be achieved.

BOX 3: Community empowerment in the context of the Glasgow housing stock transfer

[Ref: Lawson L, Kearns A. 'Community Empowerment' in the context of the Glasgow Housing Stock Transfer. *Urban Studies* 2010; 47(7): 1459-1478]

A key objective of the Glasgow housing stock transfer in 2003 was "promoting community empowerment, community control and community ownership". This study assessed the nature of community empowerment in Local Housing Organisation (LHO) management committees. Its aim was to examine how empowerment has been experienced by LHO management committees in the Glasgow housing stock transfer at a particular point in time. Specifically, we were interested in the factors that influence empowerment, and in assessing whether community ownership is a necessary component of community empowerment in this context. A qualitative research methodology was adopted using interviews and focus groups with informants at various levels including (LHO) management committee members and staff.

Our study found that, despite its construction and aims, stock transfer policy is not able to deliver a uniform policy outcome in terms of community empowerment. We identified four versions of community empowerment: "Confident"; "Maturing"; "Responsive"; and "Powerless". No unitary relationship between community empowerment and community ownership was observed. We suggest that the opportunity and capability to make choices about preferred management/ ownership arrangements is more empowering than ownership per se.

We have studied community empowerment in very challenging regeneration areas, and acknowledge that the processes and outcomes may be different in other regeneration areas. The challenging nature of our areas, and their complex circumstances, is reflected in our Findings.

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Our work has informed the development of two models of community empowerment: one focuses on the processes and outcomes of community empowerment, and the other on the factors that can influence community empowerment. A series of key messages and policy recommendations are made, based on the findings from our studies.
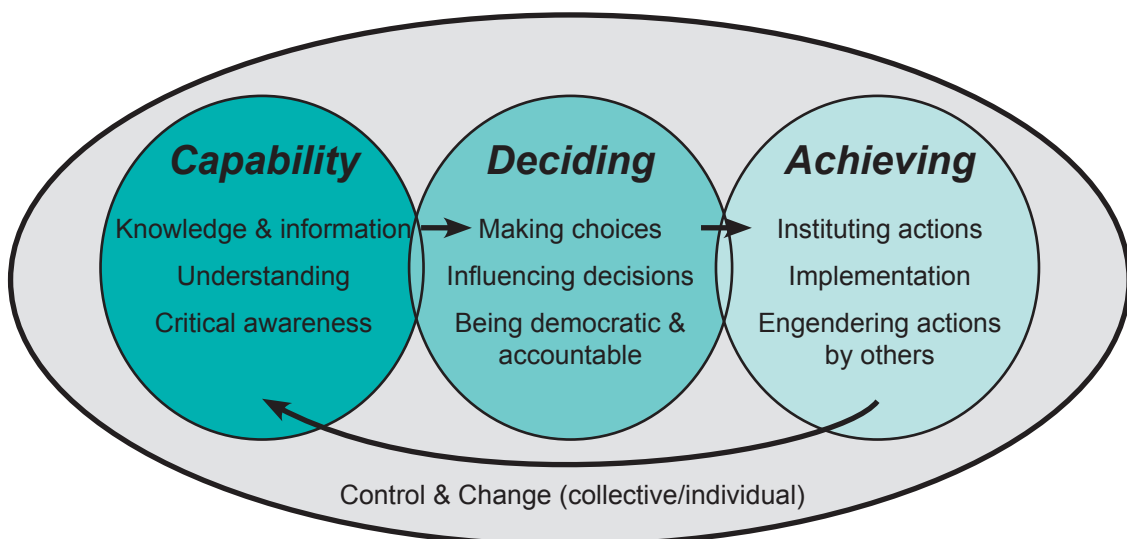
1. A model of community empowerment

We have defined community empowerment as a community's *"capacity to make effective choices, and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes".*

Using this definition, we acknowledge that in any given context empowerment depends on the nature of social, political and organisational structures, on people's individual and collective assets and capabilities, and on the interactions between them. If the structural or organisational conditions are not favourable and if people are not aware of their real interests, then, as previously stated, simply creating opportunities for community involvement and participation will not be sufficient to empower them to argue for or make necessary changes.

We have adapted the World Bank's framework on empowerment that identified four elements as: access to information; inclusion and participation; accountability; and local organisational capacity.[18] Our model has three key elements which are inter-linked. It is based on the notion that communities must develop *capability* – through information, understanding and critical awareness – so that they are able to make choices and/or *influence* decisions that are then *achieved* and/or *implemented.*

A model of community empowerment

Developing Capability. This can include knowledge, understanding and critical awareness. A *well-informed* community is central to community empowerment. Clear, relevant and accessible information can not only inform communities about what is happening but can be key to enabling people to have some involvement or play a role in an area's regeneration. In order to argue their case convincingly, communities also need to *understand* the language, parameters and constraints of practitioners, so that they can mount convincing arguments for what they want. *Critical awareness* is where people become more engaged and thereby more reflective and challenging. If communities understand their position and the things that can hold them back then they may be more able to be critical, reflective and pragmatic about where they want to be and how they want to get there.

Making choices/influencing decisions. The capacity to make effective or informed choices is shaped by a community's ability to consider and purposively choose courses of action and/or objectives, as well as having the opportunities that enable them to do so. In situations where the community is not in a position to actually decide things, it may feel more empowered if it is at least able to influence those decisions.

Since the community's input is often made through selective or representative processes, then to be empowering of the wider community, decision-making also has to be *democratic* and *accountable* with feedback arrangements to all residents, and arrangements whereby representatives may be questioned or held to account.
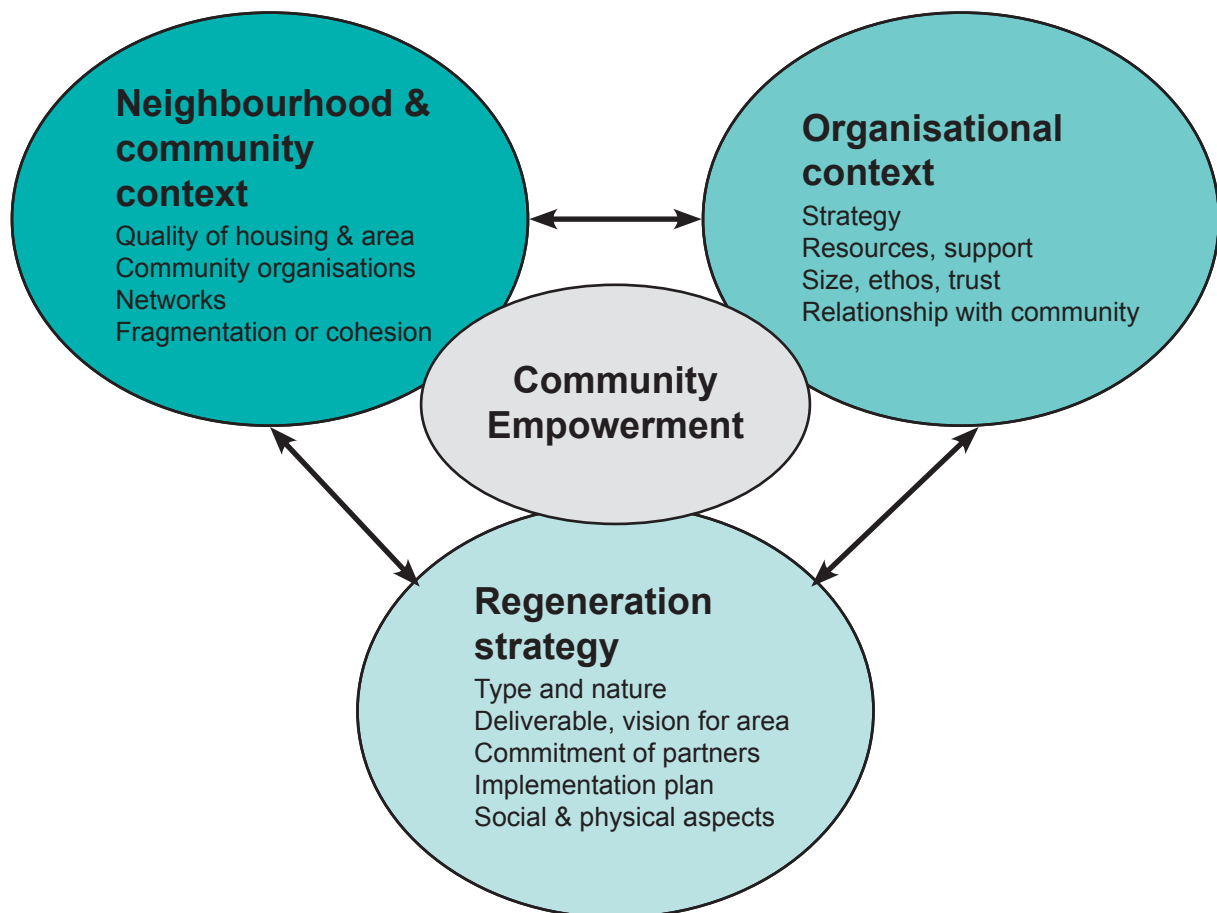
Achieving. Community empowerment can only be attained if there is the ability to institute actions directly, or engender appropriate actions by others, based on the decisions or choices made. In this way, communities may achieve their aims and the process is not simply one of making *abstract* choices that do not lead to change. Stakeholders, community organisations and wider connections and networks may be necessary to help action the choices that are made.

Outcomes. The outcomes of community empowerment may be about communities being or feeling more in *control,* through gaining the ability to *change* or *influence* aspects of their homes, neighbourhoods and communities (individual and collective).

2. Factors that can influence community empowerment

We have identified three key factors that can influence community empowerment: neighbourhood and community context; organisational context; and, regeneration strategy (where relevant). The wider structural, environmental and policy context are also important.

Factors influencing community empowerment

Neighbourhood & community context
Quality of housing & area
Community organisations
Networks
Fragmentation or cohesion

Organisational context
Strategy
Resources, support
Size, ethos, trust
Relationship with community

Community Empowerment

Regeneration strategy
Type and nature
Deliverable, vision for area
Commitment of partners
Implementation plan
Social & physical aspects

Neighbourhood and community context

The neighbourhood and community context are important and play out in different ways. Neighbourhoods with poor quality housing and amenities may offer opportunities for community empowerment because of the desire from residents for improvement in their living conditions. Conversely, the problems may be indicative of broader community disintegration and there may be some reluctance for communities to get involved. In neighbourhoods where there is seen to be a sense of community, and where the housing and amenities are considered satisfactory, there may be a willingness to accept the status quo rather than a desire to improve the area for

others. Where there are few established community organisations and community cohesion is regarded as poor, community engagement can sometimes be more challenging.

Our three regeneration study areas were similar in many ways (e.g. housing types and deprivation levels) but also different in terms of neighbourhood and community. One is an area with very poor housing and local services with a rapidly changing community; the majority of residents here accepted that demolition was the best way forward for the area and were prepared to be re-housed, the majority in the surrounding area. Another area could be described as a divided community with different views about the way forward for the area; some indicating a sense of community and campaigning to retain and refurbish the existing flats, others opting for demolition and comprehensive regeneration. The third neighbourhood is situated within a more affluent area with an interesting local history. These different contexts had implications in terms of community empowerment and the type of strategy adopted. Some strategies were considered more appropriate or successful than others.

In our study of housing management, LHO management committees in better areas with adequate services and fewer problems had more time to focus on local issues and the question of where they wanted to be, without the distractions of more intractable concerns associated with areas with poorer housing and amenities.

Organisational context

Many empowerment initiatives are initiated by organisations in a top-down manner. The organisational context, its policies, ways of working and related legislation can provide opportunities, but also constraints, for community empowerment, depending on choices about the way forward.

The relationship between the community and organisations is important in terms of how well the organisation serves the community, the resources and support it can offer, and the sense of trust and connection. In two of our regeneration areas the LHO office was situated very close to or in the actual neighbourhood, and in general appeared to have a good relationship with the community. In our third area the LHO was situated on the outskirts of the neighbourhood; here the relationship between the community and organisation was more complex, which may in part have been to do with its location, but also its connection with the community. Although many LHOs represent a wider area than where they are situated (e.g. the LHO in one of our study areas covered four distinct neighbourhoods), it may be the case that in some contexts/neighbourhoods, the situation of the office may have some relevance and importance for community empowerment.

In our study of community empowerment in the context of the Glasgow housing stock transfer we found that the size, type and ethos of the LHO made a difference to empowerment. Other relevant factors were the opportunities made available

for training and development of committee members, relationships with staff, and agreement about the way forward.

Regeneration strategy

A regeneration strategy, or a clear vision, for neighbourhood redevelopment can work in different ways in terms of community empowerment. Relevant factors include: the type of strategy (e.g. social and/or physical); the support, commitment and co-operation of all relevant partners and stakeholders; the communication strategy; and, means of implementation. At a wider level, the role of cash resources, regeneration progress at city-level, and broader strategic issues are also important.

If the strategy is owned or accepted by the community then it can potentially have an empowering influence. If a strategy has been developed without consultation and foisted upon a community, or if it means breaking up a community against its will, then it can have a disempowering effect. Where a community is involved in developing plans which then lack the support or means to be taken forward and/or implemented, this can also be disempowering.

In some circumstances a strategy based on *informing* a community about changes to the area and how residents are going to be affected (e.g. demolition, timescales, re-housing plans) may be more appropriate than one involving a series of community consultation activities. In one of our study areas where the main focus for engagement was around the provision of information, the community indicated feeling more in control of the changes that were happening to them and their neighbourhood. In a different area there was extensive community consultation, but little evidence of change and an identified lack of control by members of the community.

The key findings and policy recommendations we make are based on our research findings (Boxes 1-3). As previously indicated, we have studied very challenging areas and this is reflected in our findings.

Community engagement

- Community engagement is an important component of community empowerment but more attention needs to be given to the *type* and nature of such engagement, what its *purpose* is and the mechanisms for *implementing* any agreed course of action. From our studies we found that the processes of community engagement often do not offer control to the community, in that residents are not in a position where they can choose their own way forward. A particular weakness has been the failure to give the community any purchase over the *actions* required for achieving any given choice.

- In our regeneration study areas the focus of community engagement was about the physical aspects and concrete plans rather than the social and community aspects. Although we are aware that there are related wider action initiatives and other activities taking place in our study areas, our findings show there was no sense conveyed as to how community empowerment would be achieved, how the new communities would look *socially* (for instance who would be living there), the types of facilities and amenities to be provided, and how they would be managed or governed in the future. Strategies to engage communities in transforming their neighbourhoods need to focus on the social as well as *physical* aspects, or this needs to be more apparent.

- We found no attempt to use community engagement to enhance community empowerment or cohesion on a *sustainable* basis. Community engagement for empowerment purposes needs to be *ongoing*; this might require changing or adapting strategies, engaging in different ways and with different groups/people over time, and integrating these approaches with other initiatives and local strategies.

Capacity-building

- Where engagement involves capacity-building – learning and deliberation over a period of time – people make different choices to those reported by ad hoc processes which do not allow people to be reflective or to consider the consequences of different choices. Without such capacity-building processes people may not develop critical awareness, and be less able to make informed decisions and choices.

- In situations such as decisions to be made about large regeneration projects, the capacity of the community to make a significant contribution to the process would be enhanced if the community were resourced to make use of independent consultants to advise them on the process of regeneration and the possibilities for the community to achieve its goals within that.

- Capacity-building – involving small groups of residents and consultants working together – happened in the planning stages of transformational regeneration. Those involved reported their involvement as inclusive, enabling them to understand the complexities of regeneration and thereby make decisions that they felt were realistic and feasible. But, capacity building needs to be *ongoing*: in our study areas capacity-building was not maintained beyond the initial planning phase (there may have been some ongoing activity but this was not apparent to those in our study). Furthermore, there were no mechanisms in place for information to flow from representative or consultative groups to the wider community. Such mechanisms are important so that any empowerment benefits are more far-reaching.

- Views about the benefits of capacity-building, when instigated by organisations (i.e. top-down), varied in our study of community ownership. This related to the type and quality of capacity-building being provided, and the starting point and capabilities of those involved from the community.

Information

- Different types and levels of information may be necessary for different purposes and at different stages during an initiative. There should be a practical, and a related social component, so that communities know how they will be affected by any proposed changes. In our research, residents reported being unclear about where they would be re-housed, who they would be living next to, where their children would be going to school and how they could access information about such issues. (It may also be the case that some residents are given information but do not take it on board, which raises an issue about how the information is conveyed).

- Informing the community needs to be *ongoing* rather than being ad hoc and occurring only when the main parties involved think it necessary. In the case of the regeneration of people's homes and neighbourhoods, communities need to remain informed on a regular basis, even when there is uncertainty and lack of clarity. Information-giving cannot only happen when there is certainty. The lack of feedback and information on a regular basis can lead to ignorance, uncertainty, worry and confusion on the part of the community, eventually leading people to be grateful for any decision, whether in their best interests or not.

Community consultations

- Community consultations (mainly via surveys) were used to find out community preferences about the future of their area, such as to inform decisions about high rise flats. Such methods can be *disempowering* if the efforts of consultations do not lead to change or action. For example, if residents feel their involvement was a waste of time; such feelings can lead to scepticism and future apathy.

- Consultations need to be appropriately set in context, detailing the implications or consequences of making a choice or expressing an opinion about an issue. In one area where there were repeated processes of engagement and consultation, none of the residents in our study knew how the plans for the estate as a whole were to be progressed, when and by whom. They had no awareness of the constraints on the delivery of regeneration, stemming from planning, finances or other factors. Therefore, the community was not well placed to ask about progress, nor was anyone answerable to them for progress. Yet the community had been repeatedly consulted, presentationally giving the impression of an empowering process.

Role of community organisations

- There has been little attention to questions about how community organisations communicate with, and represent the views of, the wider community: in one of our study areas a group opposing the demolition of the flats became a RTO and thereby the official group representing the community. Although RTO registration criteria require evidence of membership, publicising meetings, circulating minutes etc, we found no readily available public records of proceedings, attendance at meetings or other indicators. The group may be considered weak in democratic terms because of issues surrounding its membership, elections, decision making and accountability (this is based on what we observed at the time of the research and circumstances may since have changed). We suggest that the ways and means by which diverse views within communities are represented and reconciled through democratic and accountable processes requires consideration.

- Linked to the above point, community organisations should establish their own regular means of communicating with residents, both reporting to them and collecting views from them, for example through advertising meetings, regular newsletters and making available proper records of public meetings.

- An effective community organisation would ensure that regeneration agencies commit to regular meetings with the community at all stages of the process, not just during the planning phase, but also during the firming-up and implementation phases. We also found through our research that once community organisations attain a position of authority (e.g. through being subject to unwanted, imposed

changes), few questions are then asked about their legitimacy or effectiveness as the voice of the community.

- There is a distinction to be made between *group* and *community* empowerment. Community organisations can achieve things and be empowered through using political and media networks for instance to advance their own case (e.g. campaign group against demolition of flats) but not necessarily that of the wider community.

Stakeholder and implementation issues: empowerment for whom?

- There is a need to strengthen the connections between community engagement processes undertaken within transformation areas as part of regeneration processes, and higher-level planning arrangements within the city. This particularly applies to spatial planning for development purposes and community planning for public services. Without a stronger link between local and higher-level processes of planning and community engagement, there is a danger of a disconnection between the views expressed by communities in a regeneration context, and subsequent decisions taken by regeneration partners or agencies, on the one hand, and policies determined in other settings for public services and development priorities within the city on the other hand. This has the potential to prevent or frustrate the achievement of local aspirations where these do not feature in, or may conflict with, higher-level plans.

- The legitimacy sought through community engagement can be partly undermined by poor community engagement in relation to the *implementation* of any decisions that have been made. The inherent uncertainties about the 'how' and 'when' of implementation, can mean regeneration agencies and practitioners are reluctant to conduct further community engagement during the implementation phase. But in order to meet its objectives, community engagement has to proceed on a regular basis even when regeneration programmes run into problems, indeed even more so then.

- In our study of community engagement in major regeneration processes we observed different types of community engagement being used with the best of intentions, from capacity-building exercises to surveys, with small and large samples. However, some community engagement activity employs methods that can be considered weak, and therefore the findings from such exercises may not reflect the views of the wider community. Community engagement and consultation exercises can be open to manipulation (in timing, process and reporting) and used in inappropriate ways by both sides. The design and interpretation of one particular consultation exercise was presented as valid and authoritative, irrespective of issues of size, scope or representativeness.

- Extensive community engagement can still leave communities unaware of who is **deciding** their fate, when and how. A community may think it is deciding things, when it is not.

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CONCLUSION

Our evidence on attempts to empower communities in Glasgow through both housing management and regeneration routes adds to other recent studies and reviews of community empowerment efforts in Scotland[19], the UK[20] and France.[21] Themes about community capacity, breadth of involvement, resources and accountability are commonly mentioned across these studies as issues to be addressed if community empowerment is to be fully achieved. Our findings echo those of other studies, but also emphasise additional issues of a lack of candour and of clarity in the parameters for community engagement and empowerment.

This growing evidence base is timely given moves by the UK Government to embed a degree of 'localism' within the planning system in England through new legislation (the 'Localism Bill'), and by the Scottish Government to develop a Regeneration Strategy which expands the role of asset-owning, anchor community groups to meet a community's needs and to introduce a Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill which enhances community participation in the design and delivery of public services (amongst other things).

Community empowerment is desirable as an objective for liberal governments as it in theory diffuses power within society away from the state towards citizens themselves, and so is an attractive reform agenda in the current era. The current policy thrust also chimes with the move towards an asset-based approach to narrowing health inequalities via community participation in health development processes.[22,23] It also has potential to deliver physical, psychological and psychosocial health gains for participating individuals, as long as the sources of stress and disillusion that are often present in community engagement processes can be avoided.[24] This is why the details of how to try to 'get it right', as revealed by ours and other research, are crucial if a policy of promoting community empowerment is to deliver societal benefits rather than exacerbating disadvantages for deprived communities.

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