‘Hard-to-reaching’ or ‘easy-to-ignore’?
Promoting equality in community engagement

Dr Ruth Lightbody, Glasgow Caledonian University
Dr Oliver Escobar, University of Edinburgh
The purpose of WWS is to use evidence to transform public services for all of Scotland’s communities to flourish
• 12.30   lunch
• 13.00   welcome and introductions
• 13.10   presentation
• 13.35   panel response
  – Tressa Burke, Glasgow Disability Alliance
  – Hilary Third, Scottish Government
  – Kaela Scott, Involve
  – Andy Thompson, University of Edinburgh
• 14.00   table conversations
• 14.30   plenary
• 14.50   panel reflections
• 15.00   Close
‘Hard-to-reach’ or ‘easy-to-ignore’?
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• **User reviewer:** Kaela Scott, Scotland Engagement Lead, Involve.

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• **Editors:** Charlie Mills and Dawn Cattanach
Evidence Review

- Over 70 sources
- Post 1999
- Primarily Scottish focus
- Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, evidence reviews, toolkits/best practice
- Ecology, urban regeneration, public policy, local governance, social policy, education, gender, youth studies, health, deliberative democracy
Research Aims

How is the relationship between equality and community engagement conceptualised in the literature?

What are the key dimensions and factors in the relationship between community engagement and equality? (i.e. in terms of both process and outcomes)

What Works? What are the most effective strategies and approaches to ensure equality in community engagement?
Key Terms

Equality

Community

Inequality

Hard to reach

Easy to ignore
Equality of access

Key Messages

• Structural inequalities are often replicated, and perhaps reinforced, in community engagement processes.
• Barriers facing equalities groups are often complex and people face multiple challenges

Key Issues

• Barriers:
  – Practical (e.g. resources, transport, childcare);
  – Personal (e.g. confidence, language);
  – Socio-economic (e.g. low earners, asylum seekers, homeless);
  – Motivational (scepticism)
Equality in the process

Key Message

• Gaining access to community engagement processes does not guarantee influence over the outcome

Key Issues

• Internal exclusion
• Poor facilitation
• Language barriers: ESL and complex terminology
• Influence of well-resourced groups and usual players
• Challenges for equalities groups

‘it is not simply a matter of sharing airtime equitably – some people can do more with less time’ (Roberts and Escobar 2015: 102)
The outcome: How are people affected?

Key Message

• Evidence to suggest that there are positive and negative impacts of community engagement

 Positive: improved health, confidence, engagement, development of key skills, social cohesion, policies face less resistance

 Negative: pressure, stress, exhaustion, disengagement, feeling dispirited when outcome does not reflect the process

Key Issues

• More research needed to determine long term impacts
What are the key dimensions and factors in the relationship between community engagement and equality?

- Power-sharing
- Partnerships
- Representation
- Digital Resources
- Funding and Bureaucracy
What works?

**Finding 1:**
Be flexible and learn from past experiences

- Listen to communities
- Avoid ‘one size fits all’
- Catalogue practice (e.g. VOiCE, Participedia)
Finding 2: Support communities to get involved

Allocate resources to help people to get involved

Make the entire process as transparent as possible

Forge new partnerships based on distributed and facilitative leadership

Develop community support services
What works?

Finding 3: Offer support to those taking part

- Use clear and supportive communication
- Support and train facilitators
- Support people with difficulties
- Involve a cross-section of the population
- Make use of technology
- Keep a close eye on who is taking part
What works?

Finding 4: Think Long term

Invest in long-term community engagement

Invest in the future, community ownership
Being mindful that inclusion and diversity are multifaceted

**Inclusion / exclusion**
- **External** (i.e. access to the process)
- **Internal** (i.e. influence within the process)

**Diversity**
- **Backgrounds** > e.g. gender, income, age, ethnicity ... *(demographic diversity)*
- **Perspectives** > e.g. views, values ... *(discursive diversity)*
- **Knowledge** > e.g. experience, expertise ... *(epistemic diversity)*
The public engagement paradox: growing participation and growing inequalities

Propositions to be tested in future research:

Inequalities in health, income, wealth, education... stemming from inequalities of power and influence? E.g.

- engagement processes are **not inclusive** and thus reflect a limited set of priorities and preferences
- engagement processes are **inclusive**, but do not have influence on policy and decision making
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Panel

- **Tressa Burke**, Chief Executive, Glasgow Disability Alliance
- **Hilary Third**, Equality Unit, Scottish Government
- **Kaela Scott**, Engagement Lead Scotland, Involve
- **Andrew Thompson**, Professor of Public Policy and Citizenship, University of Edinburgh
Talking points

• Social inequalities are often replicated, and perhaps reinforced, in community engagement processes. How can this be avoided?

• How can community engagement processes be based on effective power-sharing?

• How can the issue of representation and responsibility be reconciled without over-burdening community members?

• How can accountability be managed if communities are making unpopular decisions or not everyone is taking part?