

The influence of social context in place based programmes

Communities in Control study Research summary #3

Overview

All areas have unique characteristics that help to describe a local place and its population as well as its history. This might include how much interaction there is between people living in an area, as well as people's memories of the past.

Social context can be understood as:

- A community's shared history
- Past experiences of community activism
- People's attachment to local areas
- Social relationships in communities
- Trust in public sector agencies

When it comes to place based programmes that aim to support community action, such factors are likely to shape participation and the community's ability to develop a stronger collective voice.

Drawing on published findings from the first phase of the Communities in Control study (Orton et al, 2017), this summary highlights how social context influences the way in which the programme was developing at an early stage of its delivery.

The findings point to the need for public health programmes and evaluations to pay attention to context, such as the influence of collective identities within diverse communities, the relationships between organisations and the residents they serve, and how these relationships are shaped by previous experiences and memories.

Key points

- The programme – Big Local - has allocated funding to 150 areas. These vary from former mining villages to urban areas. In some cases, the funding boundary for Big Local areas fitted well with pre-existing geographical or political boundaries (e.g. a ward or village)
- Other Big Local areas covered more than one 'community'. Cohesiveness of local identities also influenced the time that it took for people involved to agree priorities and act collectively around these.
- The presence of community activists or existing organisations provided links or structures that Big Local was able to work through. This enabled some areas to quickly establish networks compared to other areas where groups effectively started from 'scratch'.
- Previous bad experiences or distrust of agencies affected residents' willingness to work with practitioners. This included when there was a lack of transparency about how funding from past initiatives had been used.
- Evidence of shifts in relationships was also emerging. One example of this was connections developing between residents and professionals despite initial reluctance, as benefits of collaborating were realised.



FURTHER INFORMATION

The Communities in Control study

The independent research is investigating the health and social impacts of Big Local and aims to draw out lessons for the development of future community initiatives.

Two preliminary phases (2014/17) were funded by NIHR School for Public Health Research and gathered evidence on the early implementation of Big Local and early health and social impacts of the programme.

Phase 3 is funded by the NIHR Public Health Research Programme. It builds on these earlier stages, to investigate longer-term health and social outcomes for individuals and local populations living in Big Local areas

About Big Local

Big Local is a Lottery funded place based programme rolled out in 150 areas in England over at least ten years, managed by Local Trust (www.locatrust.org.uk)

In each area, residents have control over decision making about how funding is used to address neighbourhood priorities, whether this relates to the environment, the economy, social relationships or area reputation. Big Local could improve health and wellbeing by empowering people to have more control over their lives and by improving the local determinants of health in these areas.

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This is one in a series of summaries from the research

1. How collective control is developing
2. The role of money
3. Social contexts
4. Spaces for participation
5. Improving area reputations
6. Newspaper coverage and Big Local

Graphic narratives of health inequalities and community action



Read this online booklet by the illustrator Joe Decie, inspired by residents in Big Local areas

Visit the new website

Browse, read, watch and download resources from the study

www.communitiesincontrol.uk

Orton L, Halliday EC, Collins JM, Egan M, Lewis S, Ponsford R et al. Putting context centre stage: evidence from a systems evaluation of an area based empowerment initiative in England . *Critical Public Health*. 2017;27(4):477-489.

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