

Spaces for resident participation in place based programmes

Communities in Control study Research summary #4

Overview

Place based programmes that enable residents to gain more control over decisions and actions affecting the places where they live, emphasise the importance of residents being actively involved or leading efforts to identify local needs and take action to respond to them.

The way that communities participate in such programmes has traditionally been understood as a 'ladder' that assumes people move from less to more empowered positions, with greater control/influence, according to the activities in which they participate. Yet this does not account for the multiplicity of ways in which people may participate (Lewis et al, 2018).

Drawing on accounts of residents and practitioners involved in the place based programme - Big Local, this summary considers approaches to resident participation in the programme, including the types of participatory spaces that have emerged locally.

By examining opportunities for resident participation in the early phase of Big Local, four spaces were identified where residents commonly participated: partnership, event, resident and project spaces. The research found that these spaces served different purposes in terms of how they supported resident participation in decision making and action.

Key points

- ◆ Participatory spaces are situated opportunities within place/community based programmes that shape residents' participation, and control over decision making and action.
- ◆ Four types of spaces were identified as opportunities for residents to participate locally in Big Local (event, partnership, resident and project spaces).
- ◆ These spaces were found to have different characteristics (e.g. how they were accessed and the extent of their formality) shaping the nature of participation within these spaces.
- ◆ Both resident- and event-spaces offered opportunities for residents to connect, and supported inclusion by reaching more members of the community. Partnership and project- spaces offered more opportunities for residents to exercise control (e.g. influencing decisions).
- ◆ A range of spaces can help achieve both *breadth* of participation (e.g. offering a range of activities that appeal to different groups and individuals) as well as opportunities at different *depths* of participation (e.g. being elected as a member of a decision making group).

So what we found with our community space it's been really interesting because it's been pulling lots of people in and we've been having lots of conversations.



Four common types of spaces

The figure provides a brief overview of these four spaces — **partnership, resident, project and events**. Four dimensions found to shape the nature of participation in these spaces are then described below.

Partnership spaces	Set up as a programme requirement of Big Local. It is the most well-known space for participation and is most closely linked to decision making and governance in an area.
Resident spaces	These spaces (e.g. community hubs, informal meetings in libraries and other venues) reflect more spontaneous or unplanned opportunities for interaction between residents.
Project spaces	Where people get involved in planning or delivery of a particular activity (e.g. a community garden). People gain expertise and build connections as they work on 'getting things done'.
Event spaces	The largest of the spaces. Events have helped to build community pride and connections in an area, but are also used as a way of involving and consulting with the local population.

1. Formality of the space

Spaces vary as to the extent that they are formal or informal opportunities for interaction.

Partnership spaces are associated with decision making and governance arrangements for the Big Local programme.

They are typically formal in their nature, sharing characteristics such as scheduled participation (e.g. monthly meetings), formal agendas and minute taking, and the election of partnership members.

In comparison, resident spaces often represent less formalised opportunities where interaction occurs. In these spaces, participation is more flexible, occurring in different locations, often in a community venue (cafes/pub, community hubs or someone's home).

The lack of time pressure in informal spaces offers a place where issues 'closed down' within the partnership can be discussed in a less pressured setting. Less formal spaces are also where residents share experiences of being involved in Big Local and their aspirations for the local area.

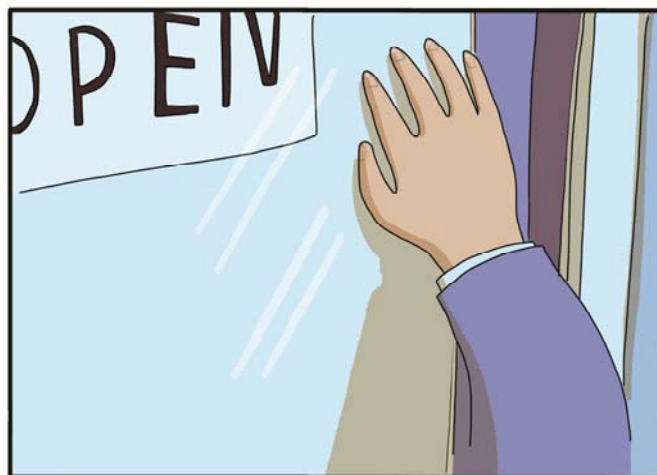


Illustration Joe Decie 2018

When we have the Steering Group meetings a couple of us we pop around just to have a bit of a socialise after the meeting. So it's not all just the formality of the meeting and we can get to know each other a bit better.

2. Who can access the space?

Some spaces are open to anyone in the area; other spaces are where people are invited or elected. Big Local partnerships usually involve smaller groups closely involved in decision making in the programme. These are people living and working in the local area who are elected or invited to join.

Over time, other spaces are being created in some areas, open to anyone locally.

Community hubs are one such example. Often investment in these spaces has occurred where an area has lost community facilities historically and/or has no communal space where people can meet.

3. Power and inclusion

A range of factors shape exclusion and inclusion, making it more difficult for some groups/individuals to participate compared to others.

Barriers that constrain participation include:

- impact of poverty and inequalities
- physical barriers such as a lack of transport or a road dividing an area
- competing work and family responsibilities
- ill-health and disability

In any participatory space, there is potential for power imbalances and for certain interests to be prioritised over others. This could occur where individuals or groups exercise their power over other residents, preventing their voices from being heard or included in decision making and action.

4. Connectivity between spaces

How spaces connected was also found to be important in enabling resident participation.

As the example below highlights, in some Big Local areas, the links between spaces are intentional to encourage participation.

Community events are used to recruit new volunteers to get involved in the partnership or project activities and as a place to consult the wider community about Big Local priorities and plans.

Where people initially get involved in one space (e.g. volunteering for an event), over time this may lead more organically to residents participating in other spaces such as the partnership or a project sub-group, as they gain confidence and make connections

In one area a programme of events supported volunteering in other Big Local activities as this partnership member explains:

“On the back of a summer gala, we developed a volunteering programme, so once you have had your first exposure to Big Local through a bouncy castle and bringing your kids along, you get an opportunity then to volunteer at the next event orget involved in a project we have got.”

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.

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.

This is one in a series of summaries reporting findings 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

Lewis S et al. Reframing "participation" and "inclusion" in public health policy and practice to address health inequalities: Evidence from a major resident-led neighbourhood improvement initiative. *Health and Social Care in the Community*. 2018 DOI: [10.1111/hsc.12640](https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12640)

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