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9DF: a nine-dimensional framework for community engagement

Participatory planning literature has yet to fully engage with the situatedness of community engagement and diverse experiences of involvement. In this article, nine dimensions based in core concepts of engagement in decision-making are explored using data co-produced with community researchers. Empowerment, influence and inclusion are distinguished as: connection and legitimacy of voice; enacting change in development or plans; and the representation of minorities or disadvantaged groups. When articulated in terms of process and outcome, and planning context, they offer a nine-dimensional framework (or 9DF) for a more community-oriented evaluation of community engagement.

Keywords: community engagement, participatory planning, lived experience, participation, empowerment, influence, inclusion

Introduction

In recent years, the notion of 'co-production' has become more prominent as a goal within the debates of participatory planning, and this aligns with ideas of greater community engagement. Communities have a situated understanding of the workings and outcomes of engagement, which differs greatly from the research perspective in existing studies of participatory planning. This is a significant problem when trying to review participatory moments together with communities. In this article, we present the results of a study that orients towards the perspective of communities on their engagement in planning. As researchers of urban planning and community development, we ourselves approach the subject from different angles but find common interest in the situatedness of the phenomenon. We explain the study, positioning it within existing literature and providing findings and reflections on the nine-dimensional framework (9DF), using community-oriented data. The aim of our work is *not* to produce a normative definition but to offer a new analytic proposition. We seek a community-oriented lens for research on urban co-production and participatory planning which responds to critiques of existing tools for evaluating community engagement that proliferated around Arnstein's work (Slotterback and Lauria, 2019; Varwell, 2022).

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Our assumptions are that planning for development should support urban functions that sustain communities, and stakeholder engagement is both practically useful and legitimatises processes. This position is not unorthodox for planning but does not ground understandings of engagement in the lived experiences of communities. We explore the perspectives of communities who might be engaged in planning, drawing on existing literature and data provided through USE-IT!, which is a community researcher (CR) programme at University of Birmingham entitled 'Unlocking Social and Economic Innovation Together' (O'Farrell et al., 2022; Hassan and O'Farrell, 2023).

In our work, we needed a framework to analyse the empirical material and developed it as recapped in this article. We started by reviewing participatory planning literature, and found three core concepts – empowerment, influence, and inclusion. This review affirmed the significance of the situatedness of community engagement in planning where context and materiality are important factors in the presence of actors, and demonstrated the need to unpack the core concepts in respect of particularities of process, learning and context. Further, it suggests nine distinct dimensions of engagement (see Figure 1), where the three core concepts are articulated through elements of process, learning and context. With the existing data from the USE-IT! project, these nine dimensions of engagement and their interactions with each other were explored. As explained later, the community orientation of the data has a high level of reliability, as the dataset was co-designed with CRs and data collection conducted solely by them. When used together the dimensions provide a community-oriented framework with nine dimensions that accounts for the situatedness of engagement – a nine-dimensional framework or 9DF. This represents an innovation in the tools of participatory planning evaluation because it can be meaningfully used where communities have an active role, which is critical given the aspirations of co-production.

The rest of this article is as follows. The second section sets out lessons from participatory planning research on community engagement, empowerment, influence and inclusion. The third section covers methods and findings from analysis of USE-IT! data. The fourth section presents discussion of the 9DF, and its account of the live dynamics of community engagement. We conclude that it offers a strong evaluative tool, and is methodologically appropriate for researchers in urban planning and community development who work in co-productive modes.

A community-oriented lens on engagement

In this section, we reflect on existing research about participation in planning, focusing on community engagement. We present the findings of our literature review under the areas of 'empowerment', 'influence' and 'inclusion', which are key terms throughout

connoting successful engagement. We acknowledge well-established critiques around power and context. Foundational works do not sufficiently recognise the diversity of engagement practices and evaluative methods are overly decontextualised. For instance, in a recent review (Varwell, 2022), critiques of Arnstein's ladder are found to emphasise the confounding complexity of natural environments (Collins and Ison, 2009; Hurlbert and Gupta, 2015) and the geography of political activities (Carver et al., 2001; Smith and Prieto Martín 2020). We also hold space for the concerns raised (Brownill and Inch, 2019; Flyvbjerg, 1996; Slotterback and Lauria, 2019; Westin, 2022; Yiftachel, 1998) about knowledge–power dynamics within planning across diverse practices. This implies that it is important to recognise the inherent situatedness of community engagement and the impossibility of consensus on matters of substance, which means that success of participation in planning is never a unitary 'win' in one moment or for all parties but that community engagement can have value across different dimensions.

Empowerment

Foundational theories present engagement as empowering stakeholders in that it connects them into planning processes and boosts legitimacy of their voices. This implicates collaborations of communicative exchange within statutory processes of planning. However, well-rehearsed knowledge-power critiques of Habermasian communicative rationality suggest there are difficulties inherent in structured (Abbot, 2020; Natarajan et al., 2019) and unstructured learning (Hurlbert and Gupta, 2015). Evidence from the Netherlands suggests community-based organisations cannot shield co-production from the hierarchical structuring forces of strong governments (Kleinhans, 2017; Nederhand et al., 2016). Technical parity within exchanges is important for reasons of social-psychology and procedural justice (Froncek and Rohmann, 2019), but cannot assure an empowering connection with others in planning. This is found to be particularly true for lay actors interacting with professionals (Abbot, 2020; Natarajan et al., 2019), who encounter challenging procedures such as expectations of communication capacity, e.g. broadband readiness, and familiarity with codified knowledge forms. Further, lay actors are delegitimised by 'expert' bias in dialogic (Natarajan, 2017) and non-dialogic processes (Natarajan et al., 2018)

The social construction of 'legitimate voices' in planning relies on linkages that are empowering. Trusting relations are needed between a range of actors – notably with those in policymaking for 'bridging' (to use Putnam's term) into formal institutions of the state – and their absence is associated with failed participatory initiatives (Boyle and Michell, 2021). However, levels of bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000) are also a factor in planning outcomes, since close proximate ties and more heterogeneous ones are bound up with economic processes (Muringani et

al., 2021). Thus, for planning in contexts with lower levels of social capital, building connections to end-user stakeholders is part of the process of renewal as well as engagement per se.

For community engagement in planning then, empowerment is the performance of a connection between those who plan and end users of plans, where there is legitimacy of stakeholder voice. Creating relationships for exchanges with stakeholders is key, but there is a multiplicity of actors, interests and forms of communication within exchanges. As such, the details of processes, ways of knowing and connections of interest all matter greatly to empowerment.

Influence

Participatory planning studies suggest communities have influence via learning in governance networks and 'follow through' in local development, including shaping places and plans. Collaborations require multi-way interactions and co-learning, and thus the agency of community actors is critical. This co-productive mode is contrasted to delegated powers, and organisational researchers suggest that ends-oriented co-learning is a political act (Suárez-Herrera et al. 2009; Pouw and Gutpa, 2017; Zaveri, 2020) as it can change organisations as well as urbanism. Suárez-Herrera et al. (2009) argue for deliberative learning processes in pluralistic institutional settings where 'reflection, negotiation, dialogue, decision-making, knowledge creation, and power dynamics are all intentionally changed' (Suárez-Herrera et al., 2009, 325).

A central concern is the nature of planning challenge at hand and how this is defined. Hurlbert and Gupta suggest social learning has been romanticised and diverted attention from 'what learning is required, what learning is desired and how to promote such learning, when considering the policy problem' (2015, 109). A planning 'problematic' may also have structuring effects on learning or affect trust in co-productive relationships. For instance, historic failures of policy fuel distrust and speaking about entrenched disadvantage in an area carries a risk of stigmatising (Tomaney et al., 2019). Mace and Tewdwr-Jones argue that influence in planning for places depends on the desired change; 'assessing the likelihood of making a difference depends on the extent of the difference sought' (2019, 189). Thus, the substantive context and interests around the subject of planning are known to shape the chances of influence.

While communities may form connections with governance actors and have legitimacy of voice, meaningful engagement is expected to go further for influence in development processes. This might involve communities in creating knowledge or shaping procedures of urban change, or in producing or limiting changes to existing environments. Hence, influence is prima facie related to urban development and changes/conservation with those affected by the 'planning challenge' at hand. Thus,

influence is distinct from empowerment. While engagement may empower communities through access to plan-making networks and associative standing, influence is a matter of agency, i.e. communities' capacities and purposes for engagement with respect to urban change and co-production.

Inclusion

A long-standing debate on the 'power-knowledge nexus' of planning has paid attention to the breadth of engagement of non-planners. Notably, Quick and Feldman (2011) distinguish inclusion from participation, and remark on the importance of including diverse community interests and perspectives. Others critique invited spaces that privilege elite interests (Miraftab, 2004), and highlight the institutional and unconscious biases that exclude specific sections of society (Beebeejaun, 2017). Procedural barriers associated with communication are unevenly distributed, which vary by location, format and timing of exchanges (Natarajan et al., 2019; Natarajan, 2019). This is most challenging for low-income communities given the costs (of time, effort and money) of inclusion.

Representation in planning processes is also highly contextual, as it relates to prevailing societal inequalities rather than just the principle of equal access (McGregor and Pouw, 2017; Zaveri, 2020). The details of socio-economic disadvantage are likely to matter to who needs to be included (Nzimande and Fabula, 2020), and those can be site specific (e.g. vacant land impacts; Kim et al., 2020) and culturally significant (e.g. vernacular design considerations; Glackin and Dionisio, 2016; Ferretti and Grosso, 2019). Ferilli et al. (2016) highlight socioeconomic barriers created to engagement, and there is plenty of evidence of the spatial clustering of limits to involvement (Muir 2004; Dillon and Fanning, 2016; Musterd and Ostendorf, 2021; Trivedi and Tiwari, 2011; Wolfel, 2020). Inclusion affects levels of involvement, and opportunities for learning are also linked to relational contexts and existing levels of trust (Boyle and Michell, 2020).

Equitable engagement cannot be assumed based on the existence of statutory processes for connection, or even the observed influence of people from a community. For example, rights for communities to create statutory plans at a 'neighbourhood' scale were introduced in England in 2011 (Wargent and Parker, 2018; Salter, 2022), but not all places or social groups engage with their production (Parker and Street, 2018). Inconsistency in institutional cooperative structures is also observed internationally (Savini, 2011; Konsti-Laakso and Rantala 2018). Opportunities for inclusion therefore also differ between places using the same participatory planning practices.

Inclusion is distinct from both empowerment and influence. It is associated with equity in involvement in the engagement processes. The central concern is representation within participatory planning activities of minority social groups and those

	Process that provide...	Learning with communities...	Contextual factors such as..
Empowerment	opportunities for connecting to development processes (including learning processes).	having demonstrable legitimacy of voice within processes.	actors' capabilities (e.g.) for connection that link to relational and practical circumstances.
Influence	possibility of impact on collective decisions about development activities.	shaping understandings of (desired / likely) outcomes, and learning processes.	nature of the issues at stake (e.g.) entrenchment/novelty will determine levels of mutual understanding/intensity of work needed for impact.
Inclusion	practicable means to involvement for all social groups, and (e.g. regional / interest-based) communities.	opening up to diverse forms of knowledge and 'outlier' viewpoints.	established relationships always matter (e.g.) affecting trust needed for involvement / co-production, and are likely to require expansion/change.

Figure 1 Core concepts of community engagement

who are socio-economically marginalised, and factors of context and socio-economic circumstance will boost or stifle chances of involvement.

As shown in Figure 1, existing literature has highlighted the importance of processes for, and learning with, communities in respect of: legitimacy of voice; actualisation of change or co-produced plans; and equitable involvement. The terms empowerment, influence and inclusion were used somewhat interchangeably as overlapping normative goals. We distinguish them as follows. Empowerment is primarily about connecting or communicating with legitimacy of voice within relevant exchanges. Influence is about enacting change in development or plans. Inclusion is about equity in representation of minorities or disadvantaged groups. These are readily conceptualised in terms of process and outcome, and we contend that planning context, particularly existing relationships, resources and social need, must also be considered.

Testing dimensions of engagement

The approach

The proposed nine dimensions of engagement (Figure 1) relate empowerment, influence and inclusion to process, knowledge and context. To test this from a community perspective understanding we used data gathered by community researchers.

Community researchers were involved in the USE-IT! project. This was a partnership between 15 institutions and local organisations funded by the Urban Innovative
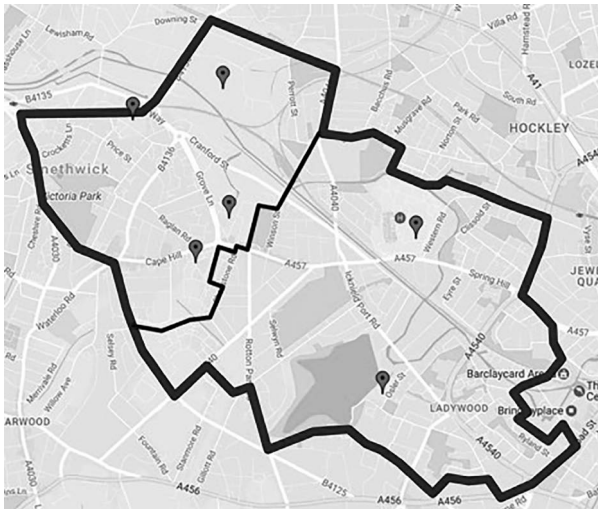
Figure 2 Map of the USE-IT transect (Hassan and O'Farrell, 2023)

Actions programme funded by the European Regional Development Fund. Its aim was to facilitate collaboration on urban poverty, and community research was one of seven work packages that focused on an inner-city area between two local authorities in the West Midlands region of England – Birmingham City Council and Sandwell Borough Council. That area was a 'transect' (Figure 2), which was historically known for the ethnic diversity and low socio-economic status of its residents (Johnson and Akinwolere, 1997; Holyoak, 2009; Valadez and Hirsch 2016), and today increasingly attracts migrants including refugees and asylum seekers (Refugee Action, 2023). The USE-IT! research team designed and delivered CR training to upskill residents and enable them to co-produce research on the area (Hassan and O'Farrell, 2023; O'Farrell et al., 2022). Once qualified, CRs were commissioned to conduct research on behalf of the partnership, and one of those commissions was a civil society perspectives project for an independent advisory body known as the UK2070 Commission.

The USE-IT! CRs were contributing to the UK2070 Commissions' work, which was rooted in an inquiry on regional inequalities (UK2070 Commission 2020a; 2020b). University College London (UCL) led the component of the inquiry that was focused on the role of civil society in strategy to rebalance the national economy (Natarajan et al., 2020, Cho et al., 2021), which included interviews co-designed and conducted by the CRs.[1] This provides 25 anonymised interviews with a range of community representatives from the transect. Interview topics were co-produced by the CRs and the authors in deliberative workshops on 'what mattered to communities'. Results of analysis of transcripts and workshop records, coding for the nine dimensions, is reported next with illustrative quotes from the interviewees.

1   UCL research ethics committee identifier 7339/002.

Dimension 1: empowerment and processes

As shown in the literature reviewed, it is no simple matter for people to participate in planning and urban development, particularly in contexts of disadvantage. The research data helped explore empowerment, shedding light on opportunities to connect and express voices in the transect area (Figure 2).

Drawing on experience, interviewees noted diverse processes they considered empowering. A prominent technique was to use distinct phases for initiating contacts and connections within communities. That typically involved sharing stories without requiring participants to reveal their names or job titles, and facilitated lived experience exchange between stakeholders. Participants emphasised that having active members of a community who can animate and encourage others was important for voice and participation. Such meetings and engagement activities need to happen in multiple locations to increase visibility and outreach of these processes. A key resource in these processes is trust and relationship building for the engagement to take place successfully without being 'diluted' or narrowed down. However, there is a need for spaces and places for these engagement processes that can enhance occurrence, primarily by removing practical barriers but also as 'social infrastructure' (Klinenberg, 2018; Tomaney et al., 2023) that helps build community connections. Some communities use existing immediate spaces such as streets and community centres in their neighbourhoods to create hubs for their activities.

Other resources need to be specifically tailored to the needs of a community and certain groups of local service users. This was particularly important because people's interests relate to more sensitive topics and personal matters around disadvantage. For example, an interviewee explained how they needed to create resources for their community to showcase challenges of homelessness:

> Another way that I tried to engage with the public on homelessness was recently, we tend to do a lot of interviews, and even though we use experts by experience we commissioned a film to give a very real account of what homelessness means and where we are in the city. We were very open with the statistics, what the issues are, and recently we showcased that film in the MAC [Midlands Arts Centre] we opened it to the public and we had a Q&A session at the end which involved myself, practitioners and experts by experience, so the public had an opportunity to engage with us and get an answer to some of that.

Additionally, capacities are needed for stakeholders to engage via these processes. Time is crucial, as is the ability to build conversations with people who might not be involved in initiatives but are still key stakeholders in respect of decision-making. Such conversations demand personal aptitude and willingness to meet with people and be open to often fairly challenging subjects and discussions. This was seen throughout all of the interviews as key for connecting to people, particularly those who are most

vulnerable. One interviewee emphasised personal capacity for communication in his community group, saying, 'The most successful way of engaging with people is to be open minded and meet with people'.

The CR data on the first of the nine dimensions echoes the lessons in the literature review on the need for bridging social capital, both in terms of the relationships needed (e.g. Boyle and Michell, 2021) and the importance of material resources in securing them (Muringani et al., 2021).

Dimension 2: empowerment and learning

The literature demonstrated the importance of legitimacy of voice, and the CR data highlighted how knowledge building related to that. In practice, it was shown how empowerment meant engaging people through learning, with the sharing and construction of different types of knowledge. The exchange of different knowledge was central, with all people having something to contribute. As testament to this, being able to explain where projects might help people was a critical skill that could encourage community engagement. As one interviewee explained, 'I have worked with incredible individuals who have the ability to see opportunities to seize opportunities… sell them to others'. Gaining knowledge was part of the route to empowerment, and interviewees emphasised that process knowledge and two-way learning were key. Getting initiatives off the ground needed local knowledge, for instance about networks, localities and who needed to be involved.

Empowerment meant that experts and professionals were learning with the lay knowledge of lived experience. Yet, local knowledge of engagement processes and the development of that type of knowledge were also evaluated and found to fuel learning. In interviews people described how lay knowledge and procedural knowledge needed to be fed back to services, for instance as people gained experience of processes, they might then decide that their approach to matters should change. This was seen as an iterative process to constantly feedback what works, and matters more for this dimension of engagement.

> we have a team of street connectors led by a member of staff who basically their job is to go and knock doors, talk to people, ask people what they care about, ask people what they're passionate about, help people think about what skills they've got and help people connect those together with other people.

While these processes of learning could boost community voice, this would take a good deal of new resourcing and rely on personal commitment, interpersonal skills and emotional energy. The biggest support for people to become engaged in learning processes was personal relationships. Without precluding the possibility of empowering digital and online means of exchange, those were simply not found to be useful

in the CRs' interviews. For instance, one interviewee explained, 'We all attempted to fill in the Council's online housing application form. The whole group attempted this, and nobody managed to complete the process – including some of the people who know their stuff'. Other typical comments included, 'for this project to be successful, I had to put a lot of time and effort into building relationships' and 'welcome and hospitality are really, really important parts of that process'. These face-to-face interactions underpinned learning in these cases and demonstrated legitimacy of voice.

The community research lessons on the second dimension reflect expectations in the literature of unstructured learning arenas that have inherent procedural challenges (Hurlbert and Gupta, 2015) and strong external structuring forces (Kleinhans, 2017; Nederhand et al., 2016). While the CR data shows how those points mattered in Birmingham, it also highlights ways for strengthening community voice through knowledge building.

Dimension 3: empowerment and context

The context in which empowerment of stakeholders might happen can also be a challenge for community engagement, as discussed in the literature review. In the USE-IT! UK2070 project, socio-economic performance circumstances were important but they were not the only factors that mattered to communities.

Barriers to community engagement were both practical and affective. Feelings of exclusion could arise where new participants noted others' previously existing relationships, which could severely hinder their motivation for engagement. Another relational challenge was a shortage in volunteers and people working to support them. In addition, engagement processes are organic, or occurring naturally, which adds a layer of complexity for organisation of support as they are people-led and thus difficult to control or manage with (e.g.) bureaucratic rules.

The existence of social disadvantage was notable, yet interviewees reported that it could either help or hinder empowerment of stakeholders. Indeed, the attention given to the USE-IT! transect area arose because of the level of disadvantage and led to unlocking resources and interest in engagement. However, there had been a legacy of underinvestment, which also fuelled mistrust in the area.

Dimension 4: influence and processes

Influence, according to the reviewed literature related to a community's ability to enact real change, and related to procedural matters, including those of communicative processes. CR data showed some opportunities for influence that were afforded by involving stakeholder groups in early stages of neighbourhood planning. Participants were shaping processes for small-scale decisions, which enabled a focus on existing

local character and need, i.e. prioritising the most vulnerable communities. This could boost the influence of communities, particularly in engaging people who had no voice within other spheres of policymaking.

Many interviewees expressed frustration with processes of local authorities where their own activities were not respected. It clearly hindered influence when community projects already underway were overlooked or overtaken. For example, one interviewee stated:

> The sequencing should not be what it is a community can do for itself but what is a community already doing? Like leaving them alone. Don't grab hold of it, don't possess it, don't professionalise it, don't do those things. Let the community do the things it cares about together. It's all about a holistic approach.

Many of the concerns voiced by different participants involved lack of communication between different stakeholders particularly those working in local authorities. There were also challenges of bureaucracy and staff churn which created fears that some service providers were relinquishing their responsibilities amidst budgetary cuts to local councils. However, the interviews also show how prioritising work that involves community engagement becomes a burden for many of the stakeholders. For example, council budgetary cuts and lack of capacity were to blame as there was not enough staff to deal with the community organisations. In an interview with a community organisation, they stated, 'There's loads of tiny little bits of work that are started but not finished because something they deem as more important comes along and that just gets left'. Some of these procedural challenges reduced empathy and therefore also opportunities for influence particularly with more vulnerable communities. This sabotages the engagement processes. For example, one community leader explained this challenge like this: 'Trying to get the humanity back into processes is very difficult but that's what it needs'.

As had been noted, the critiques of foundational analytic tools of engagement (Varwell, 2022) note that there are diverse processes where communities can leverage a range of changes. The CR data underscores the complexity of formal and informal processes of change that interact over time within places.

Dimension 5: influence and learning

It was clear from the CR data that certain types of knowledge were privileged in participatory exchanges, and this affected people's chances of having influence and shaping change. Developing knowledge of local economic opportunities was a prerequisite to being part of some of the efforts to shape the future. One interviewee who had steered a successful project put it like this:

> What was most important for me was that the understanding of assets does not increase on the consultant side, or the city side, it increases on the community side and that

the community feels more connected with their local assets, and understand what the economic opportunities are, and really more than just understand, dictate what the local economy is to be about.

Existing literature establishes that certain forms of knowledge can give greater weight to different parties, for instance in regulatory proceedings, (Abbot, 2020; Natarajan et al., 2019). As such, communities' ability to shape change might be hindered when their knowledge was not easily communicated, and in the CR data this was true for complexity of changes desired in relation to poverty, which involved several challenge areas at once. For example, well-being needs to be addressed before economic challenges could be tackled. For instance, one interviewee supporting homeless people explained 'we could do more signposting, more holistic support, networking with people like the Health Exchange… osteopath support for our clients.'

What mattered was not purely what was known, but how issues were 'put on the table' or learned. Typically, the approaches to community engagement that had enabled learning together in Birmingham involved ad hoc learning and a good level of trust. Trust was made possible when stakeholders and community were involved in developing stores of knowledge and this unlocked influence over the content of policies. An interviewee described this as, 'nothing about us, without us, is for us. And that's the ethic behind it', and ways of learning that worked for local people were critical to this. Typically, communities could most easily shape policy when working in a bottom-up way. Yet as demonstrated in the following quote, it was the learning process that created the conditions for influence.

There was real trust and people felt they could be honest, and we heard some very hard, challenging stuff. But it needs to turn everything upside down and do it the other way. It needs to start with what people's experiences actually are and listen to them as individuals and work that way, rather than just sit at the top with the money and think 'well the money's all been cut so this pot can only have this much, and this pot can only have this much' and so on.

Successful experiences demonstrated means to learning that were bespoke in each project, and the legacy of those mattered a good deal for people's prospects of real influence. The loss of stores of knowledge that had been built through trusting relationships over years could be very damaging to people's confidence in their ability to shape the changes. Institutional 'forgetting' could go beyond loss of information to erosion of the capacity for engagement. Systems of learning forged with communities through participatory projects are part of the outcomes of community engagement. Their dissolution would undermine routes to influence through learning within statutory processes. For example, one interviewee reflected that:

> The biggest challenge is people hardly ever talk, apart from stuff like fly tipping, people don't really talk about the council that much anymore, because they go 'well we can't trust them so let's do it', they're in that 'we'll do it' mode.

Dimension 6: influence and context

CR data highlighted the importance of existing institutions. Governance norms that allowed for co-production processes enabled community-based organisations to develop influence. One community organisation member referred to this saying:

> All of the people who took part have changed enormously. The civic leaders who took part – it changed how they work, and they've shared that with colleagues. And our testifying commissioners, all of them being in a position where they could be listened to, has done enormous amounts for people's confidence and people's ability to move forwards.

The embeddedness of those in governance networks could boost the influence of stakeholders. In an interview with a community leader, this was explained as follows:

> It was such a leveller, it really was. You'd just talk about a thing – a memory of school – and suddenly people have something they share. Someone who's come in a really high-end jag [Jaguar car] and is wearing a lovely suit, and someone who's come on the bus and is wearing old clothes and shoes with holes in them, when you open up a conversation suddenly, you're sharing the same story about remembering the milk bottles at school.

In the literature reviewed, the community is rightly positioned as the weaker actor vis-a-vis vested powers that influence planning and are manifest in close relationships between investors and the state. Reflections on the CR data highlight that influence can also be built up through relationships with (and between) community actors. The nature of community relationships is beyond this article, but those that matter (i.e. existing relationships of influence in a context) will deserve attention and can be identified under Dimension 5 of the 9DF.

Dimension 7: inclusion and processes

In the literature, inclusion related strongly (esp. Quick and Feldman, 2011) to the range of stakeholders who can participate and (as with empowerment and influence) the role of process has been given a lot of attention. The CR data showed how this was seen as 'best practice' within grass roots organisations themselves, i.e. they found it beneficial to include maximum diversity of stakeholders. Nonetheless, some people noted the

value of involving diverse community leaders, but this brought further challenges. For example, participants explained that not all civic leaders were ready to commit or able to join their meetings, e.g. they were often very busy.

Some groups catered to vulnerable and marginalised people facing extreme hardship, such as people who were homeless, rough sleeping, as well as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. These groups typically had no sources of funding, shelter or food, and so organisations focused on inclusion for these groups. But they also noted processes for this were particularly challenging and time consuming. Rather than talking about 'hard to reach' groups, the interviewees discussed the high levels of interpersonal capacity (see Dimension 1) required for the processes of engagement for stakeholders who faced cross-cutting challenges, such as female refugees from conservative social groups or drug users who were out of work.

Inclusionary processes needed to allow for other types of interests and vulnerabilities, beyond immediate poverty, and interviewees insisted on the value of intersectional thinking. For example, an interviewee explained: 'One of our testifying commissioners has done a lot of work with the Poverty Premium – Fair by Design work that Barrow Cadbury are doing. One of our guys who was a heroin addict for twenty years has just started a Masters in Goldsmiths, London'. Thus, inclusive processes boosted outcomes and prioritised those who were most at risk of marginalisation.

This dimension related to the distribution of engagement opportunities and the consequent beneficiaries, marginalised groups, and involvement of other types of interests of people within a community. The data shown illustrates that the focus on inclusivity can be linked to processes and their outcomes.

Dimension 8: inclusion and learning

In considering the potential for marginalisation, it has been asked whose knowledge might be included in planning (Natarajan et al., 2018) and everyday urbanism (Beebeejaun, 2018). The issue of gender and its intersections with other social identities was raised in the CR data as a serious concern in relation to the engagement of diverse knowledge. Since the nature of the marginalised groups was also a factor in learning and co-production, this could create particular barriers for them. Exclusion related to specific vulnerabilities or to the interest of potentially marginalised groups, and it was clear that ethnicity was pertinent with immigrant communities, people from different backgrounds, faiths and sexual orientation. Moreover, fears around judgement of social groups in different cultural contexts might be a barrier as this could restrict opportunities to share knowledge or learn together.

For certain people, the types of challenges that they were experiencing necessarily compounded the efforts that were needed to avoid their exclusion from co-productive processes. Homelessness itself is a practical barrier to important areas of knowledge,

e.g. in situations where people need to share information in order to access funding or for organisations to reach people. This is because people find disclosure burdensome either because people wish to avoid revealing information due to the social stigma of their circumstance or they have research fatigue, as this quote illustrates.

> We got a few who said, 'I'm sick of telling my story, it doesn't make any difference'. Some felt that it was an invasion of their privacy. A few didn't like the term 'poverty truth commission' and the stigma of the word poverty. It was not easy.

Language, or the ability to exchange in English, was potentially a barrier. However, the act of learning could also be a point for engagement and even helpful for relationship building of the sort that underpins empowerment (see Dimensions 1, 2 and 3).

> Even things like one lady who comes from Africa comes from a French-speaking country and one of the civil leaders his French has come on leaps and bounds. Her English is good, but every time we did stuff in little groups if he was with her, he would speak to her in French. So even things like that it's lovely. We're all human. I think our societies just stripped that away from us. That we're all the same species.

Dimension 9: inclusion and context

Inclusion of stakeholders is known to be challenging, and specific contextual factors are acknowledged in the literature (Collins and Ison, 2009; Hurlbert and Gupta, 2015; Carver et al., 2001; Smith and Prieto Martín 2020). The CR data showed the relevance of past and current relationships, which relate to local development history and matter greatly to the goal of inclusion.

Organisations represented in the CR data supported the notion that inclusion was key to moving forward in community engagement; however, for them, legacy and continuity was a central problem. In this context, grass roots organisations had become especially worried about projects or funding coming to an end. They said that the key was to create ecosystems that could endure, and this was evidenced by the problems witnessed through the inter-generational history of failure to develop change in this locality. One interviewee articulated this as follows:

> What we are developing here is an ecosystem. We're not in control of it, it grows, and morphs and other things grow and die, and other things grow, and things connect together, and it moves and is fluid and all that kind of stuff – that's how we see community life developing.

In the current UK context, where local authority budgets cuts are coupled with rising inflation (CNN, 2023), the growing burden on service provision will de facto be most acute in places such as the transect area serving high levels of vulnerable

communities. Interviewees noted that a lack of robust funding for services hinders inclusion, but also considered the contextual backdrop of both local development and engagement to be critical. Reiterating stories about places and what may have helped or hindered inclusion historically was useful if the lessons from past experiences could be remembered during times of change. A participant explained this, saying:

> All of us have a story. And when you end up in a position, I think one of the things that someone on the council said is you are so involved in your job and all the plates you're juggling in the air that you're so far removed from the actual experience that you need someone to remind you of that because you've forgotten the story.

Finally, the history of civil society and relationships between local organisations (including NGOs and local authorities) was an important part of the context for engagement because the legacy of what had gone before could create barriers for grass root groups working to include marginalised people. Some bodies found it hard to approach key individuals who have been involved with other organisations. Part of this was participation fatigue, when asked to retell stories multiple times. It was particularly noted in 'left-behind places' (Pike et al., 2023) which have been historically marginalised and whose residents' agency had been undermined. People could be apprehensive of interventions where local authorities were involved, as one interviewee explained:

> It's the local authority, who see you as a machine that they need to pull levers with and do something to fix and we see it very differently. That culture clash I think is probably the biggest obstacle. Occasionally you get a council officer who does see it differently, - who goes 'its brilliant you guys do that, how can I help?

Overall, there was a strong message of how to promote success. In contexts where communities have a strong sense of ownership of projects it is more possible to pursue engagement in co-production of plans. This was discussed by the leader of a community organisation with the example of facilities being designed and negotiated with young people as a stakeholder group: 'the difference is the council could have done that but young people would have vandalised that in thirty seconds flat. We did it with young people and nobody has touched it.'

A nine-dimensional framework

This article explored core concepts of community engagement from participatory planning literature using data collected and co-produced by USE-IT! CRs. The work is guided by a well-founded critique of tools for analysing engagement, as well as the need for acknowledgement of situatedness and a way to engage the community-oriented perspective. To recap very briefly, the literature showed expectations for

Processes shape knowledge-power dynamics within learning

		Process	Learning	Context
PROCESSES AIM TO BUILD	EMPOWERMENT	1	2	3
	INFLUENCE	4	5	6
	INCLUSION	7	8	9

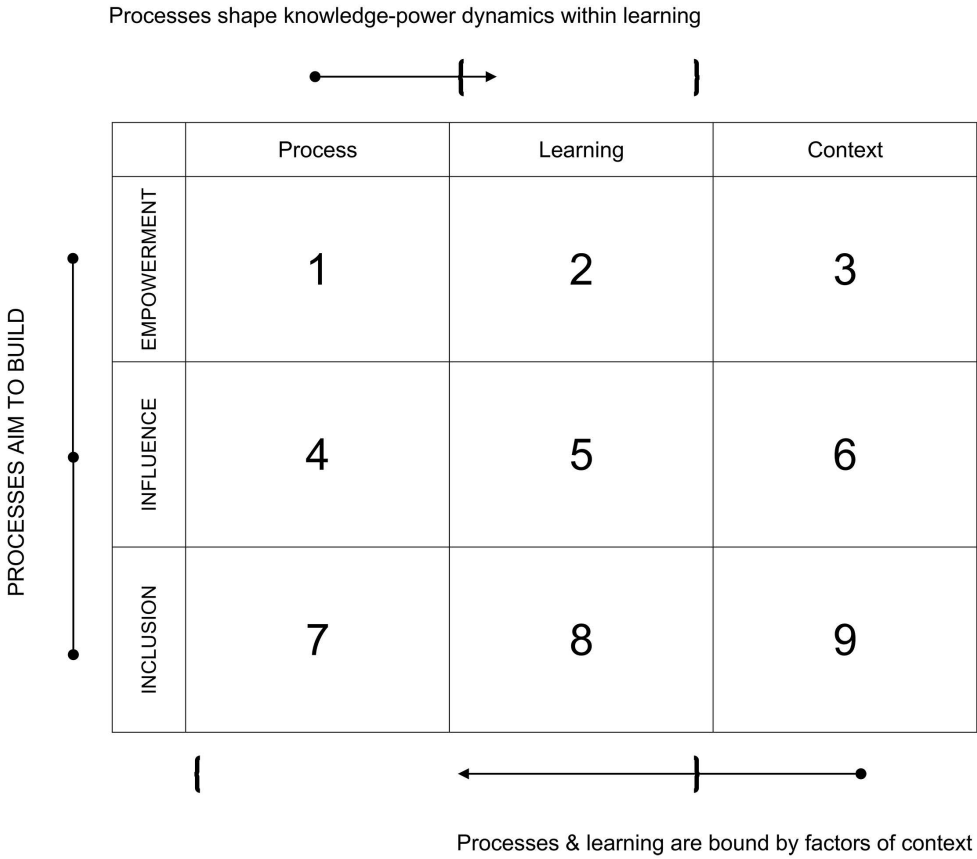Processes & learning are bound by factors of context

Figure 3 Dynamic situated interactions

empowerment to arise from relational connections and legitimacy of voice, and for influence and inclusion to be taken as separate goals. However, engagement exercises are diverse and challenging. There are serious concerns about misuses of power, as well as communicative and institutional barriers to engagement compounded by material and cultural challenges for communities. The analysis of CR data further demonstrated the importance of context and its effects on the processes of community engagement and associated learning. The 'lived experiences' offered evidenced how the attainment of empowerment, influence and inclusion will be shaped by processes, learning and contexts for engagement. In conclusion, community engagement needs to be articulated for processes, learning and contexts across empowerment, learning and inclusion. When brought together they offer a new, more 'co-production relevant'

route to the evaluation of community engagement. We now turn to synthesise lessons from the analysis of the dimensions and provide insights into their dynamic interactions (Figure 3) within the consequent nine-dimensional framework (9DF).

Distinctive lessons were noted for each of the three core concepts of community engagement. In the literature, empowerment involved procedural, epistemic and contextual capacities for engagement in collective decision-making. In the CR data, such matters underpinned interpretations of procedural justice, which echoes socio-legal arguments about the importance of localised viewpoints (Abbot, 2020). Influence is connected to enacting change and time is foregrounded. While the literature focused on institutional critiques, the CR data had a range of temporal issues related to the processes, knowledge and context of community engagement, which aligns with concerns on the nature of change (e.g. Mace and Tewdwr-Jones, 2019). In the evaluation, inclusion corresponds to Quick and Feldman (2011) and others focused on challenging existing marginalities and levels of trust (esp. Boyle and Michell, 2020). The CR data also showed the potential impacts of poor or absent social relations and associated exclusions manifest within procedural, learning and contextual aspects. This suggests that 'tailoring' engagement activities will be critical for inclusion dimensions. Together the findings prove that engagement happens across the nine dimensions and can be promoted with community-oriented thinking.

Starting with empowerment, common humanity and belief in equality were key. Capacities for engagement and key resources needed were often not acknowledged, and when they were not recognised or accounted for they could be more at risk. In Dimension 1 – empowerment and processes – greater investments and efforts were required for certain tasks. Notably, animating interactions helped surmount barriers such as those caused by sensitivities associated with disadvantage and poverty, but extra time was needed, and this type of work depended on emotional energies, relationships and personal resources. As such, making processes visible in places of disadvantage was critical and reinforced belief in, and thus achievement of empowerment. In Dimension 2 – empowerment and learning – people were entering a forum for learning with a wide diversity of knowledge. In those spaces, everyone needed to interact with forms of knowledge they were less familiar with; for professionals this was primarily the knowledge from lived experience of places and for communities it was often about procedural knowledge. Intermediaries with special abilities could look out for opportunities for exchange with 'others' and promote exchange around community knowledge. Thus, a shared understanding that everyone would be expected to contribute and learn, and that exchanges were reciprocal or focused on knowledge acquisition from those in other fields could also help underpin empowerment. Positive moments often rested on the recognition that lived experience was as valuable as professional learning, but learning needed to be continual not something to 'tick off a list'. In Dimension 3 – empowerment and context – both present

experiences of inequality and histories of development in a locality are critical to engagement. Unfortunately, a common example was past development and narratives about 'left-behind' places fuelling distrust in processes and dampening enthusiasm for engagement. But learning about the past was useful to confidence in engagement, providing a background for newcomers such as new residents, researchers or planners.

Within the 9DF, influence centres on making a change to development or plans for a place via community engagement. Given the wealth of practices and diversity of techniques of engagement, the orthodoxy of early involvement might not always be applicable but developing trusting relationships for the long term certainly is. In Dimension 4 – influence and processes – perceptions mattered greatly, and the sense of 'never getting to have a say' was reinforced by jargon and strictures around processes were experienced as lack of empathy. Particularly decision-making sequencing and lack of time on the part of under-resourced professionals undermined engagement and caused burnout on the part of key actors. Turning to Dimension 5 – influence and learning – although co-production of meaningful change may initially appear out of reach, it is by no means impossible. Learning with communities' local knowledge is key and can produce a virtuous circle, since witnessing influence builds confidence to engage with a generally daunting knowledge-power nexus. A serious risk remains around preserving lessons, which are often forgotten through 'organisational churn'. For Dimension 6 – influence and context – governance norms were important. Community engagement could be a means for reshaping contexts, and the perception that a problem is shared was critical to galvanising people into making changes.

Lastly, we turn to inclusion, which centres on the multiplicity of impacts on communities, the nature of existing marginalisation, and how inequality is manifest with engagement. What mattered in terms of Dimension 7 – inclusion and processes – was the mode of engagement being tailored to the communities and a special focus on those who were most at risk of exclusion. This inevitably requires intensive, time-consuming efforts as new connections would likely be needed for engagement of the most marginalised or disadvantaged. For Dimension 8 – inclusion and learning – a key finding was that no single community group would have the store of knowledge. Thus, there should be a continual learning process that is sensitive to local knowledge and the range of different types of knowledge in play, which was anticipated by existing literature (e.g. Natarajan, 2017). In addition, identities were important and could affect learning because people will avoid stigmatising situations (e.g. being labelled 'homeless' or 'from a poor area'). And in the last Dimension 9 – inclusion and context – there is an overarching need to recognise the live and evolving nature of places, the need for continuing relationships and legacies of engagement (whether positive or negative). Therefore, in addition to community involvement, historic effects of engagement in places will have an impact on the possibility of future engagement results.

To conclude, we propose that community engagement can be better understood

by articulating empowerment, influence and inclusion into their procedural, learning and contextual elements. Gains can be made in each of the nine dimensions which arise in such a framework. While processes are clearly important, on their own they cannot explain the dynamics. They should be seen in interaction with learning and context (Figure 3). For this reason, we have argued that it is more fruitful to consider all nine dimensions of community engagement together. In reflecting on CR data that represented the lived experience of diverse moments and modes of engagement, we both illustrated this point and demonstrated the application of the community-oriented lens in the context of co-production.

We perceived a gap in the array of existing tools to evaluate participatory planning, which did not sufficiently acknowledge our account for the value of lay and local knowledges and the importance of inequalities in existing resources and capabilities. We propose a framework arising from our encounters with CRs in England and the UK2070 Commission work, which enables greater appreciation of the role of learning and how knowledge connects to the processes of outreach and co-production. Perhaps most innovatively, it enables evaluations to account for contextual issues in the outcomes from moments of community engagement. The CR data examined here showed how the capacity for growing place-based knowledge and fomenting trusting relations within engagement processes mattered greatly. We hope that the nine-dimensional framework of community engagement (or 9DF) can be used co-productively, not only to evaluate the particularities of engagement programmes but also to build up scholarship in an open manner.

Acknowledgement

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