

Pathways through participation



Background

It is a joint research project being led by NCVO in partnership with the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) and Involve. Funded by the Big Lottery Fund through its Research programme, the project started in April 2009 and will last 2.5 years.

Aims and objectives

The project aims to explore how and why people get involved and stay involved in different forms of participation over the course of their lives. It looks at participation in a very broad sense and considers the act of taking part in a wide range of social or civic activities, including:

- fundraising
- boycotting a product
- voting
- being a school governor
- campaigning
- volunteering for a charity
- signing a petition
- helping out in a local fete
- responding to a local council consultation
- joining a community group

The project seeks to address a gap in knowledge on how people's motivations and patterns of participation emerge and develop over time. Through the improved understanding of the reasons for, and the contexts of participation, the project also aims to influence policy and practice, and encourage the development of opportunities for participation that are better suited to people's needs and aspirations.

It focuses on the following questions:

- How and why does participation begin and continue?
- Can trends and patterns of participation be identified over time?
- What connections, if any, are there between participation in different forms of participation and what triggers movement between them?
- How can policy-makers and practitioners enable and encourage different individuals and communities to participate?



Approach and methods

This is a qualitative research project, which will explore participation in three contrasting case studies areas: Leeds (inner city), Enfield (suburban) and Suffolk (rural). It involves a number of key stages:

Literature review

The literature review brings together different bodies of literature on participation and has helped us develop a framework for participation that will inform the fieldwork and contribute to a broader understanding of the multiple dimensions of participation. In order to produce this framework, the review has looked at: what the drivers of participation are; how participation is conceptualised; what the activities and spaces of participation are; who participates and who does not; and how individuals participate and why.

Selection of areas

The selection of the three study areas has been based upon a number of criteria including the demographic make-up of the area, and the extent and nature of the local voluntary and community sector and the political control of the local authority. A key criteria for selecting the areas was the willingness of major stakeholders to engage with the project.

Local area profiling

Observation of local activities, background statistical analysis and informal interviews with a wide range of individuals and organisations is being carried out in order to identify people who are willing to take part in the research and who provide a range of participatory experiences (including non-participation).

Activity mapping sessions

A series of local activity mapping sessions will be held in each of the three case study areas to identify the range of opportunities, sites and activities for engagement in each area. Mapping is an interactive approach to data collection that draws on the local knowledge, understanding and interpretation of the research participants.

In-depth interviewing

In-depth interviews will be conducted with individuals identified in the previous two stages. The aim of the interviews is to draw out personal histories and pathways of participation (or non-participation). To best capture people's experiences we are considering the use of participatory research methods including photo elicitation and 'timelines'.

Participatory workshops

The workshops aim to test and validate initial research findings from the interview phases, and to develop emerging recommendations. They will explore what these findings mean in practice for voluntary and community organisations, public service providers and policy-makers, and how they translate into action.

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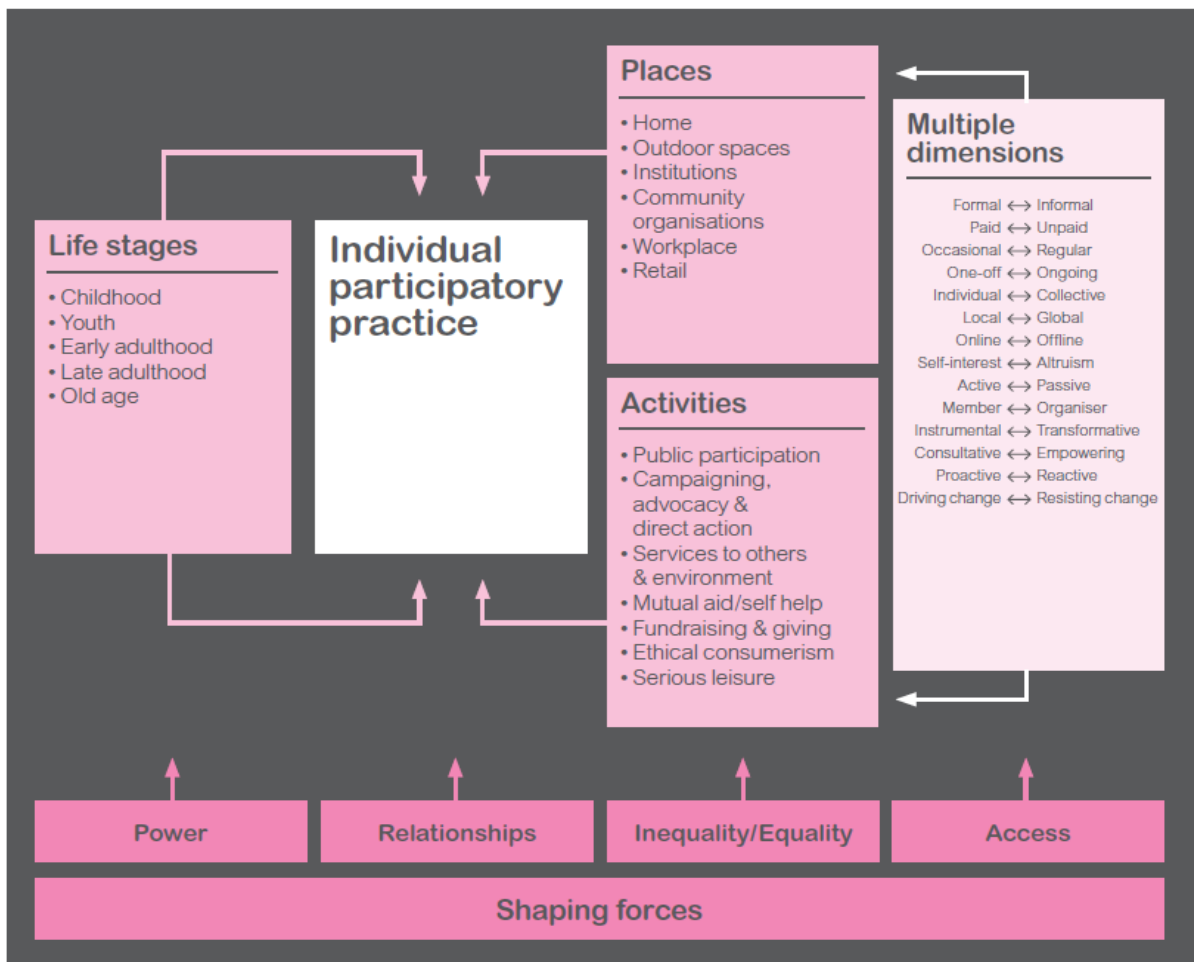


Participation framework

The conclusions from the literature review have shaped the development of the project's framework for participation, which reflects our understanding of what participation is.

It focuses on the key experiential elements of participation in practice: the actors; the activities; the places in which activities occur; and the time over which they develop. The framework then focuses on some of the key dimensions of participation: the intensity of engagement, for example, or whether it is an individual or collective activity. Finally, it highlights some of the key shaping forces, influencing people's pathways through participation.

This framework will inform our fieldwork and will be further developed and tested in the subsequent stages of the project.



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Want to know more

For more information and to subscribe to our newsletter, please visit our website:

<http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/>

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