

Local community engagement

Fact and fiction?

Kath Hulse and Wendy Stone

AHURI Swinburne-Monash Research Centre

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Outline

- What is community engagement?
- What is it intended to achieve?
- Under what circumstances do people ‘engage’ within local communities?
- Some implications for policy and practice

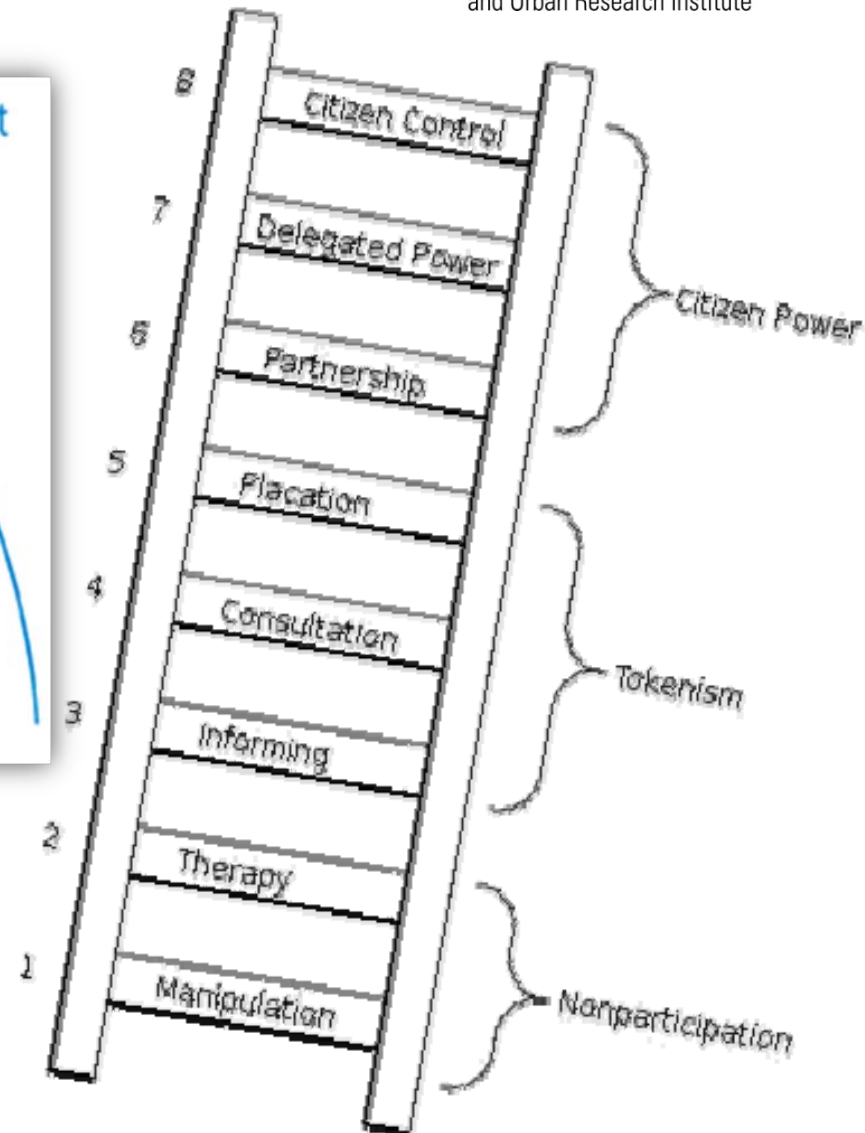
1. What is community engagement?

- No one agreed definition
- Refers to types of relations between citizens and governments
- Can occur at different spatial levels, including the local level
- Typically through organisations/institutions
- Different types and levels of engagement (models vary)

Some models of community engagement



Empower
Collaborate
Involve
Consult
Inform



What ideas lie behind community engagement?

- 'Third Way' ideas
- From government to governance
- Incorporates a number of different themes
 - e.g.
 - active citizenship
 - community strengthening
 - partnerships
 - social capital

2. Why do governments hope to achieve?

- Complex and interconnected problems ('wicked')
- Solutions require collaboration across interest areas
- Can mediate local level conflict
- Support for government policies/programs
- Better outcomes 'on the ground'

However.....

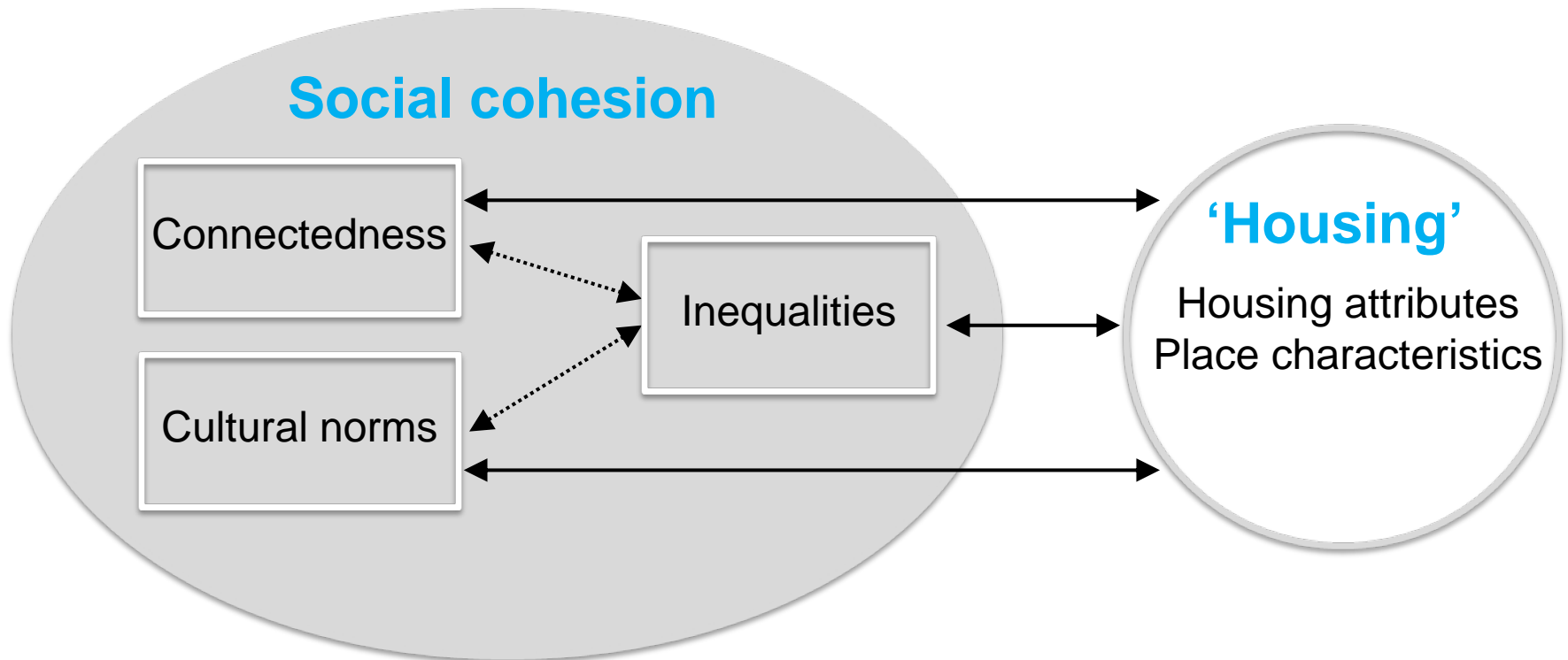
- Not a 'blank sheet' –types of engagement before and after community engagement projects
- Local communities affected by a range of government policies and programs and markets
- Different spatial scales:
 - 'Home area' (identity, belonging)
 - Locality (planning, services, housing markets)
 - Urban district (employment and social networks) (Kearns and Parkinson 2001)
- Engagement as citizens or as consumers/clients

3. Under what circumstances do people engage within neighbourhoods

Most work on disadvantaged neighbourhoods

- Variable/high levels of social connectedness within neighbourhoods - family, friends and neighbours ('bonding social capital')
- Low levels of connection across neighbourhoods ('bridging social capital')
- Low levels of connection to economic and social institutions ('linking social capital')

AHURI research project on housing and social cohesion



Data and method

- Exploratory statistical approach
- 2 data sets used:
 - HILDA Wave 4 (N=10,565)
 - AIFS Social Capital Survey (N=1,506)
- Regression models predicting 5 key indicators of social connectedness:
 - 'Perceived social support' (HILDA)
 - 'Voluntary work'; 'Civic action' (AIFS)
 - 'Perceived neighbourhood interaction'; 'Feel part of community' (HILDA)

Key findings 1



There is a direct relationship between housing and social connectedness

This relationship is stronger for some aspects of social connectedness and some housing/place attributes than others

In particular

- Aspects of housing most conducive to social connectedness include: security of tenure, especially home ownership; stability; living in ‘untroubled’ neighbourhoods & rural areas
- Aspects of social connectedness most likely to be influenced by housing policy and assistance include: support networks; neighbourhood ties
- Aspects of social connectedness least likely to be influenced by housing policy and assistance include: ‘vertical relationships’ such as volunteering and civic action

Key finding 2

There is also a direct relationship between inequalities and social connectedness

- These relationships sometimes more powerful than the housing-connectedness relationship
- Most influential aspects of inequality on social connectedness include: financial hardship and poor health (education has mixed results)
- Hence in some cases housing/place attributes may be considered as proxy for inequalities

Qualified conclusions from exploratory research

- Housing policy aimed at ‘strengthening communities’ is on right track
- However housing still has a critical role to play in reducing household inequalities, which can in turn influence other aspects of socially cohesive communities

4. Implications for housing policy and practice

- Importance of housing in improving health (and income) associated with higher levels of social connectedness
- Gender and household type important: families with children have higher levels of social connectedness
- Satisfaction with housing itself is critical

4. Implications for housing policy and practice

Cont...

- Renting negatively associated with most indicators of social connectedness, including attachment and belonging
- Place matters: living in disadvantaged areas relates negatively with various indicators of social connectedness (except neighbourhood interaction)
- Security and stability matters: decreasing non-chosen mobility resulting from policies such as renewal schemes

Publications to date



Hulse, K. and Stone, W. (2006) Housing, housing assistance and social cohesion, AHURI Positioning Paper No 91, AHURI, Melbourne

Stone, W. and Hulse, K. (2007) Housing and social cohesion: an empirical exploration, AHURI Final Report No 100, AHURI, Melbourne

Hulse, K. and Stone, W. (2007) Social cohesion, social capital and social exclusion, A cross cultural comparison, Policy Studies 28 (2), pp 109-128

Contact: khulse@swin.edu.au

(03) 9214 5321