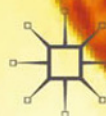Edited by
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# COMMUNITY RESEARCH for COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community Research for Community Development

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# Community Research for Community Development

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*To the memory of Jenny Harris, inspirational theatre maker and dynamic community activist, who sadly died before the chapter that she planned to co-author with Chrissie Tiller was finished; and to all those who are promoting community research and community development for social justice in Britain and beyond*

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# Acknowledgements

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# Part I

# Promoting Active Citizenship: Learning from Experiences and Third Sector Evaluation

# 1
# Community Development, Community Organising and Third Sector–University Research Partnerships

*Marjorie Mayo, Zoraida Mendiwelso-Bendek and Carol Packham*

## The aims of this book

This book sets out to explore the contributions that research can provide, supporting Third Sector organisations concerned with community development.

Whilst policy makers have been highlighting the opportunities for civil society, in the current policy context, critics have been pointing to the extent of the challenges. How can research – and research-based evidence – contribute to the development of strategic responses to these potential opportunities and only too present challenges?

Active citizenship, community organising and community development have emerged as topical, if highly controversial, policy concerns over the past decade or so. The terminology may have been contested and varied, but common strands can be identified, despite some shifts of emphasis and approach, over time. Community participation and empowerment featured prominently within New Labour's policy agendas, for instance. And community organising and community empowerment have featured in the policy statements of the Coalition government, since its formation in 2010. Drawing upon the learning approaches developed by both Paulo Freire (Freire, 1972) and Saul Alinsky (Alinsky, 1971, 1979), the programme, to train community organisers as part of the Big Society agenda, aims to provide the means for people – 'above all those who are most excluded from the inner circles of power and privilege – to combine and be counted, to discover

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their ability to identify those changes which will mean most to them and, on their own terms, take action to tackle vested interests' (Locality, 2010: 5).

This emphasis upon devolving power and promoting people's own self-activity, however, has not been without its critics. As Bauman amongst others has argued, neoliberal strategies have aimed to promote efficiency and choice by reducing the role of the state whilst expanding the roles of private and other non-statutory service providers (with the voluntary and community sectors as the acceptable faces of policies that have actually been more concerned with increasing marketisation). But the results have been proving problematic, according to the critics, with increasing pressures on civil society organisations, struggling to cope with the consequences. Despite the rhetoric of choice and empowerment, communities, and individuals within communities, are actually being expected to seek individual 'biographical solutions to systemic contradictions' (Bauman, 2011: 53). In the view of the New Economics Foundation (NEF), for example, '[t]he "Big Society" idea goes hand in hand with deep cuts in public spending' and goes on to argue that these cuts 'are only feasible alongside a strategy for shifting responsibility away from the state – to individuals, small groups, charities, philanthropists, local enterprise and big business'. Civil society will be left, NEF concludes, 'to fill the gaps left by public services, providing support to increasing numbers of poor, jobless, insecure and unsupported individuals' (NEF, 2012).

The likely future success or otherwise of Big Society initiatives is beyond the remit of this particular book. The point to emphasise here is simply that there are major challenges for civil society in the current context, whatever the policy makers suggest to the contrary, in terms of the potential opportunities to be grasped. In this increasingly marketised policy framework, organisations concerned with community development need to be more effective than ever, bidding for resources and tendering for contracts, but without losing sight of their distinctive values and missions in the process.

So how can research provide support to organisations facing these challenges? This collection explores these issues, in the context of programmes to strengthen Third Sector organisations' own capacities to undertake research and evaluation for themselves. What lessons can be drawn from such programmes? How might research contribute to voluntary and community sector organisations and groups, in their efforts to survive and to develop strategically for the future? And how might this all strengthen community development, social solidarity, community

cohesion and active citizenship more generally? As Third Sector organisations face increasing pressures to meet social needs – with decreasing public resources – in the coming period, the ability to provide research-based evidence to demonstrate the value of their outcomes for potential funders can be expected to become ever more significant. And so can the pressures to make the most effective use of resources, thinking strategically and building alliances with organisations with similar values, working towards transformative goals for the longer term.

This book provides a series of critical reflections on the lessons to be learned from varying initiatives – identifying examples of promising practices; building the Third Sector's research capacity; promoting, exploring and developing participatory approaches to research and developing partnerships between Third Sector organisations and researchers for the future. There are lessons to be shared here, both from British experiences and beyond, reflecting upon international experiences of university–community research partnerships, as the final chapter considers, for comparison.

The book concludes by identifying promising practices for the future with implications for policy and practice as well as implications for strengthening Third Sector research as part of the processes of community development for the future.

## The outline of this chapter, more specifically

This first chapter situates the book in the context of contemporary debates on community development. This includes reflections on the influence of the writings of Paul Freire and Saul Alinsky, who have both been cited as influences on policies to promote active citizenship and community organising (under previous governments as well as under the Coalition government). Paulo Freire's work has particular relevance here as a key influence, in addition, on the development of participatory approaches to research.

This introductory section provides the background for a summary discussion of public policies towards civil society and the role of the Third Sector, over the past decade or so, focusing upon policies to promote active citizenship, community participation, social cohesion and social solidarity. This sets the context within which to introduce the Third Sector Research Capacity Building Programme, launched by the New Labour government via the Economic and Social Research Council with support from the Cabinet Office – Office for Civil Society and the Barrow Cadbury Trust in 2008. This was the programme that supported

the research projects that provide much of the evidence, which is to be considered in subsequent chapters.

## Contemporary debates

The discussion of the varying ways in which the writings of Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky have been interpreted/misinterpreted needs to be set in the context of contemporary debates as these have been related to community development more generally. Community development has been and continues to be a contested field, characterised by varying definitions and competing theoretical perspectives, aims and objectives (Mayo, 2008). The term 'community' has been problematic enough to define, and so has the associated term 'community development'. Similar debates have been taking place when it comes to considering related terms such as 'community participation' (Hickey and Mohan, 2004), 'community empowerment' and 'community cohesion' (Ratcliffe and Newman, 2011) along with 'community education' to promote learning for 'active citizenship' (Mayo and Annette, 2010). These are terms that have been used in differing ways, covering varieties of underlying meanings, aims and objectives.

As Craig and others have argued, community development has 'always had an ambiguous nature' (Craig *et al.*, 2011: 7). It has been described as a broad church, from state-sponsored schemes to small-scale, poorly resourced, but independent community action. Community development, the authors continued, was 'not only a practice, involving skills, a knowledge base and a strong value base. It is also a goal, self-evidently the development of communities, in the context of social justice agendas, notwithstanding the different interests at work in defining what this is all about and why it matters' (Craig *et al.*, 2011: 7) – including the differing interests at work, defining the concept of social justice itself (Craig *et al.*, 2008).

Without going into detail here, the key points to emphasise from these varying debates are as follows. Community development has been promoted by governments, top-down, to manage social change without fundamentally disturbing the interests of the powerful. And it has been promoted top-down to facilitate self-help in order to legitimise reductions in service provision, shifting responsibilities from the public sector to the voluntary and community sectors, whilst opening up new spaces for the private market.

Alternatively, however, community development and community action initiatives have also been linked with progressive agendas to meet

social needs, promoting co-operation, equalities and social and environmental justice from the bottom-up. And finally, as Taylor has also argued, community development may be promoted in ways that move beyond the 'top-down'/'bottom-up' dichotomy, working both sides of the equation. The underlying aim may be to strengthen democratic processes and promote social justice agendas, enabling the voices of the most disadvantaged to be heard more effectively, whilst setting out to transform rather than to bypass or even undermine the structures of public service provision (Taylor, 2011).

There are parallels with discussions on community participation, community engagement and active citizenship. Have programmes been developed top-down, in the context of neoliberal agendas to manage social change more effectively, facilitating co-operation with the reduction of public service provision in times of increasing social needs? Have initiatives to promote active citizenship been developed from alternative perspectives such as the perspectives of libertarians, suspicious of the state and so concerned to strengthen the role of civil society in contrast? Or have programmes been developed with the aim of working both sides of the equation to build 'a more active and engaged civil society and a more responsive and effective state that can deliver needed public services' (Gaventa, 2004: 270)? As subsequent chapters demonstrate, these debates have particular relevance in the current policy context.

## Differing interpretations of the specific influences of the writings of Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky

Given the contested meanings associated with these slippery concepts, it is perhaps unsurprising that Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky, two key influences on community development, community education and community organising, have both been claimed as authoritative influences by policy makers from a range of different perspectives. In summary, Paulo Freire's approach to community education and experiential learning aimed to enable oppressed people to develop a critical understanding of their situation, questioning previously accepted ideas in order to develop strategies for social change, actively engaging with others, collectively, to transform oppressive social relationships.

The learning was to be based upon processes of problem-posing and dialogue, rather than treating people like empty vessels, waiting to have information and ideas poured into them. Once people had developed a critical understanding of their situation, through these processes of

problem-posing and dialogue, Freire argued, they would be in a position to develop strategies for social transformation (Freire, 1972). This was about making change possible.

As Ledwith and Springett, amongst others, have demonstrated, when Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was first published in English in 1972, it had an immediate impact on community development, as well as impacting upon related areas such as adult community education, adult literacy and popular health campaigns (Ledwith and Springett, 2010). His thinking was, in addition, influential in the development of participatory action research, starting from people's existing knowledge and concerns and working with them collaboratively, to develop the knowledge and critical understanding – knowledge as power for transformative action.

Freire has had his critics, from a range of perspectives, including Marxists critical of his emphasis upon changing people's consciousness rather than emphasising the need for structural change (Coben, 1995; Holst, 2002). Feminists have also been critical of the lack of gender analysis, at least in his early writings, as he himself recognised in his later writings (Freire and Shor, 1987). But despite such criticisms, Freire's ideas have been appropriated (and sometimes misappropriated) very widely, with policy makers from very varying perspectives claiming to be basing their programmes on Freirian approaches, as the following section illustrates.

There are parallels here with the claims to be made about the Freirian basis for a range of participatory action research initiatives. Participatory Action Research has been developed as a set of tools, enabling people to be actively involved in generating knowledge about their own conditions and how these can best be transformed (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991). Over the past quarter century or more, participatory research methods have been applied in Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as in the Global North (Tandon, 2005). Through the application of innovative methods, including the use of popular theatre (Boal, 1979), experts' monopoly of knowledge has been challenged, and alternative approaches to research have been developed. Subsequent chapters provide contemporary illustrations of the potential value of research in terms of producing knowledge and critical understanding underpinning strategies for community development. But participatory approaches to research have also been the subject of critical debate just as they have also been appropriated and misapplied, participatory research being easier said, perhaps, than done (Brock and Pettit, 2007; Newman, 2008). As subsequent chapters also illustrate, researchers committed to

participatory approaches need to manage the tensions inherent in their roles, as critical friends.

Meanwhile there are, in addition, parallels to be drawn with the work of Saul Alinsky, who has also been claimed as a key influence by policy makers and practitioners, from a variety of perspectives. Like community development approaches (Craig *et al.*, 2008) and Freirian approaches more generally (Coben, 1995; Holst, 2002), Alinsky-based approaches to community organising have been characterised as inherently controversial. In brief, Alinsky's pragmatic style of organising, as he himself developed it – often involving the imaginative use of conflict or the threat of conflict – focused upon mobilising people-power. His *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* (Alinsky, 1971) sets this all out explicitly from the start. The rules were intended to provide the basis 'for a pragmatic attack' (Alinsky, 1971: xviii), offering a practical guide to the skills required in the here and now for building effective organisations and alliances.

Alinsky's approach has been taken up in a number of ways in recent times, including through London Citizens' Living Wage campaigns, for example. But Alinsky's style of organising has also been the subject of some criticism. In particular, it has been suggested that Alinsky was a populist, distrustful of political ideologies, 'with relatively little to say about what he was "for" on specific issues such as equality and human rights' (Eversley, 2009). Other critics have raised similar questions about how radical Alinsky's approach to community organising has actually been, arguing that it has been characterised by an 'absence of analysis of how inequality is reproduced and maintained through the existing economic and social structures and processes' (Mills and Robson, 2010: 13).

Although there are similarities between them, there are also significant differences between Freirian-based models and Alinsky-based models (although both approaches have been interpreted in varying ways in practice, differences that are beyond the scope of this chapter to explore in further detail). The analysis of the underlying causes of social problems and social injustices was central to Freire's approach – education as the basis for long-term strategies for social justice. Alinsky's approach, in contrast, has been perceived as being more centrally concerned with organising to attain achievable targets in the here and now. He emphasised the importance of people's self-organisation to achieve this. And he was generally sceptical about the role of the state, refusing to have any part in public programmes such as the US 'War on Poverty' (although he was less than entirely consistent on this, as it turned out in practice).

This issue of the role of the state – and anti-statism – would seem to have particular relevance in view of the fundamental challenges posed by the Coalition government. At a time when inequalities have been rising whilst poverty in Britain is predicted to rise, and public spending to be cut back by 2013 to a lower proportion of GDP than that in the United States (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011), anti-statism risks reinforcing the view that the responsibility for responding to increasing social needs and widening social inequalities should lie with civil society in general, and with active citizens more specifically. There are issues here for further research, as the following section on the policy context illustrates in more detail.

## Policy contexts

Before moving on to outline the Third Sector Research Capacity Building Programme that underpinned the research that provides the basis for the chapters that follow, the underlying policy contexts need outlining more generally. Previous governments have launched programmes to intervene in communities for a variety of purposes (Taylor, 2011). These have included efforts to reduce public expenditure and increase civic involvement to address a range of social, economic and political challenges, such as crime, sustainable development and the provision of care. There have been programmes to increase volunteering – for example, programmes to engage communities in service planning and service delivery and programmes to encourage Third Sector organisations to deliver public services themselves.

These varying approaches to public policy in the community can be traced back over the past decade or more. Under New Labour governments, for example, there were initiatives to draw the voluntary and community sectors into an expanded role in the delivery of public services. There were, in parallel, capacity building programmes such as 'ChangeUp' and 'Futurebuilders' to strengthen the voluntary and community sectors' capacities to secure contracts to deliver public services. In this way, governments aimed to promote broader public service modernisation agendas, promoting competition and choice to provide services more cost effectively.

Public service modernisation agendas have been highly contentious of course (Clarke *et al.*, 2000, 2006; Page, 2007; Powell, 2008). Rather than attempting to provide a summary of the debates that have surrounded these issues, the point to emphasise here is simply this. Public service modernisation agendas have posed major challenges for the voluntary

and community sector, just as they have posed major challenges for the public sector more generally. Instead of receiving grants based upon relationships of trust with funders, Third Sector organisations have had to compete for resources, demonstrating their effectiveness, providing outputs to meet specific (often centrally determined) targets. Private sector structures of management have been imported in many cases, as part of strategies to respond to the challenges of the target cultures, including the challenges involved in producing appropriate evidence for the purposes of accountability. As subsequent chapters argue, there have been significant implications in terms of the need to strengthen evaluation processes in Third Sector organisations, as a result.

Critics have argued that service delivery became increasingly prominent at the expense of the Third Sector's other roles, stimulating innovation and supporting advocacy for social change. But service delivery did not entirely dominate the policy agenda. There were also New Labour government interventions that focused more widely, including interventions to promote community engagement in public and social policy. And there were initiatives to foster social cohesion, civil renewal and active citizenship (Harris and Schlappa, 2007) initiatives with particular relevance for the issues that are to be explored in subsequent chapters.

There were common policy threads between these latter types of interventions although there were differences of emphasis too, with shifts of focus, even within particular programmes over time. Programmes to promote active citizenship began with an emphasis on active citizenship as participation and democratic engagement in the promotion of equalities, including space for campaigning on social justice issues, for example. This was a focus that shifted over time, moving towards a narrower emphasis upon citizen involvement in formal structures of governance – for example, becoming a school governor or training to become a magistrate. In addition to this, there was increasing emphasis upon the promotion of volunteering (Mayo *et al.*, 2012) with less emphasis upon advocacy and campaigning, as a result. As it has already been suggested, active citizenship has been a contested term, susceptible to differing interpretations by policy makers and by practitioners, in varying contexts, as subsequent chapters consider in more detail.

## Active learning for active citizenship

Previous governments began to develop policies to promote active citizenship by launching programmes of citizenship education in schools

and colleges. These were then followed up with programmes to engage adults in communities too. It was these community-based learning programmes that have the most direct relevance for the concerns of this particular book.

The first of these programmes, 'Active Learning for Active Citizenship' (ALAC), was launched in 2004 by the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett. This was a two-year programme, based initially in the Home Office's Civil Renewal Unit and subsequently moved to the Department for Communities and Local Government. Learning programmes were delivered via Third Sector organisations based in seven regional hubs in South Yorkshire, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, the South West, the East Midlands, London and the Tees Valley. These hubs worked as partnerships between voluntary and community sector organisations and academic institutions that had relevant experience of adult community-based education in their regions. These included Birkbeck, University of London; Fircroft in Birmingham; Manchester Metropolitan University; the University of Lincoln; and Northern College and the Workers Education Association in South Yorkshire.

## The Freirian approach developed through ALAC

ALAC started from the principle that active learning for active citizenship should build upon existing knowledge and experiences of good practice. The background paper set this within an explicitly Freirian approach, aiming to facilitate the processes of learning and reflection, to enable people 'to support each other in identifying the issues that concern us, and develop the confidence and skills to make a difference to the world around us' (Woodward, 2004: 1).

Equalities issues were to be centre stage, together with the principles of valuing diversity, strengthening co-operation, social cohesion and social solidarity in the pursuit of participation for social justice. Most importantly, the learning process itself aimed to be participatory and empowering, starting from people's own perceptions of their issues and their learning priorities, negotiated in dialogue with them, rather than imposed from outside. In summary, then, learner participation was to be central at every stage in the process of

• identifying learning priorities (from people with disabilities, wanting to be able to speak up more effectively, to refugees and asylum seekers wanting to learn about their rights and how to campaign around these);

- developing the learning programme to be directly relevant to learn-
  ers' interests and experiences (delivered in appropriate ways, whether
  via formal courses, one-off workshops or study visits, tailored to take
  account of the needs of those with caring responsibilities);
- delivering programmes with the active involvement of the learn-
  ers, with an emphasis upon the links between knowledge, critical
  understanding and active citizenship in practice; and
- evaluating the programme participatively.

ALAC was externally evaluated by one of the authors of this chapter and
a colleague. This evaluation used a participatory approach that included
participant observation with regular feedback and dialogue. The hubs
were actively involved in the production of the evaluation framework,
working together to decide the research methodologies and indicators
to be used. Learners too were actively involved in the research processes
through a series of workshops to share reflections together across the
seven hubs (Mayo and Rooke, 2006).

In the event, at least amongst the policy makers, there seemed par-
ticular interest in the quantitative outputs – how many people were
volunteering, how many were participating in structures of governance
(as school governors for example) and how many were progressing in
terms of gaining qualifications and improving their employability. The
policy focus had been shifting. But even so, there was still space for
reflections on people's experiences of empowerment more widely (Mayo
and Rooke, 2006). Overall, on the basis of both types of evidence, ALAC
was deemed to have been sufficiently successful to warrant a second,
expanded initiative, the Take Part programme.

## Take Part: Another Freirian programme?

This £8.7-million programme was sponsored by the Department for
Communities and Local Government and ran from 2008 to 2011.
Although the Take Part programme was not a direct successor to ALAC,
it was built around the Take Part Network, which had been formed by
the ALAC hubs themselves to maintain their links and to take forward
the rebranded ALAC approach. So, like its predecessor, the Take Part
programme also acknowledged the influence of Paulo Freire.

Take Part consisted of two components: the 'Pathfinders', which
were to apply the learning from ALAC more widely, and the 'National
Support' programme, which was to engage organisations beyond the
Pathfinders and enable them to run Take Part activities. There were

initially seven 'Pathfinders' (six of them were former ALAC hubs), subsequently increased to 18, bringing in several local authorities as well as Third Sector organisations.

The Pathfinders ran a variety of learning programmes, supporting people and organisations to strengthen their knowledge and skills and gain the confidence to become more involved in structures of governance. They were, in addition, supporting people to progress to various forms of education and training (which included offering accreditation options). The regional Take Part Regional Champions complemented the work of the Pathfinders by facilitating new Take Part activities and promoting the approach more widely. The evaluation report (published shortly after the completion of the Take Part initiative in 2011 (Miller and Hatamian, 2011)) provides a detailed account of the procedures and practices involved, assessing their impact and pointing to the importance of the lessons learned for the Big Society agenda.

As with the ALAC evaluations, the framework for the Take Part evaluation was developed following consultation with the relevant stakeholders. There were focus group discussions and surveys, including research with civic activists and other participants, tracking their progress and views over the lifespan of the Take Part programme. Whilst the emphasis had shifted further over time, there turned out to have been some space still for advocacy and campaigning, for example, around young people's issues. Subsequent studies have been following up past participants, investigating Take Part's impacts more fully over time, as part of the Third Sector Research Capacity Building Programme, launched in 2008, as subsequent chapters consider in more detail.

This Third Sector Research Capacity Building Programme consisted of three different clusters of researchers, together with the Third Sector Research Centre at the University of Birmingham. The cluster with specific relevance for this particular book has focused on the theme of community-based learning for active citizenship – led from the University of Lincoln, working in partnership with Goldsmiths, University of London, Manchester Metropolitan University and the Take Part Network. Through this programme, a series of research projects have been developed in partnership with Third Sector organisations of varying sizes, with varying remits and focus. The chapters that follow draw upon these initiatives and reflect upon the findings, in terms of the ways in which research might contribute to active citizenship and to community development, social justice and social solidarity more widely.