

Community Empowerment: Climbing the Stairs – or Scaling the Ramparts?

Kelly Hunt

Authors:

**Dr Jill Jesson, Dr Robert Pocock, Chief Executive,
Kelly Hunt**

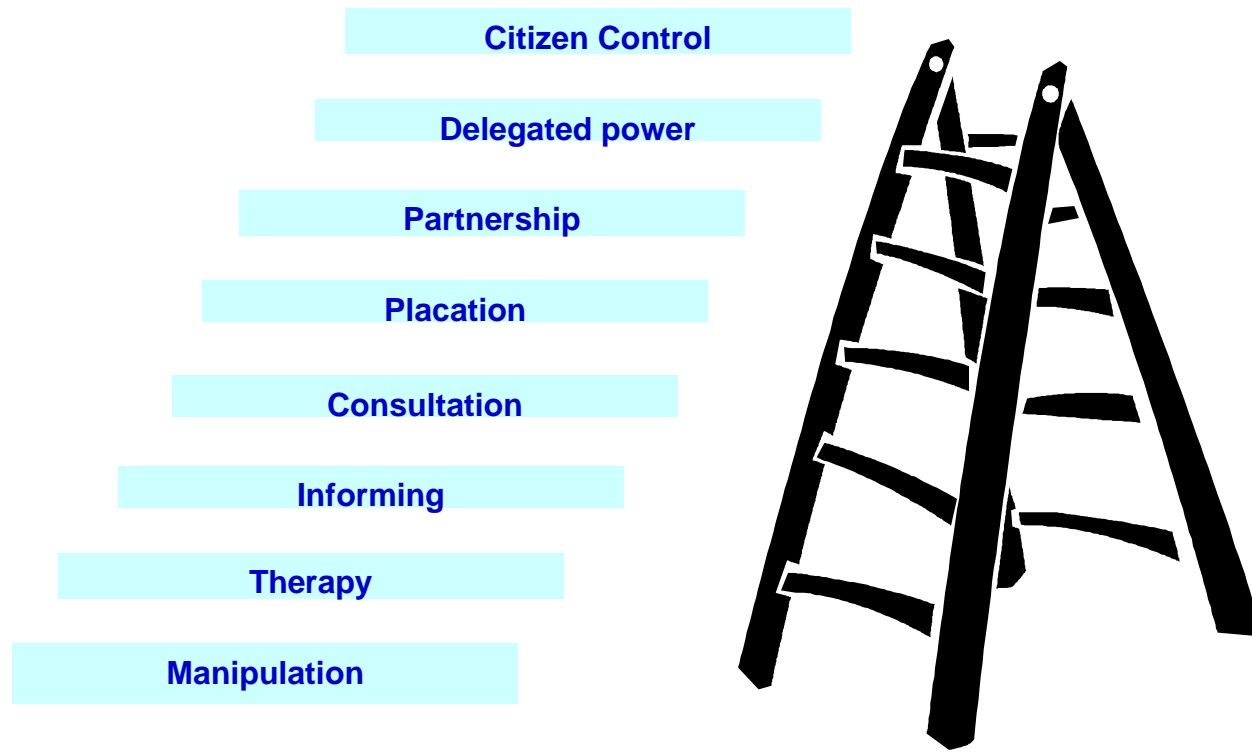
UKES, 23 October 2008

Empowerment: a new agenda

- ◆ Past : representatives acting on behalf of citizens
- ◆ Future : citizen control
- ◆ Hazel's favourite quote:

“There's not a single public service that could not be improved by greater involvement of users and the local community”

Arnstein's Ladder of Participation



Ladder of participation in practice

- ◆ Citizens ‘move up’ the ladder throughout lifetime of initiatives
- ◆ Eg with NDCs : community subject to PR exercise 9 years ago; moved onto consultation through surveys; now within some NDCs, citizens are involved in delivery
- ◆ Sure Start Local Programmes: decisions made with parents as part of the partnership

Empowerment – who and why

- ◆ Outcomes from empowerment:
 - ◆ Better services
 - ◆ More satisfied users
 - ◆ Collective purpose
 - ◆ Citizenship
 - ◆ Ownership and building capacity

Dilemma: 2 interpretations of empowerment

1: Resident climbing the stairs: on the 'inside track'

- ◆ Engagement in service improvement groups
- ◆ 'Participation in management and decision making'
- ◆ Tenants on the Board, Resident reps on the Executive

2: Citizens scaling the ramparts, external scrutiny and hold the powers that be to account

- ◆ Service quality reviews
- ◆ Neighbourhood Forums – alternative resident representative bodies
- ◆ Consumer vs producer interest (trade union equivalent)
- ◆ Citizen / Councillor Call for Action

So what is the dilemma for evaluators?

- ◆ Needing to know whether the intention is for citizens to scale the ramparts or climb the stairs?
- ◆ Often, the intention is that citizens are climbing the tower and are part of the machinery
- ◆ Enabling community voices to be heard
- ◆ Increasing emphasis on empowerment in delivery = increasing emphasis on empowerment in evaluation!

What works?

- ◆ Need an evidence base
- ◆ Upfront agreement about the focus of the evaluation
- ◆ Clear spec: aims and objectives
- ◆ Close collaboration with client: almost re-writing the spec!

Contact

Kelly Hunt, Senior Social & Community Research Consultant

M·E·L Research, Aston Science Park
Birmingham B7 4AX

www.m-e-l.co.uk

Kelly.hunt@m-e-l.co.uk