'Making data meaningful' – the messy business of evidence use in community planning

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University of Glasgow, What Works Scotland

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Community planning

• **Partnerships and community engagement** processes such as *community planning* are found across the world as strategies to...

  – deal with complex issues, increase problem-solving capacity, foster social capital, improve public services, counter democratic deficits and restore legitimacy to governance processes

• We know surprisingly little about **how community planning works** and **how local partnerships use evidence**
Local practitioners

- There are a range of local practitioners involved in the **everyday work** of community planning in Scotland

  - Service professionals – managers and operational staff across a range of front-line services e.g. policing, cleansing, housing, environmental health, health and social care

  - Third sector organisations, community trusts, community groups

  - Policy and research officers working within public and third sector organisations

  - Community planning officers – ‘**boundary-spanners**' (Williams, 2012); **work across departments and organisations**; **public engagers** (Escobar, 2017a, 2015b) – involve communities as part of policymaking and/or governance processes and **knowledge brokers** (Ward et al., 2009)
WWS Community Planning Officials Survey

• **First survey of Community Planning officials** (managers and officers) in Scotland (baseline for a second survey in 2018)

• Census of **171 CPOs**
  – managers and officers, at local and strategic levels

• **107 responses (62% response rate)**
  – 29 CPPs

• **Limitations:** mapping the workforce + changing census; small sample for statistical testing; categories not clear cut (e.g. local/strategic)

• **There doesn’t yet seem to be a ‘natural’ institutional space for CP teams**
  – cross-cutting roles defy established departmental boundaries and functions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Skill in the Workforce</th>
<th>Skill Importance</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Skill Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Writing for different audiences (81%)</td>
<td>Consultation and engagement (96%)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Consultation and engagement (77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Facilitation (74%)</td>
<td>Persuasion (88%)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Negotiation (69%); Facilitation (88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Managing team work (69%)</td>
<td>Presentation / public speaking (81%)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Persuasion (64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Presentation / public speaking (61%)</td>
<td>Mediation (54%)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mediation (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Resource management (51%)</td>
<td>Process design (73%)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Research (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Process design (33%)</td>
<td>Managing team work (68%)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Using evidence in community planning

- **strong focus (70%)** on using evidence to assess outcomes, particularly regarding inequalities
- focus (55%) on using evidence to assess value for money and achieve SOA outcomes
- 50% reported their CPP team has expertise in evaluation
- **88% agreed that CP could be improved by better use of evidence and evaluation**
Which of the following challenges does the CPP face in the use of evidence and research in general? Please tick all that apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We do not have enough capacity / resource to undertake our own research</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do not have enough capacity / resource to commission research from others</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected members do not prioritise using evidence and research to inform policy- and decision-making</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers do not prioritise using evidence and research to inform policy- and decision-making</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners do not prioritise using evidence and research to inform policy- and decision-making</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We cannot identify partners who would be willing to work together to build an evidence and research base</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which of the following challenges does the CPP face in the use of statistical data?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We do not have the capacity/resource to undertake our own data analysis</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We can rarely find data that is at the appropriate spatial scale</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We can rarely find evidence and research that we think is applicable in our circumstances</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We can rarely find data that is applicable to the questions we are seeking to answer</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Working with local data - 2 CPPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>West Dunbartonshire</th>
<th>Fife</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographic flexibility and ability to integrate different systems of analysis</td>
<td>In Profile Dataset - 2016</td>
<td>KnowFife Dataset since 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPP local geographies</td>
<td>17 Community Councils</td>
<td>104 Community Councils 7 Local Area committees 6 Local Management Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership alignment</td>
<td>CPP and HSCP not aligned</td>
<td>CPP and HSCP alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>One member of staff</td>
<td>Research Team with links to national networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of profiles</td>
<td>Engage partners in community-led action planning</td>
<td>Engage partners in community budgeting, social justice analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your West Dunbartonshire in Profile

Community Council Trends

Life expectancy for males has risen by 6 years in the last 14 years, while female life expectancy has risen by 4 years over the same period. Overall, male and female life expectancy has remained above the West Dunbartonshire average. In the most recent period shown, male and female life expectancy was very similar to the Scottish average.

Notes:
1. Data sources: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2012, Census 2013, Census 2001; Child Poverty Unit, NOIDS, National Records of Scotland (NRS) and Scottish Government.
2. Populations presented in the population trend chart and used to calculate life expectancy estimates are taken from NHS small area population estimates and are based on the 2001 census for the years 1995-2001, both the 2001 and 2011 censuses for the years 2002-2010, and the 2011 census for the years 2011-2014.
3. The income deprivation index is derived from SIMD 2012. More information on this deprivation index can be found at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/statistics12
4. Life expectancy and other measures are calculated based on population estimates and death registrations. 95% confidence intervals have been added to the graphs in order to indicate their accuracy. The variance of the life expectancy graphs gives the mid-year for each life expectancy estimate e.g. the most recent estimate, revised by 2013 represents the life expectancy estimate for the period 2012-2013.
5. A limit of 50 people or 25% of the regional population, whichever is the lesser, is used to limit the amount of information that is released on individual small areas. This means that the number of people who are currently resident in an area may be significantly lower than the number of people who were resident in the area in previous years.
Making data meaningful research

• In-depth study of a single CPP – focus on public sector employees

• Semi-structured interviews, public services (11), community members (4), research and policy staff in the local authority (6), strategic director of CPP (1), for the HSCP (1)

• Observations 12 local partnership meetings
Evidence in decision-making

Craft knowledge - knowledge based on practical experience, sensitive to the local context and gained over time

Scientific knowledge - systematic data from a range of relevant sources including quantitative and qualitative research
2 models of communication

Knowledge

Action

Transmission - message sent and received

Scientific

Craft

Dialogue and Deliberation

Dialogic – shared meaning
Transmission for community planning

• Putting data into context
  – Evidence can be either too general (“if it gets too general it’s not useful”), or contain too much detail and “overcomplicate service delivery”.
  – Dissect the data so that it clear what it means to local services.

• Evidence on the right level,
  – “local” and “identifiable” areas
  – CPO officer survey -43% of respondents struggled to find data at the appropriate spatial scale.

• Presented in an accessible format
  – evidence and data in a format that local people can understand.

• Sensitivity to how “negative” evidence is presented
  Statistics have an emotional effect
  – can be used as “league tables” and this can “stigmatise” areas by presenting them in a negative light
  – staff and researchers to communicate evidence sensitively.
Dialogue and Deliberation

1. Information, evidence, stories
2. Mapping and evaluating alternatives
3. Giving (and taking) public reasons
4. Re-examining and (perhaps) changing preferences
5. Seeking agreement or consensus
6. Making informed and reasoned decisions
Implications

• Address lack of local capacity - but recognition of the importance of evidence use
  – the challenge of ‘just getting the time’

• Establish stable collaborative relationships with key practitioners within CPPs – CPOs.
  – Appreciate the challenging operational context
  – budget cuts, continual change and pressure for innovation

• Focus on productive collaborations and avoid over-burdening

• Integrate and value different forms of evidence and knowledge in decision-making processes
Thank you!