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Stream: Evaluation of 'innovation' projects and partnerships: challenges, practical experiences and methodological innovations

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Engage, participate, empower: modelling power transfer in disadvantaged rural communities

Abstract

This article explores a process meant to empower disadvantaged communities that have not previously engaged in government-instigated civic projects. Drawing on a large exploratory study of an empowerment project in seven Scottish rural communities, findings include that empowering communities should harness community development techniques that use both external actors and sources of support (i.e. exogenous practices), and those that utilise assets from within the community (i.e. endogenous practices).

Findings suggest that - to reach endogenous empowerment - exogenous empowerment practices are useful and effective for some communities. Aligning findings with Philips and Pittman's (2009) community development framework, the paper presents the **Engagement-Participation-Empowerment Model (EPE)** showing stages in transferring power from external actors to local communities. The paper highlights that the process of community empowerment starts with engagement and follows with participation – both representing a precondition of community empowerment. The paper indicates that there are limits to which community members are capable of embracing current community empowerment policies and showing that even targeted 'well-tailored' community empowerment programmes might fail. Implications of the study for further research and policy are identified.

Keywords

Rural, Community, Empowerment, Participation, Engagement