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EC SO6004: Sustainable Communities & Global Development

Theme 5: Community Profiling for Sustainable Communities

What is a Community Profile?

A community profile can be defined as follows:

‘A comprehensive description of the needs of a population that is defined, or defines itself, as a community, and the resources that exist within that community, carried out with the active involvement of the community itself, for the purpose of developing an action plan or other means of improving the quality of life of the community’.

(Hawtin & Percy-Smith 2007).



Community Profiles and Assessing Needs

- Assessing local need and profiling the local community is the first step towards developing a local plan to identify:
- Changing needs,
- Gaps in provision of health care, environment, economic, facilities for young / old etc.
- Can you think of other areas that it may identify?



Community Profiles and Assessing Needs

- A tool used by a number of professions to help plan or address issues within an area....
- Not just for professionals...increasingly community needs assessment are community member led and instigated,
- This ensures that any strategy for that community is informed from the “lived reality of that community or groups within that community”.
(links to co-production & activism)

Community Profiles and Assessing Needs

- Communities are not simply homogeneous, but consist of a range of social and cultural groups.
- People's thoughts, ideas, perceptions and needs may therefore differ.
- One of the key issues facing decision makers, developers and communities is the growing complexity of communities

What do we mean by Community ?

We could define a community in the following ways:

- A group of people who live and/or work in the same geographical location, for example a housing estate, village or neighborhood.
- An administrative area or district
- A group of people with a shared or common interest or set of characteristics (e.g. we talk of the LGBT community).
- In terms of community profiling the first and second definitions are most relevant

Different types of 'Community Profile'

- Hawtin *et al* (1994), (cited in Moran & Butler, 2001, pp. 60-61) have identified a hierarchy of activities that are grouped together under the term 'community profile'
- The first of these is 'needs assessments, which make extensive use of existing data, tend to relate to single issues, but rarely involve the community' (Ibid. p.60)
- The nature of this type of needs assessments means that they are not as useful for planning **sustainable** communities because they do not include what Tuhin Mia *et al* (2022) have called 'community building action'

Different types of 'Community Profile'

- The second type are 'community consultations, which usually present the community with **pre-defined** proposals, and where the 'consultation' involved may be **perfunctory** (Ibid. p.61)
- The third type are 'social audits which, though covering a wider range of issues, concentrate on relationships between needs and resources within localities (the 'balance-sheet' approach). (Ibid. p.61)
- For Moran and Butler neither of these approaches are comprehensive enough to gain a truly useful community profile.

Different types of 'Community Profile'

- The fourth type of profile are those 'which are the broadest in scope, comprehensively covering local issues, including those of needs and resources, but where the **essential requirement** is the **active involvement of the community**' (Ibid. p. 61)
- For Moran & Butler, who are writing in the context of community health profiling 'It is only the last of these definitions that meets the public and personal health policy criteria' which states that the public 'should be involved in the processes of defining and developing health services' (Ibid. p. 61)

Community Profiling for Sustainable Communities

- The same argument is made by organisations and practitioners involved in planning and developing sustainable communities
- It is a key element of the [UN Sustainable Development Goal No. 16](#) (United Nations, No Date)
- Tuhin Mia *et al* (2022, p.33) argue that the involvement of a community in the planning process can help to **‘solve the problems** of its occupants, **upgrade and ensure its current environment**, and develop a more **compassionate society** within its limits’

Community Profiling for Sustainable Communities

- This point is further emphasised by the United Nations (2013) who state that sustainable community development needs to promote;
- ‘the involvement of citizens in **decision-making** process[es] of the state through measures and/or institutional arrangements so as to increase their **influence on public policies** and programs ensuring a more **positive impact on their social and economic lives**’

Community Profiling for Sustainable Communities

- This approach also forms part of the theory underpinning Social Work Practice.
- For example, the Open University (no date) state that effective community profiling can;
- ‘help give voice to **all sections** of the community. It can **identify underutilised and potential resources**, identify **social capital** within the community, and contribute to the **empowerment** of a wide-range of individuals and groups’.

'Our' Community

This video gives an example of Community Profiling in action.



Community Profiles (Jamaican Information Service, 2012)



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'Our' Community

This is an exercise to explore the process of community profiling

Over the course of this exercise, I will ask you as a group to plan a community that meets the needs of different groups.

In turn plan a community that meet the needs of the following:

- *People over 65*
- *Young people under 18*
- *People who travel into the area to work*
 - *Parents with young children*

'Our' Community

*Together we will create a **map** of the community each group might like to live in, identifying significant places that have specific meaning to the group or which meets their specific needs*



Why do we represent it visually?

When instructed to do so, move on to the next group's map, look at what resources they have included and decide what you would like to add and if there are any resources that you would like to remove

Continue to do this until you have visited every 'community' or you are instructed to stop



'Our' Community

Now think about all of the 'communities' that you have created



- *Are they all the same?*
- *Are there any significant differences?*
- *If so, what are these differences?*
- *What are your thoughts on the practicalities of community profiling based on this activity?*



Profiling as Social Research

- Community profiling is a form of social research in a community primarily in order to listen to the voice of (often) marginalised people and then to feed that voice into an assessment of their collective needs,
- with a view to creating what Moran and Butler (2001, p. 60) refer to as a 'living health profile'. (this could be extended to a living **sustainability** profile"



Profiling - The Whole picture

- A community profile should be *comprehensive* in coverage.
- Rather than look at individual aspects of a community in isolation it should explore how different aspects of the life of the community are interrelated.
- This is also the principle behind the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) that we have looked at previously (although this only uses statistical data)



Profiling - The Whole picture

- *1. the area as a **place** to live* – including;
- the quality of the physical environment and people's attitudes to living there;
- the extent to which needs are matched with resources; and,
- the extent to which local facilities meet people's goals and aspirations;



Profiling - The Whole picture

- *2. the area as a **social** community –*
- residents' involvement in the social life of the community;
- the extent to which the community is supportive (often called community cohesion);
- formal and informal networks within the community;



Profiling - The Whole picture

- *3. the area as an **economic** community –*
 - income levels and employment prospects of local residents;
 - travel to work data (both inwards and outwards)
 - prosperity and viability of local shops;
 - prosperity and viability of major employers



Profiling - The Whole picture

- *4. the area as a political community –*
 - systems and structures of political representation and local area management;
 - the extent to which local people can influence decisions that affect them;
 - the degree of involvement in local decision making;
 - participation in **community organizations**;



Profiling - The Whole picture

- *5. the area as a personal space -*
 - the degree of attachment that people have to the local area;
 - memories and life experiences of local people;
 - the amount of leisure time that people spend in their local area



Profiling - The Whole picture

- *6. the area as part of its city/town/region –*
 - infrastructural, economic and social linkages between the local area and the city or district of which it is a part;
 - The specific local identity that differentiates the community from the rest of the area/district.



Community Profile

- The aim of the community profile must be to act as a catalyst for the improvement of the quality of life of members of that community.
- It should recognize strengths, needs and areas for conflict or tension
- Here is an example from the University of South Florida



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How to profile

- Essentially a community profile is a piece of social research....



The Welsh Government document 'Community Profiling and Tension Mapping' outlines three elements of the process.

- Community mapping and profiling
- Tracking cohesion
- Monitoring tensions

Discuss what you understand each of these to mean.



How to profile

- Community mapping and profiling
- Tracking cohesion
- Monitoring tensions

Look at each in turn and, using the Guided Study provided identify how you would collect the data and any issues that you would need to consider.

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