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Being involved in community-based research: Lessons from the Objective 1 South Yorkshire context

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**Tables:**

**Table 1 – Summary of fieldwork areas**

Area name	Community development status	Research characteristics
Type 1, area a (Rotherham)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership is a company set up to develop the community action plan, beginning as, and developing through, public meetings.</li> <li>• Partnership had no core funding or staff at the time of the consultation.</li> <li>• Small group of people drove the development process, research and writing of the action plan.</li> <li>• Support from one paid worker employed by the local authority.</li> </ul>	Type 1: <b>Grassroots volunteer type</b> Local volunteers have complete control over process, from design stages through to analysis and dissemination.
Type 1, area b (Barnsley)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership is a charity, made up entirely of volunteers. No paid staff.</li> <li>• No other funding and no office base from which to work.</li> <li>• Local community members received training at Northern College as part of this process.</li> <li>• Some support from paid workers and a local resident who has experience of community research.</li> </ul>	
Type 2, area b (Sheffield)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership is a development trust, a company and a charity. It was set up Sheffield Hallam University and has accountable body status.</li> <li>• Partnership has more than ten paid staff members and an array of volunteers, including researchers.</li> <li>• Has Single Regeneration Budget funding and a large financial turnover.</li> <li>• Consultation is an ongoing process and has occurred in a variety of forms.</li> <li>• Area has high levels of black and minority ethnic cultures.</li> </ul>	Type 2: <b>Grassroots contract type</b> Local people in either a voluntary capacity or as paid workers do the data collection and have some limited involvement in

<p>Type 2, area b (Rotherham)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership is a development trust and started in 1998.</li> <li>• Has received funding from the New Opportunities Fund, the Coalfield Regeneration Trust, and the Home Office.</li> <li>• There is one full-time paid worker and a number of part-time staff.</li> </ul>	<p>the analysis. However, they do not design or control the research</p>
<p>Type 3, area a (Barnsley)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership established by local council but now run independently and employs 19 people.</li> <li>• Is funded by the Coalfield Regeneration Trust</li> </ul>	<p>Type 3: <b>In-house contract type</b></p>
<p>Type 3, area b (Sheffield)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership is the meeting of two forums, without any legal status.</li> <li>• No paid staff at the time of the consultation.</li> <li>• Area has a high concentration of black and minority ethnic cultures.</li> </ul>	<p>Paid workers within the local area carry out consultation and control it with some volunteer input</p>
<p>Type 4, area a (Doncaster)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership is a company.</li> <li>• Partnership has funding through Single Regeneration Budget (pays for workers whose remit is to support groups in the area).</li> <li>• Consultation done by consultants and action plan then written by the local community worker.</li> </ul>	<p>Type 4: <b>Outsourced contract type</b> External professional help is brought into the area to</p>
<p>Type 4, area b (Doncaster)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership is constituted but has no legal status. It is run by a management group and was initially set up by the local authority following the liquidation of another regeneration initiative in the area.</li> <li>• Gained funding for one worker who was able to support some of the consultation and community action plan process.</li> </ul>	<p>conduct the research. Local people manage the contracts and consultants but do not participate in the data collection</p>

**Table 2 – Factors influencing type of research**

Type of research	Key influencing factors
<p><b>Type 1 areas</b> <b>Grassroots volunteer type</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low capacity – no staff, limited money, no experience.</li> <li>• Newly emerging and embryonic partnership (untarnished and naïve members?) homogeneous attitudes and values.</li> <li>• Community activists with clear leadership potential.</li> </ul> <p>These organisations are grassroots and so carry out grassroots research. There is very little option in terms of adopting different models of research because of their limited capacity.</p>

<p><b>Type 2</b> <b>Grassroots contract type</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A medium or high level of capacity to undertake development work – some staff, some funding, previous consultation work.</li> <li>• Both well-established partnerships.</li> <li>• Both partnerships work in clearly fractured communities – distinct communities of immigrants located within the geographical boundary of the communities.</li> </ul> <p>These conditions led to attempts to include all sections of the community through survey/interview approaches, with such approaches being directed by professionals (workers and consultants) in order to maintain professionalism and control.</p>
<p><b>Type 3</b> <b>In-house contract type</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interestingly, the partnerships adopting type 3 approaches were completely different in terms of capacity, size and demography. However, both had heterogeneous attitudes and values, and local authority and other professional agencies heavily influenced them.</li> </ul> <p>The influence of local authority practice and other development agencies affected the research approach taken by partnerships.</p>

Type of research	Key influencing factors
<p><b>Type 4</b></p> <p><b>Outsourced contract type</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium capacity present; both had history of development work and both had workers.</li> <li>• Both had problematic issues in the past in relation to funding, leading to a desire to dispel negative images and a perceived need for professionalism.</li> <li>• Both successfully gained funding to buy in professional expertise.</li> <li>• The two were located in the same local authority ward and drew the research funding from the same source.</li> </ul> <p>The combination of a problematic history and available funding resulted in outside professional help being purchased.</p>

**Table 3 – Research type and levels of involvement**

<b>Type of research</b>	<b>Type of involvement</b>	<b>Level of involvement</b>	<b>Retention of involvement</b>
Type 1 areas	Small group of unpaid volunteers directed the research. All self-directed involvement, but only a small group doing the work.	Research took six to twelve months of regular meetings and participation, so the level of involvement was intense.	Most volunteers stayed involved in local activities/groups or management of the partnership post-research.
Type 2 areas	Volunteers recruited to do specific research tasks (data collection/some inputting).	Volunteers were less involved than type 1 in the organisation and control, participated less invested less time.	Most did not stay involved (one or two continued involvement), several used the experience to get references and as a stepping stone employment.
Type 3 areas	Paid staff carried out the research, although not experienced researchers themselves.	Time investment still heavy (six to twelve months) but involvement not volunteer-based, part of job.	Staff remained involved in the partnership as paid workers.
Type 4 areas	Volunteer chair and management group members directed and controlled the research by employing and paying consultants.	Less involvement in the empirical side of research but still high levels of involvement in terms of time invested in managing the process.	Same volunteers remained involved with management of the partnership.



## **Being involved in community-based research: Lessons from the Objective 1 South Yorkshire context**

### **Abstract**

*This article reports the findings of a qualitative investigation into community-based research within the Objective 1 Programme, South Yorkshire. The study involved semi-structured interviews with participants who were undertaking community-based research and developing action plans based upon the research findings. The findings highlight the issues associated with involvement in such research from the participants' perspective. The article begins with an examination of involvement in research and then moves on to discuss the wider issues of involvement in regeneration and partnerships. It argues that, despite the increased policy focus on bottom-up approaches, involvement is complex and conceptualised in a number of ways and therefore requires further investigation.*

### **Policy context**

Research has often played an important part in community development work, with community profiling, needs assessments, social audits and community consultations all having been used in the past (Hawtin *et al.*, 1994). Participation within UK research is currently influenced by the government's promotion of bottom-up approaches (Waddington, 2003) securing a policy drive for public participation, citizen involvement and community consultation (Jones and Jones, 2002). This has been matched by a corresponding growth of interest within the social sciences in more participatory ways of producing research. During the last decade public and private funders' growing emphasis on outcome-based community service initiatives has spurred interest in collaborative and participatory forms of research and evaluation (Cousins and Earl, 1992; Fetterman, 1996). Furthermore, some funding agencies have called for research that is collaborative and community-based rather than community placed because community is not a place, it is not necessarily geographically cited. Furthermore, many contemporary social problems are complex and, arguably, ill-suited to traditional outside expert approaches to research (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2003). Clearly, approaches to involving non-experts within research have gained credibility and become more fashionable, with research being viewed as one approach to gaining community involvement (Brown, 2002).

### **Focus**

This study examined community-based research within the Objective 1 South Yorkshire context. Objective 1 is a programme set up by the European Union to provide investment funds to help reduce inequalities in social and economic conditions, both within and between member countries. Objective 1 South Yorkshire is one of three such programmes in the UK, alongside Cornwall and Merseyside. All programmes are targeted at areas where the gross domestic product per head of population is 75% or less of the European average. South Yorkshire qualifies for Objective 1 funding because it has a weak economy, which underperforms. The Objective 1 programmes were established with the aim of tackling economic decline through regeneration activity. Within the South Yorkshire context, under the umbrella of 'enhancing people, skills and communities', partnership areas were commissioned by Objective 1 to develop community action plans in order to access ring-fenced funding. However, despite this commissioning, partnerships were able to conduct their research as they desired, allowing the level of community control to be self-defined. This study explored the process of research from the perspective of participants, focusing on consultation carried out as part of the development of action plans.

Eight areas were sampled from a total of 40 developing action plans across South Yorkshire within this qualitative study. Data collection methods included 39 telephone interviews, 25 in-depth semi-structured interviews, observation and documentary analysis. The eight areas had different characteristics and were at various stages in terms of community development.

An array of research had been carried out across some of the Objective 1 partnership areas. However, the research types examined within this study related specifically to the consultation carried out to develop the action plan. The areas applied different types of research for their consultation, with clear differences visible in terms of the levels of participation in the empirical work across the partnerships. Four research types were defined across the 40 partnerships and then examined in detail across the eight areas sampled. These four approaches, despite any differences, fit upon a continuum because the research was carried out for the same purpose in all areas – to develop a community action plan. In addition, the research was carried out within partnership areas that were geographically distinct but governed in the same way – by a management group. Thus, all the examples had a common purpose and are therefore comparable. The types of research and area dynamics are illustrated below:

(Table 1 here)

Across the 40 areas, seven applied a type 1 grassroots volunteer type approach, five used a type 2 grassroots contract type, eleven applied an in-house contract model (making this the most frequently used type of research) and eight used outsourced contracting. Two areas used a combination of research types, two areas used existing data and did no primary data collection, three areas did not do any research at all, one partnership opted out of the community action plan process completely and one area was unavailable for interview and so could not be classified.

Despite differences in the types of research used, all these approaches are situated under the umbrella of community-based research involving local people. The question of why some areas chose specific types of research produces an interesting analysis. An examination of the eight case study areas reveals that there were a number of influences in each area that should be considered when looking at the choice of research. This reflects the fact that, when partnerships are at certain stages of development and are faced with various influencing factors, different types of research appear to be more appropriate. As partnerships have different capabilities in terms of their research capacity and have distinct histories and demographic influences, one type of research will not fit all. Thus the nature of each partnership is a significant variable in the choice of research approach and, therefore, in any ensuing involvement related to the research. As partnerships develop different approaches to community-based research for varying projects, it is likely that, as influencing factors change, the choice of research will be correspondingly adapted. The following table demonstrates the influencing factors upon the types of research used in this context.

(Table 2)

Given that four types of community-based research were examined within this study, the differences between them could potentially lead to varying outcomes in terms of involvement. The following table provides a comparative overview of involvement across the areas sampled.

(Table 3)

### **Issues with involvement in the Objective 1 context**

Involvement is discussed within the literature as being a crucial requirement for community-based research because the approach theoretically accommodates the participation of those involved in a more active role than participants take in a traditional research approach; involvement here is about non-experts undertaking research rather than simply being research participants. (Hills and Mullett, 2000). Despite this, reference is made to the difficulties associated with gaining involvement (Israel *et al.*, 1998; Ferguson, 1999). The difficulties associated with involvement are confirmed by the findings of this study, which demonstrate differences in participation across the areas sampled. One difference that emerged from the interview data is that people were less interested in becoming involved within type 4 areas than in type 1 areas.

‘I mean the partnership is open but people who work here get more involved rather than those who live here ... it is a continuous struggle. We [partnership] did get a number of people attending but not really getting support from them, how could you get more support?’ **Local vicar, type 4, area a (interview 20)**

‘... people aren’t really interested in consultants ... we [partnership] had one or two meetings that were well attended ... but people mostly not.’ **Worker, type 4, area b (interview 17)**

The grassroots (type 1) research gained more involvement. Whether type 1 areas gained the necessary numbers of volunteers as a result of the approach, even if only for a limited time, is debatable; it may simply have been the case that more people were interested. Whatever the reasons, more involvement was evidenced.

‘... again they brought in other volunteers for the collation of the work and the survey. There was quite a lot of work in terms of doing that, in terms of putting that together so they [partnership] brought in other volunteers, other members of the partnership ...’ **Worker, type 1, area a (interview 22)**

‘I seem to remember some volunteers, trustees, we were all involved, we also had a worker. I remember spending days at the office and analysing the information, checking the tick boxes ...’ **Local vicar, type 1, area a (interview 25)**

‘Oh yes, I mean we got the local scouts involved and we [partnership] gave them a donation for delivering the questionnaires and we had volunteers as well. We had an advert for local people ... a recruitment drive that said paid expenses and stuff ...’

**Worker, type 1, area b (interview 9)**

Despite differences across the partnerships in relation to how involvement was perceived and achieved, it was cited as problematic across all four approaches. Why some areas managed to retain volunteers whilst others did not cannot be explained within the scope of this study’s findings. There were, however, a number of dynamics influencing volunteering. For example, some areas had community champions who served as strong role models. Volunteering was also affected by differing interests and the amount of time available. The levels of power afforded to, and negotiated by, volunteers varied, and this may also have had an impact on volunteer retention rates.

Involvement within all areas included in this study was lower than partnerships would have liked, in terms of the research and the general meetings associated with the mechanisms of the partnerships.

‘The partnership was founded in 2000 by a public meeting and about 30 people got involved then, but over time people drop out ...’ **Volunteer, type 1, area b (interview 10)**

‘... “no” is the answer to your question. We got very few responses from people willing to participate in the process.’ **Worker, type 2, area b (interview 8)**

‘It is a large town but the people turnout for these things is quite poor really, but how do you get people involved ... it is like getting blood out of a stone. Membership is actually open to all but there are not that many local people interested.’ **Volunteer, type 4, area a (interview 22)**

Similarly, in all areas a core group of people became involved and drove the research process forward.

‘... they [questions on survey] were designed really by an interested group if that’s what you would call it. They debated the questions and talked about the wording and really it was the same small group who directed it all.’ **Worker, type 1, area a (interview 22)**

‘It is the same core people ... So really there were about eight people, maybe six, who were really active doing the research ...’ **Volunteer, type 1, area b (interview 10)**

‘I think it was really four key players who did most of them’ [referring to the interviews] **Consultant, type 2, area a (interview 13)**

‘I mean the sub-group involved four or five people through the whole process ...’ **Vicar, type 4, area a (interview 20)**

‘Well we have got a group of people who are really committed to the process and so they have helped raised interest and kept it going. I think really we have a small committed group at the moment ...’ **Volunteer, type 4, area a (interview 21)**

Other development work also involved a core group of dedicated individuals doing the majority of the research. Only a small number of people committed to any community development activity, including research.

‘There were difficulties to do with lack of people available to be involved, so it meant a few people did a lot of work although everything was open to anybody. It was like anything else. So it meant that there was a lot of work for those people who did it.’

**Volunteer, type 1, area b (interview 12)**

Clearly, the positive policy views of ‘community’ require critical analysis because a core group of volunteers driving community-based research and development work more generally reflects exclusivity. The question as to whose ideals are being realised through research remains unanswered. There is still the issue that some community members effectively exclude themselves from participating in both research and development work. Issues such as time, availability, competing commitments and relevant skills can act as barriers (see Israel *et al.*, 1998, 183) preventing some from engaging, not just as volunteers, but also as respondents to research, irrespective of its community-based principles.

### **The nature of involvement**

So what about the nature of involvement? Some people, having been involved in the beginnings of the partnership, went on to remain highly involved, whereas others did not. The nature of involvement within this setting was highly fluid, with some areas failing to retain volunteers recruited for research purposes.

‘... what didn’t work for us as far as I am aware we didn’t get (pauses) the people who actually did the research didn’t necessarily go on to be volunteers and activists in the community ...’ **Volunteer, type 1, area b (interview 10)**

Comparatively, other areas successfully kept volunteers engaged and involved within their organisations.

‘... but then there are other things that have come up from ... once you are involved in one thing you soon get drawn into other things that you see happening and because a lot of the groups and things that are happening all link into each other.’ **Volunteer, type 1, area a (interview 23)**

‘First of all, all of those volunteers still volunteer for [organisation] ...’ **Worker, type 2, area b (interview 8)**

‘... at least three quarters of my workers are former volunteers ... which is wonderful.’ **Worker, type 3, area a (interview 4)**

Several participants working within regeneration were aware of the problems of maintaining involvement and therefore adopted specific strategies in an attempt to overcome this problem. For example, in one partnership the local data collectors were paid for their work but only after they had completed a number of surveys.

‘... they [volunteers] were also paid for that but only after they had done ten surveys ... it is just a way of keeping them on board.’ **Consultant, type 2, area a (interview 13)**

Other partnerships offered incentives in a bid to engage more people.

‘... we [consultants] did a presentation at the end of stage B, open to all the community – we even gave £200 prize money from our own budget at the event – and

whilst there was a reasonable attendance, it still wasn't great ...' **Consultant, type 4, area a (interview 19)**

However, the partnerships that used such tactics did not always perceive them as beneficial and so did not necessarily secure or retain volunteers. Despite partnerships expecting to retain volunteers, the process of volunteering itself was cyclical as well as linear.

'... then we [partnership] also sort of get a rotation of volunteers ... some just see one project as relevant and so get their satisfaction and commitment from that but then don't have any more involvement after that so the people change ...' **Worker, type 4, area b (interview 18)**

The findings of this study suggest that differences in involvement relate to the way in which those engaged in development work perceive it.

### **The meaning of involvement**

For some people involvement was just about being informed, rather than being actively engaged.

'... to be fair it is not difficult to recruit people, it is difficult to get them to do something once you have recruited them.' **Volunteer chair, type 1, area a (interview 24)**

'But most people are talkers not doers ... the same as all groups.' **Volunteer, type 1, area b (interview 9)**

Some individuals felt that the working process of regeneration, including the community action plan process, was enough to discourage the wider general public from becoming involved.

'The whole process does not help people to get involved because of the way the funding works and the objectives, so the format of the community action plan is quite unique and detailed with all of the cross references and things ... I suppose people have a lack of interest in the subject of community work.' **Volunteer, type 1, area b (interview 9)**



‘It is about building capacity and it’s a catch 22, the process itself. The level of interest is poor, people ‘talk shop’ but local people want to help with practical things but not ideas so the process tends to engage professional people ...’ **Local vicar, type 4, area a (interview 20)**

Apathy was also described as a problem in relation to involvement.

‘I mean I think people can’t see the benefit so they don’t get involved ... they are generally apathetic and things like this have very little impact for ordinary people.’ **Volunteer, type 1, area b (interview 10)**

‘I think that people need to see something happening otherwise they get a bit disillusioned and then they don’t get involved. I think because it is such a lengthy process people just stop being interested.’ **Volunteer, type 4, area a (interview 21)**

These different perceptions surrounding involvement beg the question of how involvement should be measured within regeneration. Participants in this study conceptualised involvement in a number of ways. One relates to attendance at meetings. For example:

‘... community involvement for me personally, it is a major problem, we [partnership] set meetings up, sometimes we might get eight people there, sometimes we might get 12 ...’ **Volunteer chair, type 3, area a (interview 3)**

‘I mean there could have been more with the size of the area.’ [referring to numbers of people at a local meeting] **Local data collector, type 2, area a (interview 14)**

However, this may not be an accurate way of representing involvement from the wider community, nor is it the only way. Some workers highlighted that people generally enjoyed being involved in more practical aspects of regeneration.

‘Some [volunteers] in ‘area’ get involved in the activities but not in the partnership ...’ **Volunteer, type 1 area b (interview 10)**

‘We have a lot of members and the majority of the members never attend a meeting, they won’t ever come to a full partnership meeting because that is not what people want to do ...’ **Worker, type 3, area a (interview 4)**

So involvement can be conceptualised as attending meetings – engaging in the running of the partnership as well as participating in practical projects.

‘... some of the projects that we have actually set up have got people involved from the actual community, like the garden centre ... local community help-out ...’

**Worker, type 3, area a (interview 2)**

Involvement can also take the form of volunteer work experience and training.

‘We have all sorts of cases of volunteers who have come and worked for us, women who wanted to return to work but who were too scared to ... People have come and been supported and then they go on and get jobs.’ **Worker, type 3, area a (interview 4)**

If people wish to be involved in more practical projects, rather than the mechanisms of partnerships, involvement within research should theoretically be less problematic. However, as this study found, there were still issues with gaining involvement within community-based research.

### **The complexity of involvement**

The complexity of regeneration settings and the multiple influences on research impact upon both involvement and interest within any research applied in practice. Accounts from the interview data reflect that agents involved in regeneration perceive involvement as an ongoing process. However, the involvement is not necessarily continuous. Perhaps it is more useful and appropriate to view it as a stepping-stone within research and development work. Involvement could simply be a ‘snapshot’.

‘Some of them [volunteers] that is all they want to do, they are quite happy just to play their part in one particular piece of work or one particular project.’ **Worker, type 3, area a (interview 4)**

‘... some [volunteers] have dropped off ... you get that don’t you ... when they have seen the project through that is it for some people ...’ **Volunteer chair, type 3, area a (interview 3)**

Also, volunteers are unable to become involved if they are unaware of what opportunities exist. Some partnerships had more time, money and capacity to engage people and, arguably, as a result gained higher levels of involvement.

‘Well we had a recruitment drive. There is a newsletter that goes around so we put a flyer in that and then had a drop-in session so people could come and pop in for a chat ...’ **Consultant, type 2, area a (interview 13)**

‘... those are the different methods that we used to try to get the information out to people ... lots of local community groups were contacted to ask if they wanted to have an input but also lots of the other agencies ...’ **Worker, type 2, area b (interview 9)**

In some areas gaining involvement was achieved through word of mouth.

‘We [research management team] didn’t get many to the drop-in but then it was really word of mouth and people saying “oh I am coming to the thing can I bring my friend?”.’ **Consultant, type 2, area a (interview 13)**

However, in some areas, irrespective of the amount of advertising and recruitment conducted, involvement did not necessarily ensue.

‘Yeah I think it was good for getting people to be aware of the partnership but people still do not get involved.’ **Volunteer, type 1, area b (interview 10)**

### **Involvement: a development work fundamental?**

Involvement is crucial in community research and it is also seen as essential within partnerships, yet it is clearly difficult both to achieve and maintain – as this study demonstrates. Participants cited a lack of involvement in community-based research as one of the main barriers to its success. As individuals do not always become interested and involved, this has implications for representation and voice. If local people do not become involved, whose voice is being projected towards funding bodies?

‘The idea of this is supposed to be community led but ... It is to a degree but there are times when it is not.’ **Worker, type 3, area a (interview 2)**

The lack of involvement might relate to the way in which partnerships work in practice. Contemporary regeneration discourse cites partnerships as the most effective way of working and of developing good regeneration practice. However, partnership working was highlighted as problematic by some of those engaged in community-based research and wider social regeneration practices, and this can affect levels of involvement.

‘... and there are other things like you know all of the issues are to do with working together so you have to get all of the partners all involved, community and everything else working together ...’ **Worker, type 3, area b (interview 7)**

‘... From the responses we [partnership] did get there were things said at the time that did discourage people from getting involved, it was just a cross we had to bear at that time.’ **Worker, type 2, area b (interview 8)**

The issues associated with partnership working and involvement reflect how development work can effectively exclude some people because of the mechanisms underpinning it. Those who do participate may find themselves marginalised within partnerships, which can impede success in terms of achieving locally identified goals. Many people involved in community-based research within the Objective 1 context felt there was a lack of impact for those living in the wider community following the research. This was a perceived barrier to success because individuals need to see results, which can serve to increase both interest and involvement.

‘It’s like, you know things are on the back burner and nothing’s actually happening, people get frustrated and downhearted ...’ **Volunteer chair, type 3, area a (interview 3)**

‘... it has been completed but whether it has an impact is another thing isn’t it? It has not got (pauses) none of the projects have gone ahead ...’ **Worker, type 3, area b (interview 6)**

The community development literature makes reference to the problems of partnerships. It is important to recognise these problems because research for development work takes place within the framework of partnerships. The literature recognises how conflicts can occur as a result of differences in individual perspectives, priorities, assumptions, values, beliefs and language (Israel *et al.*, 1998). In effect, research can become part of the problem rather than the solution, because holding the capability of defining need and focus means being powerful (Lloyd *et al.*, 1996).

## **Conclusion**

The research approaches that required higher levels of involvement gained higher numbers of volunteers, but it is not clear which came first: the volunteers or the research. Many of the areas did not necessarily keep their volunteers for prolonged periods and so, unsurprisingly, involvement in all partnerships was less than most members would have liked. The general lack of involvement resulted in a small number of committed people driving the processes of research and the action plans in all areas, irrespective of the type of research being used. Therefore, the question remains as to how partnerships can increase involvement and diversify the types of people who become involved to ensure more representative development work.

There are a number of issues with volunteering and therefore involvement (including time, money, availability and other commitments), meaning that, in practice, people are often unable to commit to being involved as a volunteer for community-based research or any other project. So the nature of involvement is highly fluid within social regeneration. Some areas managed to retain volunteers for future work, whereas others did not. Explaining causally why this is the case remains beyond the scope of this study, however, a number of factors interplay and affect volunteering within development work contexts. Many partnerships recognised the difficulties associated with holding on to volunteers and therefore offered incentives in an attempt to secure involvement. But these operated with varying success, and so may not work in all regeneration contexts.

Furthermore, involvement is not necessarily linear; in some areas it was cyclical, with a rotation of volunteers frequently occurring. Some partnerships experienced involvement as linear, recruiting volunteers for specific projects, including community-based research, and then retaining them. But for some volunteers involvement can

be a one-off experience. Therefore, if research is used as a development tool in other contexts, there is no specific model that can be exported and reapplied.

Overall, achieving some level of involvement – recruiting people and getting them ‘interested’, for example getting names on lists and members for partnerships – was not perceived as difficult. However, involvement within regeneration may be problematic because it is time-limited, and because of the processes associated with it, such as gaining matched funding and accessing streams of money. Many community members perceived the pace at which change happens is being too slow. Involvement can also be conceptualised in a number of ways. For example, it can mean attending meetings, being involved in the mechanisms of partnerships and being involved in specific projects such as community-based research, as well as engaging in work experience and receiving training. Thus measuring involvement varies according to how it is defined, which is context specific. Finally, some partnerships have greater capacity to advertise and recruit volunteers than others, which can mean higher levels of involvement. However, in the areas examined within this study, raising awareness did not necessarily increase involvement

This study demonstrated that there are problems associated with involvement. Involvement, like partnership, is a feature of current regeneration discourse that requires further investigation because, despite being a key principle underscoring development work, there is no ideal way to achieve it and the context specificity of regeneration programmes serves to complicate the picture further.

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