

# Closing the participation gap - democratic innovations in Scotland

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- A four-year project led by researchers at **University of Glasgow and University of Edinburgh 2014-2018**
- Funded by the ESRC and the Scottish Government
- To support and improve public services in Scotland
- Worked in partnership with **4 local community planning partnerships** and **9 national agencies**
  - Glasgow Centre for Population Health
  - Healthcare Improvement Scotland
  - Improvement Service
  - Inspiring Scotland
  - Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Sciences
  - Scottish Community Development Centre
  - NHS Education for Scotland
  - NHS Health Scotland
  - Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

# International trends in participation

## Story of decline

- Declining...
  - Voter **turnout** in elections
  - **Trust** in & **legitimacy** of traditional institutions of public life (e.g. government, media, parties, unions, community associations, etc)
  - **Social capital**: community 'ethos' & networks

(Dalton 2005; Putnam 2000)

## Story of progress

- What's happening is that **citizens are becoming**:
  - better educated, more knowledgeable and critical;
  - less deferential to traditional authority and elite-driven / hierarchical forms of governance;
  - dismissive of conventional channels and engaged in alternative mechanisms of political expression;
- The **myth of public apathy**

(Norris 2002; Castells 2012)

# Debunking the myth of apathy: Civic participation in Scotland

- Record-breaking participation in the independence referendum (84.6%)
  - A growing, vibrant civil society / third sector: social enterprises, community development trusts, housing associations, transition towns, charities, etc
  - Civic participation on the rise:
    - 55% in 2009
    - 61% in 2013
    - 69% in 2015
- (Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2013 and 2015)

# Participation in local decision-making in Scotland deficits and aspirations

(Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2015 + Ipsos Mori 2014)



**35%** of Scottish citizens feel part of how decisions affecting their community are made

**77%** would get more involved in their community if it was easier to participate in decisions that affect it

**80%** said that people should be involved in deciding how money is spent on local services

**96%** said that people should be involved in making decisions about how local services are planned and run

**In the last 12 months,  
have you participated in a  
forum to discuss policy or  
community issues?**

# Stay standing if at that forum there was a reasonable...

- ...gender balance
- ...mix of personal and professional backgrounds
- ...range of perspectives and opinions
- ... age range (i.e. 3 generations)
- ... income range
- ...sense that most participants felt included and influential
- ...sense that most participants enjoyed it
- ... sense that their participation would have a clear impact

# Key challenges in community engagement

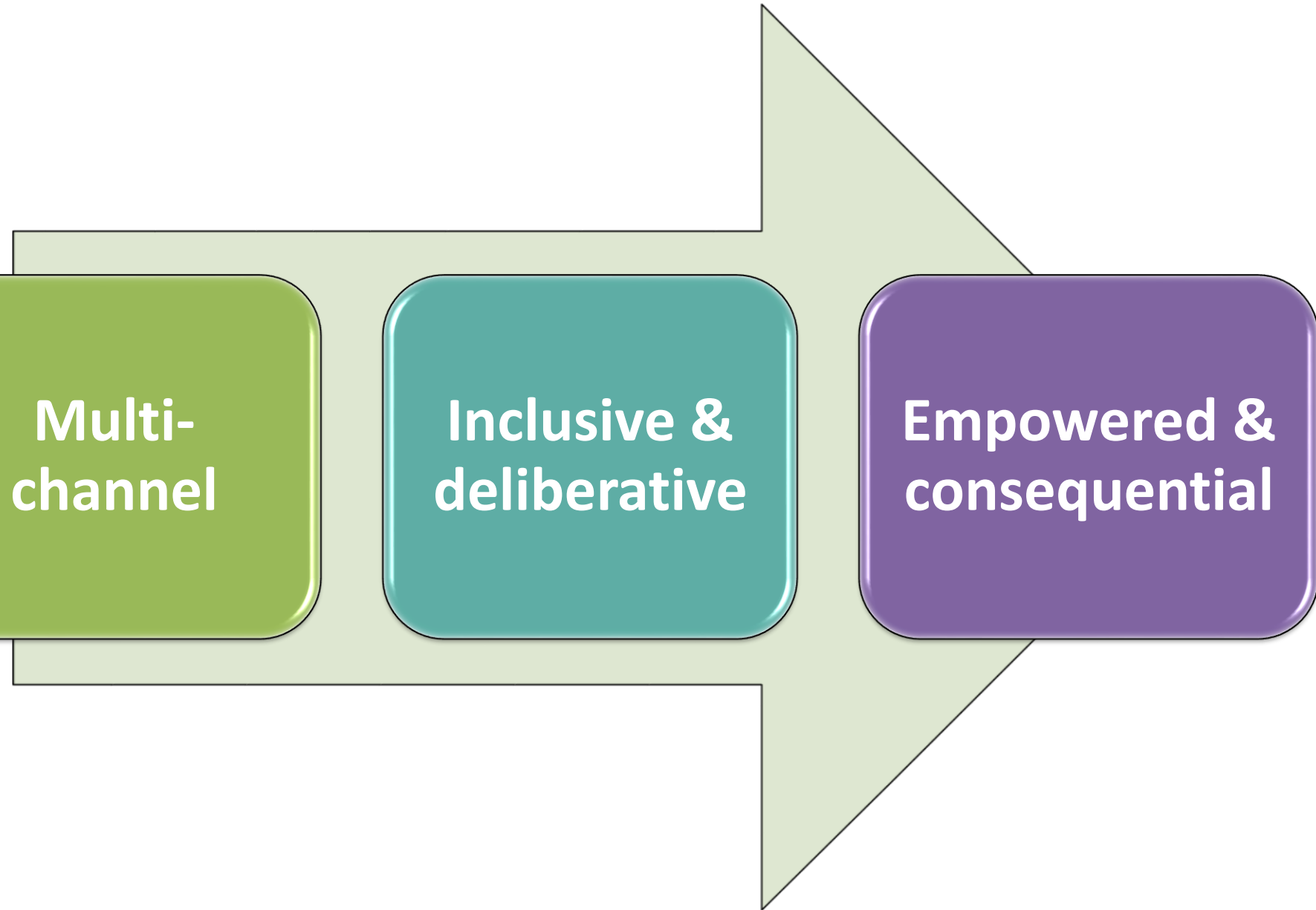




# What Works in public participation?



# 3 components of 'what works' in public participation



# Multi-channel

- Developing a **variety of channels** for participation:
  - online, face to face, combined
  - light-touch vs. intensive
  - ‘**crowdsourcing**’: tapping into ‘the wisdom of the crowds’ (Surowiecki 2005)
  - Open Government (Noveck 2015)
- Examples
  - Better Reykjavik
  - Decide Madrid / Madrid Listens / Laboratories for Citizen Innovation



# Inclusive AND deliberative

- **Inclusion and diversity** are crucial for meaningful, legitimate and effective participation

- demographics AND perspectives
- lowering barriers to participation

- **Deliberative engagement**

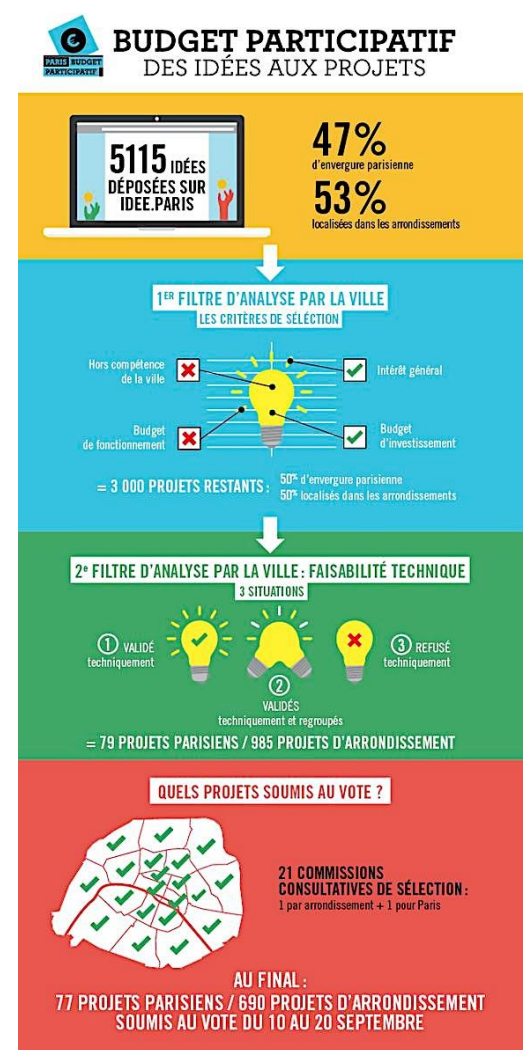
- assessing evidence
- hearing & scrutinising different views
- then, making informed decisions

- **Examples of 'mini-publics' in Scotland**



# Empowered and consequential

- Participation thrives when **important issues and resources** are at a stake, and citizens feel their contribution can actually make a difference
- **Example:**
  - Participatory Budgeting, from Porto Alegre (Brazil) to 2,700 localities around the world







## Representative Democracy

- Electoral dynamics
- Party politics
- Delegating to representatives + bureaucrats/technocrats



## Participatory Democracy

- 1960s onwards
- 'invited' or 'uninvited' publics participate



## Deliberative Democracy

- 1990s onwards
- Emphasis on (i) communication + (ii) new ways of 'making publics'



# Mini-public

*An assembly of citizens,  
demographically representative of the  
larger population, brought together to  
learn and deliberate on a topic in order  
to inform public opinion and decision-  
making*

# Citizens Jury

## Community Bonfire Aberdeenshire

- Partners: **police, fire and council** services
- Jury - local people who described themselves as **not being involved in activism or any formal community groups**.
- Their involvement in the jury was **a new experience**
- They heard from expert witnesses, asked questions, considered the evidence, and **produced their recommendations**
- The jury heard from expert witnesses, asked questions, considered the evidence, and **produced their recommendations**
- The process helped to **'unblock'** the stalemate, **renew relationships** and **open dialogue**, and gave public services **a more nuanced understanding** of the community view



# Mini publics – examples from Scotland



- Resources and examples of mini-publics:  
<http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/topics/mini-publics/>
- Wind farms  
<http://www.climateexchange.org.uk/reducing-emissions/citizens-juries-wind-farm-development-scotland/>
- Health inequalities <http://www.healthinequalities.net>
- North Marr Rural Partnership – a mini public approach to Participatory Budgeting
  - Contact Rosin Daly - roisin@marrareapartnership.org.uk

# International trends in participation



<http://participedia.net>

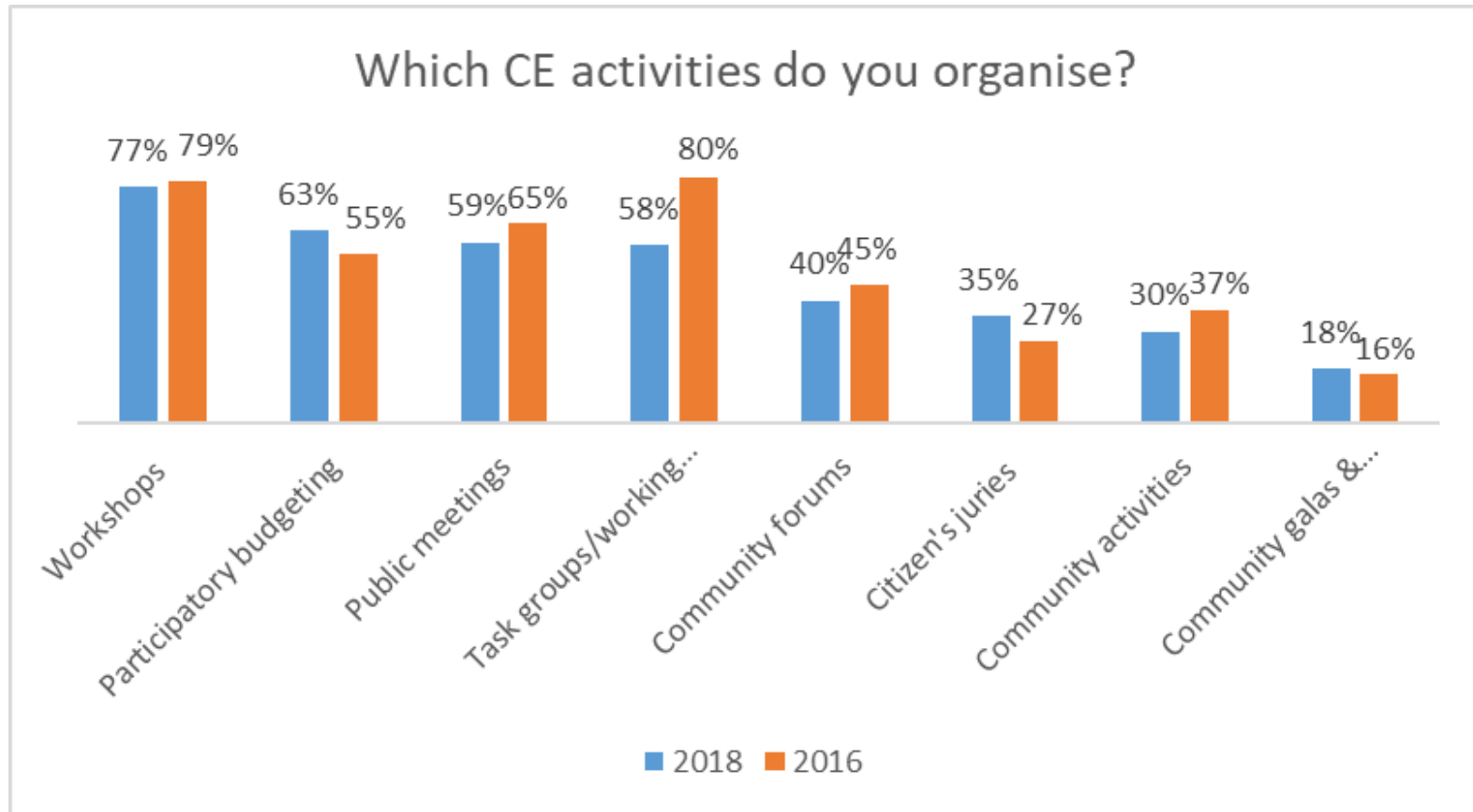
# Deliberative innovations





# CPO survey 2016-2018

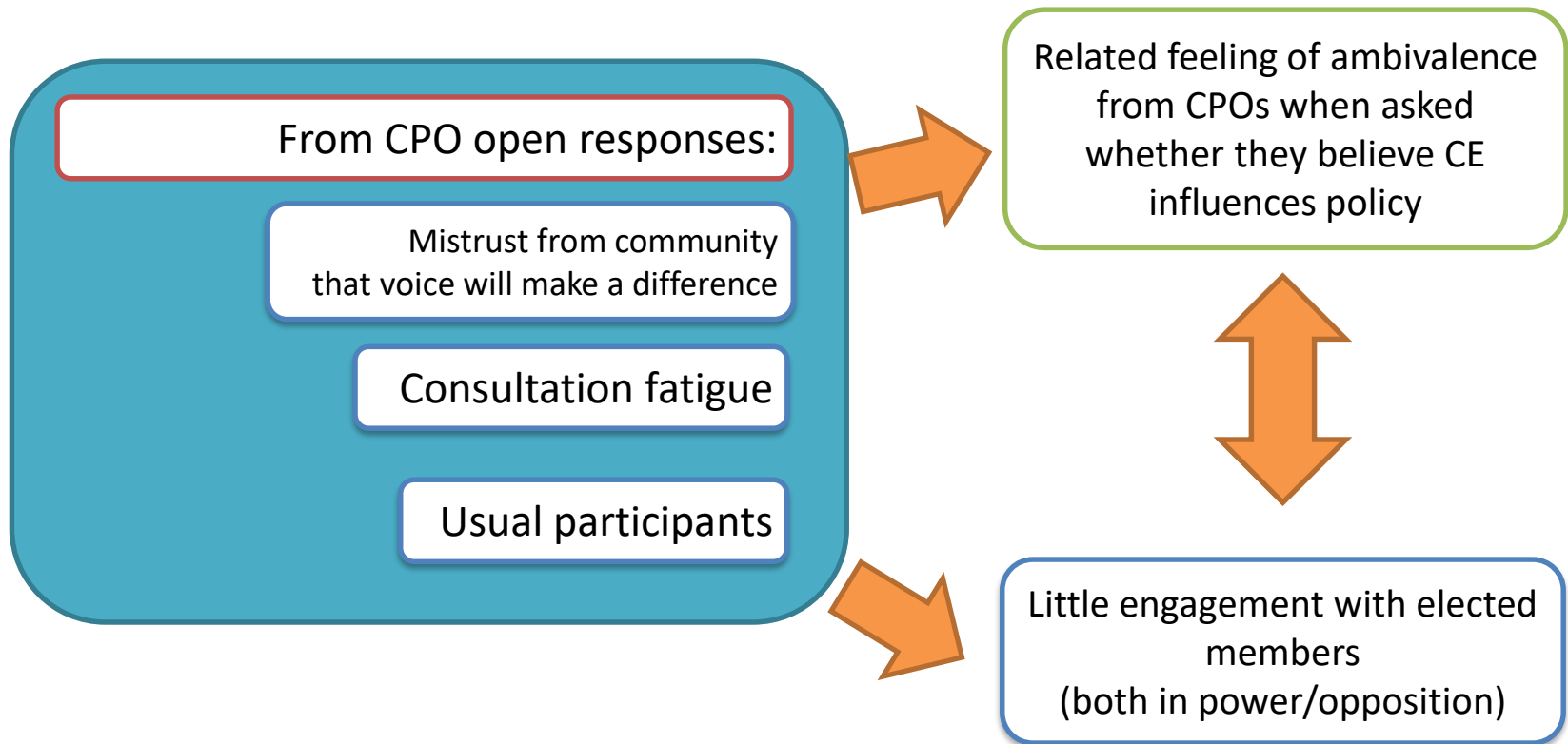
**What Community Engagement activities do Community Planning Officials organise?**



\*Data from WWS Community Planning Officials surveys, 2016 (n = 102) and 2018 (n = 70)

# CPO Survey 2018

## Challenges in community engagement



# Insights from CPO survey

- **Community Planning Officials** - community engagement activities are a very **important aspect of their work**
- There has been an **increase in hybrid activities** - a mix of representatives from established groups and non-affiliated community members
  - **E.g. participatory budgeting, citizen's juries and community forums**
- **Challenges remain**
  - **predominance of associative activities** where participation is limited to those from established groups
  - **lack of impact** - need for improved engagement with elected members / decision-makers

# But is all participation good?

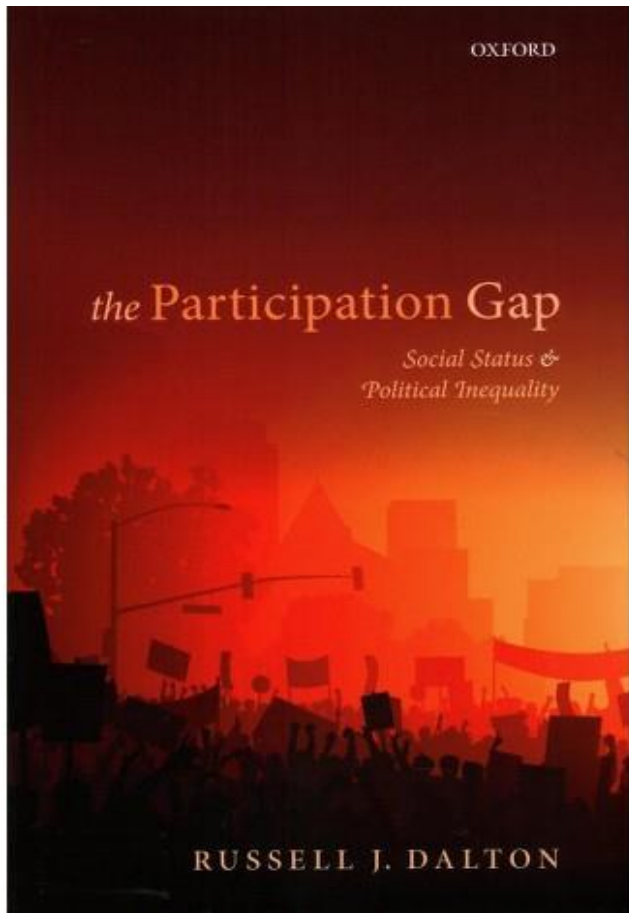
- Paradox of **growing participation and growing inequalities** (Walker, McQuarrie & Lee 2015)
- Inequalities in health, income, wealth, education... stemming from **inequalities of power and influence?** (Dalton 2017)

unless **corrective measures** are taken “participation of all varieties will be skewed in favour of those with higher socioeconomic status and formal education”

(Ryfe & Stalsburg 2012)

# The participation gap

‘a widening gap between  
*‘the politically rich and the politically poor’*’



***‘changes in the methods of political action over time in affluent democracies may actually increase the size of the participation gap’***  
*(Dalton, 2017: 8)*



In Glasgow ... “*the micro-local* may be increasingly important as a site of activism...this both reflects and potentially exacerbates widening socio-spatial inequalities”

(Rolfe, Bynner & Hastings forthcoming in Transforming Glasgow (eds. Kintrea and Madgin))

unless **corrective measures** are taken “*participation of all varieties will be skewed in favour of those with higher socioeconomic status and formal education*”

(Ryfe & Stalsburg 2012)

# Conclusions – closing the participation gap

- **Recognise the local and national context:** participatory governance is still in its infancy; there competing perspectives on community empowerment; and a wider context of uncertainty
- **Scale:** organise participation at a scale and geography that is meaningful and practical for decision-making
- **Incentives:** develop and strengthen democratic innovations - PB; mini-publics; online participation and digital dialogues; provide support with financial costs, childcare and transport
- **Institutional mindsets and skills:** support elected members with a clearer definition of their role; engage public participation professionals skilled in facilitation

# Acknowledgements

- Oliver Escobar, Senior Lecturer at University of Edinburgh and co-director of WWS
- Sarah Weakley, Research Associate, Policy Scotland

**Find out more!**

**whatworksscotland.ac.uk**

 **@wwscot**

# Resources

## Community engagement

[‘Hard to reach’ or ‘easy to ignore’? Promoting equality in community engagement](#)

Evidence review exploring the intersection between community engagement and inequality. It examines evidence, from Scotland and the UK, on what is being done to overcome inequality in community engagement.

[Blog: Facilitative Leadership: Involving citizens and communities in local decision-making’](#)

Development of training for a new era of community participation in local democracy which requires public services staff to develop skills for collaborative engagement.

[What do citizens want?](#)

Research report that reveals the profound effect of formal and informal relationships on people’s wellbeing as seen through the experiences of users of housing services.

## Participatory governance

### [Community Planning after the Community Empowerment Act: The Second Survey of Community Planning Officials in Scotland](#)

Report and executive summary of the findings from the second survey of community planning officials in Scotland, conducted in 2018. It compares the results to those from the 2016 survey and offers an overview of key dynamics, challenges and accomplishments over those two years, with a particular focus on the Community Empowerment Act.

### [Community Planning Officials Survey: Understanding the everyday work of local participatory governance in Scotland](#)

Findings from the first survey of community planning officials in Scotland focused on their role, their work and implications for community planning partnerships and community engagement.

[Pluralism and Democratic Participation: What Kind of Citizen are Citizens Invited to be?](#) Article exploring how different understandings of democracy deal with pluralism and the meaning of democratic life. The focus is on three prominent models in contemporary democratic theory and practice: representative, participatory and deliberative. (Open access)