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The following research was carried out by the Applied Policy Sciences Unit at the University of Central Lancashire in collaboration with the Samuel Lindow Foundation, an independent educational charity based in West Cumbria, which has operated since 1992 to advance the education of the public. It is offered as evidence for the proposed implementation in this region of a Connected Communities programme, an evidence-based framework for activity to address the identified research findings.

The report below responds to the question:

Why do so many communities and groups feel "left behind"? Are there any specific factors which act as barriers to active citizenship faced by different communities or groups - white, BME, young, old, rural, urban? How might these barriers be overcome?

A summary of the work undertaken will be provided in this document, followed by a presentation of evidence to answer the above question, referring specifically to white coastal communities (Centre for Social Justice, 2013).

Knowledge Transfer Partnership Research (2013 - 2016)
A Knowledge Transfer Partnership between the University of Central and Inspira (a careers and personal development social enterprise) sought to create, validate and market an innovative family-centred package of interventions to promote the aspirations of secondary school students to realise their life ambitions. It was made possible by £150,000 of funding from the Technical Strategy Board and the Samuel Lindow Foundation.
Focus groups and interviews held with low-income parents living in areas with high levels of child poverty (Cumbria Intelligence Authority, 2011) revealed that parents and children felt "left behind". By this, parents meant that they felt that they lacked the socially ascribed cultural capital to navigate the world beyond that of their immediate communities (Bourdieu, 1974). These beliefs stem from under-developed sense of self and self-esteem, moulded by a generational exclusion from academic or professional opportunity and success. The experience of feeling "left behind" was exacerbated by low levels of perceived *agency*- that is, members of these communities felt that there was little they could offer to enhance their own lives nor that of the community around them. Consequently, low aspirations were found to be features within these communities, consequently low aspirations were a feature of these communities, which – additionally – outsiders tended to perceive as evidence of a community that had become apathetic.

Connected Communities Research Project (2017 - 2020)
The current research, being undertaken under the auspices of the Centre for Citizenship and Community (CCC) a collaboration between the University of Central Lancashire, the Royal Society for Arts with the London School of Economics, aims to better understand how communities can work together to get the best outcomes for those who live in facing challenges resulting from the prevalence and persistence of child poverty and unemployment. A desk-based needs assessment has been conducted to capture a quantitative and qualitative 'feel' for the community, and will be followed by community engagement and further research planning before embarking on community engagement and research planning.

Desk based needs assessment

An initial desk-based analysis was conducted to identify areas scoring highly in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) as identified by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DfCLG, 2016). It was found that the following features scored highly in coastal communities in West Cumbria:

1. Low income
2. Unemployment
3. Low educational attainment
4. Child deprivation

Furthermore, the subsequent analysis revealed that many communities with high levels of multiple deprivation are vulnerable to relative deprivation (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2007). Relative deprivation refers to the discontent that people may feel when they compare their positions to others and realize that they have access to less of the assets to which they have access to less of the assets to which they feel entitled than those around them, who are also - at times – in close proximity to them. This is well evidenced in the case of Sandwith, the most deprived ward in Copeland (and in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country), which shares a boundary with St Bees, the borough's third most affluent ward (and amongst the 30% least deprived neighbourhoods in the country) (DfCLG, 2016). Relative deprivation can cause feelings of stress, challenge concepts of community coherence, impact on political attitudes and on the potential for participation in collective action (Walker & Smith, 2002).

Stakeholder Consultation

In order to gain insights into the issues that impact on West Cumbrian communities with high levels of multiple deprivation, local stakeholders were engaged in order to provide feedback on the above data. The results of these consultations are presented below using a community capital framework (RSA, 2015).

Well-being

Stakeholders report the existence of a number of small closed networks, which are perceived by some local people as 'cliques' within communities. These can cause isolation to those excluded from these groups, to the extent that these cliques are felt to exist, they foster a sense of isolation amongst those who feel excluded and unable to access whatever benefits or services that others enjoy. Young mothers and older people, for instance, are two groups that have been identified by stakeholders as being the most vulnerable to isolation and loneliness. There are available services for these populations, but low levels of engagement with the services seems to result from the perception that there is a 'clique' membership. Furthermore, low self-esteem across all groups has been identified as being a key factor for many community members, its negative impact being frequently expressed in substance abuse. Again, this is related to the perceived lack of agency, which is summed up in the feeling of being 'left behind' and the commonly heard rationalisation, 'that's not for us' (Bourdieu, 2000, p.185).

Family stress has also been identified as negatively impacting on subjective well being in the community. Stakeholders report a sense of isolation associated with geography: that 'there's nothing up here' which in a circular fashion contributes further to a lack of perceived agency. This is further compounded by the relative deprivation outlined above, in which communities witness affluence that derive from the opportunities provided by the region's nuclear sector, but access to which they perceive themselves as being excluded from. Negative neighbourhood satisfaction is further informed by reports of crime, including vandalism and drug taking by a local primary school, for example. There

have been several attempts to rejuvenate sections of the physical fabric these communities, but these invariably fall victim to vandalism. Consultation with secondary school teachers revealed a concern regarding collective self-esteem, offering evidence that the interventions delivered within school to promote self-esteem did little to promote a positive identity within students' communities.

Citizenship

There is a perception in the community that access to job opportunities are limited ("Sellafield or nothing"). Community members experience a 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1974) in which they feel removed from mainstream employment; indeed, that they do not possess the attitudes, values or social competencies to navigate the employment world. This is despite a number of well-funded, well-attended interventions to support employment opportunities (provided at different times by the nuclear, public and third sectors). Transmitted to young people at an early age, this habitus generates a sense of low aspiration and, commonly, poor educational outcomes. The transition from primary to secondary school has been widely highlighted as having a significant impact on young people from these communities. At primary school, it is reported that children all feel 'in the same boat', due to the homogeneous socio-economic composition of the school while in the comparatively heterogeneous secondary school environment they are confronted more directly to that which they do not have. Consequently, the experience of relative deprivation is further exacerbated.

As previously discussed, there is a poor sense of citizenship and agency within coastal communities. Due to the higher levels of multiple deprivation, a number of interventions have been implemented, with little success. The reasons for this were described by a local police officer as the result of 'intervention fatigue', with community members being resistant to external support due to the experience of the intervention being something done 'to' the community, and not 'with' them. This is further compounded by the widely held attitude that 'we've tried that before and it didn't work'. Again, these kind of feelings / responses impact negatively on the experience of being "left behind", feeling excluded from mainstream society.

The main access to local information, institutions and influence is through social media. It is reported that community members felt competent to access information through this medium as it was familiar and easy to use. Furthermore, local county and town councillors have active Facebook accounts, which are well used both by councillors to communicate with communities, and reciprocally by at least some community members to voice their concerns to those in positions of power. It is felt that the 'faceless' nature of social media, along with its ease of use, is the source of this platform's success.

Capacity

One important consequence of the lack of individual or collective agency is the perception that people perceive themselves as having low levels of civic capacity[1]. Community members report themselves as valuing services that are offered in community centres but as lacking the confidence to take responsibility in the delivery and management of the services. This impacts on the sustainability of the communities, where 'everything [is] dependent on named persons [member of paid staff], and once they finish, the work finishes'. This lack of capacity has been identified as being inter-generational, with primary school teachers reporting that children in early years seem to present a learned sense of helplessness and hopelessness that has been communicated from their parents / their home environment.

Economic

These perceived challenges regarding well-being, citizenship and capacity have significant economic ramifications. For example, there are more people in receipt of welfare benefits than the national average, resulting in a larger cost to the welfare system. Furthermore, substance abuse and health deprivations result an additional and avoidable source of cost pressure for NHS care and treatment at both primary and secondary care levels.

Summary

As our account demonstrates, white coastal communities are vulnerable to barriers associated with feeling 'left behind'. This is a consequence of relative deprivation, and a perceived lack of agency, both of which are influenced by the inter-generational transmission of poverty.

How might these barriers be overcome?

Stakeholder consultation revealed a significant number of aspects of the West Cumbrian communities under consideration as distinctively positive; a strong collective identity and active in-group peer support for example, testifying to this value. It is through these assets that a number of interventions will be co-produced in these communities to promote *community capital*[2], including the promotion of citizenship participation. The interventions will draw on the Connected Communities evidence framework, which has now been further applied and elaborated in a range of local, national and international settings in the work of the CCC. Connected Communities is an asset-based approach to community engagement that focuses on the strengths available to each local community, while acknowledging while acknowledging and identifying other needs. Significantly, the approach sees the often unseen community and social networks of communities as key to these assets. Through co-production, it aims to empower communities to better understand themselves, address their own problems in partnership with other organisations, and realise the opportunities and aspirations.

This framework uses an innovative and inclusive methodology as a means of building community capital. This involves training community researchers to survey local communities, and holding community 'playback' sessions, providing community members with the opportunity to discuss the results, and work together in the co-production of an intervention project. This intervention involves strengthening community assets through bringing important social network relationships to the fore and developing social value (or 'dividends'). The four key areas in which we would expect to see an increase a dividend are well-being, citizenship, capacity and cost. In beginning the programme, we are currently forming steering groups for each community with whom we will be working, involving local stakeholders who are established and embedded in these communities. Through the development of community capital, it is proposed that communities will be less likely to experience the feeling of being 'left-behind'; rather, it is intended over time that they will feel empowered as active agents for change within their own communities and beyond.

An associated aspect of the programme will be the formation in partnership with UCLan and the County Council of a community based youth council. This community model will also involve the focused engagement of schools and families in the challenge to the multiple inequalities by which our communities are impacted. It is essential that young people are enabled to become central to this work. Their engagement in this way as future agents of change within their communities, will be key to breaking the inter-generational transmission of exclusion and poverty to which so many of our coastal communities are vulnerable.

Conclusion

In addressing the question 'why do so many communities and groups feel 'left behind'? the evidence presented here suggests that white, low-income coastal communities experience relative deprivation and low perceived agency, which is experienced across generations. In response to this, there is some evidence that asset-based community engagement within the Connected Communities framework can contribute significant potential to addressing or overcoming these barriers; working closely with communities themselves to co-produce interventions that promote the well-being, citizenship and capacity of their members.

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[1] Defined as "the ability of the key actors in the community development system to influence or shape policy, practice, and resources in ways that allow them to increase the scale, scope, and effectiveness of their activities" (Auspos, Brown & Sutton, 2007, p. iii).

[2] Defined as "the sum of assets including relationships in a community and the value that accrues from these" (RSA, 2015, p. 121).