PLACE-BASED INTEGRATED SERVICES: LITERATURE REVIEW

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In recent years, place-based approaches to service delivery have seen a resurgence in Australia, as community services and government departments seek to address the geographical concentration of long-term, complex social problems. At the same time, the community sector has recognised the importance of collaboration and service integration to better meet the needs of individuals, families, and communities. However, the meaning of concepts such as **place**, **community**, **needs**, and so on are often taken for granted, and the causes and effects of disadvantage conflated in analyses that fail to recognise the complexity of social and structural factors. This literature review outlines the main approaches to the relevant key concepts, as well as providing an insight into some of the benefits and problems associated with place-based integrated service delivery – such as how to **implement** it and **evaluate** its effectiveness.

Place, space, and scale

The central concern of place-based approaches to service delivery is to address the needs of people within a specific location, which may be defined as a suburb, local government area, region, and so on (Bellafontaine & Wisener 2011). Other terms used to describe place-based approaches to service provision also exist, such as 'area-based' approaches (Smith 1999) and 'localisation' or 'localised service delivery networks' (FACS NSW 2014). The terms currently being used all have in common a concern with some form of service delivery that focuses on addressing the needs identified within a specific local area. Even from the very beginning, we can see that what constitutes a 'place' can shift in scale and meaning.

There is a long history of theoretical debate over how to define the terms 'place' and 'space', but common throughout these debates is the attempt to understand the social processes and power plays and inequalities at work in our understanding of specific places. Space has been described as a 'power-geometry' that involves 'a complex web of [social] relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity, and co-operation' (Massey 1992, p. 81), and places are defined and contested through social processes that often involve a struggle between competing interests (Brenner 2000; Harvey 1988 [1973]; Lefebvre 1991 [1979]; McDowell 2015). The spatial aspects of social inequality are important, since 'class, gender and race/ethnic differences exist not only in how populations are distributed across space, but also in how space is used and experienced by different social groups' (Lobao, Hooks & Tickamyer 2007, p. 10).

Furthermore, while evidence points to regional concentrations of disadvantage within Australia (Baum 2008), the results vary depending on the geographical scale used to gather data and the type of disadvantage that is analysed (Byron 2010; Darcy 2007). Residents of some places may share common experiences of social disadvantage and therefore feel a sense of belonging, while at the same time facing little hope of breaking cycles of poverty

due to little investment or injection of new funds into the area, lack of access to healthcare or education, and so on (Arthurson 2002; Darcy 2007; Manley et al 2013).

The relative advantages and disadvantages of individuals reflect the unevenness of broader societal changes:

> Advantage and disadvantage at the level of the individual gets reflected in local communities, neighbourhoods and towns through the uneven spatial impact of advantage and disadvantage on local labour markets, and through the operation of housing markets. In short, changes in social and economic life that have included shifts in economic processes and fortunes, changes to the demographic structure and shifts in the welfare state, are linked to the circumstances in local communities, neighbourhoods and towns because of where particular people live and the nature of their roles in society and the economy. (Baum 2008, pp. 32-33)

At the planning level, it is important to recognise that the interventions meant to address disadvantage may themselves contribute to further disadvantage, for example if gentrification of an area results in merely pricing people out of living in a certain location, rather than addressing their needs. Thus, interventions to address place-based disadvantage need to do more than merely focus on an area's redevelopment:

> While redevelopment inevitably changes the demographic profile of small areas, this measurement-centred approach begs the question of how disadvantage is constructed and understood, and fails to address the issue of causality. Undue emphasis on spatial statistics may thus lead to a misunderstanding of the dynamics of disadvantage at the local level, and to simplistic and ultimately ineffective policy intervention. (Darcy 2007, p. 348)

Place-based approaches are 'limited in [their] capacity to address the impact of more systemic or structural disadvantage, which requires a wider cross-government and non-government commitment' (Darcy & Gwyther 2010, p. 16). If such initiatives hope to effectively address social inequality, they must address both the structural factors of inequality, and questions of scale, by 'establishing at what scale place-based responses can most effectively work and what data are available to help identify places at this scale' (Byron 2010, p. 24). Reaching a shared understanding of 'place' will help in the development of coordinated policies and programs, able to respond to 'the conditions prevailing in particular places' (Moore & Fry 2011, p. 30).

People and communities

Another important consideration is *people*: after all, place-based services are 'designed and delivered with the intention of targeting a specific geographical location(s) and particular population group(s) in order to respond to complex social problems' (Wilks et al 2015, p. viii). Groups of people within the broader population form communities through '*shared identity* and *reciprocity* over time' (Adams & Hess 2001, p. 14). Communities of place, formed through proximity in space, and communities of interest, formed through shared activities, beliefs, experiences and so on, are the two main forms of community. These forms of community are not mutually exclusive, and people may belong to multiple communities at

any one time, through the maintenance of relationships with different people: 'people's sense of community is not based on where they live but on the relationships they have with the people where they live, and on their sense of belonging' (Moore et al 2016, p. 5). At the same time, new technologies are transforming communities, with greater ease of communication and travel across vast distances but also increased fragmentation and unequal access to such technologies. These changes, however, need not necessarily be negative, as long as efforts are made to ensure people feel a sense of belonging:

> Thus the problem we face is not so much that communities are dying but that they are fragmenting. The forms of society have changed, and we need to find new ways of developing community in the fragmented world in which we now find ourselves. We need ways to maintain and enhance those fragments so that they can provide a basis for the wellbeing and development of individuals, neighbourhoods, regions and nations. (Hughes et al 2007, p. 3)

Community cohesion, or lack thereof, is an important aspect to addressing social inequality, since the social environment in which one lives has real effects on an individual's health and wellbeing (Blau & Fingerman 2009; Moore et al 2016; Moore & Fry 2011; Stone 2001). This is especially the case for people who are already in vulnerable positions. Children and families at risk become more vulnerable when social networks are weak, but stronger community cohesion goes some way to allaying these risks (Bessell 2014; Eastman et al 2014; Higgins 2014; Hunter & Price-Robertson 2014; Lohoar 2012; Lohoar et al 2013; Moore et al 2014; Moore et al 2016; Nair 2012; Wright 2004).

Place-based approaches often explicitly focus on a community of place, although communities of interest may also be addressed (Gilbert 2012; Griggs et al 2008; Higgins 2010; Moran 2016; Stewart et al 2011; WESTIR 2016). Communities of interest are those communities that form around a shared interest or common membership of a group, however that is defined. Communities of place and communities of interest need not be mutually exclusive, and indeed, some communities define themselves through both a strong identification with place, and a clearly defined group membership. Remote Indigenous communities, for example, face specific challenges relating both to systemic, structural marginalisation and place-specific factors, as they are often 'characterised by small populations, less developed market economies and a lack of infrastructure, and are largely reliant on government-funded programs' (Stewart et al 2011, p. 2). Remote Indigenous communities also face challenges with justice and policing, an area that has not traditionally been the focus of place-based services (Gilbert 2012, p. 1). Urban Indigenous communities are also engaged in developing programs that respond to local needs, drawing on local expertise, for example the Aboriginal Family Planning Circle in Blacktown LGA (WESTIR 2016). While elements of such programs may be adaptable for other places, and for other groups within remote, rural, and urban populations, their success comes from their ability to address needs that are specific to Indigenous communities in those locations, including considerations of cultural fit, connection to country, stability of core funding, and so on (Moran 2016).

As with the term 'place' discussed above, it is important that the work be done at the planning stage to develop a shared understanding of the term 'community'. Combining the approach of targeting a service at a place as well as a specific group of people allows the community sector to target the services on offer, depending on the needs identified.

Collective impact

One of the key benefits of taking a place-based approach to service delivery is the potential to develop a flexible and dynamic mode of organisation that responds to local needs. However, this flexibility and responsiveness will depend on organisation and planning: place-based services can be delivered in a top-down approach, with 'experts' brought in from outside and little buy-in from local communities. All the relevant organisations need to come together at the planning stage, as they all have their role to play. Government departments, as part of a larger bureaucracy, may not have the flexibility to respond to local need built into their operating models, however NGOs and others in the community sector may not have the budgets or decision-making power to implement those changes. Without significant buy-in from local communities, interventions may fail. Thus, to work well, place-based services need the investment and active collaboration of both larger organisations and local communities, and good data to support their activities (Bradford 2004; Cytron 2010; Government of Canada 2011; Stewart et al 2011, p. 2).

Collective impact is 'the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem' (Kania & Kramer 2011, p. 36). Collective impact needs a number of conditions to be met in order to provide the desired results, including agreement on a common agenda, shared measurement systems, adequate resources (which may include both local and national resources), leadership, and continuous communication (Aquino 2004; Kania & Kramer 2015; Jolin et al 2012). Collective impact can work because all those who have a stake in the outcome are involved, so that 'many different players [can] change their behaviour in order to solve a complex problem' (Kania & Kramer 2011). However, much discussion of collective impact to date has ignored the role that local communities play in ensuring the success of new initiatives.

Communities should be involved in all stages of program development in order to achieve the best outcomes. This is true even as social workers, planners and policy makers turn towards data to support their interventions. As argued by Barnes and Schmitz (2016) in their discussion of community engagement, which drew on the example of a failed initiative to reform Newark, New Jersey public schools:

> *How* policymakers and other social change leaders pursue initiatives will determine whether those efforts succeed. If they approach such efforts in a top-down manner, they are likely to meet with failure…. data-driven solutions will be feasible and sustainable only if leaders create and implement those solutions with the active participation of people in the communities that they target.

Much of the work of community impact, therefore, rests in developing relationships between organisations and communities. Community empowerment is one of the elements needed to achieve lasting social change (Ranghelli 2016).

Identifying needs, evaluating programs

There is no question that social inequality exists, but the measures taken to alleviate it depend on a range of factors. Big data is becoming an increasingly important tool in identifying underlying causes of inequality (Getz 2014; Shah & Gilma 2015). At the same time, funding bodies and governments are developing approaches such as results-based accountability to measure the efficiency and accountability of not-for-profit service providers (Houlbrook 2011). Developing a consistent and effective data collection system can help to strengthen collective impact initiatives, as an element in building consensus between partners and funding bodies. The research conducted during the planning stages will help the partner organisations 'to understand both the problem and how systems will need to shift over time' (Jolin et al 2012, p. 6).

It is also important to develop consensus as to what constitutes a social need, and which needs should be addressed first. Relying only on big data sets, without examining what is being measured, why, and what value judgements are being made, can 'harbour bias against disadvantaged groups or reinforce structural discrimination' (Diakopoulos 2016; see also Darcy 2007). Ife (2016, p. 324) argues:

> Needs cannot be seen as existing by themselves in some objective, measurable way…. It is much more appropriate to think about need statements rather than about needs *per se*, as needs emerge only from the act of definition…. it is essential that people be able to define their own needs; this, after all, is the basis of empowerment.

Thus, discussions about *which* needs should be addressed in a community, and *why*, should also involve all partners, from government organisations, to NGOs, to members of the community themselves.

Of course, data is important in another area as well. As governments and other funding bodies require more evidence that programs are working, organisers will need to consider evaluation within their program design. However, for place-based services, this is not as straightforward as it may seem. There are significant limitations to our ability to evaluate the success of place-based service provision, in that place-based approaches are necessarily 'open systems…in a constant state of interaction with their environment' (Government of Canada 2011, p. 10). In such situations, mixed-methods approaches to evaluation are essential, as they 'allow stakeholders to understand not just the "what" of change, but the "how" of change' (Cytron 2010, p. 7).

Conclusion

From this discussion, it is clear that place-based integrated services have much to offer. If such approaches are to be successful, clear communication between organisations and communities must be combined with a commitment to long-term funding and resourcing, which may come from outside the local area. At the same time, for these initiatives to have long-term impacts, they must be committed to a community development approach, to ensure that existing skills and knowledge within communities are not overlooked, to further develop skills and knowledge within the community, and to ensure that communities are empowered to take ownership over the initiatives in their neighbourhoods.

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