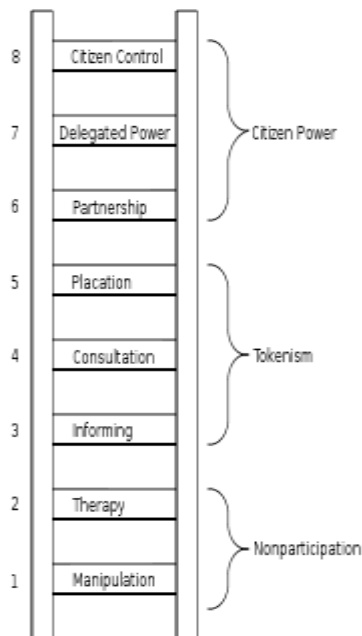


Levels of Participation

Participation suggests some degree of involvement in an activity or an organisation.

There are however different levels of involvement, with some people being at the centre of activity and decision making whilst others take a back seat role. The level of participation therefore relates to how much power or influence participants actually have.

ARSTEIN'S LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION - is arranged so that each rung represents the degree of power the citizen holds



At the top rungs of the ladder **community participation is about empowering citizens, and citizens** have increasing decision-making clout the further up the ladder you go.

At these levels citizen's opinions are taken into account and acted upon, they have a direct say in developing alternatives and identifying preferred solutions and, at the top of the ladder, they are in a position to initiate or make decisions themselves.

Key features include partnership and collaboration between communities (or service users) and service providers at each stage of decision making to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

At these levels participants have some involvement in an organisation or community but others still make the final decisions.

When participation is restricted to these levels citizens may indeed be heard, but they lack the power to ensure that their views will be listened to by the decision makers.

There is a risk that this involvement may be tokenistic, or designed to placate communities, as while they may be invited to give their opinions or advise, the final decision is still held by those who hold decision making power.

The bottom rungs are essentially non-participation as, although people may be members of an organisation or community, their involvement is passive and they have no real say or influence in how it operates.

Members are expected to go along with the decisions of others and are usually powerless to make changes themselves.

Arstein’s ladder of citizen participation (described on the previous page) suggests that some levels are always better than others. In practice however different levels of participation are appropriate in different circumstances and at different stages of a process. What makes the difference is often the motivation of those leading, or encouraging, the participation.

Using the ladder below (which has been adapted from the Arnstein model) try to think of examples of participation you have been involved in (or know of) to illustrate each level. What has been the strengths and/or weaknesses in each case?



EMPOWERMENT gives people the **RESOURCES TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY** on community initiatives.
Here an organisation (or traditional decision maker) helps participants to do what they want.

COLLABORATING or joining in **PARTNERSHIP** with others means acting together to provide a service.
By **ACTING TOGETHER** not only do different interests decide together what is best, but also they form a partnership to carry it out and are equally responsible for the outcome.

INVOLVING means an organisation asking others to participate and help plan or run an event, service or policy.
Here participants are encouraged to provide additional ideas and options, and to join in with decision making about the best way forward (**DECIDING TOGETHER**)

CONSULTATION is about giving people **OPTIONS** about what **COULD** be done.
Consultations must be clear about what they are asking people’s opinion about and why, what can and cannot be changed and which decisions the results of the consultation can influence.

INFORMING tells people what is planned so that they are informed about what **WILL** be done or what will happen.

Your examples...

Strengths

Weaknesses

Session 3

Worksheet

Empowering -

Collaborating -

Involving -

Consulting -

Informing -

