



PARTNERSHIPS:

A LITERATURE REVIEW

Partnerships: A Literature Review

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	2
Policy Context	3
Partnerships	5
Definition of partnership	
Types of partnerships	
Capacity for engaging in partnerships	
Community engagement	
Governance	9
What is governance?	
Tensions between network governance and centrally driven policy	
Evaluation of partnerships	
Partnership failure	
Summary	12
References	13



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POLICY CONTEXT

Working in partnership across government departments and their agencies and with the community, voluntary and business sectors and trade unions is central to government policies for tackling complex problems. Several such partnerships have been set up to improve health in deprived communities and address inequalities in health in Ireland and Northern Ireland. For example, in Northern Ireland the *Investing for Health* (IfH) public health strategy led to the establishment of four partnerships as a key mechanism for implementing this strategy. These partnerships all share a common goal of reducing inequalities in health by effectively tackling the wider determinants of health. The involvement of communities and users in deciding and implementing policies is central to their approach. The *RAPID* programme, led by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in Ireland, similarly focuses on bringing government departments and state agencies together with community and voluntary organisations to coordinate services for disadvantaged communities.

Definition of partnership: where two or more organisations make a commitment to work together on something that concerns them both, develop a shared sense of purpose and agenda, and generate joint action towards agreed targets.

Health Education Board, Scotland 2001

EVALUATING PARTNERSHIPS

People often assume that collaboration will be more effective than efforts planned and carried out by a single organisation, yet there is little evidence that collaboration has improved health status or impacted on health systems. Evaluating partnerships is difficult for various reasons such as the long timescales for achieving impact, different perspectives on what success means, the complexity and variability of partnership interventions, and the different contexts within which partnerships work.

RESEARCH INTO MEASURING THE BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIPS

The Research and Development Office for Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland funded the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) to undertake research into partnerships between 2003 and 2006, as part of their *New Targeting Social Need* programme. The study was a collaboration between IPH and the Centre for Psycho-Social Studies at the University of the West of England. The aim of the research was to identify the impacts of multisectoral partnerships, how they can be measured, and what contribution they make to tackling inequalities in health.

In-depth case studies of four partnerships were carried out with: *Armagh and Dungannon Health Action Zone* (ADHAZ); *North and West Belfast Health Action Zone* (NWBHAZ); *Northern Neighbourhoods Health Action Zone* (NNHAZ); and *Western Investing for Health Partnership* (WIHP). Based on these case studies, IPH has developed a conceptual model linking the collaborative efforts of partnerships to benefits which impact upon the determinants of health and a set of indicators for use in assessing progress.

The indicators make up a Partnership Evaluation Tool (PET) which has been developed as a web-based resource available on the Institute's website for any partnership to use to support its own assessment and development.



This paper reviews theories relevant to partnership working and to partnerships as a form of network governance, to inform our research. It describes definitions of partnership and network governance; how a strong emphasis on such structures evolved as part of Labour's modernisation agenda; and explores the tensions between the Labour Government's aspiration to strengthen community participation and civic leadership and their tendency to drive policy centrally. It also considers the literature on organisational capacity for collaboration and community engagement. Finally, it looks at approaches to partnership evaluation and their implications for understanding partnerships as mechanisms for change. The literature on both governance and partnerships has burgeoned in the last decade or so and our review is intended to be comprehensive rather than exhaustive.

PARTNERSHIPS

DEFINITIONS OF PARTNERSHIP

The Audit Commission (1998:16) refers to the term partnership as a 'slippery concept'. There is no one agreed definition of what exactly is meant by 'partnership'. Clarke and Glendinning (2002:33) see this non-specificity as having some advantages politically in that it provides a 'key, overarching and unifying imagery' of Labour's new approach to governing and like the ideal of 'community involvement', who could disagree with the principle of working in partnership? Powell and Glendinning (2002:2) comment that 'in government circulars and ministerial policy pronouncements, [partnership] is largely a rhetorical invocation to a vague idea'.

The Health Education Board for Scotland (2001:3) offers a working definition of partnership: 'Partnerships are formed where two or more organisations make a commitment to work together on something that concerns both, to develop a shared sense of purpose and agenda, and to generate joint action towards agreed targets'. Stern and Green (2005:270) provide what they call a pragmatic definition in which a partnership is 'a programme that has a high level of commitment, mutual trust, equal ownership and the achievement of a common goal', as distinct from networks which might 'involve sharing information or other resources but not for the explicit purpose of joint working'. Many partnerships may, however, have difficulty in reaching the level of mutuality implied by this definition.

Terms such as collaboration, cooperation, coordination, coalition, network, alliance and partnership are often used interchangeably (Huxham 1996). Different forms of working together may occur along a continuum with isolation and integration as the extreme points. Isolation refers to the absence of joint activity and integration refers to organisations being ready to form a unitary organisation (Powell and Exworthy 2001). Between the extreme points there may be some informal inter-agency contact marginal to the goals of the separate organisations; or contact may be more formal and structured but still marginal; or it may develop to a stage where joint working is seen by the agencies as central to mainstream activities and in which a level of trust has developed. Most partnerships, including the partnerships in this research, tend to fall somewhere towards the middle of this range.

Huxham (1996) coined the term 'Collaborative Advantage' which is of relevance to all forms of collaboration, and by which she means 'the creation of synergy between collaborating organisations' which refers to something 'unusually creative' being achieved that no organisation could have achieved on its own.

Himmelman (1996:7-28) considers collaboration as a means to transform power relations. He refers to power as 'the capacity to produce intended results'. In particular he is concerned with using collaboration as a means of supporting and building the capacity of poor communities and in shifting power from government agencies towards those who traditionally have been excluded. He sees collaboration as an important change strategy.

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS

Variations in the constitution of partnership boards may give an indication of who have access to and influence over decision-making (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002). Some partnership boards have little or no involvement of the community or client group being served. Others are community-inclusive with significant representation from community and voluntary interests. Sullivan and Skelcher found that agency-inclusive boards are the norm, that the great majority of members in a range of partnerships in the fields of regeneration, health, community safety and other forms of partnership are senior managers from the relevant agencies. Community representation on partnership boards tends to be limited. Community

participation is often provided by some type of consultative forum. As Newman (2001) observed, there is a tendency to marginalise difference through the formation of a tightly focused group which can work to a common agenda, with the less powerful being left out of the process.

Powell and Glendinning (2002) categorise partnerships according to which sectors are involved. This gives public-private, public-public, public-voluntary and public-community partnerships. Partnerships often involve all these parties to make up what is referred to as multisectoral partnerships. In partnerships concerned with achieving public good, it can be very hard to engage the private sector whom Skelcher (2003:13) refers to as 'a hard-to-reach group'. When studying multisectoral partnerships it may be useful to establish not only which sectors are represented but also which sector takes the lead. Most commonly the statutory sector takes the lead but some local initiatives may be community-led, such as some Healthy Living Centres (Institute of Public Health in Ireland 2007).

The Audit Commission (1998) has explored reasons why agencies form partnerships. The partnerships in their research were designed to tackle what the Commission term 'wicked issues'. These are complex and intractable problems which cross traditional organisational boundaries and which present challenges that agencies cannot tackle on their own.

The term 'wicked issues', introduced in the UK by Stewart (1991, in Newman 2001:59), refers to problems with the following characteristics:

- they are subject to competing definitions about the nature of the problem
- the relationship between the different factors contributing to the problem are hard to assess
- interventions do not fit into single-policy frameworks
- effective intervention requires collaboration both in policy formulation and delivery.

There may be different motivations behind the participation of organisations from different sectors. Stern and Green (2005) identify different motivations for statutory sector partners and community organisations to engage in partnerships from their research on two *Healthy Cities* partnerships. For community representatives, involvement represented a "'foot-in-the-door" of decision-making processes of the authorities' (*ibid.*:274). They saw incremental progress as a strategy for long-term change and recognised the importance of improved dialogue in helping to move forward. Partners from statutory organisations felt that their primary responsibility was to protect the interests of their organisations and that their role was therefore to act as 'gatekeepers at the door'. This required them to maintain the agenda of the partnership within the limits of their organisations' policies. 'This position ... led to a conflict of interest for the authority representatives, for as well as maintaining the interest of the authorities, they were also endeavouring to satisfy the agenda of the partnership. One way of resolving this dilemma was by steering the partnership towards marginal, process oriented, short-term interventions' (*ibid.*:274). Stern and Green conclude that the partnerships adopted 'satisficing' compromises: solutions that were 'good enough' if not optimal, and adopted an explicitly incremental approach that enabled a level of progress, whilst not 'rocking the boat'.

CAPACITY FOR ENGAGING IN PARTNERSHIPS

The growing emphasis on collaboration between agencies and sectors is creating the need for potential partners to develop their capacity for working together across organisational and sectoral boundaries. Both individual and organisational capacity is required. Individuals need specific skills and attributes to enable them to work in this environment while within partner organisations, a culture supportive of collaboration is important (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002). To date, more attention has been paid to building community capacity to engage in collaboration but increasingly the focus is moving to other sectors.

Individuals who exhibit the skills and attributes for driving collaboration have been called boundary-spanners or reticulists (Williams 2002; Alter and Hage 1993, in Sullivan and Skelcher 2002:50-51).

Boundary spanners are people who are skilled communicators, networkers and negotiators and have good conflict resolution skills and can deal with uncertainty and risk.

A particularly important role that they play is to act as a link person between partners in the early stages of collaboration. Being trusted and trustworthy is an important attribute. Other research has highlighted the importance of personality as a necessary dimension in leading collaboration (Asthana *et al* 2002).

Commitment to partnership at senior level is commonly cited as an important factor in ability of partnerships to be effective (Hardy *et al* 2000; Evans and Killoran 2000). In particular, partnership sponsors need to be able to position the initiative on the strategic agenda. Choice of representative is important. The status and level of participation of statutory representatives is often seen as carrying significance, and 'the attendance or non-attendance of senior staff [is] being taken as a visible signal of the strength or absence of support' (Asthana *et al* 2002:788). If less senior managers represent the organisation they need to have their legitimacy confirmed by senior officers and as far as possible be given relative autonomy to make decisions.

At both individual and organisational level, leadership is a key attribute and is required from all members of a partnership: from the chair; from partners on behalf of their organisations or the group they represent; and from partners who are required to lead on particular issues (Boydell 2001).

Crosby and Bryson (2005) have developed a framework, 'leadership for the common good', in which: 'representatives of diverse stakeholders engage in defining public problems, finding promising solutions and in obtaining and sustaining the necessary policies, programs, rules and norms that can establish a 'regime of mutual gain' over the long haul... A regime of mutual gain is a policy regime that achieves widespread, lasting benefits at reasonable cost and that taps and serves people's deepest interests in, and desires for, a better world for themselves and those they care about' (*ibid.*:182).

They emphasise that leadership capabilities may be exercised by many people 'and even by groups and organisations over the long course of a policy change effort. While an individual may exhibit talent in exercising a particular capability, an important meta-skill for a leader seems to be knowing when he or she is best suited to provide a type of leadership and when to turn that work over to someone else' (*ibid.*:183). They identify several leadership capabilities required to exercise 'leadership for the common good' including political leadership, which they refer to as 'making and implementing decisions in legislative, executive and administrative arenas' (*ibid.*:187).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Within government policy discourse, partnership working between public agencies and community organisations is a consistent theme. The dominant assumption seems to be that if only local communities could get involved and play their part, then automatic progress would result (Blaxter *et al* 2003). However, it appears that those in community organisations that come to the table are expected to accept existing structures, conventions and rules of participation and that they will 'accept responsibility to deliver community compliance with the aims of the process' (*ibid.*:133). The issue of power is not addressed.

Picken *et al* (2002), exploring the processes that constrain the capacity of statutory organisations to work effectively with lay communities, found that a key issue for lay people is the way in which local communities are seen by statutory sector workers as a collection of needs and problems. Although they are seen as having a legitimate voice in defining these needs and problems, it is much less likely that they will be seen to have an equal right to contribute to solutions. Picken and colleagues found that few statutory sector workers are able to see the community as a resource and to seek to harness the energy, experience and skills of local people to support the development of solutions. Many statutory sector workers were found to have an overly simplistic approach to communities, with a lack of appreciation for the daily life of people living in deprivation, and they were unable to deal with diversity or the competing interests of different groups. There was an over-emphasis on professionals' expert knowledge compared with knowledge based on experience. Statutory sector workers identified the tension between the need for public accountability and the desire for innovation and change. Financial accountability and audit mechanisms were seen to lead to risk aversion, which is seen to conflict with the entrepreneurial culture of the voluntary sector. Lasker and Weiss (2003) also draw attention to the tendency of professionals to determine the language used and the way in which issues are framed. Craig and Taylor (2002:134) refer to the way in which partnerships tend to be developed within existing structures, processes and frameworks and calls this 'new rhetoric poured into old bottles'. They suggest that public sector cultures are so engrained that power holders are often unaware of the ways in which they perpetuate unequal power relations through use of language and procedures.

Where lay people are members of the strategic body directing a collaboration, their role is a representative one. These individuals tend to be 'community leaders', that is, people who are recognised as having a legitimate position of authority within their communities. Community representation can also be secured through the formation of an umbrella body to represent the interests of a particular group or groups, who then elect or appoint a leader to participate. Because of the relatively small number of seats available for community representatives on strategic partnerships, it may be difficult to have the diversity of the local population fully represented, thus compounding exclusion.

Newman (2002:11) criticises the tendency to treat communities, particularly geographic communities as homogenous, using 'un-gendered, unracialized and non-antagonistic conceptions of the public' and treating them as if they are single entities that can be consulted with, engaged in dialogue or enter into decision-making.

This is often manifested in the way communities are represented by umbrella organisations in the voluntary sector, selected by people from the statutory sector. Community representatives are therefore seldom elected by communities themselves, and the organisations may not have the time or the resources to provide comprehensive feed back to their communities (Jewkes and Murcott 1998).

Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) state that one of the most powerful ways in which statutory bodies can silence community leaders is to question their representativeness. They also refer to the danger of community leaders becoming 'unpaid community professionals' required to manage the paperwork and bureaucracy associated with their involvement (*ibid.*:170). It is important to be aware of the danger of burnout for community leaders. The costs of participation in terms of time and money tend to borne disproportionately by small community organisations (Asthana *et al* 2002).

An alternative view put forward by Barr and Huxham (1996) is that what is important for community representatives is not their representativeness, but that they bring a community perspective, ease of communication with the community and engender trust. They conclude that community involvement does take time, requires changes in working practices,

professional and technical language and organisational culture. It is important that there is an open agenda and that community representatives can challenge 'conventional wisdom' (Lasker and Weiss 2003:28). Damodaran (1996, in Asthana *et al* 2002) identifies 'hostage phenomenon' which refers to the way users who become involved take on different values and perceptions from the group which they represent. They suggest the same can happen to community representatives. The possibility of their involvement in partnerships resulting in the distancing of community representatives from the community is also flagged up by Jewkes and Murcott (1998). It is important not to assume that community members want to become fully involved or necessarily take responsibility for decision-making (El Ansari and Phillips 2001). Representation of the community by non-elected members of the community also potentially undermines the democratic process by displacing elected politicians (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998).

GOVERNANCE

WHAT IS GOVERNANCE?

The concept of governance is increasingly applied in social policy. Indeed, it has been claimed that 'governance has become the defining narrative of British Government at the start of the new century' (Rhodes 2000, quoted in Newman 2001:11). The term signifies a change in the understanding of governing processes and is not synonymous with 'government' in current usage of the term (Rhodes 1997).

Rhodes uses the term governance to refer to '*self-organising, inter-organisational networks* characterized by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state' (Rhodes 1997:15).

These networks are autonomous and self-governing because the capacity of government to control is limited by factors such as the complexity of policy processes and the multiplicity of institutions involved (Kickert 1993). Governance by networks is seen as providing an alternative mode of government to hierarchies and markets, in which the state is seen as steering action within complex social systems (Rhodes 1997; Kooiman 1993, 2000). In network forms of governance, trust is the central co-ordinating mechanism, in contrast to command in hierarchies and competition in markets (Rhodes 1997).

Rhodes refers to a 'hollowing out' of the nation state in which power has shifted upwards and outwards to international and global markets and downwards to local agencies (Rhodes 1997). A similar view is held by Newman (2001:11-12) who claims that 'the state, it is argued, can no longer assume a monopoly of expertise or of the resources necessary to govern, but must rely on a plurality of interdependent institutions and actors drawn from within and beyond government'. She describes a move away from coordination through hierarchy and competition towards networks and partnerships. New governance structures have developed in 'response to the challenge of governing complex and fragmented societies, and the difficulties faced by the state in attempting to solve complex and intractable social problems through direct forms of intervention' (*ibid.*:14). It is expected that coordination through inter-organisational networks will enhance 'the capacity of local agencies to respond more flexibly to changing patterns of need, new funding arrangements, shifting political priorities and the increasing complexity of localities and communities' (*ibid.*: 14).

Newman suggests that in discussing changes to the way society is governed, the governance literature has paid insufficient attention to issues of power: 'Theories of governance that focus on the steering capacities of networks and partnerships tend to marginalise issues of agency and individual, institutional and state power' (*ibid.*:20). She proposes that the faith

placed in the self-governing and self-coordinating capacities of people in the systems-based theories on which much of the literature on governance is based is problematic. The question is 'which people and institutions have the power to define the terms of the debate or the way in which a problem is to be understood' (Watson 2000, quoted in Newman 2001:30). Newman refers to the new public policy discourses which have emerged under New Labour, for example, joined-up government, social exclusion, evidence-based policy, best value and public involvement and suggests that these terms are adopted by organisations to establish or retain legitimacy in a changing policy environment. These in turn produce shifts in authority and power in organisations (*ibid.*).

A key point made by Newman is that New Labour has placed 'a distinctive emphasis on devolution, public participation, partnership, policy evaluation, long-term capacity-building, public participation and democratic renewal' suggesting 'an emphasis on the open system and self-governance model' but that 'this emphasis is cross-cut by residues of, and even an intensification of, other styles of governance' (*ibid.*:39).

TENSIONS BETWEEN NETWORK GOVERNANCE AND CENTRALLY DRIVEN POLICY

While Labour promoted a shift towards governance based on networks and partnerships they also needed to demonstrate that they were achieving results. This has created tension between the use of local partnerships to deliver centrally-driven policies and allowing them to focus on locally determined needs and priorities. Newman suggests that rather than Labour having strengthened local decision-making, partnerships may 'be viewed as a further dispersal and penetration of state power' (*ibid.*:125). The Government may in fact be using the principle of governance through local networks to strengthen its power over local politics in that local stakeholders, including community groups and business organisations, are drawn into a more direct relationship with Government to carry out Government's agenda (Davies 2005).

Rummery (2002) concludes that strong central control, in the form of targets to increase vertical accountability, is inimical to the horizontal sharing of goals which would enable local partnerships to work effectively. She suggests that an over-prescriptive encouragement of partnership working by Government can undermine the kind of reflexive, adaptive working methods necessary for effective partnerships.

Newman (2001) also highlights the tensions between promoting accountability within partnerships, maintaining flexibility, ensuring things get done (pragmatism) and sustainability. For example, putting in place structures to promote accountability may limit flexibility and create barriers to fast action. A pragmatic focus on delivering short-term goals may inhibit capacity building and limit sustainability. Craig and Taylor (2002:134) highlight the negative impact of new partnerships having to 'hit the ground running', as working against full engagement because it does not allow sufficient time for building relationships and trust.

Northern Ireland has been affected by Labour's modernisation agenda, including the promotion of network forms of governance, but this has been at a slower pace and with a lighter touch compared with the rest of the UK. There has been greater organisational stability to date and while a range of area-based initiatives are in place, there has been less government intervention. For example, two of the *Health Action Zones* (HAZ) studied in this research have been in existence since 1999, which may create opportunities for the development of a mature partnership, which, in turn may have implications for the ability to achieve change.

EVALUATION OF PARTNERSHIPS

With growing Government commitment to public governance through partnerships as well as to evidence-based policy-making, there is concern about whether partnerships add value (Davies 2002). Davies raises the possibility that partnerships can lead to governance failure, may generate more costs than benefits, and may not provide an unqualified answer to the problems they are set up to address. Bauld *et al* (2005) reporting on the evaluation of HAZ in England, found that they did not achieve the goals identified at the start of the programme. Mann *et al* (2004) also comment on the scant evidence that efforts to improve partnership working in the public sector have improved outcomes for services users and warn that it can in fact lead to losses for less powerful partners, particularly from the voluntary sector. Huxham and Vangen (2004) say that despite the rhetoric of partnerships, reports of success are uncommon.

The core purpose of evaluation is to determine the effects or effectiveness of an intervention. In the case of partnerships, this raises substantial methodological challenges.

As part of the increasing emphasis on evidence-based policy and practice (Muir Gray 2004), interest in evaluating partnership outcomes is commonly driven by a desire to justify the investment of resources, to identify and replicate what works and to eliminate interventions that do not work.

Social scientists have pointed out the limitations of evaluations that focus exclusively on outputs and/or outcomes. Objective measures are not necessarily obtainable methodologically in applied research or when the environment in which the research is taking place is dynamic and subject to multiple and complex influences (Guba & Lincoln 1981; Strauss & Corbin 1990). Two theoretical approaches which claim to take these complexities into account and have increasingly been used in the evaluation of partnerships, including the national evaluation of HAZ in England (Judge 2000; Barnes *et al* 2005), are 'Realistic Evaluation' (Pawson and Tilley 1997) and 'Theories of Change' (Connell and Kubisch 1998). Experience of using Theories of Change in evaluation of HAZ has found that it does address some of the methodological and conceptual challenges of evaluating partnerships (Cole 2003). It is, however, a difficult, time-consuming and resource intensive approach to use. Moreover, requiring a range of stakeholders to participate in theory generation, it can be difficult to reach a consensus (Springett and Young 2002). This approach has mainly been used to evaluate projects and programmes developed by partnerships rather than the impact of partnership working itself.

Dowling *et al* (2004), in a literature review of research examining the impact of partnership working to assess the evidence concerning their effects, found that 'despite the emphasis on evidence-based policy-making and the dictum that what works is what counts, these policy imperatives [to work in partnership] do not appear to be based on sound evidence that partnership works' (*ibid.*:309-310). They drew a distinction between process measures which refer to the health of the partnership, and outcomes, that is, whether partnerships lead to benefits such better services or improved health for users. They found the distinction between processes and outcomes unclear. For example, developing relationships or trust might be seen as processes, while relationships and trust developed as outcomes (Asthana 2002; Boydell and Rugkåsa 2007). While they accept that such achievements may provide benefits for partners' organisations, they do not necessarily result in better outcomes such as improved health or reduced social exclusion. They do, however, recognise the problems associated with attribution and causality in evaluation of longer-term impacts.

Taylor (2005) suggests that evaluation has now become a legitimating device for government, suggesting that the pursuit of objective scientific evidence of what works supports the idea of value-free policy. He quotes Guba and Lincoln as saying, 'to approach evaluation scientifically is to miss completely its fundamental social, political and value-oriented character' and Pawson and Tilley, who say that 'the very act of engaging in evaluation constitutes a political statement' (Guba and Lincoln 1979, and Pawson and Tilley, 1997, quoted in Taylor 2005:602-603). Taylor (2005:603) proposes that evaluation should be seen as 'socially located and understood as politically contested'. It is a discursively constructed concept. It is not neutral but works in the service of power relations.

In this research our concern has been with how to measure the benefits of partnership working and we have already referred to the development of a model in the introduction to this report. The difficulty we have encountered is that the benefits identified are what Davies (2002) would refer as 'soft' and what Dowling *et al* (2004) might refer to as process measures. To address this criticism we have embraced the concept of intangible assets, the value of which is based on their capacity to generate change leading to future value. This notion is explored in an accompanying paper.

PARTNERSHIP FAILURE

Jessop (2004) puts forward the argument that markets, hierarchies and network governance are all prone to failure, given the complexity of the social world. He identifies a 'rhetoric of partnership', which he says leads commentators to highlight achievements and describe failure as exceptional. He suggests that failure should be recognised as a routine feature of everyday life and that we should reflect on failure, adjust projects and consider whether the mode of governance should be modified.

Stern and Green (2005) also highlight a 'rhetoric of optimism' in the midst of the limited potential of partnerships to bring about change.

'At first sight there is little incentive for contributing energy and effort into partnerships that are unlikely to gain major policy gains. Yet the practice contradicts the assumption. Are those involved, then suffering from naivety, or an excess of optimism that their partnership is likely to avoid the tensions widely described in the literature? How do those working at the interface cope with the possibility of disillusionment, given the limited potential?' (*ibid.*:271)

The answer to this paradox given in their paper is the suggestion that for communities, partnerships provide the 'foot-in-the-door' to statutory agencies. For public sector bodies, it meets the requirement to engage with other agencies and communities in decision-making.

SUMMARY

In this paper we have given a brief overview of the literature on partnerships as a form of governance to enable discussion of the implications of the findings of our research. We have offered some perspectives on definitions and forms of partnership to give a better understanding of the partnerships in this research. We have addressed some issues of organisational capacity and community engagement, both of which influence the potential of partnerships as mechanisms for change. Finally we have discussed the limitations of current methods of evaluation to demonstrate that partnerships have achieved worthwhile outcomes, leading to an exploration of what motivates and sustains partners in the absence of evidence of achievement. While there is acknowledgement in the literature that the purpose of partnerships is to achieve important goals in the interest of the public good, there is relatively little consideration of how that change may be achieved.

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