Democratic innovation: Involving citizens and communities in local decision making

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WHAT WORKS SCOTLAND

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Outline

- Why community participation?
- Policy context: a glass half full or half empty?
- Local democracy in Scotland
- International trends in participation
- Challenges in participation
- What works in participation?
- Making it happen

Why community participation?

(Involve 2005)

- Addressing **complex problems** drawing on untapped knowledge, experience and perspectives
- Making **better policies** and ensuring effective implementation
- Improving public **service design and delivery**
- Building **legitimacy and trust** in public institutions
- Developing **citizens' skills, confidence and ambition**
- Enabling more **active citizens and communities**

Policy context for community participation in local democracy

- Relaunch of the National Standards for Community Engagement (2016)
- Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015
- Participatory Budgeting national programme (2014-2016)
- COSLA's Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy (2014)
- Parliamentary Local Government Committee (2013, 2014)
- National Planning Framework 3
- Christie Commission on Future Delivery of Public Services 2011
- Audits of Community Planning Partnerships (2011, 2013), Review of Community Planning (2012, 2016)
- Community Councils Short Life Working Group (2011)

Community empowerment in Scotland

-

half full or half empty?

local democracy in Scotland

A ‘silent crisis’ of local democracy? (Bort et al 2012)

- Scotland has “the largest average population per basic unit of local government of any developed country”(Keating 2005)
- Average population **size of municipality**:
  - Finland=15,960; France= 1770; Germany= 7,080; Spain= 5.680; EU average= 5,630
  - Scotland= 163,200
- Alongside England, Scotland has some of the **lowest voter turnout** at local elections in the EU
- Ratio Elected Councillors / Citizens represented:
  - Finland= 1/500; France 1/125; Germany:1/400; Spain 1/700; UK= 1/2860
  - Scotland = 1/4270

Participation in local decision-making in Scotland

- only **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
- and **82% would like more say** in how local services are provided in their area.

Source: Ipsos MORI 2014

Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy 2014:

- “50 years of **centralisation** has not tackled the biggest problems that Scotland faces
- For a country with Scotland’s wealth and strength, the level of **inequality** is intolerable, and has huge social and financial costs
- There is a link between the **absence of strong local democracy** and the prevalence of inequalities
- It is **communities** that **empower governments** at all levels, not governments that empower people”

International trends in participation

Evolving role of citizens: 2 stories can be told

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 2001)

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;Eliasoph1998)

Debunking the myth of apathy: Civic participation in Scotland

- Record-breaking participation in the referendum
- A growing, vibrant civil society / third sector: social enterprises, development trusts, housing associations, transition towns, etc
- Civic participation on the rise: from 55% in 2009 to 61% in 2013 (Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2013):
  - 48% engaged in active participation
  - 25% volunteered at least once
  - 7% volunteered 13 times or more

Table 5.2: Civic participation in past 12 months

	2009	2013
	%	%
Did nothing	45	39
Signed a petition	28	38
Give money to campaign/ organisation	13	22
Did something active	44	48
Don't know	*	*
Sample size	*1482*	*1497*

Note that percentages do not sum to 100% as respondents were able to choose more than one

Community participation and collective action

are being reinvented

But is all participation good?

- Paradox of growing participation and growing inequalities (Walker, McQuarrie & Lee 2015)
  - proliferation of traditional consultation and de-politicised forms of participation
- Inequalities in health, income, wealth, education… stemming from inequalities of power and influence?

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)

In the last 3 months,

have you participated in a public forum to discuss policy or community issues?

Stay standing if at that forum there was a reasonable…

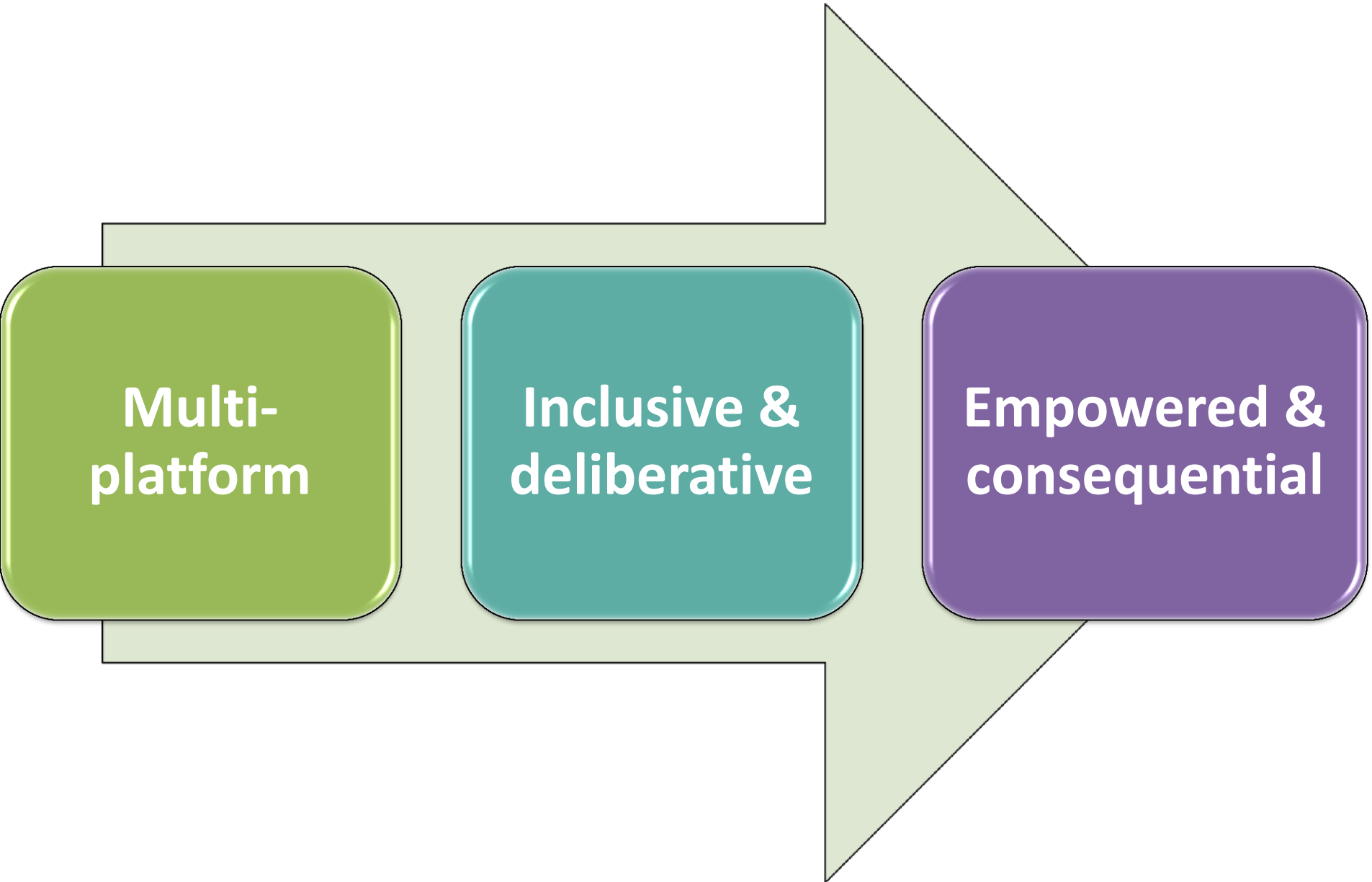
- …gender balance
- …mix of personal and professional backgrounds
- …range of perspectives and opinions
- …age range (i.e. 3 generations)
- …sense that most participants felt included and influential
- …sense that most participants enjoyed it
- … sense that their participation would have a clear impact

Key challenges organising community participation in decision-making

What Works in community participation?

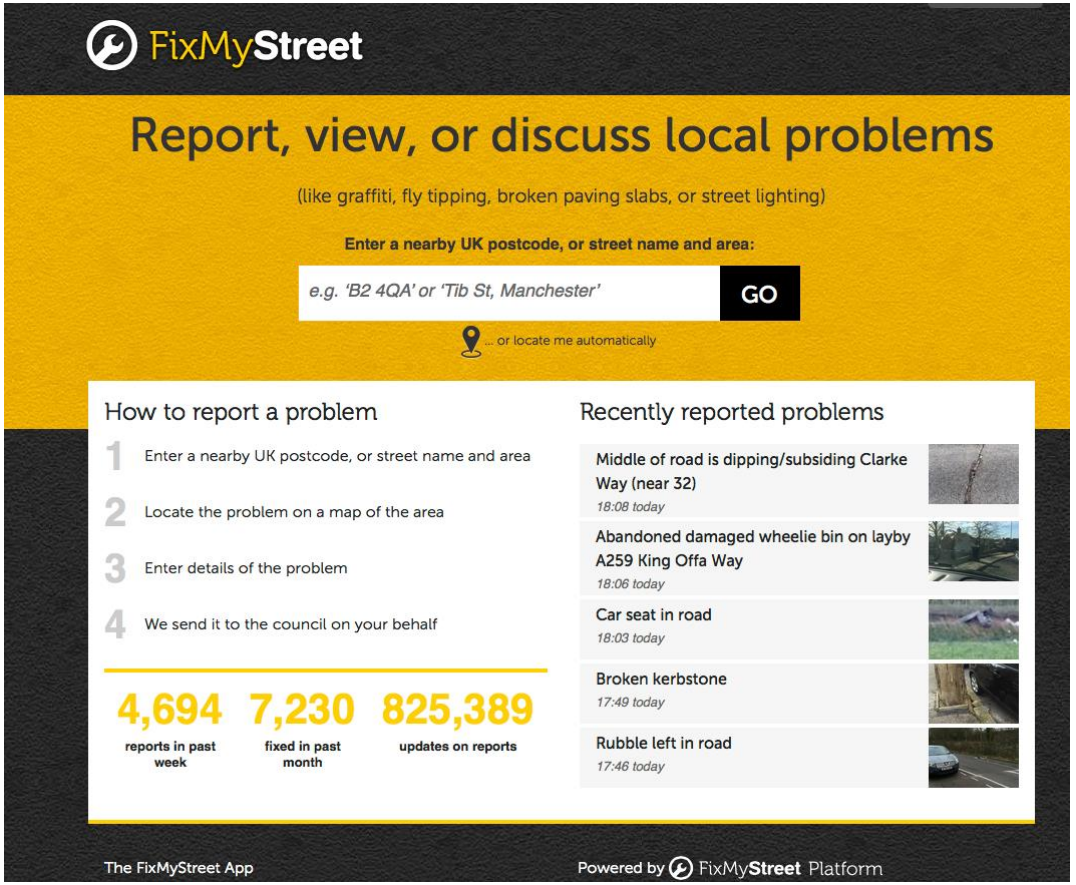
Local innovations around the world

3 components of 'what works' in community participation



Multi-platform: crowdsourcing

- Accommodating a variety of forms of participation:
  - online, face to face, combined
  - light-touch vs. intensive
  - The power of 'crowdsourcing': tapping into 'the wisdom of the crowds' (Surowiecki 2005)
- Examples:
  - Fix My Street www.fixmystreet.com
  - MapLocal https://maplocal.org.uk
  - U-Report Uganda www.ureport.ug

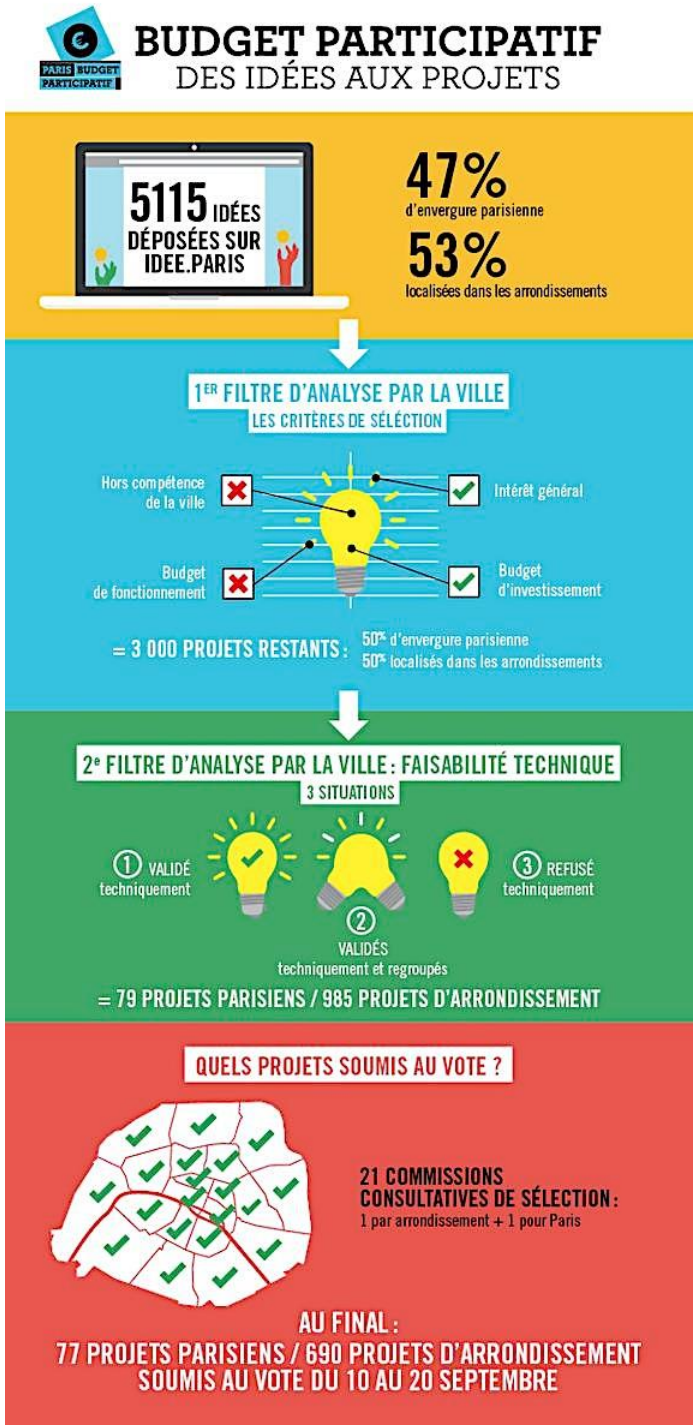


Inclusive AND deliberative

- **Inclusion and diversity** are crucial for meaningful, legitimate and effective participation
  - demographics AND perspectives
  - lowering barriers to participation
- **Public deliberation** is about:
  - learning about the issues
  - hearing & discussing different views
  - then, making informed decisions
- Examples –'mini-publics':
  - Citizens' Juries on Wind Farm Development (Coldstream, Helensburgh, Aberfeldy)
  - Melbourne Citizens' Panel on Local Finances

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



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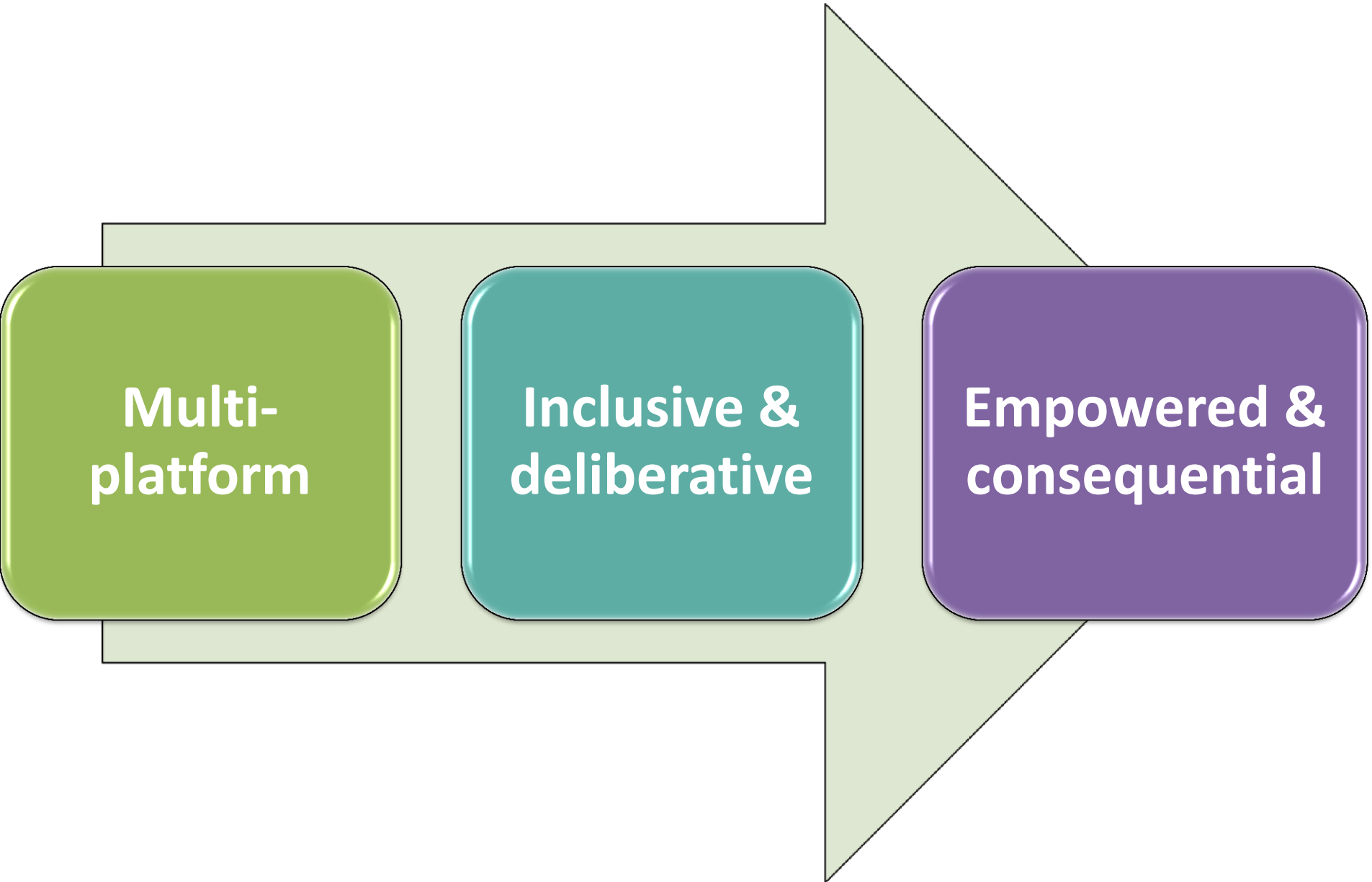

People involved in organising community participation must ask:

- Are we harnessing the power of combining online and face-to-face platforms for community participation and action?
- Are we creating opportunities that accommodate the variety of ways in which people may want to participate?
- Are we creating inclusive processes where everyone has an equal chance to participate and influence?
- Are we creating deliberative spaces where participants can learn, hear different views, and engage in dialogue to offer informed opinions and considered judgements?
- Are we fostering empowered processes, where people know that their participation can make a difference?

strengthening community participation will require

democratic innovation

and

facilitative leadership:

new approaches, processes and institutions that enable inclusive forms of co-production and decision-making

so that communities can participate not only in service design and delivery

but also in the decision-making processes that determine what services are to be delivered, how and by whom

critical optimism
or energised pessimism…

both can be powerful
motivators, so…

whatever gets us into collective action!

Thank you!

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