Local Government Studies ›

Volume 39, 2013 - Issue 4

1,149 Views | 22 CrossRef citations to date | 6 Altmetric

Articles

Gap Analysis: Participatory Democracy, Public Expectations and Community Assemblies in Sheffield

Matthew Flinders & Katharine Dommett

Pages 488-513 | Received 01 Feb 2011, Accepted 18 Oct 2011, Published online: 06 Feb 2013

Cite this article https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2012.751023

Sample our Politics & International Relations Journals

>> Sign in here to start your access to the latest two volumes for 14 days

Full Article | Figures & data | References | Citations | Metrics

Reprints & Permissions | Read this article | Share

Abstract

This article offers an argument of almost primitive simplicity: politics tends to promise too much and deliver too little. In order to substantiate this argument this article presents the results of the first attempt to analyse an experiment with participatory democracy through the lens of ‘gap analysis’. This approach focuses attention on the creation, management and fulfilment of public expectations vis-à-vis products, services or experiences. In a historical period in which the fiscal and social resources of democratic politics are severely limited the argument and empirical research set out in this article offer valuable insights for scholars and practitioners of politics and public policy. Central amongst these is the suggestion that responding to unprecedented levels of anti-political sentiment is likely to demand that politicians pay more attention

to the management of public expectations (i.e. demand) and less on how to maximise political outputs in terms of public services (i.e. supply).

Key Words:

Public expectations | participatory democracy | community assemblies | gap analysis | political engagement

Notes

1. This article focuses upon politically invoked expectation gaps but the impetus for such schisms can emerge from elsewhere. Such causes are not, however, the focus of this article.

2. Whilst other forms of participation can be identified (Fung 2003), deliberative and participatory democracy represent the dominant wings of the literature. This focus is therefore deemed most illustrative, but this does not prevent the future expansion of this framework in line with other conceptions of participation.

3. This approach could also be adapted to focus on more instrumental concerns such as expectations of service delivery in local government but we feel it provides an innovative technique for the analysis of democratic initiatives.

4. It is important to assert that whilst developed with one initiative in mind this approach has far broader application and can be tailored to study other initiatives, be they participative or deliberative in nature.

5. This figure relates purely to the assembly meetings which offered, as noted, limited participatory opportunities. Other points for engagement were available.

Related research

People also read | Recommended articles | Cited by 22

Information for

- Authors
- R&D professionals
- Editors
- Librarians
- Societies

Open access

- Overview
- Open journals
- Open Select
- Dove Medical Press
- F1000Research

Opportunities

- Reprints and e-prints
- Advertising solutions
- Accelerated publication
- Corporate access solutions

Help and information

- Help and contact
- Newsroom
- All journals
- Books

Keep up to date

Register to receive personalised research and resources by email

Sign me up

Copyright © 2026 Informa UK Limited Privacy policy

Cookies Terms & conditions Accessibility

Registered in England & Wales No. 01072954
5 Howick Place | London | SW1P 1WG