

# Poverty, pathology and pills



15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> January 2019, London



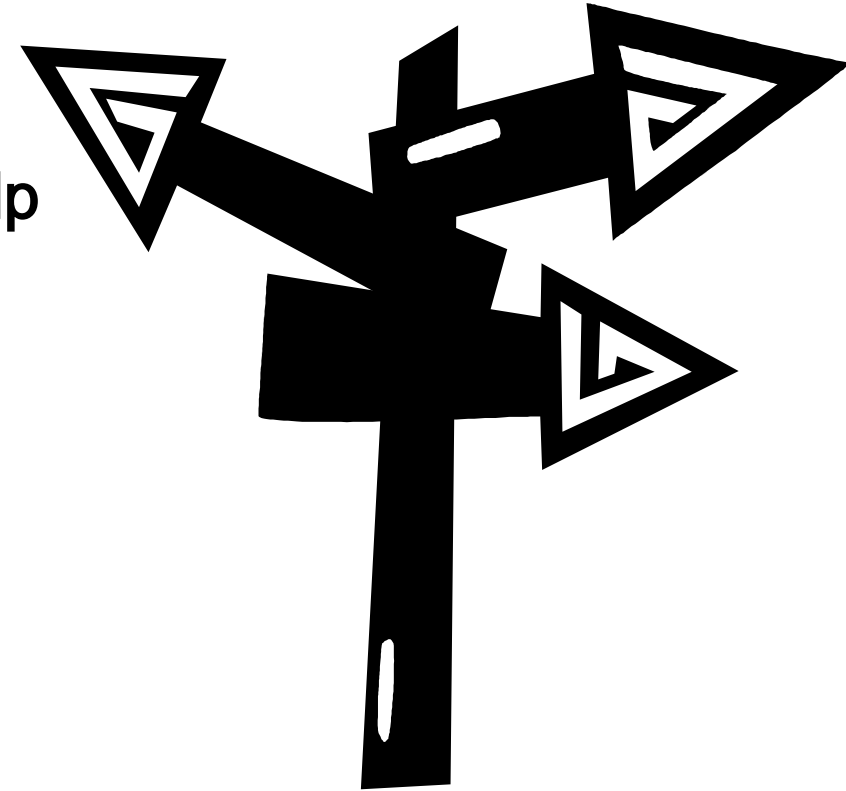
# **Re-centering Power and Control in work with Communities experiencing poverty & disadvantage**

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# The presentation

- What is community empowerment and how can it help reduce social (and health) inequalities?
- The limits of contemporary community approaches
- What can professionals do to support community empowerment?



# What is Community empowerment?

- *Communities*: people sharing common interests - can be spatially connected, local, national or international.
- *Empowerment*: more than the engagement, involvement or participation of communities in action set by the agenda of others. Rather it:
  - A process enabling the relatively powerless to release/gain capabilities to exercise ***collective control*** over decisions/actions impacting on them
  - Focuses on social transformation and political change for social justice

# How can it enhance social and health equality?

**At its best community empowerment initiatives can:**

- Enable experiential knowledge of 'poverty and disadvantage' to be utilised to create more appropriate and acceptable services and policies
- Reduce social isolation and increase social support and cohesion
- Improve proximal social, economic and material conditions for living
- Increase political understanding, potentially increasing civil society action to shift the political system towards more socially just policies

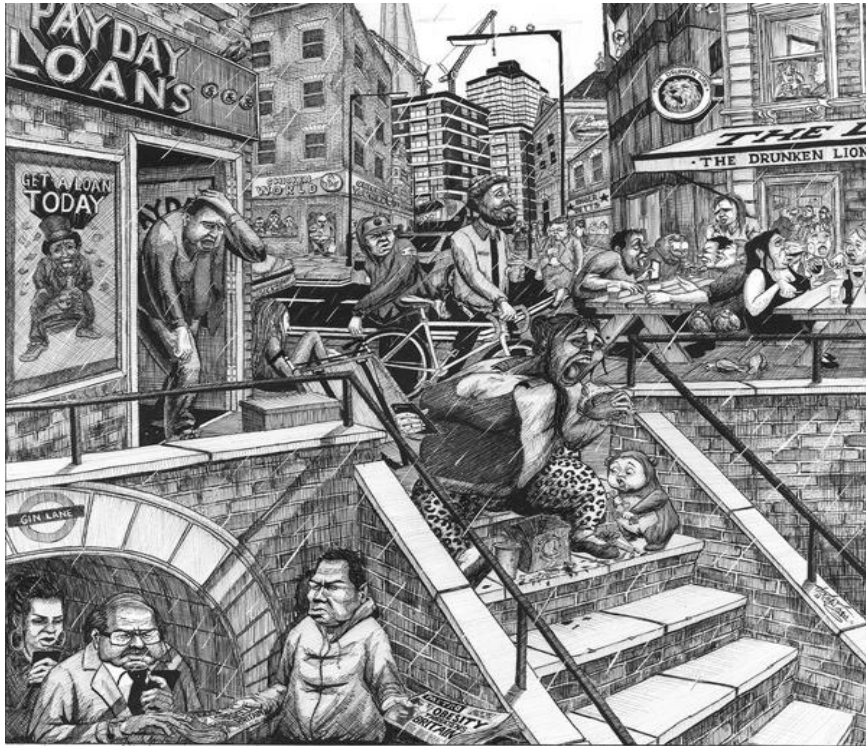
# What's wrong with contemporary community approaches

- Community empowerment is mainstream – SDG, International and National strategies – new governance models in all policy sectors and all communities
- But many initiatives adopt an '**inward gaze**' on internal dynamics of communities and proximal 'problems' – e.g. behaviors and lifestyle – risk widening inequalities by increasing control “better off” communities have over decisions impacting on them whilst potentially undermining capabilities in disadvantaged communities.
- Meanwhile, **outward gaze** on social transformation and political change for greater social justice embedded in foundational statements on community empowerment is neglected
- Urgent needs to 'return' to this outward gaze of community empowerment initiatives - 're-centre' power and collective control in their design, delivery and evaluation

# What can external agents/governments do?

1. Catalyse, facilitate or "accompany" a community in acquiring power by:
  - Reducing structural barriers to empowerment e.g. protecting/promoting human rights, access to quality services including welfare support, living and working conditions etc
  - Supporting empowerment processes arising spontaneously in response to threats e.g. using planning and licensing regulations to improve quality of environments

## 2. Use organizational/professional power to challenge stigmatization of people/places e.g. in policies and practices, media, etc



Professional discourse on health inequalities threaten positive moral and social identities

[National Audit Office](#)  
Tackling in areas with the worst  
Health and deprivation



[PHARMAFILE website](#)  
NHS Slow to tackle inequalities



[The Guardian](#)  
Close call on health  
inequalities



[FUSE Newcastle University](#)  
understanding and tackling  
health inequalities



[Holyrood website](#)  
Scottish Government's  
health inequalities pilot nears end

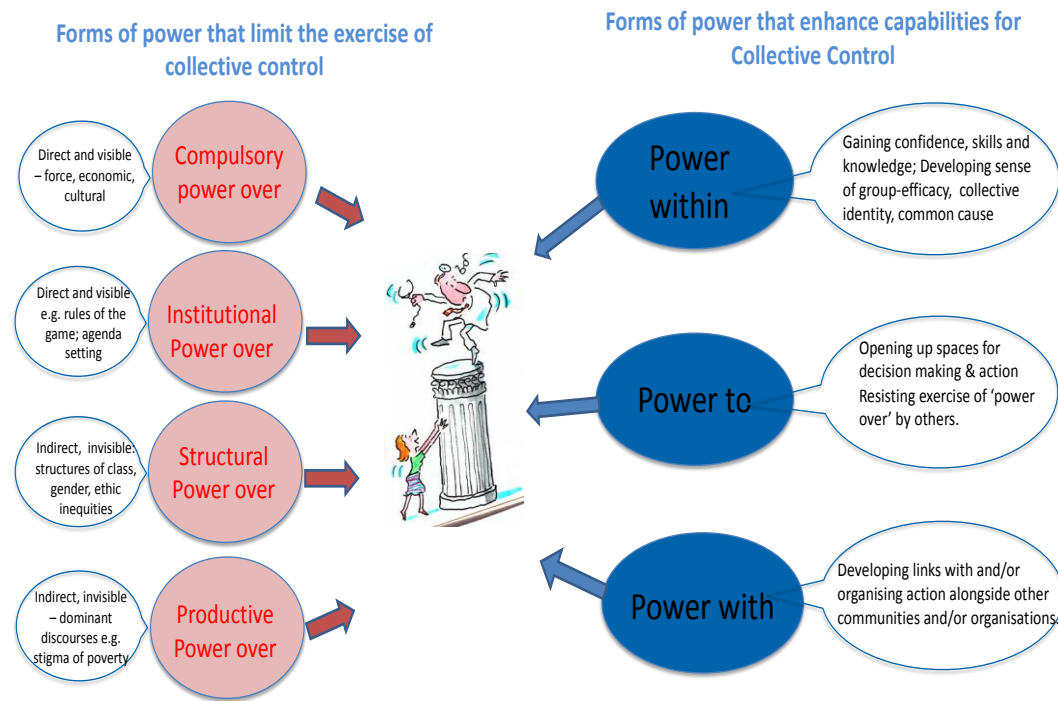


[Sustainable Development Commission](#)  
the key to tackling health inequalities



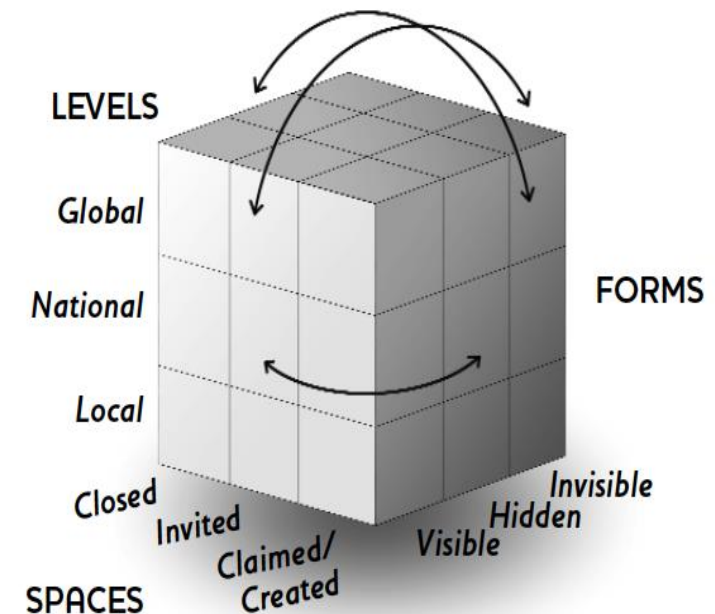


3. Support/design community initiatives able to develop collective control by adopting a power lens e.g. map power dynamics in spaces and how to address these; not descriptive maps of assets in communities!



Communities in Control Study Power Framework

Figure 1 The 'power cube': the levels, spaces and forms of power



Institute of Development Studies 'power Cube

# 1. Recognise the value experiential knowledge The story of Fish head soup

