Objectives

- Ascertain what the conditions for genuine communication are

- Ascertain what communicative issues can arise during the process of participation

- Examine the level of participatory data that is incorporated into the planning of projects within Anglicare

- Ascertain if there is evidence of any challenges for participation within Anglicare's practices and policies

- To analyse Anglicare's participatory practises using Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action

Methodology

The methodology of this project is comprised of two approaches; a literature review comprising of three focus areas: On Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action; on participation within development, both international and community-based; and on social theory informed by postcolonial and subaltern studies. The second approach is primary interview-based research with Anglicare staff and other relevant parties yet to be confirmed, which will focus on Anglicare's approach to participation and recognise any challenges faced in specific cases.

*"Whereas a **grammatical** sentence fulfils the claim to comprehensibility, a successful **utterance** must satisfy three additional validity claims; it must count as **truthful** insofar as it expresses something in the world; it must count as **truthful** insofar as it expresses something intended by the speaker; and it must count as **right** insofar as it conforms to socially recognized expectations."* [1]

Introduction

I am developing a project that focuses on the ways in which a particular theory of communication developed by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, can be applied to the area of participatory/consultative research. There is some evidence to suggest that even though organisations may have the best of intentions when engaging in participation with the community, that there may exist some communicative barriers between the organisation and the community, or individuals within the community. This barrier may be based on existing structures of power within the community; it could also be based on the environment within which the participation takes place. The barriers may exist simply becuase methods of communication are not oulined in participation policies. The approach that this project will take is to apply Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, which focuses on establishing genuine communication, in an attempt to help improve the efficacy of participatory practices.
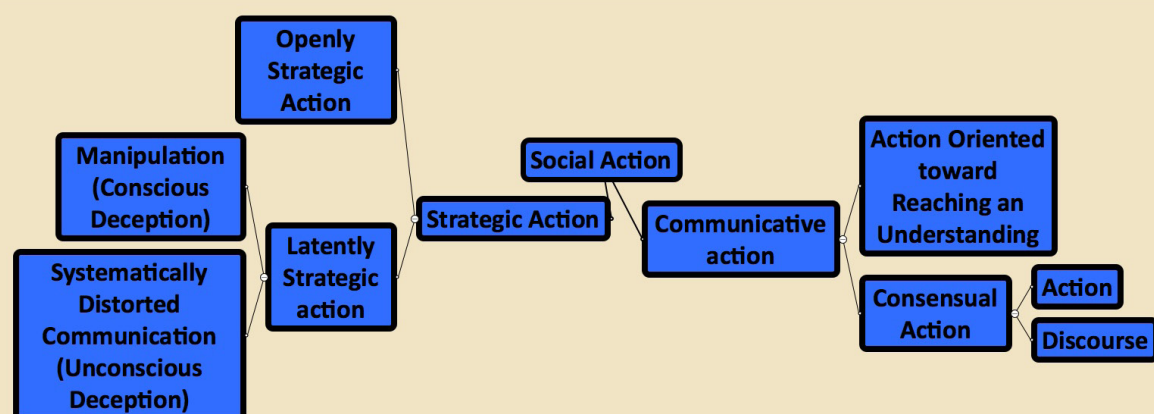
Participatory Communication in Project Development:
Applying Habermas to the participatory practices of Anglicare

Intern: Jake Cooper   Academic Superviser: Jenny McMahon   Workplace Liason: Ian Goodwin-Smith

Habermas: Communicative Vs. Strategic Action [2]

If projects are developed based on participation informed by the Theory of Communicative Action, then the likelihood of reaching a genuine understanding with participants will be increased. More accurate participatory data will assist in improving the efficacy of community projects.
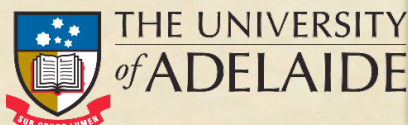
The Organisation:

Anglicare is a non-profit, Anglican organisation, which develops and executes community programs aimed at socially disadvantaged groups and individuals.

Anglicare recognises that social disadvantage and what is required to assist people out of vulnerability is complex, and champion approaches to community development that move away from mono-dimensional perspectives, towards multi-faceted approaches, including a focus on capacity building and improving existing strengths.

The Project

Jenny McMahon suggested the crux of the project: to use Habermas' theory of communication in an applied context. Jake Cooper developed this idea into a brief outline of the project. Amanda Phillis was instrumental in connecting the project outline to Anglicare's services and Ian Goodwin-Smith provided invaluable insight into how the project's conceptual framework could be applied to Anglicare's activities.

Key Findings So Far..

Communicative Action:

Habermas suggests that in order to acheive genuine communication, each participant must suppose that four specific conditions are being met during an exchange of utterences, or speech. Acheiving these conditions is what is required for 'communicative action'.

The four conditions:
- Comprehensibility – The utterance must be comprehensible to the listener.
- Truth – the speaker must have the intention of speaking a true proposition.
- Truthfulness – the speaker must convey intentions truthfully, so as to achieve credibility.
- Rightness – the utterance must be right within the context of social norms and expectations.

According to Habermas, reaching an understanding with another person must meet these conditions in order to be successful. A sucessful understanding is what Habermas calls ***genuine*** communication, or a communicative action.

Participation:

Much of the literature on participation suggests that the ineffectiveness of participatory-based development projects can be attributed to poor design and poor implementation.

Such structural concerns must be overcome in order to achieve an effective participatory process. It is unlikely that the conditions for genuine communication can be met, if participants feel that the administrators are not providing a legitimate avenue for their interests to be heard.

The focus that participatory literature has on the structure and implementation of participation leaves the process of communication itself largely unexplored.

Once the structural and implementation conditions for an effective participatory process have been met, how then do the administrators of the consultation process engage with the participants in such as way so as to achieve genuine communication, and thus a genuine understanding of the participant's needs and interests?

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1. Jürgen Habermas, "On the Pragmatics of Communication", Maeve Cooke (Ed.), (Massechusetts: MIT) 2008: 49.
2. *Ibid*: 93.