



## Two Alliance for Action Learning Events 2015

Spring – Creative Participation  
Autumn – Food in the Community

In 2015, SURF's Alliance for Action held two shared learning sessions for cross-sector partners and people living and working in the communities of Govan, Glasgow and the Gallatown, Kirkcaldy. This report explains the background, context and content of the sessions and records the learning and outputs achieved.

### BACKGROUND

In 2011-12 SURF delivered a participative study on responses to recession-based policy decisions in two contrasting case study disadvantaged areas: Govan in Glasgow and the Gallatown in Kirkcaldy, Fife.

That collaborative investigation was supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and the Scottish Government. The research was presented as '[Reality, Resources, Resilience](#)' - a report published by the JRF as a SURF-authored Programme Paper in January 2013.<sup>1</sup>

The Alliance for Action was developed in response to the research findings, which had identified a need for a more coordinated approach towards connecting assets and investments from a wide range of local and national partners.

The operational Alliance model was built on the individuals, networks and connections SURF identified and fostered in the course of the initial study. It has recently expanded to include Rothesay on the Isle of Bute. A feasibility study on a further expansion to include the town of Dunoon is currently underway.

---

<sup>1</sup> A final report on SURF's 'Reality, Resources, Resilience: Regeneration in a Recession' programme is available on the JRF website: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/reality-resources-resilience>

The dual purpose of SURF's 'Alliance for Action' programme is:

- to further strengthen resilience and practical outcomes in the programme's two case study communities;
- to enhance wider policy and resource considerations for supporting community regeneration in the continuing recessionary context.

One way in which SURF pursues its aims is by facilitating and promoting opportunities for communities to learn from each other. This paper reports on two SURF shared learning sessions in 2015.

## THEMES

SURF's Spring learning session was:

### [Creative Community Participation in local and national regeneration policy and practice](#)

**Creativity** had been identified as a key theme in both of the original SURF Alliance for Action case study areas in Govan and East Kirkcaldy.

SURF's experience has been that creative activities can be used to demonstrably enhance and secure inclusive community participation. Alliance for Action partner Creative Scotland had actively invested in Govan and East Kirkcaldy and SURF had made links with other existing and embryonic creative initiatives in the communities. Govan already had many established and successful creative projects in place, many of which were reviewing funding models and exploring ways of formalizing existing partnerships. The Gallatown – which had no large established arts projects running at the time - was in the process of completing a Creative Scotland funded participatory budgeting initiative which sought to use creative processes to increase community engagement.

SURF's Autumn learning session was:

### [Food in the Community: the role of food in local and national regeneration policy and practice.](#)

**Food** – its production, use and distribution – is a key component in supporting the health and wellbeing of a community.

The Scottish Government Food Commission had been set up in 2015 in response to the 2014 public consultation which identified that reducing food poverty had become a major priority across social justice organisations.

The Alliance for Action found that at a time when welfare sanctions and the proliferation of foodbanks were limiting nutrition choices to meeting basic fuel needs, there were a growing number of active citizens learning to grow, cook and distribute food and share their skills and knowledge. In both Govan, Glasgow, and East Kirkcaldy, Fife, there were several emergent groups which were taking ownership of the kind of food produced, cooked and eaten in their communities. These food-related initiatives

were providing opportunities for people to come together and enjoy a shared positive experience - as well as directly impacting on diet and health. In the Gallatown food had successfully been used as a way of engaging with and supporting poor families through a community café, cooking classes and the distribution of soup packs to parents at the school gate. In Govan, Children in Scotland had been working with Govan Housing Association and local schools to find ways of using food as a catalyst for engaging with and supporting families. The Govan and Craigton Integration Network had found that food was an effective way of initiating and cementing relationships between diverse groups.

## PURPOSE

- To showcase different approaches and experiences in using creative processes and food to support greater community participation and cohesion in the regeneration of the different Alliance for Action contexts of Govan and East Kirkcaldy;
- To create a constructive context for shared learning and cooperation across:
  - People and organisations from Alliance for Action areas involved in directly supporting or participating in relevant community initiatives.
  - Representatives of relevant local and national support bodies
  - Relevant policy influences and funders
- To explore existing and potential collaboration among existing initiatives in practical regeneration efforts.
- To facilitate shared learning and enhance cross sector understanding and support for the role of creativity and food - its production, use and distribution - in local and national regeneration policy and practice.

## PROCESS

Both events were held in Govan in venues which also hosted projects related to the event themes. The original intention to base one event in Kirkcaldy and one in Govan, was revised in response to the timing of another (unrelated) SURF event held in Kirkcaldy.

There were between 30 and 40 participants at each event. As well as local people and project workers, both events attracted representatives from Alliance for Action supporters and partner organisations. These included people from Big Lottery, Carnegie, Children in Scotland, NHS, Glasgow Centre for Population Health, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Poverty Alliance, Faith in Community, Fife Council and Scottish Government.

Each session was arranged around its own discrete theme with creative and food-related elements introduced to each programme.

SURF colleagues provided introductions, general background and broad context, and individuals working or participating in relevant projects led lively discussions based on a reciprocal sharing of experience and learning.

**Creativity:** The event began with a guided walk through Govan town centre and waterfront to the Portal Arts Venue in Govan Road. After introductory talks from project participants and workers on the themes of Participatory Budgeting and the Collective Model, the attendees divided into two groups for more focused exchanges on successes and learning from practice. Over lunch the groups reconvened for a general discussion on potential practical collaborative activity and consideration of resource and policy options for increasing creative activity locally and in a broader national context.

**Food:** In keeping with the theme, this event was catered for by local social enterprise Soul Food Sisters Collective and held at the community-owned, Kinning Park Complex where a community café had been recently set-up. The designated speakers discussed the challenges and realities of: setting up a new initiative; developing and sustaining existing projects; the central role played by food in breaking down barriers and forging connections within a potentially divided community; and the wider policy implications thereof. A general lunch-time discussion reflected on potential collaborative connections and ways in which learning could inform the shape of broader national resources and policy decisions.

## LEARNING

**Although the learning sessions were based around different themes, participants at both events reported similar and related experiences, perceptions and challenges in their use of themed initiatives to build community capacity and engagement.**

### Trust

#### **Safe environments and trusted facilitators increase ‘non-professional’ participation**

SURF’s findings reflect the broadly recognised academic view<sup>2</sup> of the paramount importance of trust in encouraging public participation in regeneration programmes.

The importance of trust was illustrated both in the positive participation of attendees in the Alliance for Action sessions – and in the issues raised during the discussions.

---

<sup>2</sup> Aitken, D (2012) Trust and Participation in Urban Regeneration. People Place and Policy,6,3.

In order for debates to reflect the real knowledge and views of participants, people taking part need to feel that they are in a place where their skills and experience will be respected and valued.

SURF events are designed to create an environment where participants will feel comfortable, and part of that comfort comes from SURF's pre-existing relationships with those who take part, particularly with those who are not there as 'paid professionals' but who attend voluntarily.

Those 'non-professionals' had earlier expressed scepticism about the benefits of taking part in previous (non-SURF) events set-up to 'allow' funders and or 'experts' to meet 'real people' who may be beneficiaries of their decisions.

*"I don't want to be trotted out like some kind example of 'a poor person' so that I can tell my 'story' and be patronised or have to act as though I am so grateful."*

The Alliance for Action has spent time establishing relationships with individuals and projects within these communities and is seen as an honest broker without the baggage carried by other outside or even local agencies.

The informal settings and pre-existing relationships between SURF colleagues and participants contributed to an atmosphere conducive to an informal and honest exchange of views. By providing a 'safe space' policy makers and funders had the opportunity to meet and have conversations with local people and project workers in a relaxed and sociable environment.

After the events individuals from the community and project workers reported that they felt confident about contacting funders and policymakers directly to continue conversations begun at the events or to initiate new ones.

### **Funders place faith in numbers and not enough in local knowledge**

The importance of trust was also raised as an issue in discussions on funding and resources.

Remote investors often lack local knowledge and so may only fund readily measurable outputs of specific activities and numbers rather being able to trust in and support more integrated, softer outputs which were 'the software for building trust' in and across individuals and communities.

It was suggested that without local knowledge funding organisations were left to make a best guess. Decisions about which individual projects should benefit from limited funds appear to be largely based on numbers based outputs which were unable to recognize wildly different approaches and context.

While recognising the need to demonstrate value, there was frustration that local people were not more often trusted to make local decisions. (see [Community Empowerment](#))

## Connections

### **Strong recognition of the benefits of partnership and collaborative working**

Some of this discussion overlapped with the issue of trust. The short term nature of much funding provision was identified as a way in which trust between neighbouring projects could be undermined. Groups felt that funding processes encouraged competition between them.

One way to overcome this would be the establishment of collaborative frameworks to give smaller projects a bigger voice. Projects could still work independently of each other but would join forces for funding bids on projects where their interests were shared. SURF has since successfully introduced groups in Govan and Kirkcaldy which expressed interest in this model, to Scottish Community Development Council mentors (see [Outcomes](#), p.8)

National funding and policy organisations also recognised the advantages of collaborating with local partners to achieve their aims in ways which would localise their reach and the likelihood of meeting the actual, rather than perceived, needs of the community.

## Community empowerment

### **Enthusiasm for autonomy tempered with doubts about the reality**

Several participants from the Gallatown were engaged in a Participatory Budgeting initiative during 2015 and there was broad-ranging and enthusiastic support for increasing the ways in which people living in communities could make decisions about funding and policies which impacted directly upon their lives.

Again the issue of trust was raised. There was disbelief from the community that they would ever really be 'allowed' to make important decisions – and many felt that officially endorsed consultations were just window dressing to cover up decisions already made by those in authority. There was also some experience of professional bodies demonstrating reluctance to hand over authority. Could a community really know what's best for them?

It was noted that the handing over of 'small pots' of money to communities was not a substitute for real autonomy over their lives. Some argued that the process offered the community the illusion of being in control, while having no influence over the macro geo-political factors which shape the reality of their communities.

The Scottish Government's promotion of community empowerment was welcomed as an opportunity for addressing inequalities. But it would only work if community empowerment were prioritised across all policy making; informing

decisions taken across directorates about related issues such as land ownership, food distribution and education.

### Leadership and volunteering

#### **Leadership a key driver in the success of communities.**

The enthusiasm and energy of individuals was often the difference between success and failure and there was debate about how leaders could be identified and supported.

There were concerns about unsupported individuals developing 'volunteer fatigue', juggling jobs and families and losing pay in order to attend meetings, or being sanctioned or losing benefits because their voluntary work was seen as interfering in their ability to look for work.

It was also argued that the benefits system should not penalise those who have medical conditions which may prevent them from taking paid employment but who may want to contribute voluntary work in their community. People with unpredictable conditions such as multiple sclerosis or chronic fatigue syndrome might be unable to commit to an employer's need for regular attendance but could still contribute to their community. Volunteering would also have a positive impact on the volunteers' own health and wellbeing.

There was also evidence of paid professionals suffering burn-out with several examples of respected community workers taking long term sick leave because of the pressure of their work.

### Communication

#### **Widening engagement and clarity of language**

There was a recognition that while it may not be possible to engage with each member of a community, more could be done to extend consultations beyond the 'usual suspects'. There were strong examples given of effective consultations and ways in which connections had successfully been made with hard-to-reach sections of the community.

There was discussion around language - and the lack of clarity around the interpretation of terms even among similar professional groups.

What did regeneration mean? At which point was a community recognized as having been regenerated? No-one believed that there would ever be full-time employment again so without that marker, what did a regenerated community look like?

Community was another word identified as tricky to define. There was concern that the sometimes fractured and damaged reality was a long way from the

imagined homogenous and integrated whole perceived as necessary for the successful implementation of some high level policy and funding efforts.

## OUTCOMES

As well as learning from the events themselves and the ongoing and valuable relationships which have developed from the session meetings, the Alliance for Action has recorded other ongoing benefits to the participants and communities which took part. These include:

- The Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) is now working with three organisations in Govan supporting the development of a Collective model.
- Link Up in the Gallatown has now connected SCDC to several individuals and embryonic community groups which are benefiting from capacity building support.
- Several participants said the events had provided them with opportunities to reestablish valuable connections.
- Similarly, the Kinning Park Complex's (KPC) increasing isolation from other more centrally placed Govan projects has been reversed. KPC management reported that the event had raised their profile, allowed broken links to be reconnected and supported re-engagement with the broader community.
- The Soul Food Sisters collective which provided the catering for the food event has already benefited from new commissions as a result.
- The participation in the Food-based learning session by a member of the Government's Food Commission has enabled learning from that event to be fed into the Commission's work.
- SURF has now been invited to contribute further learning from the Alliance for Action to national food poverty conferences.
- The Gallatown has recently succeeded in achieving funding for a heritage/history project, inspired by similar projects in Govan.

## IN CONCLUSION...

SURF's role through its Alliance for Action approach has been to facilitate the sessions in a way which creates an atmosphere of sufficient trust for participants to engage in lively and informed debate. Feedback from these events has been entirely positive.

Participants from the communities report feeling confident that their views have value and are heard by those who have some influence over decisions taken about their communities. Useful and mutually supportive relationships have been established between people facing similar challenges in diverse communities in very different geographical locations.

Similarly, and importantly, funders and policy makers are given the opportunity to meet and connect and learn from those whose lives are impacted upon by their decisions.

As well as the event learning being used to inform the broader Alliance for Action work, learning from these sessions has also helped to inform the broad-based 18 months of research which produced SURF's 2016 Manifesto for Community Regeneration<sup>3</sup>.

This report focused on the shared learning from the two events. A further short paper records additional learning specifically related to the role of Food in the Community and can be accessed through SURF's website. (*Details below*)

*For more on SURF and its work, please visit the SURF website: [www.scotregen.co.uk](http://www.scotregen.co.uk).*

SURF Scotland's Independent Regeneration Network, Orkney Street Enterprise Centre, 18-20 Orkney Street, Glasgow G51 2BX  
Tel: 0141 440 0122 / Email: [info@scotregen.co.uk](mailto:info@scotregen.co.uk) / Website: [www.scotregen.co.uk](http://www.scotregen.co.uk)

SURF is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. Registered in Scotland as 'Scotregen Ltd' no. SC 154 598. VAT reg. no. 735 2880 21.  
Supported by: Aberdeen City Council, Capital City Partnership, City of Edinburgh Council, Clyde Gateway, Creative Scotland, Dundee Partnership, Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Housing Association, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Jobs & Business Glasgow, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the Scottish Government, and Skills Development Scotland.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.scotregen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/SURF-2016-Manifesto-Final-Draft.pdf>