

‘You want to deal with power while riding on power’: global perspectives on power in participatory health research and co-production approaches

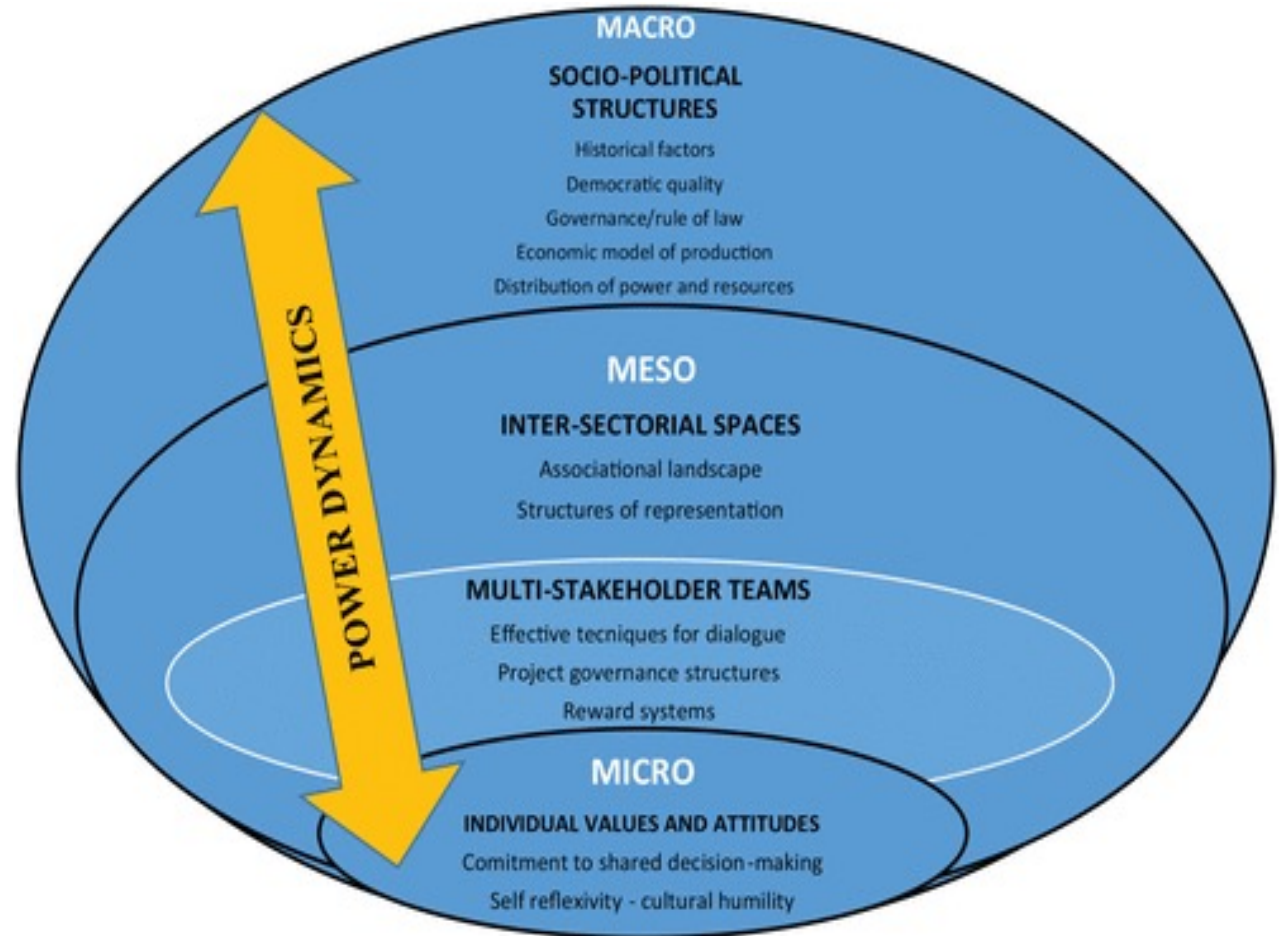
#HSR2022

Kim Ozano



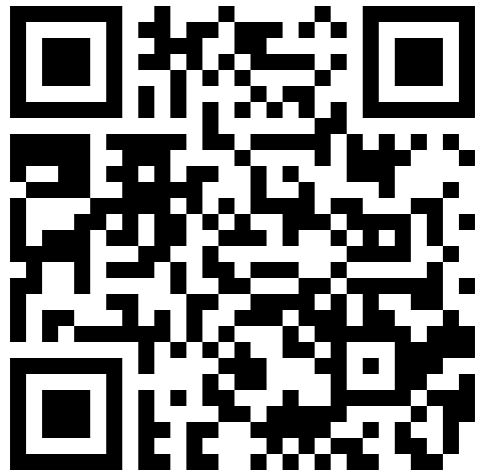
The Social Ecology of Power framework

- Socio-ecological approaches situate individual behaviours within broader inter-personal dynamics and societal structures
- The framework provides a tool to examine how power inequities filter across the different levels



Power and participation in health systems and health systems research

2pm Nov 5th Room N





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'You want to deal with power while riding on power': global perspectives on power in participatory health research and co-production approaches 

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Abstract

Introduction Power relations permeate research partnerships and compromise the ability of participatory research approaches to bring about transformational and sustainable change. This study aimed to explore how participatory health researchers engaged in co-production research perceive and experience 'power', and how it is discussed and addressed within the context of research partnerships.

Methods Five online workshops were carried out with participatory health researchers working in different global contexts. Transcripts of the workshops were analysed thematically against the 'Social Ecology of Power' framework and mapped at the micro (individual), meso (interpersonal) or macro (structural) level.



PDF

Micro level- questions to help monitor power (Roura 2021)

1. Micro Self-reflexivity—
cultural humility
2. Commitment to
shared decision-
making



Have stakeholders reflected about and shared their preconceived assumptions?



Are most powerful stakeholders aware of how their privileges influence processes and outcomes?



Is there a real commitment to shared decision-making?



Are the most powerful stakeholders ready to give up power and the privileges that come with it?

Examples from our research at the micro level



'we have built in reflection time for the [co-researcher] facilitators ... at the end of each day we reflect not just on the power relationships but on other things as well ... this is an opportunity for us to discuss what we've seen and plan if there's any way of trying manage ... the participation so it's more equal'
(Ghana/Uganda/Malawi, Workshop 4, verbal) (Nigeria, Workshop 3, verbal)

Meso level- questions to help monitor power (Roura 2021)

1. Project governance structures

Are there built-in mechanisms for how disagreements are dealt with? Are these effective?

2. Reward systems

How are the decisions over who is compensated for what work, in what form, and in what amounts taken?

3. Effective techniques for dialogue

What tools/techniques are employed for joint decision-making? Are these effective at facilitating consensus building? Do they ensure that the views of the less powerful are heard?

4. Structures of Representation

What is the composition of multistakeholder participatory structures (number of participants per stakeholder group)? How is this decided? Are these in line with the local associational landscape?

5. Associational landscape

Example from our research at the meso level

‘you want to deal with power while riding on power, and I don’t know how much equity that brings ... you want to identify the gatekeepers ... someone who can influence ... do we actually get to the point where we are able to bring in equity, or do we just empower the already empowered in the community? ... it seems that we don’t actually really reach the people who need it most.’
(Zambia, Workshop 3, verbal)



Macro level- questions to help monitor power (Roura 2021)

1. Distribution of power and resources
2. Historical and economic factors
3. Democratic quality

Are there issues of governance, democratization, rule of law, and human rights to be taken into account?

Is there evidence of repressive measures against journalists, researchers, activists, or community advocates?

Are state institutions equipped to support a meaningful participation and empowerment of disadvantaged populations?

Power at the macro level

'the concept of participatory action research is ... new to a lot of communities ... they really struggle to understand that they actually have the power to make a difference ... they're more used to researchers just coming in and dictating what needs to be done.' (India, Workshop 3, verbal)



Conclusion

- Despite widespread assumptions about power sharing, adopting a participatory approach is not in itself sufficient for addressing power inequities.
- The 'Social Ecology of Power' framework is a useful tool for engaging with power inequities
- While many researchers are intentional about engaging with power, actions and available tools must be used more systematically to identify and address power imbalances





**UK Research
and Innovation**

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