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Organisational Change, Resistance and Democracy: LGBT Equalities Initiatives in Local Government

Surya Monro, Diane Richardson and Ann McNulty

Policy Context

- Range of LGBT equalities legislation introduced since 1999, including:
  - Adoption and Children Act, 2002
  - Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations, 2003
  - Gender Recognition Act, 2004
  - Civil Partnerships Act, 2004
  - Equality Regulations (Sexual Orientation), 2007
  - Single Equality Act 2010

Policy context cont.

- Introduction of standardised implementation mechanisms
- The shift towards community engagement and partnership work
- NHS world class commissioning competencies

Conceptual context

- The changing nature of citizenship
- Organisational and institutional processes
- Democracy and participation
- Intersectionality

Methodology

- Large ESRC funded study of local authorities in Northern Ireland, England and Wales

- Interviews with stakeholders (4 Local Authorities, national stakeholders, councillors)

- Participative Action Research

Social change

- Substantial change in social attitudes towards LGBT people, however:

  LGBT equality is becoming more accepted and understood, but at the same time there are still quite a lot of people who don't understand why we're doing it or have the attitude of "It's OK, so long as you don't kiss in front of me, or shove it in my face", who don't see equality as actual equality.

Organisational change

- Legislative and policy drivers
- Leadership
- Local partnerships
- Proactive approach

Illustrative quote

- *If people are using language that's inappropriate here [at work] they'll use it elsewhere, so we've got to tackle it …I'm not a manager who will just listen and put it to one side. It will be tackled …and I'm very aware that if I take action in one place, it will have a ripple effect.* (Local authority manager)

Community Changes

- Shift towards inclusion of bisexuals and trans people
- Professionalisation of the lesbian and gay communities
- Broader changes such as greater inclusion and fluidity about gender and sexuality in some youth cultures
- Ongoing issues about community capacity

Illustrative Quote

- *'we're the experts on sexual orientation equality; and therefore people come to us and bring their own sectoral knowledge to the table and we apply the gay stuff to it really…. we're very pre-occupied with service delivery and the way in which service delivery is effected by good employment practices and therefore are very mindful of how Local Authorities and Local Government deliver effective services'* (Representative of LGB organisation)

Multiple and Intersecting Disadvantages

- There are ongoing issues around:
  - Class and socio-economic status
  - Ethnicity and faith
  - Ability
  - Location (urban/rural)
  - Citizenship and nationality

Illustrative Quote

- *'You have those who are probably on Sickness Benefit, live in a flat, so economically they're not well off, you know they can't afford, they don't have transport, so they may feel very lonely and isolated and excluded because they don't have the resources by which to access these places, and then you have some that, em, like me, em, are not particularly scene-orientated, so I don't particularly like going to places like Manchester and there are a lot of people like me'* (Gay community activist)

Bisexuality

- There has been a shift towards inclusion by statutory sector and community organisations
- BUT there is still:
  - Active biphobia in lesbian and gay communities
  - Active biphobia amongst heterosexuals
  - Erasure of bisexuality, subtle discrimination
  - Why?

Illustrative Quote

- *'…I've heard from people it's more acceptable to make those [prejudiced] comments about bisexual people and they won't be challenged as much by employers; and that's specifically biphobia. You've also then got in other context, things like, bisexual people being discriminated against by both gay and straight people and lesbian people. So you've got that lack of safe space'* (Bisexual community activist)

Transgender

- Legislative duties (specifically the GRA 2004) a big improvement

- BUT does not deal well with non-binaried forms of trans

- Transsexuality reasonably visible within local government equalities work but others trans identities erased

Illustrative quote

- *'…moving away from the idea that male and female are two totally separate boxes, em, and in fact the more you look into it the more you realise that the whole of gender is just part of nature's diversity…and the fact that intersex is now being accepted, it was swept under the carpet for ages, "it didn't exist" you know, but we are now realising that it does, even physically, nature, gender is not clearly defined in a lot of people…* (transgender activist)

Conclusion

- The legislation and implementation mechanisms provide levers for equalities

- There is still a long way to go:
  - Implementation overall
  - Multiple and intersectional disadvantage
  - Full support for the spectrum of diversity even if this takes us out of our comfort zones

Further Information

Website:

http://research.ncl.ac.uk/selg/