The double helix of community participation policy: Applying a Theory of Change approach to analysis of the Big Society and Community Empowerment

Steve Rolfe

Urban Studies, University of Glasgow

What I'm going to talk about…

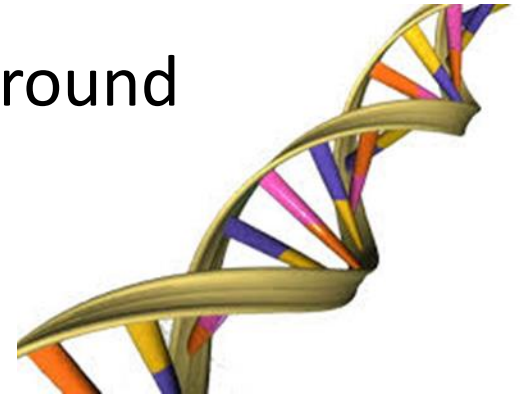
- Overview of key policies
- Some theoretical background
- A model for analysis of community participation policy and practice
- Exploring the policy differences
- Some tentative research findings

Policy Overview – Big Society/Localism

- Based on critique of state centralisation and 'broken society'
- Part of Conservative's 'Responsibility agenda'
- Three key themes:
  - New community rights
  - Reducing bureaucracy and devolving power
  - Strengthening public sector accountability

Policy Overview – Community Empowerment

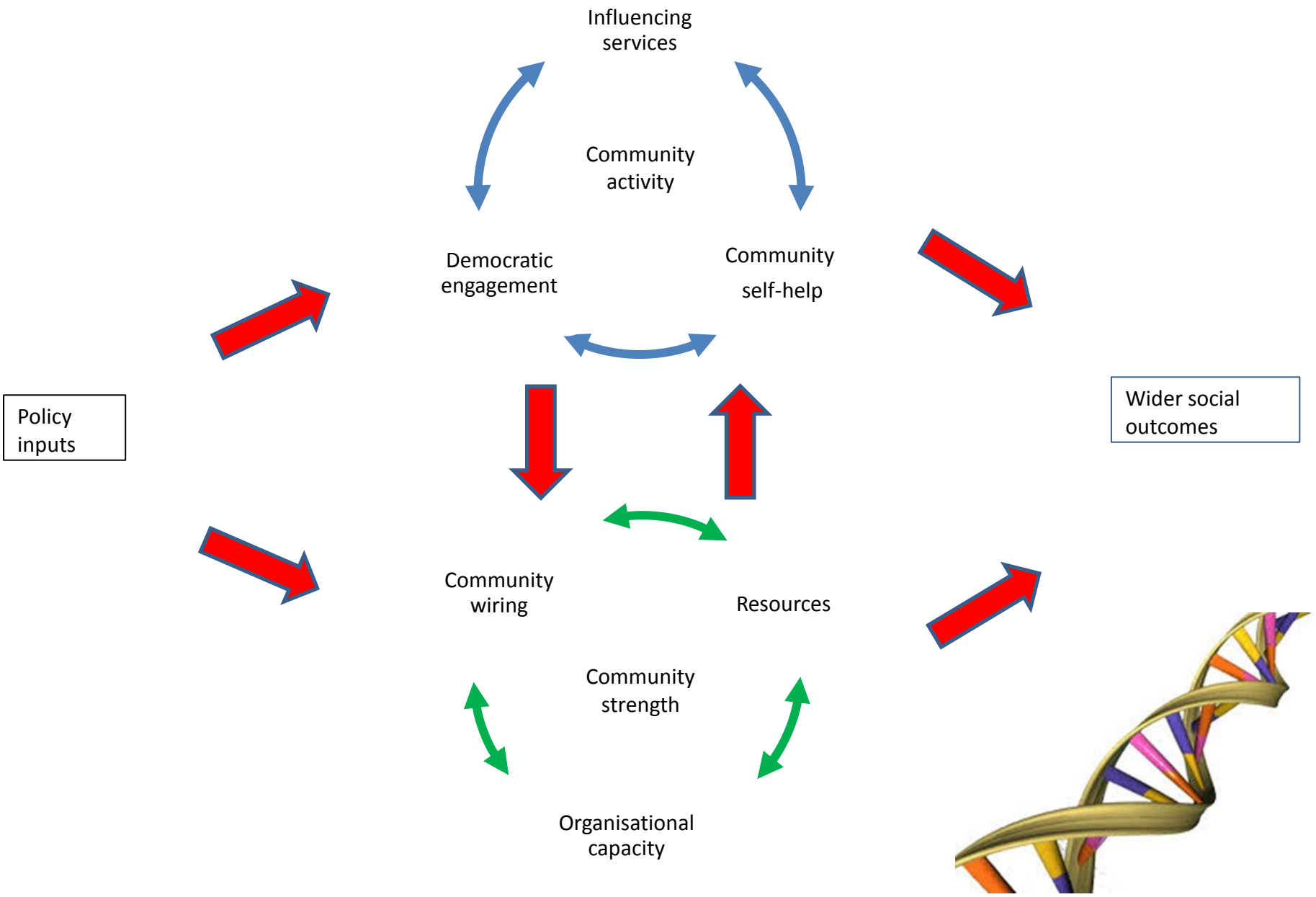
- Guidance and support, being supplemented by legislation
- Emphasis on changing public sector culture – more participative and responsive
- Key elements of draft legislation:
  - New right to request participation
  - Extended rights around assets
  - New duties on public sector bodies around Community Planning



Theoretical foundations

- Theories of Change evaluation methodology
- ‘Government through community’ (Rose, 1992 and others)
- Communities as objects and subjects (Imrie & Raco, 2003)
- Key elements of community strength – resources, organisational capacity, community wiring
- Key elements of community activity – influence, self-help, democratic engagement

A theoretical model – The Double Helix of Community Participation Policy



And a neater version…

Community strength

Resources

Organisational capacity

Community wiring

Policy inputs

Wider social outcomes

Improving services

Community self-help

Democratic engagement

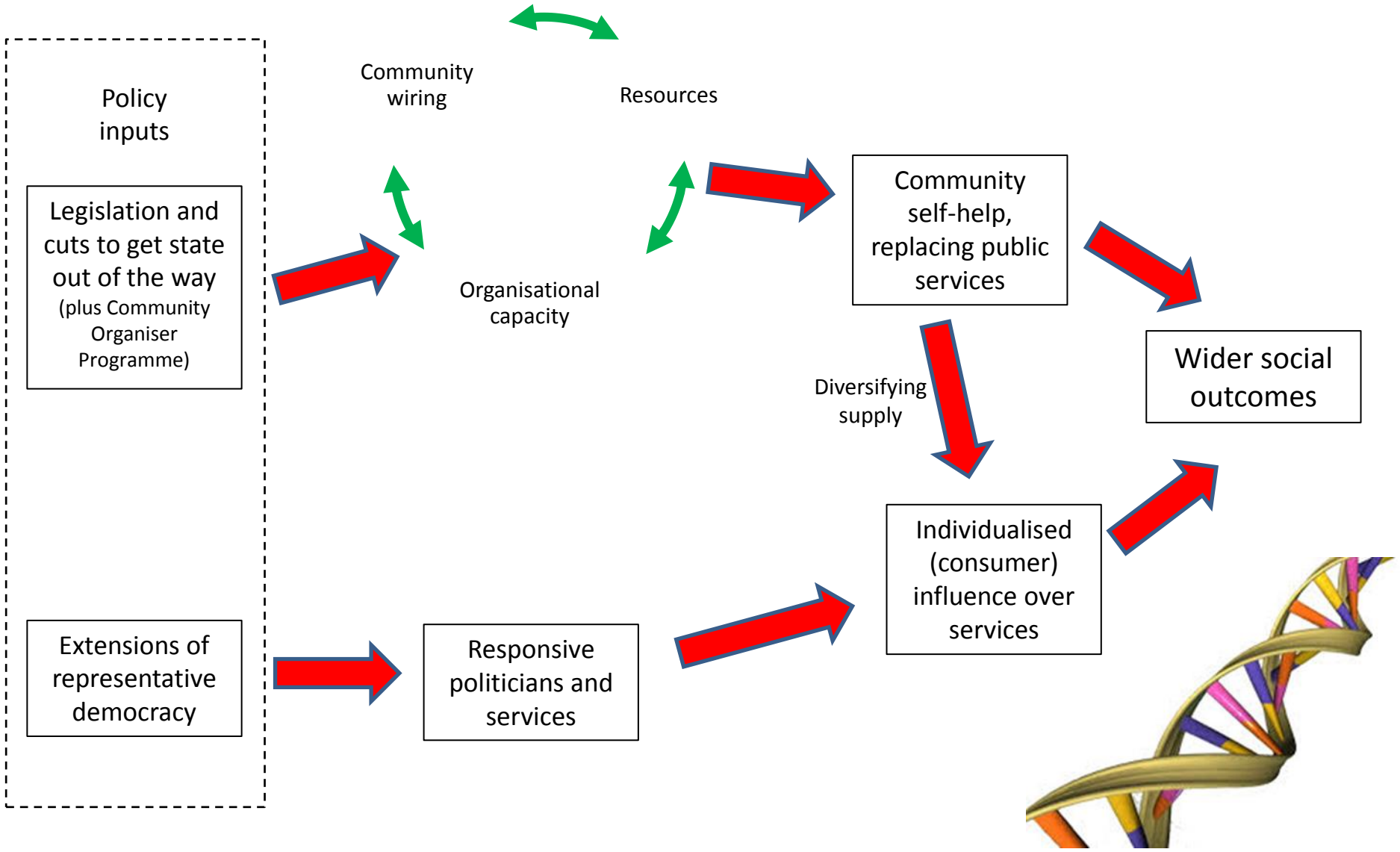
Community activity

Key differences

Resources	CLD v Community Organisers Asset transfer – rights v fire sales Finance – grants v fund-raising
Organisational capacity	Issues around types of 'community'
Community wiring	We all need to work on it v It'll be alright on the night
Influence	Voice v choice
Self-help	Choice of level of empowerment, plus issues of context
Democratic engagement	Participative v representative Collective v individual

Community Empowerment Theory of Change

Big Society/Localism Theory of Change



Early findings

- Voice v choice – a more complex view
- Issues of responsibility…but also of risk and power
- Impacts of austerity
- Mechanisms of additionality
- Feedback loops and fragility
- Gaps between policies and practice on the ground
- Moving beyond ‘carrots, sticks and sermons’

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