POWER, PARTICIPATION, AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

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RESILIENCE TO NATURE'S CHALLENGES
Kia manawaroa – Ngā Ākina o Te Ao Tūroa

PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

People's participation is widely acknowledged as a necessary component of effective, efficient and inclusive disaster risk reduction (DRR):

❖ 'Communities' are the first to respond to disasters, making them logical resources for DRR (Cadag and Gaillard, 2013).

❖ People can bring wealth of resources, especially knowledge and skills, to help reduce vulnerability and enhance capacities (Twigg, 2004).

❖ Only local people can shed light on the local complexities that comprise disaster risk (Gaillard, 2010).

❖ Participation can serve as a platform for integrative and multi-stakeholder DRR (Gaillard, 2010).

❖ Participation can strengthen local capacities, e.g increased cooperation and organisation, resources, communication and learning (Twigg, 2004).

❖ People have the right to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives (Twigg, 2004).

Participatory DRR requires participatory processes and spaces that allow people to meaningfully contribute their ideas, needs, and knowledge, and perspectives towards decision making processes (Twigg, 2004). However, participation often occurs as standardised, top-down approaches that have little interaction with formal decision making (Williams, 2004). Such approaches can perpetuate existing power relations and structures within decision making processes, and result in misunderstandings, disillusionment, and exacerbation of distrust between stakeholders (Leal, 2007). Further, these forms of participation result in the undermining or underutilisation of local capacities in DRR initiatives, and result in significant inefficiency and wasted opportunities to reduce disaster risk (Kuban & MacKenzie-Carey, 2001).

Many of these shortcomings can be attributed to a failure to adequately acknowledge, analyse and accommodate power and power relations within the theory and practice of participation (Williams, 2004). As figure 1 explores, participatory spaces and process are shaped and conditioned by power in numerous ways.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POWER

KNOWLEDGE AND DISCOURSE

Knowledge is constituted by power, and likewise the way forms of knowledge are accepted can generate different modalities of power (Foucault, 1978). Power is also operated through discourse, which can be understood as rules defining what is 'true' or fact within a discipline or school of thought, as a vehicle through which knowledge is constituted, but also resisted (Gaventa, 2003; McHoul & Grace, 1997). Dominant discourses/knowledge thus shape how participation is theorised, how issues are framed, how participation operates in practice.

WIDER CONTEXT

The wider context in which participation takes place is significant in numerous, inextricable linked ways. Local realities and power relations are constantly being shaped in relation to national and global actors and forces than span across socially created demarcations of "community" and shape many aspects of participatory processes (Gaventa, 2003). Further, knowledge, discourses and actions are culturally determined (Foucault, 1991) so they are specific to localities. These are influenced by, and shape power relations (Kelly, 2005).

"COMMUNITIES" IN WHICH PARTICIPATION TAKE PLACE

Communities are often imagined as socially homogeneous and harmonious, spatially discrete and spatially bound. However, communities can be sites of conflict, alliances, social structures, different interests and agendas. These constantly change over time and are constituted by power relations (Cleaver, 1999). Communities can be spatially diverse, scattered and transnational, attached to a place or aspatial. They overlapping and membership is often contested (Mohan & Stokke, 2000).

PARTICIPATION IN PRACTICE

When participation is put into practice, social relations, expectations, understandings and norms within people's everyday lives condition and shape participatory processes and spaces and their outputs (Kesby, 2005). These are context specific to individuals, 'communities" and localities, and are constituted by power. Further complexities are introduced when external 'experts' facilitate participation. Often faced with deliverables and pre defined outcomes to meet the structures of accountability in which they sit, facilitators may deliberately or inadvertently shape the way that participatory processes are run, how issues framed and the outcomes produced (Chambers, 2012).
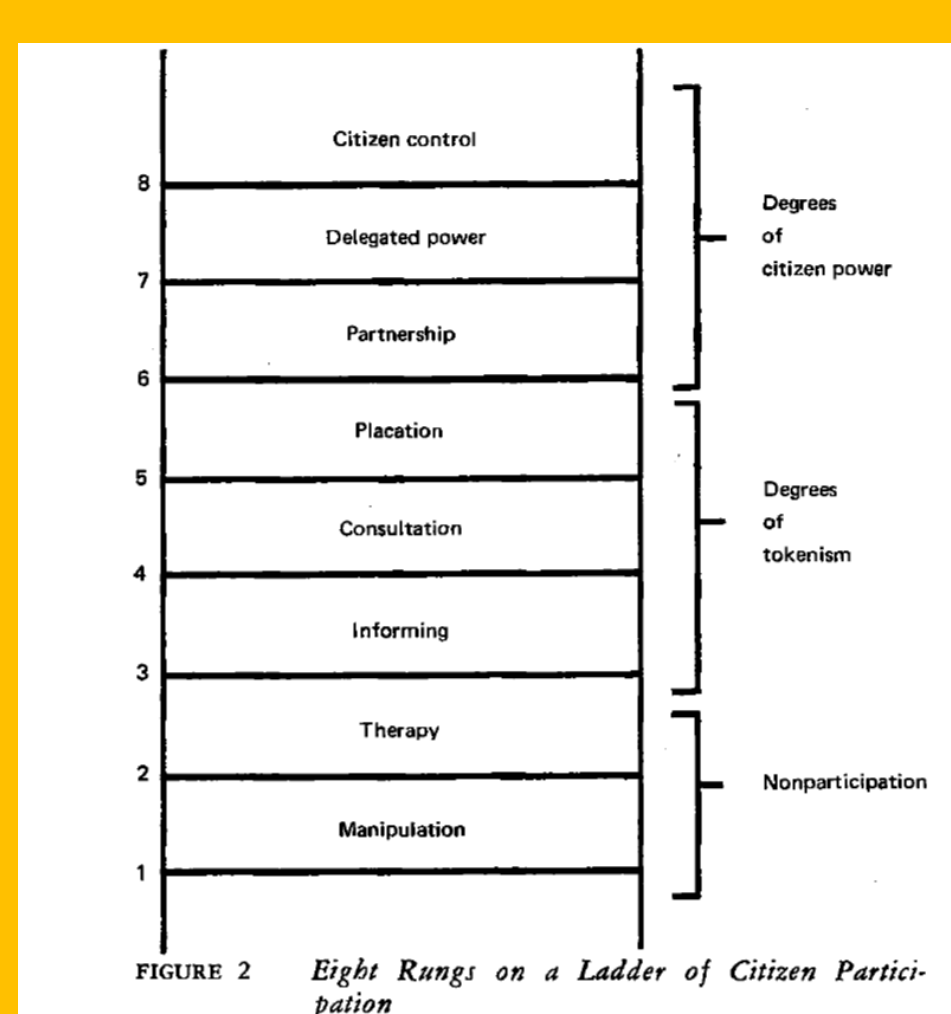
PARTICIPATORY METHODS AND TOOLS

Figure 2: Arnstein' ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969)

Various different methods to engage local people operate under the term "participation". These have different degrees of interaction with decision making processes (Figure 1), use different interpretations of participation, operate at different scales and are used to serve different, often contradicting projects and purposes (Leal, 2007).

These methods often involve the use of tools to create opportunities for people to analyse their situations, come up with solutions, participate in decision making processes. Regardless of the skill or sensitivity with which they are facilitated, these tools are laced with the world views, priorities, and assumptions of their creators, which shape how they are experienced and the knowledge and decisions elicited (Kothari, 2001).

Figure 1: Different, embedded and linked factors shaping of participatory processes and their outcomes, and how they relate to power/power relations

CASE STUDY

Theoretical framework

Understanding power in participation requires a theoretical framework that acknowledges the co-constituted nature of power and knowledge. Poststructuralism rejects claims of universal truths, fixed categorisations and binary understandings of the world (Woodward & Jones, 2009). It recognises that multiple meanings and ways of knowing the world exist and seeks to explore the ways that people make, remake, contest, and perform meaning. Poststructuralist perspectives, led by the work of Foucault, have made significant contributions to theorising and analysing power in terms of what constitutes power, where it is located, and different ways in which it operates (Woodward & Jones, 2009). It has also proven useful both to critique participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) and to look at how people use and negotiate seemingly dominating forms of power (Kesby, 2005).

Franz Josef Township

Figure 3: South Island, New Zealand. Source: Office of the Auditor-General

Figure 4: Franz Josef Township. Source: Scenic Hotel Group

Figure 5: Stock banks on the Waiho River. Source: Author's own

Figure 6: Flooding in Franz Josef Township, 2016. Source: Otago Daily Times

Franz Josef is an isolated tourist town on the west coast of the south island of New Zealand (Images 1 and 2). The town provides tourism services for the nearby Franz Josef glacier, with the capacity to host up to 5000 tourists per night. The township is threatened by numerous hazards, such as earthquake, fault rupture, landslides, rockfall, and flooding, debris flow, and dam break flooding from the Waiho River (Images 3 and 4).

The Franz Joseph 'community' is diverse and transient. It has an estimated permanent population of 444 (Statistics NZ, 2017), as well as a transient population of seasonal workers of up to several thousand, and a variety of different outside stakeholders with different interests in and involvement with the township.

Using a ethnographic methods, this research will interrogate the global, national, regional and local relations of power that are acting upon and within Franz Joseph township/"community" in everyday life, as well as within participatory DRR.
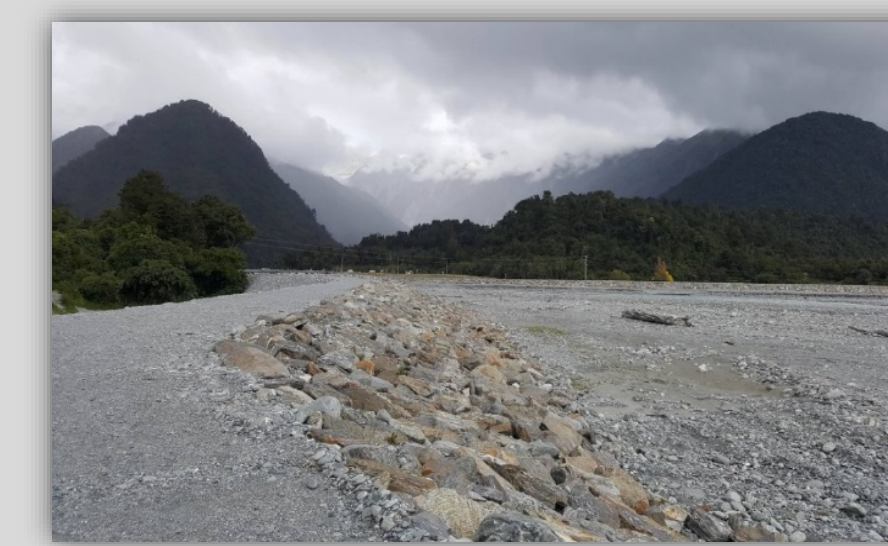
Participatory DRR in Franz Josef

A wide range of participatory processes are currently operating within and around Franz Josef where local people are attempting to address the various issues facing the town, including reducing the risk posed by these hazards (figure 2).

They vary in their origins, procedures, inclusivity, interpretations of community, inclusiveness and degrees of decision making control, presenting a unique case study to understand how power operates in and conditions participation in DRR.

This research will attempt to understand how these participatory processes and spaces are shaped and directed by power/power relations.
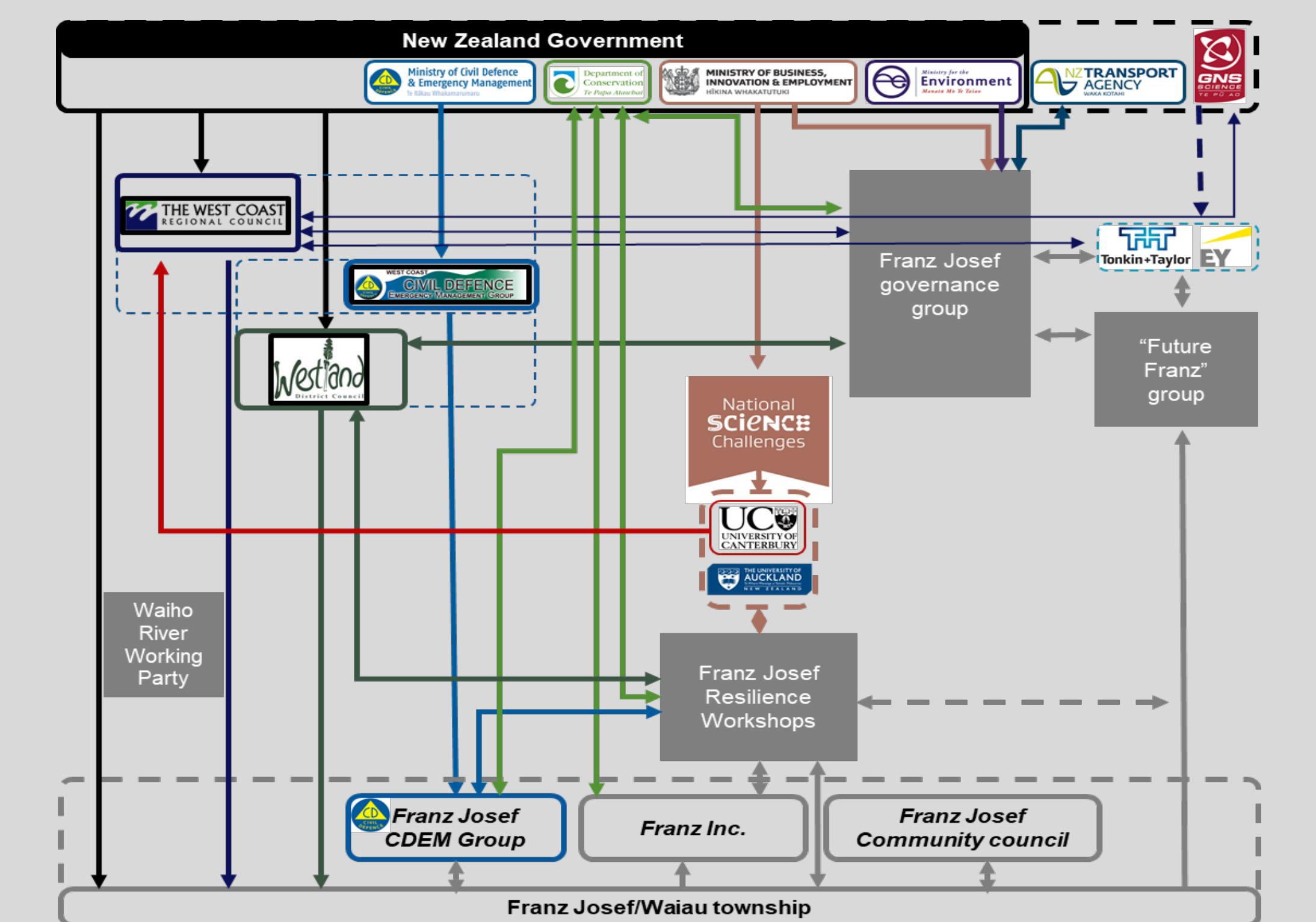

Figure 7: Network of actors and participatory platforms involved in DRR in Franz Josef. After Davies, 2018

RESEARCH

Participatory spaces and processes can be understood as microspaces sitting within larger networks of power, which shape and condition the possibilities for people to enter, the nature in which they can participate, and the knowledge and decisions produced within them (Cornwall, 2004) (figure 1). Yet in participatory practice and literature, power is either superficially addressed or completely ignored in discussions around participatory spaces and processes, their limits and their outcomes, or participation is presented as a means to "level" power relations and as spaces that can operate outside the normal influences of power (Kesby, 2005).

This research is using current understandings of power within participation as a starting point to develop a framework for understanding and analysing power in participatory DRR. Using a case study approach in Franz Josef, it will explore the social, cultural, and political context in which participatory spaces and processes have emerged and are operating in Franz Josef Township, and analyse how, in this context, modalities of power operate to condition participatory spaces and outputs. It will attempt to understand how these effects of power inhibit or are conducive to processes that increase resilience and reduce disaster risk. In doing so, it is hoped that this research will contribute towards the re-politicization of participation by re-centering power within participatory lexicon and debate, and produce tools for the analyses of power participatory spaces in future (Williams, 2004). Participatory DRR often fails in providing process and spaces in which people can meaningfully contribute their needs, knowledge, ideas and integrate their own current actions towards mitigating hazards, enhancing capacities and reducing vulnerability.

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