

Tenant involvement in the organisational structures of
housing associations in England: exploring the barriers
2000 - 2008

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the barriers to effective tenant involvement at an organisational level in housing associations by tracking, over a long period of time, the experience of tenants who get involved in the forums, panels and boards of housing associations. The focus of the research is the relationship between the tenants and the professional staff, in corporate environments where delivery of a user-focused service is purported to be the shared goal. The aim has been to explore with tenants and staff their experiences of trying to make tenant involvement work at a strategic level within the organisation.

My research seeks (a) to unravel the methods used by the different actors to influence activities and outcomes, and (b) to examine their effects on the power balance in and between the groups of people in question. Clegg's 1989 'Circuits of power' theory is used to plot and analyse the processes involved in the transformation (or not) of power within the culture and practice of tenant involvement and the empowerment (or not) of the tenants who work with staff at the heart of these corporate cultures. In addition I use Somerville's 1998 typology of empowerment to illustrate the potential for organisational change.

I gather a wide range of material, using a detailed questionnaire, 17 case studies plus a further three of national level involvement initiatives, and an analysis of 112 Housing Corporation and Audit Commission inspection reports (from 2003 and 2008). To this I add my own experience as a participant observer in a range of settings over the period. This thesis is intended to shed some light on why the same barriers continue to exist and why so many involved tenants and their housing associations are still struggling to make involvement really make a difference at this level, despite a decade of intensive regulation and inspection of involvement activities

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