How could a “capability approach” influence social work practice?

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Friday 12th April 2019, ECSWR conference, Leuven
Questions posed by the capability approach

How should we think about people’s needs?
  – how does this relate to their rights?

What does this mean in practice?
  – for what we see and measure
  – for how we work
  – for the solutions we identify

Does the CA add value to existing approaches?
Core components of the CA

1. Capabilities: people’s needs are best understood in terms of what people can be and do

Capabilities: what you are enabled to be and do, given:
- your own characteristics
- the people around you
- the resources and services you can draw on
- the rights you can access
- the institutions, structures and legal framework of society

NOT an inherent attribute of an individual but the product of the relationship between a person and his/her environment

➢ implies multidimensionality: being healthy, being safe, having self-respect, engaging in valued activities, interacting socially...
Core components of the CA

2. Conversion factors: people may need different types and amounts of resources to obtain the same capabilities

Conversion factors may include:
- personal: eg disability, maternity, age
- social: eg public goods, social norms
- environmental: eg transport infrastructure, climate

Conversion factors may themselves interact
- eg disability and transport infrastructure

➢ implies recognition of diversity and evaluating *ends* rather than *means*
Core components of the CA

3. Agency: people are ‘doers’ and ‘judges’

We are all ‘receivers’ – we are interdependent on each other - but we are not passive recipients.

We are ‘doers’ – able to make plans, able to contribute to society
- this role needs to be recognised and facilitated

We are ‘judges’ – with our own values, able to reflect and appraise our own lives, and contribute to collective judgements
- implies empowerment, choice and control
Case analysis: a girl in a refugee family unable to participate in school trips

Constrained capabilities (core 1)
- ability to learn
- ability to participate in social interaction
- avoidance of shame
- ability to be ‘a good parent’

Material resources are important but may not be sufficient (core 2)
- accessible information
- time/scheduling
- confidence

Solution needs to be found with the family not for the family (core 3)
- taking account of child’s and parent’s perspectives and values
- recognising their roles as ‘doers’ and encouraging their ‘judgement’
The CA and human rights

• Both are contested
• But can be synergies:
• Human rights values FREDA
  • Fairness, Respect, Equality, Dignity, Autonomy
• Identification of which capabilities are important can be based on human rights standards
  • UN Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
• Disaggregation
  • by key characteristics
  • focus on vulnerable groups
Common criticisms of the CA

• Individualistic
• Incomplete and vague
• Overly complex – can’t be operationalised
• It’s communism in disguise

...or...

• It’s an apology for capitalism!
How does the CA influence what we see and measure?

Example 1: measurement framework of the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Britain
Equality Measurement Framework

**Inequality of substantive freedom** (inequality in the central and valuable things in life that people can do and be)

- **3 aspects**
  - (i) outcomes
  - (ii) process (dignity and respect, discrimination)
  - (iii) autonomy (choice and control)

- **10 domains**
  - Life
  - Physical security
  - Health
  - Education
  - Standard of living
  - Productive and valued activities
  - Participation, influence and voice
  - Individual, family and social life
  - Identity, expression and self-respect
  - Legal security

**Inequality by 7 characteristics** gender (incl trans), ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion/belief, social class ...
## Physical security: from capabilities to indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capability list</th>
<th>Indicators in EMF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• be free from violence including sexual and domestic violence and violence based on who you are</td>
<td>1. % victims of violent crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• be free from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment</td>
<td>2. % victims of hate crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• be protected from physical or sexual abuse (especially by those in positions of authority)</td>
<td>3. physical security for people resident or detained in public and private institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• go out and to use public spaces safely and securely without fear</td>
<td>4. fear of crime</td>
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**Systematic disaggregation by characteristics** including gender (incl trans), ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion/belief, social class ...
Example: the capability to be free from violence 
*reflected in measure* % victims of violence in previous year
Figure 1: Individuals who self-identify as experiencing a limiting longstanding illness or disability (LLID) are systematically disadvantaged across the domains and indicators considered in the report (EU27 countries, 2011).

Note: data points that are further out on the radar diagram indicate worse outcomes against each indicator. The severity of disadvantage against different indicators is not necessarily comparable.
Uses of the EMF in Britain

Government
Government Equalities Office
Local governments

Independent statutory organisations
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Children’s Commissioner

Service providers
Public services’ equality and human rights monitoring, especially in healthcare

Civil society
Local equality networks and pressure groups...
How does the CA influence what we see and measure?

Example 2: resources and outcomes within complex households

Eleni Karagiannaki, Tania Burchardt
How do a household’s resources get translated into standards of living for individual members

Conventional view:
- decisions as a household unit
- full sharing
- equal standard of living

Capability-informed perspective:
- each individual as potential doer and judge
- differential conversion factors
- possibly unequal outcomes

Belgium 2010: 20% of women have no personal income (5 x men); 13% of women say their partner is the main decision-maker about expenditures; shared decision-making less common among low income families
Personal deprivation (adults) and household deprivation

**PD2 Personal deprivation: whether the individual cannot afford two or more of the following 7 items**

1. replacing worn out clothes by some new (not second hand);
2. two pairs of properly fitting shoes (including a pair of all-weather shoes);
3. get together with friends/family (relatives) for drink/meal at least once per month;
4. regularly participate in leisure activities;
5. spend a small amount of money each week on yourself;
6. internet connection for personal use at home;
7. regular use of public transport

**Source:** 2014 Material deprivation module

**HD3 Household deprivation: whether the individual lives in a household that cannot afford three or more of the following 9 items**

1. to pay their rent, mortgage or utility bills;
2. to keep their home adequately warm;
3. to face unexpected expenses;
4. to eat meat or proteins regularly;
5. to go on holiday;
6. to have a television set;
7. to have a washing machine;
8. to have a car;
9. to have a telephone

**Source:** 2014 core EU-SILC dataset

➢ What can the PD2 measure tell us about sharing within complex households?
Percentage of adults who live in a ‘complex household’ containing members beyond a nuclear family:

Dependent child threshold: age under 18

Source: Authors’ calculations based on 2014 EU-SILC cross-sectional data UDB ver. 2014-2 1-8-16.
Percentage of adults who live in a ‘complex household’ containing members beyond a nuclear family

Source: Authors’ calculations based on 2014 EU-SILC cross-sectional data UDB ver. 2014-2 1-8-16.
Individual income shares make more difference to personal deprivation in complex households.

Source: Authors’ calculations based on 2014 EU-SILC cross-sectional data UDB ver. 2014-2 1-8-16.
How does the CA influence how we work?

Example: RE-InVEST *Rebuilding an inclusive, value based Europe of solidarity and trust through social investments*

- Horizon 2020 project led by Alliances to Fight Poverty
- “The participative research design ... puts vulnerable people at the heart of the process”
- “For the academic researchers ... to be confronted with the lived experience of vulnerable groups who will have the chance to reflect on their experience and co-construct the conceptual framework”
- Implemented in 13 countries in 2015-18
Participatory Action Human Rights and Capability Approach (PAHRCA) methodology: merging knowledge

Academic knowledge

Experiential knowledge of vulnerable people

Professional knowledge of civil society organisations

Mary Murphy and Rory Hearne, Re-InVEST Policy Brief Issue 2/2019
**PAHRCA aims** (1)

| Participation (Judge) | Arnstein’s ‘ladder of participation’  
| Co-production of knowledge  
| Raising voice  
| Critical consciousness raising  
| Creating new spaces for public deliberation and *political participation* | Democratisation of knowledge production  
| Does it open up spaces for democracy and participatory politics?  
| Education to enhance people’s awareness of their rights  
| Increased awareness of policy measures |

[RE-INVEST logo]
| Empowerment (Judge/Doer) | Enhancing capabilities/capacity & human rights  
|                         | Strengthening individual & collective agency  
|                         | Improving individual & collective well-being  
|                         | Achieving political participation  
|                         | Challenging structural causes of injustice/oppression | Does it nourish people’s ‘capacity to aspire’ and ‘sense of entitlement’?  
|                         | Creating a culture of rights?  
|                         | Improve ‘capability for voice’  
<p>|                         | Increase awareness and capacity for action |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformation (Doer)</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Making results/knowledge public</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact on public policy</td>
<td>Empowering vulnerable groups to enter the political sphere as a public actor</td>
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<td>Impact on public sphere</td>
<td>Achieving democratic participation – speaking uncomfortable truths</td>
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<td>Become a fulfilled citizen</td>
<td>Transforming practice of institutions &amp; welfare state</td>
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<td>Power redistribution</td>
<td>Academic as publically engaged</td>
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<td>Public critical action</td>
<td>NGO/Trade union/civil society engaging in empowerment &amp; transformation</td>
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<td>Challenge existing patterns of inequality</td>
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<td>Rebalancing power</td>
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<td>Structural change towards social justice</td>
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Example: with homeless people in Ireland

- partner NGO Focus Ireland
- ex-homeless trained peer researchers
- large research team: Mary Murphy, Zuzanna Kuchardski, Rory Hearne, Emma Richardson, Paul Haughan, Kathleena Twomey, Tom Kelly
- 12 weeks intensive PAHRCA process
- impact of emergency accommodation arose as a key issue
- dialogue between participants and policymakers: roundtable event with two senior local authority officials, a housing spokesperson of the main opposition party in the national parliament and the Chief Commissioner of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC).
- policy makers gained new insights
- families felt empowered
- IHREC subsequently took up the research recommendations
Challenges of PAHRCA

- securing research funding requires predetermined research questions
- most research takes place over a short timeframe, too short to establish relationships, build capacity and achieve transformation
- unless there is prior commitment, participants may be ‘abandoned’ at the end of the project, without follow-through
- challenging for all parties emotionally, and requires openness to change your mind
- practical, cultural and linguistic obstacles
How does the CA influence the solutions we identify?

Example: *Participle*, a social enterprise set up by Hilary Cottam in the UK

- aimed to develop demonstration projects of a new approach to the welfare
- explicitly grounded in the capability approach
- 5 key shifts:
  - from meeting needs to fostering capabilities [core 1]
  - from targeted services to models open to all
  - from a financial focus to a resource focus [core 2]
  - from centralised institutions to distributed networks
  - from individual solutions to social networks [core 3]
‘Life’ programme: troubled families and troubled services

- Working with families in chronic crisis
- Deprivation, housing problems and debt; mental illness, substance misuse; truancy, anti-social or criminal behaviour (perpetrators and victims); domestic violence
- At risk of losing their home, children and/or liberty
- ‘High cost’ families: long-term engagement with social services and police (eg 73 services from 24 departments)
  
  “We’d have 17 people at these meetings. They’d start by saying I’m from such a place, I’m from here and by the time they got to the end I hadn’t got a clue who the second person was, and they wouldn’t be talking to me, they’d talk about me”

- Frontline workers demoralised and constrained
  
  “We’re not really addressing root causes, we’re fire fighting (...) it does feel like us and them, so people don’t open up. They’re fearful of what action will be taken.” -- Prospective Life Team members
`Life` programme: stage 0: invitation

- Families invited, not mandated, to participate
- Family members (with Participle) interviewed workers who volunteered to be part of the programme and built a team
- Families asked what they wanted to change about their lives
- Joint activities (eg repair jobs) for the team and the families – trust building and getting to know one another
‘Life’ programme: stage 1: aspirations

• Cameras for family members to record things workers wouldn’t otherwise know about you
• Families identify the capabilities they want to develop
• LifeBoard – interface where both families and team can record ideas and experiences, a record of the journey

‘Life’ programme: stages 2 and 3: activities and opportunities

• Developing new relationships and social networks
• Trying out different strategies and reflecting with team on successes and failures
• Experiencing new outcomes
• Making a contribution to neighbours and wider community
• Families decide when to exit
‘Life’ programme: does it work?

- but savings do not accrue to the local authority: mostly flow back to central government or other agencies
- not formally evaluated
Wellogram: managing chronic health conditions in the community

• Working with patients with multiple conditions and chronic health problems
• Relational workers in family doctor surgeries
• Referred on a voluntary basis by family doctor, nurse or self
• Initial consultation plus follow ups in person or by phone
• Capabilities Measurement Tool focuses on wellness
• Multidimensional, agent-centered, socially embedded
• Intervention based on developing capabilities in context not transferring information, advice and exhortation
Wellogram: does it work?

- but biggest savings accrue to other agencies (emergency depts; social care) so difficult to commission
- not formally evaluated, small samples
Can the CA add value in social work practice?

• Centring on conception of a person as interdependent with others, as a doer and a judge, and
• recognising diversity (in goals and identities and contexts) and
• focusing on what people are able to be and do (‘freedom-focused’ and multidimensional)

brings

- new visibility eg within the household, eg cross-cutting disadvantage of disabled people
- new voice eg homeless people, troubled families
- new policies eg changing services not just changing people

• Each of the elements of the CA are also found in other approaches
• Value of CA is in bringing these together
Comments and questions please!

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