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Monro, Surya, McNulty, Ann and Richardson, Diane

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Organisational Change, Resistance and Democracy: Findings from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equalities in Local Government project

Surya Monro, Diane Richardson, and Ann McNulty

Policy Context

- **Range of LGBT equalities legislation introduced since 1999**
- **Recent legislative/policy developments include:**
- 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

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

Legislation and Modernisation

- There is a substantial change in the landscape due to the legislation
- The continuation of local government modernisation has supported the agenda
  - Partnership working
  - Impact Assessments
  - Equalities Standard

Quotes

- *The primary driver has to be legislation, because that's your foot in the door, with everybody, with justifying it, the work, with everyone, when you produce a scheme and slamming it down people's throats, its to say "we're legally required to do this you know"* (ALS member, Wales)

- *I would have to say that in terms of all the equality categories, including sexual orientation, the awareness people have over the past few years of all the equality categories has improved significantly, so that when they are drawing up policies, the policies they are developing are significantly better than they would have been* (Local Authority Officer, Northern Ireland)

Key aspects

- Structures
- People
- Mechanisms
- Partnership and community engagement

Organisational Cultures

- Wide variation
- Direct and indirect homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in some cases
- The importance of affect: Nervousness, embarrassment and 'privacy'
- Notions of worthiness
- Faith

Quotes

- *'…well its all well and good, but I hope you know you're going to burn in hell'* [shocked reaction by ALS group]

- *'A lot of library services block searches that include the words, lesbian, gay or bisexual, and it's a blanket block because it assumes that they're all spam or porn. So people who are generally looking for support or advice or help can't actually find those services if they don't have their computer at home, and that quite often is these people who need it most, because they're likely to be the most economically deprived'* (Bisexual community representative, Wales)

Democracy

- Central-local context and differences across the countries
- Issues concerning participation and representation
- The importance of supportive local politicians
- Local councillors as obstructive

Quotes

- *'so therefore the ruling party have to demonstrate that they are reaching the gay community, and doing things for the gay community, otherwise they're going to lose that vote' (Northern English ALS member)*
- *I wouldn't wish to say that it was all members, but there are certain of our members who, if I mentioned the word 'lesbian' or 'gay' to them, I could foresee the reaction I would get. If I said I had a complaint from a gay person about somebody's behaviour, they might well make a joke of it or not regard it as particularly important … I imagine if you closed the door and there was a discussion about "Why are we doing this?" (sexualities and trans equalities work), that would not make happy listening'*

Analysis and conclusion

- Increased legitimacy and stronger structures
- Implementation is patchy
- Key factors:
  - Politics and leadership
  - Organisational cultures
  - Demographic variations
  - Resourcing