Power mapping

Authors: Artemis Koumparelou, with contributions from Giorgos Velegrakis, Sylvain Adam (commonspace, West Attica Fairville Lab), Maria Rajha and Mona Fawaz
Review: Ben Kerste

Short description

Power mapping is a process of identifying and analysing power relations and power asymmetries that determine the access and the control over local resources and/or shape unfavourable conditions for specific local groups. By mapping and ranking the actors (people and institutions) in terms of power and capacity to influence particular developments and conditions, the method enables the understanding of the divergent interests and the roots of differentiated - and sometimes uneven -power dynamics. Implemented as a participatory process in research and community building projects, it can become a tool for marginalized groups to reflect on the resources that are relevant to their well-being and to comprehend the power relations and the motives that affect the access to these resources. Moreover, the analysis of power among local actors and the identification of the different areas and aspects of influence and control aims to the deeper understanding of the obstacles and opportunities for political engagement and citizen involvement. In this way, power mapping can facilitate the discussion of possible strategies and actions and can be an early step to reverse unfair agency distribution and give solutions to the targeted problem(s).

Tags/ keywords: Method, Qualitative methods, Power analysis, Power matrix, Stakeholders matrix.

Who can use this method/ be involved?

This method can be useful for researchers and local community groups, who seek to identify key resources and analyse power dynamics and power asymmetries that affect the access to them, with the final goal to create strategies for change. The involvement of people familiar both with the local community and with the issue of focus is considered essential.

Steps

- Determination of a particular subject, project, policy or situation beforehand.
- Mapping local stakeholders/ players: identification of people and stakeholders who influence and are affected by the problem under consideration.
- Discussion and reflection on the different dimensions and mechanisms of exerting power and the reasons behind those disparities.
- Collective creation of a power matrix collectively to:
    - Rank the levels of power and capacity among identified players to affect access to resources and to enable or hinder solutions to the problem.
    - Qualify relationships between different key players and assess their relevance to the issue under consideration and to the initiative's objectives (e.g. trust-mistrust / economic relations)
    - Distinguish different forms of power among the players and make early links to the possible strategies for transformation.

Resources and materials required

- Established connection and trust among the participants and a pre-existing overview of the social, political, and economic environment, relevant to the targeted problem.
- A physical space for gathering and basic equipment (board for the power matrix, post - it, pens)

Tips/ What to pay attention to

A power matrix doesn't remain stable over time. On the one hand, the degree of information and the way of collective interpretation of the power relations do advance in time. On the other hand, the power dynamics per se do change as well. Thus, it might be useful to applicate the method regularly to reflect evolutions and dynamics and to correlate them to a wider context.
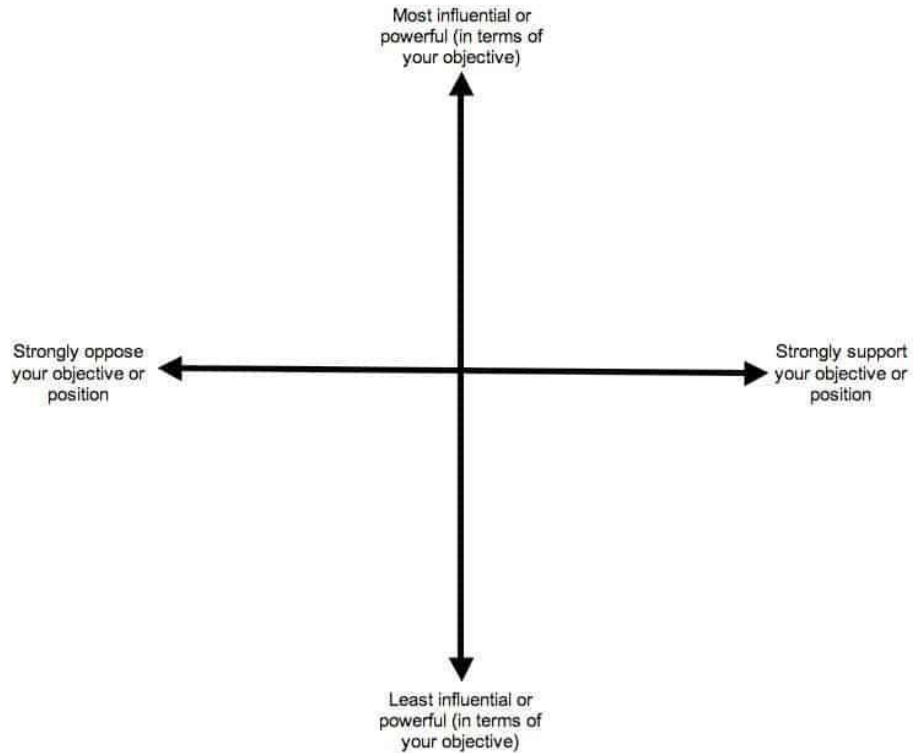
Figure 18: Power Matrix Example

Source: https://commonslibrary.org/guide-power-mapping-and-analysis/

Examples of use

- https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/movetoamend/pages/727/attachments/original/1584235236/mta-powermapping.pdf?1584235236
- https://repository.participatorylab.org/dataset/fd986b6d-6463-4b28-906b-0053a337bd57/resource/26ccf4eb-359b-4aaa-ac99-a5bedb441b3d/download/paradigma-gavdos.jpg
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Further reading/(re)sources

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