Planning The Active Neighbourhood: A Discussion of Resident-Directed Neighbourhood Planning

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by

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ABSTRACT

Resident-directed planning is implicit in the recommendations of the Brundtland Commission Report (1987) which called for the reallocation of resources and decision-making capacity to the local level, particularly in the case of disadvantaged populations.

The federal government has supported local community involvement in housing and urban issues through a variety of programs over the past thirty years. Examples include the co-operative housing programs, community resource organization funding and, perhaps most relevant, the Neighbourhood Improvement Program from the 1970s. The community-building success of one low income community is provided as illustrative of the potential of community-based approaches.

Various evaluations have demonstrated the benefits of resident-initiated and resident-directed efforts, largely focusing on the development of new skills and the enhanced self-reliance of participants. Other potential benefits include the leverage of a wide range of social goods by the empowered citizenry.

One of the most prevalent myths throughout the debate has been that home owners are the most committed residents, perhaps founded on the notion economic self-interest is the most powerful force in human decisions. A study of townhouse occupants under four different tenure forms found strong contradictory evidence: free-hold owners were less likely to be active in their neighbourhoods than condo owners and most particularly less than members of not-for-profit co-ops. At the low end of the scale, tenants exhibited both the lowest satisfaction and participation, with rates far below what could be predicted on the basis of their relative income or education levels. And these results translated as well into higher vote participation and higher involvement in organization beyond the neighbourhood level.

On the other hand, a number of potential problems of citizen-controlled planning have been suggested, ranging from NIMBYism, through the issue of parochial versus wider interests to the question of how representative participants are of the population and the danger of cliques.

Planners face a special challenge in responding to the Brundtland Commission's call for the empowerment of disadvantaged local populations which they can address within the concept of resident-directed planning. Planners can provide the tools these citizens need to become truly effective participants, whether it be knowledge ofcommunity survey techniques or introductory concepts in democratic structuring and project management.

NOTE: LE RÉSUMÉ EN FRANÇAIS SUIT IMMÉDIATEMENT LE RÉSUMÉ EN ANGLAIS.

RÉSUMÉ

Le principe de l'urbanisme géré par les résidents est sous-entendu dans les recommandations du rapport de la Commission Brundtland (1987) qui demandaient une réaffectation des ressources et la possibilité pour les localités de prendre des décisions, surtout en ce qui concerne les populations défavorisées.

Durant les trente dernières années, le gouvernement fédéral a appuyé la participation des collectivités locales dans les domaines de l'habitation et de l'urbanisme par le biais de différents programmes, entre autres les programmes des coopératives d'habitation, le financement de l'organisation des ressources communautaires et le Programme d'amélioration des quartiers des années 1970 (probablement le plus pertinent). L'esprit communautaire dont une collectivité à faibles revenus a réussi à se doter montre le potentiel que possèdent les approches communautaires.

Plusieurs évaluations ont fait état des avantages inhérents aux efforts déployés par les résidents en vue d'acquérir de nouvelles capacités et une autonomie accrue. Le fait que les résidents décisionnaires peuvent exercer une influence sur un vaste éventail de biens publics représente un autre avantage.

L'un des mythes les plus répandus dans ce débat est que les propriétaires-occupants sont les résidents les plus actifs dans une collectivité. Ce mythe est probablement fondé sur la notion que les intérêts économiques personnels ont la plus puissante influence sur les décisions humaines. Or, une étude menée auprès des occupants de maisons en bande, représentant quatre différents modes d'occupation, a révélé que les propriétaires absolus ont moins tendance à être actifs dans leur quartier que les propriétaires de copropriétés et encore moins que les membres de coopératives sans but lucratif. D'un côté, les locataires, n'étant pas satisfaits, participaient beaucoup moins à la vie communautaire, contrairement à ce que laissaient croire leurs revenus et leur degré d'instruction. Ces résultats se sont également traduits par un taux élevé de participation aux scrutins et à des organisations ne faisant pas partie de leur propre collectivité.

D'un autre côté, on a fait remarqué plusieurs problèmes qui pourraient survenir d'un urbanisme géré par les résidents, du syndrome Pas-dans-ma-cour à la représentativité des participants en passant par les dangers que représentent les cliques et par l'esprit de clocher par opposition à l'ouverture sur l'extérieur.

Les urbanistes ont tout un défi à relever pour répondre à l'appel lancé par la Commission Brundtland concernant la responsabilisation des populations locales défavorisées, une tâche qu'ils pourront accomplir en tenant compte du concept d'urbanisme géré par les résidents. Les urbanistes peuvent fournir les outils nécessaires, sous forme de formation en techniques de sondage communautaire ou d'introduction à la structuration démocratique et à la gestion de projet, pour permettre à ces personnes de devenir des participants vraiment efficaces.

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INTRODUCTION

To many people involved in local government, including some planners, the idea of ordinary citizens controlling the land use planning process is an anathema, yet the general notion of resident-directed planning is founded on the democratic principles which supposedly govern our society. In large measure, the place of municipalities and their roles are the result of historic accidents and there is a real need to redress some of the pitfalls associated with these accidents if Canadians are to achieve an effective democracy featuring a high level of participation in the decision-making processes.

During the early days of the European settlement of what is now Canada, most settlements were very small, reflecting the scattering of a limited population across a vast territory. Even at the time of Confederation, the largest settlements had populations which could be measured in the tens of thousands. Among these populations, a real sense of community and effective participation were possible. It even made sense to establish the principles in 1867 that cities were the creations of the provinces and that the national or federal government could only deal with municipalities through the provinces. Land use planning is governed largely by provincial statutes and regulations and provincial governments delegate most planning functions to local governments.

To paraphrase John Stewart Mill's argument for local (i.e. municipal) government, "there are so many things to be decided that all those things which effect only local neighbourhoods ought to be decided there." The powers of municipal governments, however, have been entrenched from the days when Hogstown had a population that could today comfortably fit into the Skydome, with room left for all the citizens of several other Canadian cities of the late 1800s. In discussions of decentralization, it has been argued that the municipal government is "closest to the people". But our cities have grown, to the point that, today, a majority of Canadians live in just eight cities. There has been no serious discussion of how an alderperson representing perhaps 100,000 people can really know or be known by the electors.

There has been a trend towards mandated citizen participation in planning over the past few decades. The nature of this participation is not well defined and in most cases has been what could be characterized according to Alexander's (1969) Ladder of Participation as tokenism. Planners have a central role in determining the character of citizen participation whenever it is called into play.

In popularizing the term *sustainable development*, the Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987) called for the transfer of resources and responsibilities to local areas, particularly those comprised of the underprivileged members of society. The concern was that the need to achieve sustainable development should not be realized on the backs of the poor. If it were, as the authors of the Commission report noted, it could not be maintained in the face of popular discontent. Again, planners have a central role in establishing our path towards enduring economic change which can be supported by the environment and contribute to broad popular support.

Whatever the term one uses - marginalized, low income, disadvantaged - it must be recognized universally that these citizens often find themselves delegated to particular areas of our cities, forced there by lack of economic options. They live close together in substandard housing, often owned by absentee landlords. Out of necessity, they may turn to illegal means of sustaining themselves. Out of desperation, they may become abusers of controlled substances. And, given the lessons they have received in the School of Hard Knocks, they have come to distrust the "authorities" and make themselves again ready victims of those who would take advantage of their vulnerability. At a recent conference on crime prevention, some of their advocates suggested that

the "authorities" went so far as to encourage criminals to relocate to these areas, where there was less political pressure for action. Policemen, social workers and even planners may come to see them as a pool of need, of dependency. There are others who would argue that they are an untapped pool of talent and energy, of resources and insight.

The issue of citizen participation in planning is parallel to those in diverse areas from rental housing management to community security or economic development. Fiscal restraint is forcing governments at all levels to give renewed consideration of enabling approaches - ones whereby those most effected by social and economic problems are encouraged and supported in their efforts to establish their own priorities, to identify problems and to develop and implement solutions. Already, there have been many lessons learned and benefits realized in enabling exercises which can benefit the urban planner. Enabling approaches are particularly appropriate in the case of marginalized populations concentrated into the urban problems areas which so many planners are challenged to address. For the professional planner, seeing these people as pools of talent rather than need may be the most important breakthrough they can experience.

Common misconceptions about local communities or neighbourhoods are rife. The first, perhaps, is that neighbourhoods are no longer an important aspect of social organization. A review of several studies in the area will show that this is not the case, despite many predictions and observations from the field of sociology, from Tonnies to Wellman[1]. The second is a set of ideas about the relative participation of populations with differing socio-economic statuses. It is widely believed that homeowners make the best citizens, an idea rooted in the notion of the economic man, that financial self-interest is the only truly potent motivator. This idea as well may have its foundations in Tonnies' theory, in which he predicted a shift from affiliations based on affect to those based on rational self-interest. A third set of misconceptions arises around the question of general apathy - whether or not a significant number of citizens are ready to exercise their obligation to participate. These too need to be critically examined.

Planners are often challenged to address the worst of urban problems which frequently are focused together in specific areas of our cities, with low-income populations, substandard housing and limited "political clout". It is no accident that these physical and social problems occur together. The danger is that planners will strive to impose solutions derived from a value system alien to the people living in these areas. Planners are not immune to the ideas that people will not participate, that the local neighbourhood is no longer an important basis of social organization and that "those people" in particular will not and can not participate in a legitimate process of change.

I want to start by reviewing some of the history of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as our national housing agency, in encouraging participation. Then I will review the "scientific evidence" on participation - its likelihood, its correlates and its consequences. Then I will turn to the issue of the local area, the neighbourhood, and whether it remains an important arena of social and political action. Finally, I will try to suggest some of the central contributions planners can make to realizing authentic and effective citizen-directed planning.

At the same time as I am attempting to point to the potential of neighbourhood planning through resident participation, planners should not turn a blind eye to the pitfalls and dangers of citizen participation. They must be aware of the danger of inauthentic participation, of both

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[1] Tonnies (1957) first published his thesis in 1887, holding that affectively-based primary groups would give way to rationally-based affiliations as a result of the social, political and economic revolutions of the 1800s. His work, together with those of his contemporaries such as Weber and Durkhiem, led into a stream of work which culminated in the Network theories such as Wellman's (1977), who declared the Liberated Community, one at last freed of geographic limitations and social control.

tokenistic participation and planning input controlled by narrow self-interests. They have a role to play in avoiding cliques taking over the process and in countering the NIMBY syndrome. Planners have to moderate in the potential conflicts between the local self-interest and the public good at large. Kasperson and Breitbart (1974) provide a useful overview of theories and issues in citizen participation. They review models such as those of Arnstien the social advocate, of Burke the administrator, the VanTils' two dimension model involving issues of scope versus focus, and of Milbraith's Hierarchy of Involvement. Planners can also be supportive of the democratic process and I hope to suggest some ways in which official plans can reinforce what I believe is a fundamental human need for community. The first challenge we must face is our own preconceptions about our fellow citizens.

CMHC INVOLVEMENT IN CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Many important lessons on the theme of citizen participation have been learned through Canada's experience in housing. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as the federal housing agency, has a long history of involvement in self-directed efforts across wide range of housing and settlement issues. In fact, it was one CMHC program back in the 70s that gave me my first taste of resident-directed planning as a citizen participant. Through the Neighbourhood Improvement Program or NIP as it was known by those involved, the federal government provided financial support for social and physical infrastructure improvements at the neighbourhood level, on the condition that local residents be involved in the planning.

NIP had varying degrees of success in citizen involvement. From the available accounts the experience of Port Dalhousie was one of the real winners. The Port Dalhousie neighbourhood of St. Catharines, Ontario, had been a separate village at the Lake Ontario terminus of the first three Welland Canals. Its links to this heritage were evident in its architecture but development in the area had been frozen when it was slated for urban renewal. Reinvestment in the housing stock halted, property standards declined, and the former village was in danger of becoming a low income ghetto.

The city invited residents to a meeting to hear about the NIP - Port Dalhousie was one of several neighbourhoods being invited to compete for funding under the program. Within three months, there was an active community association with over 700 members. Volunteers undertook a series of community surveys, leading to a set of proposals for NIP-funded improvements being put to a public meeting before being submitted to city council.

Separate committees were established to deal with a range of local concerns, many of which were not within the scope of the NIP. Social and recreational programs were set up for teens and seniors, a heritage committee was established, a monthly newspaper was put out, and resident volunteers worked on getting their neighbours involved in the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program. Work began on several long-range efforts, to develop a community centre within an unused heritage building, to put in place a shoreline protection system to counter erosion and provide public access to Lake Ontario, and to establish a commercial area revitalization program.

Throughout it all, decisions were made democratically at general meetings or meetings of the elected board of directors. People who had never before taken a role in civic affairs gained new skills and confidence. They also developed a new attitude - instead of the old complaint "You can't fight city hall", they found they could work with the city's planners and other staff for the improvement of their neighbourhood.

The organization was called the Port Dalhousie Quorum and its motto was "Working together, we'll make things happen ... PDQ!". Years later, one of the former presidents reported on a visit to the old neighbourhood where a local property owner had recently gone to city hall with a redevelopment proposal. The planners' reaction included the advice: "Go see PDQ".

Port Dalhousie had clearly become what I define as an *Active Neighbourhood* - a limited geographic area in which there is a high degree of interaction among residents who come to know each other incidentally in going about their daily lives and come to develop more or less organized ways of reaching collective decisions on common interests associated with their shared circumstance. Such local communities can be a powerful force, addressing a wide range of issues from simple planning decisions to contribution to official plans, from crime prevention to community economic renewal.

There are a number of common assumptions about such *Active Neighbourhoods*:

- they generally occur only in areas occupied by upper middle class home owners;
- they are often controlled by small cliques which do not represent the population of the area; and
- they lobby on behalf of narrow self-interests and against the wider good of the city.

For most planners, the notion of an *Active Neighbourhood* probably conjures up memories of that last fight against the forces of NIMBYism, when a much-needed emergency shelter or group home was defeated by a well-connected and well-to-do group seeking to protect their property values from intruding "riffraff".

Time and again, we have seen the signs of *Active Neighbourhoods* among marginalized groups, including those with low incomes, disabilities, limited education, or poor economic prospects. And we have seen what they can accomplish, not only for themselves but for the broader community. As the mission statement of Concordia University's Institute in Management and Community and Development puts it, they "must be seen as pools of talent rather than of need."

Encouragement of local groups within CMHC has taken many forms besides the Neighbourhood Improvement Program. It has included the Community Resource Organization Program which provided sustaining funds for local community resource organizations for a limited period of time, so that they had the opportunity to become self-sustaining. While the primary work of these organizations was in the development of social housing, many went far beyond that field into other areas of social and economic development. CMHC's support for community development extended to various housing programs, perhaps in particular in the co-op sector. Thousands of religious-based or service organization-based groups and co-operatives have developed housing to meet a variety of special needs or interests and again moved beyond housing into dealing with many other issues of local concern.

We have also supported initiatives focused on enhancing the capacity of individual households or small groups to improve their housing situation. At the program level, the Rural and Native Housing Demonstration Program is one example, in which families were helped to build their own homes. The success of this initiative has led to it becoming an ongoing approach to serving housing needs in remote areas. At a smaller scale, eight families in Whitney Pier, Nova Scotia, received help to build their own homes.

The Resident Participation Initiative which focuses on those living in public housing was introduced in 1989 and includes several provisions, such as increased funding for resident associations and support for the development of community meeting spaces. A research project carried out in conjunction with this initiative demonstrated the broad range of resident-directed initiatives in which public tenants were actively contributing to enhancing the social fabric of their communities. In a video documenting resident participation in public housing, housing managers spoke of the many benefits they had realized through encouraging this involvement.

Currently, CMHC is sponsoring an current initiative known as *Home Grown Solutions*. This two-year exploration of community enablement is being managed by the Steering Committee made up of representatives from the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Home Builders' Association. It is hoped that local groups will successfully demonstrate a wide range of activities from social programming to self-help housing. In association with this initiative, CMHC has published two manuals, *Housing Ourselves Affordably*, a guide on multiple

self-help housing, and *Land for Our Future*, which reviews the role land trusts could play in supporting the development of affordable housing.

Individual research projects have also contributed to our understanding of the ways in which communities can develop solutions to the issues which concern them, while building a tool box which can be used by other groups across the country. For example, an Inuit community in Labrador was determined to build on the new skills they had developed in building their own homes, to find a way to turn them into economic opportunities for tomorrow. The process they went through led to the development of a community skills inventory manual. Another case in point comes from right here in Saskatoon, where the residents of the Riversdale neighbourhood came together to develop a volunteer-based housing inspection program. Their work not only led to real improvements in the condition of housing in their neighbourhood but to a hand book setting out the process for other areas faced with the problems of substandard housing and absentee landlords.

The road map for future CMHC efforts in support of local communities is not fully drawn. In large measure, we are responsive to new ideas coming out of the very communities which have so often been viewed as dysfunctional ghettos, pools of dependency and need. Time and time again, we find pools of talent and commitment.

THE EVIDENCE ON PARTICIPATION

There is a widely-held belief that participation is closely related to socio-economic status - that higher income people are more likely to participate in social action. Urban problems are often concentrated by economic forces such that the very neighbourhoods which present planners the greatest challenges for renewal can often be characterized by low levels of education and income. The idea that these people will not participate and cannot do so effectively may deter one from participation strategies in developing answers to urban planning issues. The 1960s and 70s saw a number of studies which documented low political participation among those low in socio-economic status. These same studies found important interactions between other social structural elements - in particular, much of the literature on participation is found in community or neighbourhood studies. The evidence was so compelling that much of the social science effort was subsequently redirected, away from the scientific investigation of local areas, towards an area know as Participatory Action Research (Swedner, 1983; Couto, 1987; Whyte, 1991), in which the professionals conveyed their research skills to local residents, so that they might study themselves.

According to "social participation theory", voting behaviour is a product of participation which works to broaden the individual's sphere of interest, brings the individual into contact with other view points, and contributes to an increase in political knowledge and relevant skills. Participation in the political process and in public policy activities is taken to be largely predicted on the basis of efficacy - those who can influence the decisions are more likely to be involved.

Babchuk and Gordon (1962) tested the specific notion that participation increases with socio-economic status in a slum area, with a particular emphasis on how people became affiliated with associations. They reported high participation levels within the slum but found that participation increased with income, education, and homeownership.

Warner and Hillander (1963) found a strong relationship between the size of the organization and both attendance and participation, suggesting that commitment decreases as organization size increases.

Neal and Seeman (1964) tested whether voluntary organizations did indeed mediate between mass society and alienation. They found that members of organizations experienced lower levels of powerlessness than non-members, even controlling for socio-economic status and mobility. However, they were unable to determine whether those who perceived themselves as having power were more inclined to join or whether the fact of membership contributed to their greater sense of power.

Olsen argued that "rational self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests (1971, p.2). He provided a cost-benefit assessment as the underlying reason, suggesting three basic reasons why rational decisions would be to avoid participation: because increasing scale of organization results in small individual benefits; because increasing scale involves greater costs of joint action; and because large scale inhibits the formation of coalitions for action. Olsen also suggested that participation would be higher in smaller groups, supporting the theses of Manning Theory[2] and those arguing for a return to small scale organizations (e.g. Bookchin, 1989).

Olsen (1972) reported that voter turn-out had been associated with a number of factors, from age, sex and race to the components of socio-economic status. He found that participation in voluntary organizations contributed to increased political activity, but that informal social

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[2] Studies in Manning Theory (Wicker, 1979), an offshoot of Ecological Psychology, reported that people in settings with a high "role density" were more satisfied than those in less dense situations.

involvement such as neighbouring did not have this effect. It may be that the informal exchanges do not generally involve explicit joint decision-making and thus have little bearing on sensed efficacy.

Sallach, Babchuk and Booth (1972) explored the relationships between alienation, voluntary group membership, socio-economic status, and political activity (e.g. discussion, attempted influence, campaigning, association and voting). They based their hypotheses on class-related differences in access to information; occupational differences in the encouragement of political skills; and class-related barriers to political power. They found that membership in voluntary associations was the most powerful predictor of political activity, and that both socio-economic status and sensed powerlessness were clearly related to only one form of political activity - voting behaviour. They suggested that the typical pattern of socialization for middle class children emphasizes interpersonal skills, gregariousness, self-confidence, and a positive self-image which all function together to encourage and reinforce social participation in formal groups or in other potentially anxiety-producing situations. This they saw as an account for what they perceived as class differences in political efficacy.

Sinclair (1979) reviewed several Canadian studies and found relatively weak relationships between participation and sensed efficacy, with correlations of 0.15 at the federal level and 0.12 at the provincial level. He undertook his own study of the relationship between political powerlessness and socio-economic status in Canada based on surveys in 1964 and 1968. He found that levels of sensed powerlessness in Canada were high and increasing, largely independent of socio-economic status. While those in low status and peripheral groups were more alienated, powerlessness was wide-spread across socio-economic categories. Sinclair suggested that those low in status, the 'objectively deprived', might suffer from a "false political consciousness", focusing on "the improvements they had seen over time and not the distance still to be covered" (Sinclair, 1979: 132). On the other hand, he found relatively high levels of sensed powerlessness in high status people. His suggestion was that, having been socialized to accept values of individualism and minimum government interference, they see the actual performance of government as excessively populist or collectivist.

Knoke and Wood (1981) found that those who participated in decision-making had the strongest levels of commitment. Contrary to findings from other research, they found that lower income members were more supportive of their organizations than the more affluent. They also found a relationship between organization size and commitment, following the notion that increased size implicitly reduces the opportunities to participate in leadership roles or influence decisions.

There is evidence that Canadian society as a whole is moving towards the Active state. MacDermid and Stevenson (1991) found that political action of one form or another was relatively high, even among system supporters (those below average in activity and in criticism of the status quo) and the alienated (those below average in activity and high in criticism). For example, 36 percent of system supporters and 47 percent of the alienated had engaged in the 'easy' activity of signing a petition and at least seven percent of both groups had engaged in 'harder' activities such as joining a group, attending a protest meeting or phoning a talk show. They wrote of a "critical awareness" which perhaps reflects a new consciousness of some economic and political realities described by Brown (1981:358-9):

> "As long as national economies were expanding steadily, the affluent and the powerful could always rationalize that since the economic pie was expanding, everyone would eventually get more. ... With the economic pie no longer expanding, it becomes more

difficult to dodge the question of how the pie is being distributed. ... Social cohesion is bound to increase if materialism is gradually abandoned as a social and personal goal among the affluent."

Thirty years of research in sociology and political science have provided few clear answers to the questions involving participation and socio-economic status. It does appear that alienation is growing but, at the same time, more people in every income category are becoming involved. One important aspect appears to be the presence of a relatively small scale group or organization within which the individual has the opportunity to influence group decisions, and thereby tap the group's resources to address the problems which concern that individual. These might frequently be the very problems with which urban planners have to deal.

Further evidence on the topic of participation, particularly of low income persons, might be derived from less academic sources. For the past six years, CMHC has been exploring the theme of community participation, paralleling an increased interest among other agencies of government at every level as well as in academic circles. There have been some interesting findings.

Firstly, it was found that a significant portion of residents do voluntarily participate either in attending meetings or serving on committees. Table 1 provides the participation rates in the 1978-1985 non-profit and co-operative housing programs. Clearly, there are differences between programs, with housing managed by municipal organizations having the lowest rates of participation and co-op housing the highest.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPATION BY SELECTED HOUSING PROGRAMS

Program	Attending meetings	Participating in Committees	Satisfied with impact
Public Non-profit	34%	20%	50%
Private Non-profit	59%	21%	64%
Co-operative	92%	62%	88%

CMHC, 1983: 245

Even in public housing, which is fully targeted to low income households, participation rates were relatively high. The evaluation of this program found that there was no participation in only 8.5% of the dwellings and that residents participated in three or more areas of housing operations in over 52% of the units (CMHC, 1990:207).

By far the most significant findings for those concerned with encouraging self-reliance are the benefits these people reported as resulting from their involvement. Table 2 summarizes these benefits for a number of housing programs. As many as 82% of participants reported one or more skills derived from becoming active in their housing environment. Many of the benefits can be translated directly into enhanced employability and between 41% and 62% reported increased self-confidence. There are many anecdotes of someone who had been reliant on social assistance developing a rewarding career as a direct consequence of their participation. Up to 39% of co-op members reported improved self-reliance (CMHC, 1992: 145). But there is a lasting benefit to the community as a whole, as the participants learn to direct these new abilities to addressing local issues.

TABLE 2: SELF-IMPROVEMENT BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

Skill or benefit	Percent reporting new skill or benefit*

Financial	9.8% - 21.8%
Clerical	5.5% - 21.8%
Trades	2.9% - 14.6%
Organizational	27.6% - 40.2%
Project Co-ordination	40.7% - 44.4%
Self-confidence	41.8% - 61.6%
One or more	63.6% - 82.3%

* ranges reflect differing programs and populations receiving or not receiving rent-geared-to-income benefits. CMHC, 1992: 143

A Canadian study of public housing tenant satisfaction (LeBrasseur, Blackford and Whissell, 1988) underscored the importance of personal control over the environment, one of the presumed advantages of single home ownership. This study found satisfaction was related to individual self-concepts. Those who viewed themselves as having an important role to play in control of their situation (i.e. having an 'internal locus of control') were much more satisfied when they were allowed some say in the management of their housing.

It is worthwhile to explore the link between housing satisfaction and participation. Table 3 shows the relative level of satisfaction among residents of assisted housing, private market tenants and homeowners.

TABLE 3: HOUSING TENURE AND SATISFACTION

Tenure Category	Percent satisfied
Public housing	87.4
Private market Tenants	76.8
Homeowners*	92.7
General population	86.8

* Homeowner satisfaction prorated from general population. CMHC, 1992:132

In another study, I explored both local and general participation rates and both housing and neighbourhood satisfaction rates of townhouse residents under four tenure forms: freehold and condo owners, co-op members and tenants. The results are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4: TENURE, PARTICIPATION AND SATISFACTION

Tenure	Above average Local Participation	Above average General Participation	Above average Housing Satisfaction	Above average Neighbourhood Satisfaction

Freehold owners	4%	40%	53%	53%
Condo Owners	24%	43%	43%	46%
Co-op Members	57%	53%	53%	59%
Tenants	8%	28%	19%	36%

Taggart, 1995: 102-110

These tenure groups displayed the socio-economic status one would expect, with declining incomes and education levels generally, from freehold owners through condo owners and co-op members through to tenants. There are three particularly noteworthy findings here. Tenure forms which explicitly involve collective action display higher rates not only of local participation but general participation - co-op members and to a lesser degree condo owners are more involved than the higher status freehold owners. With the exception perhaps of freehold owners, housing and neighbourhood satisfaction reflects participation. And finally, the relatively low satisfaction of tenants cannot be explained by socio-economic status alone - the absence of structural opportunities for participation has a price.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD TODAY

Today's city has its critics, many of whom relate the weaknesses they see to the increasing scale of municipal populations. At the heart of this debate is the conflict between the quest for personal independence, to be free of social sanctions and restrictions, and the need to belong and to find mutual support from neighbours. We are challenged to find what trade-off we are prepared to make between individual freedom and social support if we are to address the problems of the day, from crime prevention to economic renewal.

The sociological consideration of neighbourhoods began with the modern science. Tonnies (1957) set out his theory of *Community and Society* in 1887 in which he postulated that primary forms of social organization such as the family and the local community would cease to be the major basis of affiliation in the post-industrial revolution period. He argued that people would come to base their links with others on rational self interest. The Chicago School, including writers such as Park (et al, 1925), Wirth (1938) and Janowitz (1967), examined neighbourhoods which retained some of their importance despite the fact that many residents established important relationships outside their boundaries. After the Second World War, Litwak (1960) and others examined the social ties of dispersed families. This culminated in the work of network theorists such as Wellman (1977) who described the *Liberated Community*, one finally freed of its geographic restraints. These social networks reflected the dominant value system of the period, as they also were free of the social control features of the traditional neighbourhood. The scientific investigation of local communities has subsequently focused on histories of specific neighbourhoods rather than significant development of theory.

Critics of the city such as Chorney (1990) and Bookchin (1987, 1989) view the modern city as being alienating in its nature. Chorney describes Neighbourhood Watch as an effort by the state to foster pseudo-communities while at the same time fostering inter-personal suspicions. From his perspective, such efforts run counter to the realization of true communities offering mutual help and protection simply because they are based on mutual mistrust.

Bookchin calls for participatory democracy to be realized through small scale, local area assemblies as the vehicle of political decision-making. He characterizes urbanization by the traits of anonymity, homogenization and institutional giantism, a process which destroys the city, erasing local divisions which meet the structural standard of participatory democracy. He argues that this process promotes the notion of personal freedom through independence, the ideal of the 'rugged individual' who abides no limitation on his action and has no compulsion to be part of a collective. To Bookchin, urbanization is responsible for the decline in citizenship.

According to Bookchin, the structural standards for the elementary element of participatory democracy are that it has to be large enough so that its citizens could meet most of their material needs, yet not so large that they were unable to gain a familiarity with each other and make policy decisions in open, face-to-face discourse. He suggests the answer lies in remaking society through the development of local communities. These would be the seat of political decision-making. Coordination at the city-wide or higher levels would be achieved through strictly-mandated representatives to central bodies charged with the responsibility for administration alone.

Housing satisfaction studies from over twenty years ago (e.g. Michelson, 1969; Michelson and Garland, 1974; Norcross, 1973; Bell and Constantinescu, 1974) reinforced the vision of suburbia has having the ideal housing and social characteristics. The single family detached house

with significant separation between dwellings appeared to be the positive ideal on a single continuum of both physical and social amenities.

Later studies highlighted two distinct aspects contributing to satisfaction: the amenities of the dwelling unit itself; and its context, the neighbourhood. While the former is focused on resident assessments of physical features relative to household needs and aspirations, the latter is as much a matter of social factors (such as neighbouring, perceived threats from others, density of stresses and status) as it is of physical factors (such as the condition of the structures, landscaping, traffic planning, and area amenities).

Ermuth (1974) suggested ways in which urban planning contributes to the weakness of the neighbourhood. He found low levels of social activity, weak area identity, and feelings of low esteem and isolation to be associated with long commuting distances, poor vehicle-pedestrian separation, inadequate public transportation and high noise levels. These findings suggest that it is not that people no longer seek local communities, but that urban design features themselves might stand in the way of community.

Michelson (1975) conducted longitudinal research involving two groups, one moving into high rise apartments and the other into single family homes. Michelson's most important findings concerned the residents of suburban single houses, which are central in the debate between advocates of the traditional neighbourhood and those supporting the Liberated Community. Women and teens who had moved to suburbia were dissatisfied and expressed a preference for central locations. For them, suburbia meant isolation. He suggested that the unidimensionality of the suburban "solution" provided an ideal setting for young children, but failed to meet the hopes of many others - it lacked what Michelson called "local channels to friendship".

Ferdandez and Kulik (1981) found that the social setting of residence had important effects on personal satisfaction as distinct from residential satisfaction. Social structural features such as the degree of social interaction and the number of friendship or kinship ties had the most significant effects. Social comparison had only a weak effect (those with incomes below their neighbourhood average reporting somewhat lower satisfaction), raising some question as to the importance of having "like" neighbours.

Keller (Huttman and van Vliet, 1988: 63-71) noted that suburban privacy and self-containment too readily became suburban isolation, vulnerability to crime and loneliness. She followed the development of Twin Rivers, New Jersey, a planned unit development (PUD) with a mix of owners and renters in townhousing, viewing it as an attempt to foster a new sense of collective responsibility. Given that initial residents of Twin Rivers generally aspired to the conventional free-standing single-family home on a substantial plot of land, her study of resident housing satisfaction focused on the acceptance of the townhousing form over time. She found that newcomers' fears of higher density housing, such as loss of privacy or troublesome neighbours, did not materialize. After a decade, a follow-up survey found that two thirds of the residents expressed satisfaction with their housing, compared to under 2 percent who were dissatisfied.

Connerly and Marans (Huttman and van Vliet, 1988: 37) describe the varying importance of the neighborhood "as places in which people experience the surrounding built, natural and social environment, socialize with neighbors, invest in property, receive or use local public services, organize to protect property values and otherwise defend the neighborhood from forces that affect the neighborhood's collective welfare, shop or work, and generally develop a sense of neighborhood identity ".

Armitage (1988: 65-73) identified the functions of community as including social control, socialization, mutual support, social participation and integration/stabilization. Weenig et al

(1990) attempted to tap five aspects of neighbourhood life: interaction, social support, identification or belongingness, solidarity, a shared sense of relatedness, and influence (i.e. social control). They saw the first two elements as constituting neighbouring and the last four distinct aspects of "sense of community". They found evidence of two related components, one dealing with the quantity of interaction and social supports and the other dealing with the qualitative aspects of identification and social control.

Schoenberg and Rosenbaum (1980) focused on structural features such as external links and organizations . They define a *neighbourhood* as an area with boundaries identified by residents, with at least one institution identified by residents and with shared common space. They postulate the requirements of a *Viable Neighbourhood* being the existence of a mechanism to define and enforce shared standards of public behaviour, at least one formal organization, ties to city resources, and enduring channels for exchange between conflicting groups. The *Viable Neighbourhood* may rest on the adoptation of garbage collection times as an indication of the enforcement of shared standards for public behaviour.

In my own study (Taggart, 1995), I focused on the relationships between tenure, participation and satisfaction, finding that housing tenure forms which included structured participation exhibited higher levels of housing and neighbourhood satisfaction. One question of particular relevance to the issue of neighbourhood's place in our lives today was straightforward - respondents were asked to state how they felt about the statement "This neighbourhood is important to me". The answers are summarized in Table 5. A majority of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ranging from 61% of tenants (not co-incidentally perhaps, also the lowest in satisfaction and participation) to 83% of freehold owners.

TABLE 5: NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPORTANCE BY TENURE

Neighbourhood Importance		Freehold	Condo	Co-op	Rental
Strongly Disagree	%	0	2	3	8
Disagree	%	6	6	6	9
Undecided	%	12	13	9	21
Agree	%	62	62	54	43
Strongly Agree	%	21	16	27	18

Taggart, 1995: 104

Earlier, I defined the *Active Neighbourhood* as a limited geographic area in which there is a high degree of interaction among residents who come to know each other incidentally in going about their daily lives and come to develop more or less organized ways of reaching collective decisions on common interests associated with their shared circumstance. One of the conditions I have suggested for the development of neighbourhoods is geographical limits, implicitly meaning small scale. Scale in turn is related to housing form. The density and form of residential development could have significant implications for the realization of the *Active Neighbourhood.*

I tested the relationship between scale of development and other measurements including housing satisfaction, neighbourhood satisfaction, participation and powerlessness. While the results as shown in Table 6 were only marginally significant in statistical terms, they are suggestive

that medium scale - in this case, developments of between 50 and 100 housing units - has a positive effect on all of these characteristics.

TABLE 6: DEVELOPMENT SCALE EFFECTS

Scale of development	High Housing Sat isfaction	High Neighbourhood Satisfaction	High Participation	High Powerlessness
Small	49%	44%	41%	47%
Medium	49%	60%	51%	41%
Large	40%	44%	41%	46%

Taggart, 1995: 114

The finding that neighbourhood plays an important role in identity suggests another way in which residential developments might contribute to social development. Individual developments establish unique identities through design features and boundaries and may even have a unique name. Design features such as the pattern of walkways and the presence or absence of shared outdoor recreational spaces and common areas could serve to encourage or discourage social interactions. Even matters such as door placement and sound separation could have important implications for the social life of an area.

Boundaries established by common designs and physical separations can serve to establish an area within which social interactions are expected to occur. Together these aspects of urban developments can reinforce a community identity and influence the range within which residents seek out meaningful signals. In turn, the scale of development can thus create the "density" of inputs with which residents must cope. Some may be too large to facilitate interaction and result in 'sensory overload'. Others may be too small to support external recognition of the development's identity or be lacking in sufficient stimuli. Thus, the scale of development, of the social arena for community, may frustrate the achievement of personal needs.

We have seen that local communities continue to be important to people and that they can be a significant arena of participation. It has been found that participation leads to skill development and enhanced satisfaction. Further, there is strong evidence that group participation can be higher among those with lower incomes or levels of education. It may even be that people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods depend more on organized efforts than higher income people who perhaps start with a higher degree of self-confidence and the ability to act effectively as individuals. From these perspectives, the opportunity for local resident involvement in the planning process, particularly in marginalized neighbourhoods, may be just the counterbalance required to the forces contributing to the growing sense of powerlessness among all socio-economic categories.

THE PLANNER AND PARTICIPATION

Fiscal restraint is forcing all levels of government to look to alternative approaches to meeting objectives. This has led to a new interest in enabling approaches which can produce cost-effective results while fostering increased self-reliance on the part of marginalized people and enhancing social justice. Planners have important roles to play in support of local communities, not only in their own strategic approach to citizen involvement but in contributing to the success of citizen involvement. Often, it is the urban planner who is the point of contact between citizens and city hall. The planner can also provide critical tools to assist local communities to provide authentic and effective inputs to the planning process.

The first challenge to citizens seeking a greater say in decisions affecting their environments is an open door. Within the mandates given to planners there is usually broad leeway in how citizens are approached. The choice of an information or consultation approach over true participation may occasionally be warranted, but the rewards of enabling citizens to have a real effect on decisions should not be overlooked.

The representative character of citizen involvement is critical to its legitimacy. Accordingly, planners must seek the broadest possible participation from within neighbourhoods which are the focus of specific planning issues. Among marginalized groups, there may be a lack of experience with many of the tools which provide for the legitimacy of the input. Knowledge of community survey techniques, how to organize and conduct public meetings and parliamentary procedure, and committee management can often be delivered either directly by planners or through recruiting the help of community organizations with the necessary experience. All of these will ensure that the directions coming out of citizen-directed planning will reflect the will of the community as a whole, rather than of an "elite" which is ready to co-operate with the establishment. In addition, professional planners can communicate some of their own tools kits to residents, guiding them into a consideration of all the relevant factors which will ultimately need to be taken into consideration in obtaining the approval of duly elected or appointed bodies.

One of the most often cited problems in the anecdotal information on resident participation is that of maintaining leadership. Many would attribute successful resident organization or initiatives to the presence of a single individual with commitment, charisma and drive. Leadership, however, arises everywhere, even among the most disadvantaged groups. The experience of leadership itself contributes to greater skills development and these skills often translate into new opportunities for the individual. This becomes one of the axioms of participation advocates - leaders leave. Therefore, it is important to guide groups towards practices which help develop successors, through committee structures which provide a multitude of roles in which many people can gain the requisite abilities to lead. Again, there may be community organizations or academic institutions in the area which can help beginning groups by offering training in relevant topics.

On the down-side, there has been considerable coverage of the problem of self-interest in citizen participation in planning. There are probably few planners who have not confronted a group of property owners who have organized themselves to defend what they perceive as their economic interests in defeating change. This has been characterized as NIMBYism, the Not in My back Yard syndrome. Some prefer the BANANA version - Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything. We have seen some impressive efforts at public education and a number of studies have been commissioned to show that group homes or social housing do not have the feared negative social or economic effects. The problem continues and the only answer must lay

in ensuring the broadest possible participation, particularly so that the marginalized groups have an equal say in the public policy debate.

The danger of planning decisions falling to vested or narrow interests is all too real. Planners are the one group of participants who are best prepared to inform the debate and to bring to bear the important information. They need to guide themselves in this by the public will. Michelson (1975: 415) provided an early warning:

> "The creation of a given environment or environmental practice may reflect actions taken in self-interest by relatively few people, actions taken by persons attempting to speak for the public good although not themselves necessarily affected by the situation, by perceptions (sometimes indirect) of how things are thought to work, by existing practices in government, economics and social structure, and by the existing state and supply of natural and man-made resources, at a minimum".

Finally, planners have a role to play in fostering the development of communities, in providing for urban designs in which *Active Neighbourhoods* can flourish, where there are frequent opportunities and reasons for interaction between people within small scale settings in which they share a wide range of interests. Once an *Active Neighbourhood* emerges, it can and will play a critical part in planning for the future.

CONCLUSIONS

Various forces are at work which lead us towards neighbourhood-based, citizen-directed planning. Whether it is the mandated requirement coming out of the urban reform movements of the 60s and 70s, the call of the Brundtland Commission for the delgation of authority and resources to the local level, the decentralization thrust emerging from fiscal restraint, or the rising voice of ordinary citizens seeking some influence over their environment, resident-led local area planning is the way of the future.

Although CMHC has followed a strategy of enabling local groups with success for over twenty years, there are some popular notions which can deter politicians and planners from agressively pursuing this approach. These include the beliefs that people will not participate, that low income people will not participate in particular - that participation is linked to socio-economic status, that lower income people cannot contribute meaningfully or effectively, and that the local area or neighbourhood is no longer important.

In reviewing a number of studies, I hope to have shown that these beliefs are false. It has been found that limited education or income is no barrier to participation, and that, in fact, participation leads to the development of new skills and confidence - participation leads to more participation, as people find they can influence collective decisions. We have also seen that the nieghbourhood remains an importnant aspect of people's lives.

The evidence suggests some important caveats. Participation tends to be higher where there are structured opportunities for participation through democratic means. Scale has some significant effects, with the most positive conditions arising in medium scale environments. While it is perhaps obvious that some minimum population and area is required to support recognizable "commuities", large scale areas or groups tend to have less participation and lead to less satisfaction. Players need to have roles in which they can influence others and contribute to common decisions. Anecdotal evidence points to a potential problem, in that the very positive outcomes for many participants in collective action may lead to a loss of local leadership.

Planners therefore have many important roles to play in encouraging the growth of legitimate and effective resident participation. The first lies in the more traditional role of the profession, in designing the cityscape, for this design will either support or stand as a barrier to the evolution of local communities. Urban planning must provide for relatively small scale local areas within which there is the opportunity and reason for interaction between residents. Those aspects have been reflected in a flood of models focusing on the recreation of traditional communities.

The less traditional role for the planner is as educator and facilitator and in this the planner becomes part of the same emerging tradition as those involved in Participatory Action Research. The planner conveys not only professional techniques to local residents so as to enhance their contribution, but helps them to develop the social tools and structures which will become essential to their ongoing involvement. Only then will local areas within our cities become truly *Active Neighbourhoods*, ready to undertake legitimate, authetic and effective citizen-directed planning.

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