Empowering Communities in Disadvantaged Urban Areas:
towards greater community participation in
Irish Urban Planning?
Part II – summary

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funded by
Combat Poverty Agency
working for a
poverty-free Ireland

Promoting understanding - Informing policy

Planning matters. It profoundly affects the way in which urban areas are developed and the manner in which they change. Planning can be responsible for enormous impacts on the quality of life of an individual household and can undermine the very viability of the community itself. It can create significant benefits for some while imposing enormous burdens on others. Furthermore, planning can have unpredicted consequences for urban areas. Rather than mitigating the problems ostensibly being addressed by urban policy, many of the original problems facing a community can actually be exacerbated by their operation.

Planning should therefore be of major concern to individuals and communities alike. Because so much is at stake, it is imperative that every possible encouragement and facility be made available to promote the participation of communities in the process of urban planning. This is especially relevant for those disadvantaged communities which lack the knowledge, expertise or confidence to engage effectively in the process.

In recent years, Irish urban planning has undergone a significant transformation, changing in response to the growing influence of neoliberal/Thatcherite national-government policies, reformed local-government structures and an altered climate of deepening entrepreneurialism within local authorities (McGuirk and MacLaran, 2001). It has seen the introduction of central-government urban renewal initiatives, the establishment of special-purpose regeneration authorities, the increasing use of public-private partnerships in social-housing regeneration and the in provision of urban infrastructure and the emergence of holistic, integrated and local-area planning.

Many of these developments have presented new opportunities for disadvantaged urban communities to participate in the regeneration of their areas and influence the planning decisions that will directly affect them. However, the extent to which meaningful community participation has actually been achieved is highly questionable.

This research programme, funded by Combat Poverty Agency, set out to assess the degree to which participation by disadvantaged working-class communities in Irish urban planning has been facilitated by those recent developments. Although it has been impossible to encapsulate in this short summary the range and depth of the issues which were examined, this paper attempts to provide an indication of some of the more significant points.[1]

While it is clear from the research that some communities have enjoyed a positive and rewarding experience of participation in matters relating to planning and development in their localities, it is also evident that satisfaction with all aspects of the process did not occur in any of the case studies. Moreover, very considerable deficiencies were perceived to exist in the

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[1] A copy of the full 240-page report can be obtained in pdf form from Combat Poverty Agency or from amclaran@tcd.ie.

participation process by community representatives interviewed in a number of the case studies, engendering high levels of dissatisfaction, disillusionment and, sometimes, feelings of utter betrayal.

Research Objectives and Methods

The aim of the research was to evaluate the success of measures designed to engage deprived urban communities in aspects of urban planning and regeneration affecting their localities. The work was guided by an Advisory Group of twelve individuals, including community activists and community-based workers, a number of planners drawn from the community and public sectors, including a former Chief Planning Officer and a Senior Planner from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG), several academics and a representative of Combat Poverty Agency.

A broad definition of urban planning was adopted to include:
- Development control
- Forward planning, including the formulation and implementation of regional plans, development plans and local area plans
- Planning for the regeneration of inner-city areas, including the formulation and implementation of integrated area plans and plans formulated by single-purpose regeneration authorities such as Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA)
- Planning for the regeneration of social-housing estates, including plans formulated by the local authorities, public-private partnerships and single-purpose regeneration authorities such as Ballymun Regeneration Ltd
- Planning for major infrastructural provision, such as transport or waste-disposal developments.

The research programme was undertaken by selecting a range of case studies drawn from Dublin City, South Dublin County and Waterford City on the basis that they provided a wide range of planning contexts and institutional arrangements. In-depth interviews were conducted with a range of community workers and focus-group meetings were also held with residents' groups. These were complemented by interviews with urban managers and planners. The case studies included the following:

Dublin City
- Dublin Waste-to-Energy Project: Example of a major infrastructural project
- St Michael's Estate: Example of the regeneration of a social-housing estate, initially through an agreed programme with Dublin City Council and subsequently through an intended public-private partnership
- Liberties-Coombe Integrated Area Plan: Example of planning for the regeneration of the inner city through an Integrated Area Plan involving a high intensity of property development and rapidly escalating land and residential property prices

- Dublin Docklands Development Authority: Example of planning for the regeneration of the inner city through a special-purpose regeneration authority
- Ballymun Regeneration Ltd: Example of the regeneration of a run-down, system-built, social-housing estate by a single-purpose regeneration authority, Ballymun Regeneration Ltd

South Dublin County
- Tallaght Integrated Area Plan: Example of participation in integrated area planning at the periphery, enabling the comparison of community participation in planning in the inner city and at the periphery where pressure for land-use upgrading and land price increases are significantly less intense

Waterford City
- Ballybeg Estate: Example of the regeneration of a social-housing estate by the City Council

Research Findings

This section sets out some of the more significant findings derived from the interviews with the planners and, secondly, with community representatives.

Planners' Views

There was general agreement among the planners that there has been a marked shift in the predominant planning culture away from traditional 'rational planning' towards a more entrepreneurial role. However, it was also seen to embrace a new aspiration best described as 'consensus planning', whereby community input is sought as part of the decision-making process, enabling the planner to draw on local knowledge and build consensus through a process of explanation and negotiation. However, alongside the emergence of 'consensus planning', it was noted that the new pro-active 'flexibility' of the Irish planning system has effectively removed substantial powers from elected representatives and transferred them unofficially to planners and other local authority officers.

Development Plan
The planners noted that in the mid-1980s there were significant provisions to achieve in-depth debate within the council chamber of Dublin Corporation regarding the Development Plan, enabling the councillors to make an informed contribution to the review process. They further noted, as a marked contrast, the subsequent approach of presenting the Draft Development Plan almost as a *fait accompli* for the councillors to accept or reject, the elected representatives having minimal input to the 1998 Plan. The Planning Act 2000 made provision for increased involvement of the public and politicians at all stages of the development plan process but it is not clear that this has been achieved.

Managerial Power

The planners pointed out that during the 1990s the new atmosphere of flexibility within the planning system, characterising the entrepreneurial agenda, was simultaneously associated with an increasing concentration of power in the hands of the City Manager, involving a commensurate loss of power and influence on the part of the elected representatives.

Public Involvement Initiatives
Exercises like *Let's Hear it for Dublin!* and *Dublin: A City of Possibilities* initially promised to usher in a new era of active citizenship and community participation in Dublin City. Although managerial engagement with the public in connection with these initiatives was extensive, the format precluded communities from having any meaningful input to the policy-formulation process. Interpreted as largely public-relations exercises, these initiatives largely served as smokescreens while development under the newly flexible development plan continued apace.

Integrated Area Planning
The emergence of Integrated Area Planning had promised close collaboration between the local authority, other public agencies, developers, businesses, interest groups and the local community to produce holistic local area plans covering a limited number of areas in need of regeneration (Gleeson, 1999). The Integrated Area Plans (IAPs) promised to deliver some form of community gain, in addition to the physical regeneration of an area, as a result of the designation of sites for tax incentives. However, it was believed that despite strong community participation in their formulation, the benefits of the IAPs were not often delivered. The DoEHLG Senior Planner was of the opinion that many of the difficulties associated with the implementation of certain IAPs in Dublin stemmed from the fact that these are not statutory plans and lack the legal standing of the development plan.

Local Government Restructuring
Local government restructuring, which took place under *Better Local Government: A Programme for Change* (DoELG, 1996), had entailed the dismantling of the *ad hoc* committee system, which included a powerful Planning and Development Committee in Dublin Corporation. These committees were replaced by Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) for various services, including planning, and Local Area Committees were also created. It had been intended that the replacement of the Planning and Development Committee with a Planning SPC would broaden the focus from local to city-wide issues and include a range of other interests in addition to the councillors (e.g. the Construction Industry Federation, the Planning Institute and relevant public bodies like CIÉ).

A specific aim of *Better Local Government* was to enhance the councillors' policy-making role. However, restructuring the committee system was viewed as having had the opposite effect in Dublin City where the powerful and influential Planning and Development Committee was replaced by a largely ineffective Planning SPC, reducing the councillors' role to 'rubber-stamping management decisions', with little meaningful debate of the issues raised.

Further difficulties noted in relation to local government restructuring were the City Manager's increasing statutory powers and the erosion of the policy-making role of the democratically-elected representatives – changes which tended to be unopposed by the councillors themselves since many saw their role as that of advocacy on behalf of their constituents, raising local concerns with management. As a consequence of the uncontested erosion of the power and influence of the councillors and the increasing concentration of power in the hands of the local-authority executive, a 'public representation deficit' was seen to have emerged in Dublin City:

> *… I think the hubris of some of these senior civil servants and senior local government officials is just amazing. But, again, there's a reason for it, you know, there's a vacating of the field by the elected representatives, who seem quite happy to allow this thing to cruise on ...*

Difficulties in Facilitating Community Participation
Planners and other officials face significant difficulties in promoting and facilitating effective and meaningful community participation. Some of these difficulties can be attributed to the structure and resourcing of the local authorities. Others result from the value attached to community participation by senior management. These include time constraints, an inability to deliver on promises to the community and the under-resourcing of the provision of technical assistance and capacity-building.

Other difficulties were considered to be inherent to a process which seeks to facilitate the input of diverse interest groups and individuals to local decision-making, including engaging communities in strategic planning, overcoming local apathy and alienation, involving the wider community in addition to 'the usual suspects', overcoming anti-development or NIMBY[2] attitudes and addressing conflicting interests within an area.

Local-authority planners often had difficulties in managing expectations and were reluctant to tell communities that they were unable to deliver on a request. This led, leading to a deterioration in relations. The distribution of power and the allocation of resources within the local authorities caused major difficulties for planners. The fact that planners fulfil an essentially advisory role within the local authority was highlighted in the research, the responsibility for decision-making lying with the councillors and, increasingly, with the managers. The ability of planners to engage in meaningful discussions with local communities was therefore compromised by their inability to guarantee delivery on any promises:

> *All you can keep telling them is, 'Oh yes, that's interesting. I'll tell that to the Manager. I'll write a report on it' … But, it's a sort of pointless promise in a way because everybody knows you can do that. You'd prefer to say to them, 'Well, you should approach the Manager this*

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[2] Not in my back yard

way, yourself.' But, you can't do that, when you're out in the field. So, you can talk meaningfully and constructively and technically to people and you know deep down that, even though what you and they agree should be done, it's meaningless because you have to go in the next day and try and persuade the Manager, who may just decide 'Oh look, get lost! I don't want to hear about that,' you know … managers say that, you know, 'Who told you? You weren't really given any power to say that. I can't deliver on that! No, no, that's all wrong.' Now, you're stuck! You have to report back to the people at the next meeting and you'll get blasted out of it, basically. It wasn't that the thing was irrational or anything but the Manger had another agenda. And a Manager is quite insulated from that sort of participation, by layers of officials. So, that's a real problem in public participation …

The inability of local-authority planners to deliver on promises to the community presents less of a problem in relation to the statutory development plan review process, with its strict sequence of public displays, planners reporting on submissions from the public and councillors voting on proposed amendments, than it does for other types of planning. While the statutory public consultation phases relating to reviews of development plans substantially contribute to the lengthy nature of the development plan review process, planners and community groups are nevertheless obliged to operate within tight time constraints.

Capacity Building and Resourcing
There was a consensus that communities in disadvantaged areas often need technical assistance from professional planners in order to interpret plans and proposals and have a meaningful input to the decision-making process. The DoEHLG planner noted considerable variation between local authorities in terms of their promotion of community participation, over-stretched local authorities rarely devoting sufficient resources to enable planners to engage in the provision of technical assistance and capacity-building within disadvantaged communities.

Gaps in Planners' Training
Gaps in planners' training constitute a difficulty stemming from the system of education, accreditation and professional development for planners. There was a feeling that planners should have a better sense that their client ultimately comprises the public, which encompasses both developers and communities, and that it is their responsibility to act in the public interest. A need for training in facilitation and mediation techniques was identified, together with opportunities to come into contact with the general public and to put these techniques into action at an early stage in the planner's career or during training.

Engaging Communities in Strategic Planning
Communities were seen as not tending to engage in strategic planning processes, as the local relevance of national, regional or city-wide plans was often not immediately apparent to them. However, this failure to engage in major strategic decisions at a sufficiently early stage often became a serious

impediment at the development-control stage as the strategic decisions could normally not be revisited when potential local impacts of an adopted strategy became apparent to the local community.

Overcoming Local Apathy and Alienation
Apathy and alienation were noted as presenting planners with further difficulties in trying to promote community participation. Apathy was viewed as a particular problem with regard to strategic planning processes where communities are often unaware of the potential implications of a strategic plan for their own areas. A lack of trust was also highlighted by the Senior Planner from the DoEHLG, people often feeling that their input was unlikely to make any difference, thereby discouraging them from engaging in participation.

Community Perspectives
Timing of Participation
In several cases (St. Michael's, Ringsend, Ballybeg), community participation had been sought only after key strategic decisions had been made. This severely curtailed the scope of any consultation. Most communities had not engaged in discussions of the Development Plan, a key document relating to planning strategy.

In the case of the Waste-to-Energy project, the adoption of the strategic *Waste Management Plan for the Dublin Region* by Dublin City Council in late 1998 largely determined the trajectory of future policy. (The City Manager was thereafter obliged by law to proceed with implementing the policy of developing a thermal treatment plant to serve the Dublin Region within the densely populated Dublin City Council area.) The key decision was effected some three years prior to the formation of the 'Ringsend Community Information Group' when there had been no indication that Ringsend would be the site selected for the incinerator.

The absence of disadvantaged communities from the strategic planning process in general and the public consultation process surrounding the review of urban development plans in particular, effectively meant that strategic planning decisions, which had a profound impact on the lives and locales of poor communities, had been made in the absence of the views, concerns and interests of those communities. This stands as one of the most significant barriers to community participation in all subsequent planning processes. Statutory provisions relating to public consultation during the development plan review process were judged to be clearly inadequate to the task of enabling poor communities to engage in meaningful participation in decisions directly affecting their areas.

Past Experience
In some cases, previous experiences of dealing with local-authority departments had proved unsatisfactory and, initially at least, militated against engagement (Ringsend, DDDA). Others pointed to a clear but slow pace of change in local-authority attitudes to participation (Ballybeg, Tallaght).

Concepts of Participation

There was confusion over how communities (notably in the Liberties IAP and Ballybeg) and local authoriity officers interpreted 'participation'. Communitites often entered the process of participation with far broader aims than local authority officers were willing or able to concede, often having an agenda of protecting private-sector profitability criteria (St. Michael's, DDDA, Liberties IAP, Ballymun).

A number of community representatives concluded that the motive for engaging community participation was as a public-relations exercise, deriving more from the desire to give an impression of participation than to consult in a genuine manner and to minimise the prospect of delays in proposed developments.

Others felt that the council was simply going through the motions of consultation and that nothing they said would have any bearing on the content of the final plan. Many reached the conclusion that although the council's language had changed to appear more open to involving communities in making decisions affecting their homes and neighbourhoods, this was not accompanied by a change in practice.

Communities' Capacity to Engage
The lack of expertise in dealing with planning matters, architecture and property development was commonly noted as a major obstacle to participation by disadvantaged communities (St. Michael's, Ringsend, DDDA, Liberties IAP, Ballybeg). Some organisations (e.g. DDDA) had gone to considerable lengths to facilitate genuine participation for those lacking specialist knowledge. However, communities frequently expressed anger at the attitudes of superiority which became apparent in the manner in which they were often treated by managers and professionals.

Representatives previously involved in capacity-building with regard to urban planning (The Four Cities Project[3]) discovered that the reality of Irish urban planning bore little resemblance to what they had been led to expect (Liberties IAP). This left them questioning whether meaningful community participation could be achieved without a significant redistribution of power and resources, since the community sector is clearly the weakest and most under-resourced sector involved in the consultation process.

Resourcing issues impinging on the lack of independent technical advice were pointed to particularly strongly in the cases of St. Michael's estate and the Liberties IAP. Deprived urban communities usually lacked informal access to

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[3] The Four Cities Project was 'a European Union funded initiative exploring four important themes in urban renewal – city living and environmental sustainability, physical planning, economic and community development and cultural diversity and segregation. Four cities – Dublin, Belfast, Brussels and Liverpool – are involved in the project and the Liberties /Coombe area has been chosen as the case study for Dublin.' The stated aim of the project was 'To identify and advance innovative ways of maximising the involvement of local communities in the implementation of urban regeneration projects.' The project was to 'involve a collaborative approach between the local authorities and local communities, with each city learning from the other'. (Dublin City Council, 2004: 4).

networks of appropriate professionals for advice and could not afford to engage such expertise formally. This was of major significance in communities where there was considerable reluctance to trust the advice of local-authority planners or architects (St Michael's, Liberties IAP). The fees required to lodge an observation on a planning application or to lodge an appeal against a planning decision were also noted as problematic, particularly in areas where planning applications were numerous (Liberties IAP).

The formality ofIn relation to consultation meetings, two elements frequently engendered an intimidating atmosphere not conducive to participation. Firstly, the formality of the meetings was off-putting. Secondly, there was little or not allowance made for the and the lack of allowance often given to community representatives' inexperience of community representatives in dealing with planning, development economics and architectural issues frequently engendered an inappropriately intimidating atmosphere not conducive to participation (Ringsend, DDDA, Tallaght IAP).

Shortcomings of the Participation Process
Frequently, tThere had beenwere serious shortcomings in the way in which participation was effected. They ranged from serious structural deficiencies to the absence of simple, common-sense procedures, indicating that insufficient consideration had been given by local-authority officials to the difficulties whichthat a poorly-educated, disadvantaged community might have in engaging in a process of participation. The following lists a number of these shortcomings:

- The failure to record oral contributions from the floor at public meetings, relying only on participants' completion of comments forms, was seen to be highly inappropriate for communites in which literacy skills were low.
- The manner in which community groups and community representatives were initially selected had sometimes not been transparent (Ringsend, DDDA, Liberties IAP).
- The abandonment of a promised IAP Steering Committee (which would have been mandated to adopt a directive, agenda-setting and decision-making role) for a Monitoring Committee relegated its members to an after-the-fact observer role and had neither been justified nor explained (Liberties IAP).
- The terms of reference for participating bodies were often vague or sometimes not formally established in spite of repeated community requests (Liberties IAP).
- A decision to hold meetings of one IAP Monitoring Committee on a more infrequent basis was interpreted as a strategy to lessen the local authority's accountability to the community (Liberties IAP).
- IAP Monotoring Committee meetings were sometimes timetabled to discuss matters whichthat had already been determined in meetings of the Council, nullifying the significance of any discussion (Liberties IAP, Tallaght IAP).
- In one case, a facilitator chairing meetings of a participation committee was perceived as steering the group according to the local authority's

agenda rather than facilitating a discussion of issues identified as important by the community.

- Deadlines for community representatives to report back to and obtain feedback from their respective communitites were commonly cited as being unreasonably tight (St. Michael's, Ringsend, Ballybeg). This was viewed as curtailing democratic discussion and potentially reducing the legitimacy of representatives' positions.

- The setting of inappropriate deadlines and the timing of key announcements to coincide with summer holidays, Christmas or local elections, when activists would be engaged in other community matters, was of key concern (St. Michael's, Ringsend). At best, this was seen as indicative of a lack of commitment to meaningful community participation. At worst, it was interpreted as deliberately minimising opportunities for participation by pushing key decisions through at times when the community was least organised.

Provision of Information
Once involved in the process of participation, community representatives frequently faced problems of gaining access to appropriate and accurate information. Some cCommunity representatives offered few positive assessments of the local authority's role in ensuring that the host community was kept well informed of plans and proposals for the area. They pointed instead to the very perfunctory nature of the information sessions, to the 'impenetrable' manner in which technical information was presented and to local authorities' trying to 'sell' their already-determined plan rather than imparting information in a balanced fashion (St. Michael's, Liberties IAP). IHowever, in the case of Ringsend, a problem of information overload was encountered as being just as serious as the deficient and misleading nature of the information sometimes provided to others (St. Michael's, Liberties IAP).

Echoing the reflections of the DoEHLG Planning Advisor, communities believed that a major structural concern was the lack of clarity of forthcoming information as to which element in the hierarchy of relevant planning documents was to be given legal precedence (the Development Plan, the IAP document or DoEHLG Residential Density Guidelines).

Failure to Take on Board Community Concerns
The tendency of officials to privilege technical and professional expertise over that of community representatives was widespread (St Michael's, Ringsend, DDDA, Liberties IAP, Ballybeg, Ballymun) even with respect to local issues. The attitudes of local-authority officers were sometimes characterised as amounting to a 'casual disrespect' for community concerns (Ballymun), while the response of local-authority officials to concerns voiced by community representatives regarding the participation process itself were viewed by community respondents as defensive, dismissive and derisory (St. Michael's, Liberties IAP).

Lack of Transparency, Perceived Duplicity and Dishonesty
The process of engaging in participation became particularly traumatic for some communities and certain individuals. This led to disillusionment,

fundamental distrust and ultimately to feelings of having been 'duped' by a process whichthat smacked more of legitimising local-authority policy than of a genuine attempt to engage in participation in decision making. These impressions reinforced a common perception that there had been a fundamental lack of transparency in the participation process, associated sometimes with dishonesty and duplicity on the part of local-authority officers (St. Michael's, Ringsend, Liberties IAP, Ballybeg). This further reinforced and confirmed a pre-existing lack of trust in the local authority.

At its most extreme, the process engendered feelings of complete betrayal, a loss of credibility for community leaders, a radicalisation of perspectives on the nature of the participation fiasco with which they had been associated and a shattering of any element of trust between the community and the local authority (St. Michael's, Liberties IAP).

Power Differences
For some community representatives, the reality of participation at a 'table of unequals' at which property interests, professional experts, managers and officials held all the most powerful positions became increasingly evident (DDDA, Liberties IAP).

Alienation, Demoralisation and Apathy
While apathy was commonly recognised as constituting a significant barrier to community participation (Liberties IAP, Ballybeg,Tallaght IAP), this was tempered by a strongly-expressed view that non-participation by a significant proportion of the population was not explained by either communal listlessness or a general contentment with the status quo (Liberties IAP). Both explanations were refuted as being inherently conservative assessments of declining engagement in public processes.

Some community representatives felt that lack of participation resulted from a belief that involvement would make no difference (Tallaght). Others felt that it was a consequence of demoralisation and alienation deriving from the political culture and power structures underlying the *status quo* which were inimical to genuine community participation (St. Michael's, Liberties IAP). Real participation was seen to be incompatible with the interests of the Irish state, which instead contented itself with an abundance of rhetorical commitments and spurious participative structures without any corresponding devolution of power to local communities.

Comments and Considerations

The informational, technical, resource and estrangement barriers whichthat impede the entry of inner-city communities into the planning, infrastructural development and urban renewal arenas did not represent the totality of difficulties encountered by inner-city communities. The small number of community representatives who did manage to surmount these barriers confronted a whole new series of obstacles upon gaining entry to the planning arena.

The state agencies seem far more comfortable in focusing on the internal barriers and the community's need for 'capacity building', rather than seeing the agenda progress to more critical barriers/obstacles. Where those practical tangible barriers (e.g. deficiency of knowledge, expertise and resources) were overcome, it was salutary to note that this generally served only to clarify the powerlessness of ordinary citizens in seeking to defend their planning interests in the face of very powerful state and property-development interests.

It was noteworthy that within the case studies included here, all of the participation initiatives had derived from managerial origins. While this is praiseworthy, none had sought at an early stage in the process to solicit from the communities concerned any input regarding either the format for participation or the functionrole whichthat the community would play. These were presented as *faits accomplis* that communities would have to accept if they were to enter the process. From their very origins, the reality of 'participation' would consequently be very narrowly defined.

Several issues with regard to the way in which participation was sometimes solicited give cause for serious concern. Some of the points raised by community groups were of such a simple character that they force one to question whether much serious attention had ever been devoted by local-authority officers to the problems that poor, working-class communities might experience in engaging fully in a system of participation.

When considering the question of effective participation, it is useful to reflect upon the degree to which real power was redistributed under participation arrangements. In this context, it is pertinent to note Arnstein's (1969) seminal work on citizen participation in which she devised a 'ladder of empowerment' where genuine participation was equated with the redistribution of power between interest groups through negotiation. The 'rungs' on this ladder range from Citizen Power, through Degrees of Tokenism down to Non-Participation, including 'cynical consultation' and 'civic hype'.

THE LADDER OF EMPOWERMENT (After Arnstein, 1969)

1 Degrees of Citizen Power
Citizen Control: participants and residents control a programme or an institution, govern policy and managerial aspects, and negotiate the conditions under which outsiders can make changes
Delegated Power: negotiations occur between citizens and public officials, which give citizens the power to make decisions and control plans and programmes
Partnership: power is redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders, agreeing to share planning and decision-making responsibilities

2 Degrees of Tokenism

> ***Placation:*** ground rules allow the 'have-nots' to advise, but decision-making power lies elsewhere; successful appeasement of the citizenry depends on the quality of technical support available to express their priorities and the extent to which community is organised to argue for them
>
> ***Consultation:*** inviting citizens' opinions (surveys, meetings etc.), power holders are thereby able to show they have attempted to involve them
>
> ***Informing:*** advising citizens of their rights, responsibilities and options, is often one-way communication (from officials to citizens) with no means for citizens to express their opinions and no power to negotiate
>
> ### 3 Non-Participation
> ***Cynical Consultation:*** power-holders involve citizens in extensive activity but the focus is on curing them of their 'pathology' instead of changing the social structures whichthat create their 'pathologies'
>
> ***Civic Hype:*** citizens are arranged on advisory committees or Boards merely to 'educate' them or to get their support; participation becomes distorted into the power holders' public relations instrument

Disconcertingly, the findings of this research tend to indicate that within the ethos of deepening entrepreneurialism of local authorities, 'participation' is commonly anchored firmly towards the lower end of that ladder. It is frequently 'tokenistic', often highly cynical and sometimes amounts to little more than 'civic hype' where 'participation' becomes perverted into a public-relations instrument for those with real decision-making power.

It is imperative for managers to understand and take on board the following:

1 With regard to public meetings, an accurate written record should be taken of comments and contributions made during the meeting. At the termination of meetings and discussions officers should not simply invite written comments from participants, because not everyone is comfortable at writing down their views on paper, especially in communities where illiteracy/semi-literacy rates are high.

2 Local-authority tenants may be wary of expressing their disquiet publicly in a manner that identifies them individually to an authority which also functions as their landlord.

3 Deprived communities are likely to have difficulty in dealing with plans and with professionals. The full interpretation of documents requires assistance of an impartial nature with respect not only to the technicalities of documents but also to broader strategic issues of what alternatives might be possible and the community's legal right to oppose undesired policies and press for additional options that are deemed more desirable.

4 Representing communities is highly time-consuming. Public-sector officers are remunerated for their role in the participation process, which should rightly

be viewed as an inherent aspect of their employment, rather than as a burdensome addition. However, the success of participation hinges on the voluntary commitment by unpaid community representatives to time-consuming attendance at meetings, information dissemination, discussion and feedback. It is essential for the legitimacy of the participation process that such consultation between community representatives and residents be given sufficient time to take place fully. Agendas for the participation process should therefore not be conditional upon artificial timescales set to suit the agendas of the public-sector bureaucracy or the demands of private-sector partners. For obvious reasons, new proposals and revisions should not be tabled at times when people are unlikely to be able to devote adequate attention to such items (e.g. summer holidays, Christmas etc.) when community representatives are unlikely to be able to elicit broader discussion and feedback from within the community.

It must further be borne firmly in mind that participation becomes well-nigh impossible when:

1   Resourcing and impartial professional advice is inadequate

2   There is a lack of respect for community representatives from officials, characterised by an attitude of superiority grounded in a belief that, as professionals, 'we know best'

3   Terms of reference for participation bodies are poorly defined and communities are lured into the process of participation by promises as to their role in the planning process only to find that ground rules change without notification, procedures are inappropriate and the provision of information is inadequate

4   Misleading information and untruths destroy trust

5   Character assassination and the public undermining of community representatives takes place.

Managers, planners and other local-authority officers tend to be drawn predominantly from a middle-class background. They may have little experience, or even much conception, of the central role which family and community bonds can play in combating the hardships dealt by a life characterised by chronic economic disadvantage and personal devaluation in an intensely hierarchical society. Such a society which not only fails to recognise the value of anything other than 'middle-class' lifestyles, culture and aspirations, but seems actively to pursue policies whichthat undermine those fundamental elements of working-class community life and family ties that make life bearable for residents in deprived localities.

Planning matters. It purports to be one of the most democratic domains of local decision making about the shaping of current and future geographies of our communities. It can be a vehicle for positive and constructive management and allocation of resources. However, if it fails to recognise and

address its own deficiencies, particularly those relating to equity and inclusiveness in the decision-making process, it can be a potentially destructive instrument with undesirable outcomes, as illustrated through many of the case studies presented in this report.

In the process of managing urban change, planners and urban managers should ensure that already-deprived communities are not also obliged to bear disproportionately the additional burdens arising from change. It is highly unlikely that, under the guise of 'community participation', the treatment extended to some of the deprived urban communities examined in this research would have been contemplated for middle-class areas where expertise, knowledge, political linkages and economic power are far greater. It certainly would not have been tolerated by them.

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