

THE CITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Chapter 17

Beyond the Ladder: New Ideas About Resident Roles in Contemporary Community Development in the United States

Rachel G. Bratt and Kenneth M. Reardon

During the second half of the twentieth century, the role of residents in community development programs across the United States gained considerable attention as civil rights leaders and community activists pushed municipal governments and their federal partners to develop more participatory planning processes. This greater resident voice in community development programs was stimulated by the negative effects of many Urban Renewal programs as well as the launch of the War on Poverty in the early 1960s, with its requirement of “maximum feasible participation” by the poor. Sherry Arnstein’s seminal 1969 paper “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” written during this period of growing interest in resident participation, has framed much of the subsequent discourse on this topic in the United States.

Since that time individuals and community groups have become involved in public debates in ways that were not envisioned four decades ago. In addition, recent years have witnessed growing dissatisfaction and upheaval resulting from the deregulation of housing and financial markets. This has been accompanied by a precipitous decline in public confidence in the ability of elites to manage either the economy or the delivery of basic government services. It is timely, therefore, to reconsider the role residents should play in the planning of a diverse set of public initiatives. By revisiting the Arnstein

Ladder, we hope the next generation of planning students will be better able to appreciate the range of strategies through which residents can meaningfully participate in shaping their own future.

This chapter focuses on community development rather than the broader spectrum of planning activities for a number of reasons. First, because we are using the Arnstein Ladder, it is logical to stick to community development programs, since this was her focus. Second, the bulk of the planning literature on participation is concentrated in community development. Finally, an examination of resident participation in a single planning subfield is far more manageable for a paper, as opposed to a full treatment of the history/lessons of participation in planning, which would require a book.

By tracing forty years of community development practice, and the dramatic changes in context in which this practice has taken place, we hope to offer a new theoretical understanding of the role of residents in community development. The over-arching goal is to ensure that the next generation of planners looks to the needs of residents, especially those of the poor, as the focus of future urban policy debates and community development practice; appreciate the breadth and complexity of the strategies that foster resident participation; and reflect on how their roles can interact with and support resident initiatives.

Definitions

A number of phrases have been used to refer to the role residents play in community development. Most of the participation literature uses the word “citizen.” Since many residents in countries throughout the world are not citizens, and many of these are poor and of color, we do not want to exclude these groups from a role in planning initiatives, even at a rhetorical level. Therefore, we feel that “resident” is a more inclusive term than “citizen” when discussing participation in planning. We prefer this term to the more inclusive “public participation,” since our focus is on the individuals living in a particular community, as opposed to a broader array of stakeholders. In most of this chapter, therefore, we use the term “resident participation.” However, in discussing Arnstein’s Ladder and other relevant literature, we use the language of the author, which is typically “citizen participation.”

Arnstein defines citizen participation as a “categorical term for citizen power”:

It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out. (216)

Clearly, this definition includes the desired end-result of participation, more equitable policy outcomes, not simply the act itself. As to the meaning of community development, a "textbook" definition states that it is

Asset building that improves the quality of life among residents of low- to moderate-income communities, where communities are defined as neighborhoods or multigenerational areas. [In this context, assets include] physical capital in the form of buildings, tools, and so forth; intellectual and human capital, in the form of skills, knowledge, and confidence; social capital—norms, shared understandings, trust, and other factors that make relationships feasible and productive; financial capital (in standard forms); and political capital, which provides the capacity to exert political influence. (Ferguson and Dickens 1999: 5, 4; emphasis original)

Going beyond a focus on improving quality of life, Marie Kennedy argues that

Genuine community development combines material development with the development of people, increasing a community's capacity for taking control of its own development. . . . A good planning project should leave a community not just with more immediate "products"—for example, more housing—but also with an increased capacity to meet future needs. (Kennedy 2007: 25)

Kennedy's definition of community development significantly overlaps with Arnstein's definition of citizen participation by emphasizing resident power. Thus, at least to some practitioners, community development and resident participation are synonymous or, at least, you can't have one without the other.

As planners embraced resident participation in the 1960s, a number of

distinct planning paradigms emerged. "Advocacy planning" attempted to provide residents with opportunities to enter into negotiations with public officials and private developers. Paul Davidoff (1965) offered that planners neither can, nor should, be value-neutral technocrats whose role is to carry out the plans of those in power. Instead, the role of the planner is to assist multiple interests, with a particular focus on poor and minority concerns, to argue their alternative proposals.

The concept has remained important to planners, as Tom Angotti (2007) has noted: "advocacy planning is still the foundation for all progressive planning today . . . It is relevant because it allows us to distinguish between progressive community planning and the generic community planning." The former entails "opposition to the conditions that produce and reproduce the inequalities of race and class. Without that, advocacy would be just a conservative appeal for pluralism—everybody do their own thing and don't challenge existing relations of economic and political power" (Angotti 2007: 21, 23).

"Empowerment planning," which also falls within the broad conceptualization of progressive community planning, seeks to enhance the capacity of community organizations to influence the investment decisions that, to a large degree, determine the quality of life local residents enjoy. This is accomplished through an approach that integrates the core concepts of participatory action research, direct action organizing, and popular education into a powerful social change process (Reardon 2000).

"Equity planning" is essentially synonymous with the practice of progressive community planning, except that it refers to planners working inside government who "use their skills to influence opinion, mobilize underrepresented constituencies, and advance and perhaps implement policies and programs that redistribute public and private resources to the poor and working class" (Metzger 1996). Urban planning educator Norman Krumholz is closely linked with this form of practice, based upon work he did in the government of the City of Cleveland (Krumholz and Forester 1990).

The American Planning Association has been critical of "the traditional practice of planning" because it does not sufficiently consider resident voices. It states that traditional planning practice, "in which a municipal planning department plans for the physical future of the entire jurisdiction from city hall, often fails to provide effective planning for the full range of community components that affect families at the neighborhood level" (2008). The Association has encouraged a new definition of "neighborhood collaborative

planning” that seeks “to enhance the quality of life in a specific area by joining attention to the economic, social, and physical infrastructure of the neighborhood to realize the goals defined by a resident-driven/managed/led vision” (1996).

This view of planning is nearly identical to the textbook definition of community development. But both stop short of Arnstein’s definition of citizen participation and Davidoff, Angotti, and Kennedy’s views of advocacy planning and community development. We have intentionally limited the previous discussion to planning theories that explicitly focus on outcomes, as opposed to those that are more process oriented, such as consensus building and communicative/collaborative planning. In a communicative framework, for example, the planner’s role is to “listen to people’s stories and assist in the forging of consensus among different viewpoints” (Fainstein 2000: 454). In addition, in our analysis we take as a “given” the inequality of power between residents and other stakeholders as a critical element in the context of community development practice.

Thus, in this chapter we embrace Arnstein’s definition of participation with its focus on the outcome of enhancing power among the participants, as well as the act of participation. We further believe that the appropriate aim of community development is to improve and protect the quality of life in an area, while also providing residents with greater power and control over their environments. Community development and resident participation are, then, inextricably linked.

Impact of the Ladder on Community Planning and Development

The Ladder challenged activists, planners, and officials to reexamine the role residents were playing within federal revitalization initiatives, especially the Community Action and Model Cities Programs. Influenced by the social movements of the 1960s, Arnstein was committed to building a society in which the voices of the poor could be heard within all urban policy and plan-making programs.

Seeking to maximize the influence poor and working-class individuals exerted within the planning process, Arnstein used the ascending rungs of a ladder to illustrate the degree to which formal resident participation processes resulted in real power (see Figure 17.1). At the bottom of the Ladder

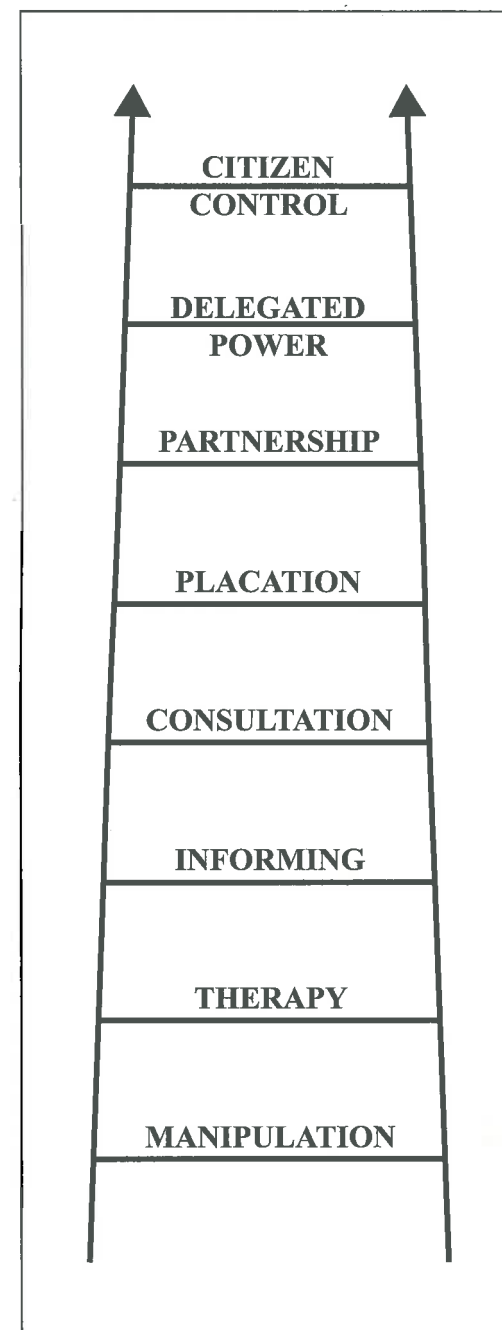


Figure 17.1. Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation.

of Citizen Participation are two forms of citizen engagement, manipulation and therapy, in which citizens are offered ceremonial opportunities to participate during public planning processes, giving them the illusion of power while decision-making remains in the hands of local elites. The middle of the Ladder, the informing, consultation, and placation rungs, offers limited participation in which residents provide input on policies while officials representing elite interests maintain their privileged positions. At the top of the Ladder are the partnership, delegated power, and citizen control rungs that offer residents significant influence and control.

Since its first publication in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*,¹ the Ladder has been used by innumerable professionals and academics to evaluate the degree to which public planning processes offer residents, especially the poor, opportunities to influence decisions affecting their communities. Published in 1969, this article continues to be featured in most introductory planning texts, including Stein's *Classic Readings in Urban Planning* (2004) and LeGates and Stout's *The City Reader* (2003). In addition, the article remains required reading in many graduate planning programs, including Berkeley, Cornell, Illinois, Michigan, and Tufts. Despite the decades that have passed since its initial publication, the article remains one of the most frequently cited planning articles. According to Google Scholar, it was referenced in 1,988 articles and books in 2007. Planetizen reported that more than 1,100 visitors downloaded Arnstein's article in the first 90 days of its posting on www.planetizen.org. In recent years, it has also become one of the most frequently read articles by Chinese planners seeking to increase resident participation in what have essentially been closed planning processes.

The importance of power and power sharing in public planning processes, as described by Arnstein, continues to occupy a vital place within contemporary planning practice and discourse. For example, 10 percent of the questions on the 2008 American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) Exam focused on resident participation, and the most popular AICP Exam preparatory text continues to quiz candidates regarding their knowledge of Arnstein's Ladder.

Within community development, questions raised by Arnstein related to resident power remain important themes in the scholarly literature. Mel King's *Chains of Change* (1984), Chester Hartman's *Between Eminence and Notoriety* (2002), and Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar's *Holding Ground: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood* (1994), describe how low-income

residents confronting large-scale redevelopment and displacement have organized to oppose such efforts. Many of the stories in these volumes describe how residents rejected various forms of officially sponsored participation to organize grassroots movements to restructure local revitalization efforts.

Issues raised by the Arnstein Ladder are further explored in many influential-planning texts. In *The Deliberative Practitioner*, John Forester (1999) explains how equity planners are frequently asked to transcend their technical analyst role to organize communities to make their voices heard within elite controlled planning processes. Martin and Carolyn Needleman's *Guerrillas in the Bureaucracy* (1974), Pierre Clavel's *The Progressive City: Planning and Participation, 1969-1984* (1984) and Norm Krumholz and Pierre Clavel's *Equity Planners Tell Their Stories* (1994) review the formidable opposition local planners encounter while seeking to implement redistributive development policies and participatory planning processes.

Ron Shiffman and Susan B. Motley's "A Comprehensive and Integrative Approach to Community Development" (1989), William Peterman's *Neighborhood Planning and Community Development: The Potential and Limits of Grassroots Action* (1999), Herbert J. Rubin's *Renewing Hope Within Neighborhoods of Despair* (2000), and Randy Stoecker's "Challenging Community Development Practice" (1997) highlight the conflict community development professionals experience when attempting to balance their commitment to community organizing and empowerment with the need to successfully complete their next development project upon which their organizations often depend for economic survival.

Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) emphasizes the challenges local leaders face in promoting participation when out-migration from our cities has reduced the number of residents participating in civil society. Leonie Sandercock's *Cosmopolis* (1998) and *Mongrel Cities* (2004) emphasize the importance and difficulty of promoting resident participation in urban areas that have become increasingly diverse.

The Ladder has also influenced scholars from other fields who are committed to understanding how individuals from economically marginalized groups can influence government policy and plan-making. Among these are scholars from environmental psychology, public health, and international development who have incorporated the Ladder into their work (see, for example, Hart 1992; www.freechild.org/ladder.html; Checkoway and Gutierrez 2006; Choguill 1996; Pretty 1995).

Strengths and Limitations of the Ladder

Arnstein's Ladder has withstood the test of time. Still widely taught in planning courses, the model's simplicity makes it accessible and understandable to students and practitioners. Arnstein highlights the centrality of resident involvement and underscores the importance of their voices not only being heard, but resulting in greater power sharing and improved policy outcomes.

The Ladder also offers practitioners, funders, and evaluators a usable framework for measuring the power sharing that exists among stakeholders within specific community development projects. In addition, the Ladder emphasizes the possibility of moving toward greater resident involvement. While not offering detailed guidance as to *how* to advance along a specific empowerment pathway, it does provide a general roadmap for those interested in adopting more collaborative approaches to practice. Finally, the lower rungs of the Ladder provide a strong cautionary message that not all forms of resident participation are positive! Indeed, the most modest forms of participation may create illusions of participation, lulling residents into believing their opinions are being considered, providing legitimacy to projects that may actually cause harm.

Despite the Ladder's many strengths, there are also some weaknesses. These include

1. Arnstein offers only anecdotal evidence to support her conceptions of how various types of participation play out in the world. The logic of the Ladder notwithstanding, Arnstein offers no empirical data to support her argument that greater participation results in improved planning outcomes, including a redistribution of power or opportunity for lower income residents and members of racial minorities.
2. The Ladder assumes a single form of participation—residents becoming involved with programs that originate outside their neighborhood through “top-down” planning.² The article fails to acknowledge the other ways residents may influence the community development process.
3. Although Arnstein defines participation as including both strategies and outcomes, the Ladder confuses the two. While the highest three rungs of the Ladder—partnership, delegated power, and control—may be viewed as both strategies and outcomes, the lower rungs focus exclusively on the outcomes of inadequate or misguided resident

- participation. The Ladder also does not acknowledge that the “best” form of resident participation may vary based upon the planning context. While it is almost certain that the three highest rungs on the Ladder represent the most desired outcomes, it may not always be the case that control is preferable to a partnership arrangement.
4. Arnstein does not offer reasons why participation, even on a theoretical basis, is important. For example, she might have elaborated on how resident involvement may lead to a better process if local stakeholders are involved. In addition, fewer delays and greater cost effectiveness may result from a decreased likelihood of local opposition. In view of the importance of lay knowledge, there is also a greater chance that the project will be consistent with resident needs. Resident involvement may also result in benefits going to those most in need, thereby promoting a more equitable distribution of resources.
 5. Arnstein does not acknowledge some potentially important drawbacks of participation. For example, residents who participate can voice anti-social attitudes, including subtle messages of white privilege/racism, income segregation, sexism, ageism, and homophobia. In other words, there are times when resident involvement can result in the exclusion of those not considered part of the community.
 6. The Ladder does not acknowledge the extent to which mandated resident participation can undermine grassroots movements. “Official” resident committees appointed by local officials often stifle legitimate community voices that may be expressed through religious and/or civic organizations. Certainly, at the time the Ladder was constructed, there were historic and contemporary examples of how grassroots movements and activism stimulated significant changes.
 7. While the Ladder acknowledges that “neither the have-nots nor the power holders are homogeneous blocs” in planning practice, these variations need to be more fully considered. Decades of planning experience have underscored that diverse stakeholders are likely to view a particular project from their individual perspectives. Yet, the Ladder does not take into account how different voices can be heard, how different racial or ethnic identities might influence participation, or how to balance competing community demands.
 8. Although Arnstein notes that the Ladder “does not include an analysis of the most significant roadblocks to achieving genuine levels of participation,” a more robust model would provide guidance to those

stuck on lower rungs regarding how to progress to higher levels of collaboration.

Moreover, it is worth noting that there is a lack of clarity regarding the unit of analysis that is being used. Is Arnstein talking about individual, organizational, or community empowerment?

Changing Context of Community Development Since the 1960s

Arnstein developed her Ladder during the 1960s, a period with a very different set of social concerns from the present era. These differences are important to understanding our proposals for a new framework. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the federal agency in charge of housing and community development initiatives, had just been created with a broad new mission of consolidating federal urban programs and expanding its mission to neighborhood revitalization. Accompanying these developments were the deep, direct federal subsidies provided through such programs as Urban Renewal and programs that offered mortgages at below-market interest rates to developers and lower income homeowners. With the current troubled state of the economy and two wars being fought, the problems facing economically challenged urban neighborhoods have not been a priority in the United States. In addition, since the 1980s, responsibility for urban policy has shifted to state and local governments, as devolution has become the standard federal approach and public-private partnerships have become commonplace.

Along with federal involvement in a wide array of domestic issues in the 1960s, federal officials and policy-makers began to articulate concerns about evaluation. Questions were being asked about how the costs and benefits of urban initiatives would be assessed. However, when Arnstein created the Ladder she was still writing from a "pre-evaluation" perspective. Her arguments were persuasive and her anecdotal observations were accepted as facts. At present, if one were to argue for enhanced resident involvement in public decision-making, policy-makers would demand convincing evidence and a compelling rationale about why such participation is necessary and what the benefits will be. With evaluation "the name of the game," outcome data on participation have become essential. Indeed, a new construct could better serve as a tool for assessing levels of participation in any given initiative.

While there was tremendous growth in the African American and Latino populations in central cities, there were few elected officials from these groups in the 1960s. There are now more than 9,000 non-white elected officials in U.S. state and local governments. All this suggests that, at present, resident participation can and does take the form of voting candidates into office and running for office.

In addition, the current U.S. population is significantly more diverse than in the 1960s, with about a third classified as non-white. While African Americans were the dominant minority group in the 1960s, today they constitute a smaller group than Hispanics and others with Latino roots. Each ethnic and racial group has its own history and cultural connections to resident participation (or not).³ Therefore, it is unlikely that we can prescribe a "one size fits all" approach to resident participation.

In recent decades, too, there has been a proliferation of small-scale community development corporations and other social service agencies assuming responsibility for public service delivery in distressed areas, eclipsing in many localities the role formerly played by federally funded public agencies. Neighborhood residents, as well as professionals living outside these areas, typically staff these organizations. Opportunities for residents to participate in these organizations simply did not exist in the 1960s. The nonprofits, then, may be serving as effective vehicles for residents to become involved in a wide variety of community development issues. Whereas in Arnstein's era public officials were concerned about how to encourage resident participation and what types of new participation committees should be created, in today's context an important challenge is to involve already-existing groups in local decision-making. The same is true for those for-profit private sector entities that have become important players in urban revitalization partnerships in recent years. While these partnerships often involve private developers and local governments, there may also be explicit roles for non-profit neighborhood associations and local residents to play influential roles.

It is worth noting that the old style of community development was easier to understand than present-day practice. No longer dependent on a single (i.e., federal) source of funding, contemporary programs typically require leveraging public dollars, layering subsidies from multiple sources, and navigating the difficult-to-understand world of tax credits. Even residents who want to get involved may get discouraged by the complexity of the programs. Although it is true that there is a great deal of information on the web, we do not know the extent to which residents actually use it for their own analyses

and advocacy. Are we disempowering residents by overwhelming them with information while, at the same time, offering them relatively few web-based, analytic tools to make sense of these data?

Finally, we are now experimenting with various indirect methods of participation that are faster and, perhaps, less costly, such as "electronic town halls." However, to the extent that such approaches are used, residents lose the opportunity to participate in the "give and take" that direct participation offers.

In view of the many differences between the 1960s and the first years of the twenty-first century, there is a need for a more contemporary conceptual framework that can enhance our understanding of the range of resident roles in community development and other planning initiatives.

Illustrative Examples of Innovative Practice

Arnstein's scholarship has prompted community development planners to approach their work in a more participatory fashion. These planners have come to appreciate how an inclusionary approach to practice can expand the base for progressive community development while enhancing the capacity of community organizations to implement increasingly ambitious local development projects.

This section presents two resident-driven planning processes from the United States that reflect the highest level of resident control described by the Ladder.⁴ From these examples we will be able to outline a number of more contemporary forms of innovative practice that will inform the model we develop.

Emerson Park Development Corporation (East St. Louis, Illinois)

In the mid-1980s, a group of women from the Emerson Park neighborhood of East St. Louis, Illinois, became alarmed by the collapse of their neighborhood's manufacturing, transportation, and retail sectors. As unemployment and poverty mounted, they watched increasing numbers of families move away in search of living wage jobs. When one third of the building lots became vacant and a quarter of the remaining buildings became seriously deteriorated, they formed the Emerson Park Development Corporation (EPDC).

Mobilizing dozens of unemployed men, these women dismantled three abandoned buildings, recycled useful materials, raised additional funds, and

mobilized volunteers transforming these properties into a beautiful children's playground. Following this success, the group recruited University of Illinois planning students to prepare a comprehensive revitalization plan. Using participatory methods that included mapping community assets, oral histories, children's planning murals, resident interviews, and stakeholder focus groups, EPDC and their student planners prepared the Emerson Park Neighborhood Improvement Plan, which was awarded the 1991 AICP Best Student Plan Award.

When funders refused to invest in the plan, residents completed a series of self-help projects to address some of the identified problems. Working together, they removed trash from vacant lots, painted low-income seniors' homes, replaced the roof of the community center, and created a community garden. These small successes attracted an influx of new volunteers and renewed interest from local funders. During the next ten years, EPDC, in partnership with University of Illinois, completed more than one hundred increasingly challenging neighborhood improvement projects.

With this track record, and based on research from the University of Illinois, EPDC convinced regional transportation officials to extend a light rail line connecting Lambert International Airport and the City of East St. Louis. Having purchased a significant number of parcels close to the Emerson Park light rail station, EPDC recruited an experienced developer to build a new mixed-use/income planned community serving Emerson Park. By 2005, EPDC had completed the \$29 million Parsons Place Project, which features a public park, a Montessori school, a charter high school, and more than one hundred forty units of market- and below-market-rate housing.

Sacred Heart Parish (New Brunswick, New Jersey)

The City of New Brunswick, New Jersey, a former manufacturing, transportation, retailing, and government center, has experienced a significant influx of Asian and Latino immigrants in recent years, many of them undocumented. Attracted by the hospitality, transportation, warehousing, and landscaping jobs available to those with limited language and technical skills, these workers earn modest wages, enjoy few work-related benefits, and are frequently denied state unemployment benefits and worker compensation. Although most of them work for well-known multinational corporations in New Brunswick, they are actually employed by "temporary employment contractors" who assume responsibility for verifying their eligibility to work.

The workers employed by these contractors receive only a small portion of the hourly compensation the corporations pay for their labor. Contractors typically require workers to travel to and from their places of employment in their vans, for which they charge a hefty fee. The contractors also hold a monopoly over the mobile food wagons that provide meals to the laborers enabling them to charge a premium for such services. Finally, the contractors provide costly check-cashing services to workers who are often unable to establish local bank accounts because of their lack of appropriate ID.

In 2002, Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church in downtown New Brunswick experienced a significant increase in parishioners from among the city's new immigrants. In addition to offering a number of services, the church initiated a comprehensive planning effort in collaboration with the Affordable Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey. With the Network's assistance, Sacred Heart secured a \$50,000 foundation grant to undertake a resident-driven revitalization plan. In 2006, a participatory planning process identified the neighborhood's most important assets, challenges, and development opportunities. More than 250 residents participated in the discussions, meetings, and charrettes that formed the core of this process.

The plan that emerged from this process proposed improved police and fire protection, expanded job training, enhanced neighborhood retail services, improved health care services; additional affordable housing; and greater food security. Following completion of their plan, Sacred Heart secured \$1 million in Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credits through the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. Novartis, a Swiss pharmaceutical corporation, purchased the tax credits enabling Sacred Heart to begin implementation of the plan. Achievements include new wellness services, rehabilitation of twelve units of affordable housing, a Building and Fire Code Enforcement Campaign, and a large-scale community garden. Based on these early successes, Novartis renewed its financial commitment enabling the parish to leverage other community development grants.

Broadening the Resident Participation Framework

From this exploration come a number of recommendations aimed at broadening the resident participation framework. We are suggesting several new categories that explicitly focus on direct and indirect bottom-up resident strategies; and new supporting roles for professional planners. In the

Column #1 Direct bottom-up resident strategies	Column #2 Indirect bottom-up resident strategies	Column #3 Professional roles in support of resident participation	Arnstein's Ladder top-down resident participation strategies
Citizen Control Delegated Power	Citizen Control Delegated Power	Citizen Control Delegated Power	Citizen Control Delegated Power
Partnership Status			
Negotiation and Mediation	Running/Serving in Public Office	Advocacy Planning	Placation
Participatory community Planning	Voting/Working on an Electoral Campaign	Working for a Local/State CD Agency	Consultation
Organizing	Writing/Engagement in Public Interest Campaign	Working for a Private Sector Firm (CRA Officer in a Bank)	Informing
Activism and Protest	Volunteering with a Non-Profit	Working for a Local CD Corporation	Therapy
			Manipulation

Figure 17.2. Professional and resident roles that lead to participation and control of community development initiatives.

following discussion we explore how each of these new strategies may be appropriate depending on three contextual variables.

New Categories of Resident Participation

Over the past four decades, poor and working-class communities have pursued planning approaches not represented on the Ladder to achieve more equitable forms of community development. These new approaches are not based on an ever-progressing increase in resident power, so they are not presented as Ladders. Rather, they encompass a type of intervention aimed at expanding opportunities for residents to have their concerns acknowledged within particular planning contexts.

As shown in Figure 17.2, in each of the participation strategies, residents

seek to enter into negotiations with local development officials, which hopefully will result in a partnership arrangement, placing them on the sixth rung on the Ladder. There would then be the possibility of moving up the Ladder to outcomes that involve delegating power to residents or residents being in control of a given program. In fact, rather than the sequential progression that the Ladder metaphor suggests, we believe the image of a pole vault may more accurately convey how specific strategies falling under the new categories may result in a situation where powerful stakeholders are willing to negotiate with residents.

It is important to recall that the Ladder is primarily concerned with outcomes achieved through various federally funded “top-down” participation initiatives. In contrast, the categories being proposed delineate three broad types of strategies that residents, or professionals, can pursue to enable residents to get to “yes,” which we consider forming a partnership arrangement with the local government or other entities in control of community resources. Moving above the Partnership level, there may be opportunities for residents to be delegated power and/or to assume control of the community development initiative.

Direct Bottom-Up Resident Strategies (Column 1)

This category includes four types of resident-driven initiatives. Residents may be able to enter into negotiation with key city officials or other powerful decision-makers directly, or they may need to pursue one of the other three strategies that result in some form of negotiation. Through this process, residents may be able to form a productive partnership or, beyond that, achieve control over key community development initiatives.

- **Negotiation and mediation**—a resident group may enter into a negotiation process with key power-holding stakeholders as a prelude to forming a mutually beneficial partnership
- **Participatory community planning**—residents can collaborate with a university or with an advocacy organization to develop a plan, independent of city hall, that meets their needs.
- **Organizing**—residents can also work through citizen organizations and public interest coalitions to create more nurturing environments in which local economic and community development can be pursued.

- **Activism and protest**—oppositional campaigns that cause disruption of “business/politics as usual” have helped many communities influence local development policies.

Indirect Bottom-Up Resident Strategies (column 2)

The following initiatives are grouped together because they seek to enhance the general level of resident involvement in civic affairs, indirectly enabling residents to influence local community development. As with the direct, bottom-up resident strategies (column 1), these aim at helping residents achieve a position from which they can enter into productive negotiations with key stakeholders that may then result in a partnership or higher form of resident involvement.

- **Volunteering with a nonprofit**—participation in these groups may range from membership and occasional meeting attendance, to volunteering in sponsored programs, to serving on the board.
- **Writing/engagement in public interest campaign**—Residents have opportunities to participate in political dialogue in ways that would have been unimaginable in the 1960s. The Internet has revolutionized communication methods. While some Model Cities programs had newsletters, today’s resident groups can have their own web sites presenting their views electronically and reporting their activities in their own community.
- **Voting/working on electoral campaign**—participation through established channels of engagement, including voter registration and “get-out-the-vote” campaigns.⁵
- **Running for/serving in public office**—participation through leadership in the political process. If you can’t get “them” to fix or change the situation, consider changing it yourself.

Professional Roles in Support of Resident Participation (column 3)

The final category includes professional roles residents or nonresidents may assume. The immediate goal of these approaches is to assist residents in entering into partnership arrangements with powerful stakeholders to promote resident voice and resource control within community development.

- **Working for a local community development corporation.**
- **Working for a private sector firm.**
- **Working for a local/state CD agency**—Whether the employee is a professional from outside the community or a resident working on the inside of a key firm or agency, they can influence policies, processes and resource allocations.
- **Advocacy planning**—Planners who serve as advocates for specific communities still play a critical role for practitioners of progressive planning.

Thus, some residents (as well as outside professionals) may assume different roles in support of resident participation in community development (column 3). Other residents may engage in direct (column 1) or indirect bottom-up strategies (column 2). The combined impact of these strategies is to empower residents to enter into negotiation whenever possible, so they can form partnerships with city officials, while continuing to move up the Ladder.

Resident Strategies in Context

One of our earlier criticisms of the Arnstein Ladder is that it does not sufficiently acknowledge how local contexts may impact the effectiveness of alternative participation strategies (See also work by Churchman, 1987, in which the importance of context is underscored.) As shown in Figure 17.3, we suggest that there are three contextual variables that community development participants need to monitor and adjust their activities accordingly: level of economic resources, level of support for community development/participatory planning, and concentration of power within the local community. Each of these variables is shown as a continuum. The more hostile the context, in terms of limited resources, weak support for community development, and high concentrations of power in the local community, the more residents will need to start their efforts through activism and protest, organizing and community planning with the goal of “pole-vaulting” to the negotiation/mediation stage.

Hostile Environment

Where powerful institutions no longer believe in the possibilities for revitalization of a community and have reduced services that threaten the

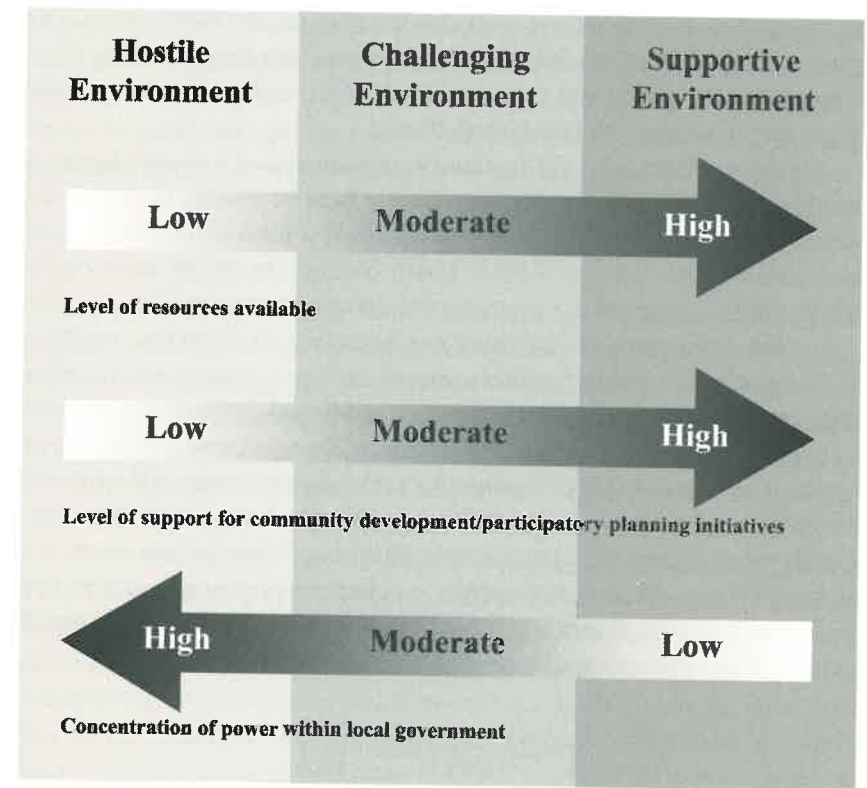


Figure 17.3. Attributes of local environments that affect resident participation strategies.

community’s future, resident organizing may take the form of adopting a self-help approach to basic service provision while also pursuing a protest strategy involving legal action to prevent powerful outside actors from destroying the community.

When New Orleans officials appeared to be embracing a “planned shrinkage” approach to post-Katrina planning, in which heavily damaged eastside neighborhoods were being reprogrammed as urban wetlands to serve as buffer areas in the event of future storms, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) responded by helping local families and businesses “gut” their buildings in preparation for future renovation, while suing the city to prevent it from demolishing the community’s building stock. ACORN then entered into a partnership with a group of universities

to formulate a comprehensive revitalization plan for the Ninth Ward. The combination of ACORN's self-help, legal defense and neighborhood planning activities enabled them to capture \$140 million in Federal infrastructure funds for the severely damaged Ninth Ward.

Similarly, when powerful institutions are interested in redeveloping a neighborhood in a manner that significantly benefits outside economic interests, while displacing long-time residents and businesses, the latter groups may be forced to mobilize a broad-based coalition to ensure basic equity within publicly-supported community development programs.

In the Greenpoint-Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, residents and religious leaders came together to ensure that a proposed up-zoning of the waterfront designed to accommodate new residential development featured a significant "set-aside" for affordable housing. By organizing a broad-based coalition of faith-based organizations, local stakeholders secured the support of elected officials; forty percent of new housing units built within their community were required to be permanently affordable. Through these efforts, the community was also able to construct a waterfront promenade, restore two parks, build a public library, implement subway station improvements, install public art, and preserve and/or create 7,800 units of affordable housing.

Challenging Environment

When powerful development interests focused their attention on the revitalization of other parts of the city, such as the downtown, the riverfront, and/or university/medical districts, all the while ignoring the needs of residential neighborhoods where the poor live, residents of these areas may need to undertake organizing campaigns to encourage a more balanced approach to economic and community development.

In Memphis, Tennessee, one of the city's largest developers proposed re-development of the Mid-South Fairgrounds—a 156 acre city- and county-owned site that serves as the home for the Liberty Bowl Stadium, a basketball arena, and an agricultural exhibition area. The developer sought to transform the facilities into a world-class athletic and cultural center by securing more than \$100 million in state tourist development bonds. While asserting his desire to see the project positively affect the neighborhoods surrounding the site, the developer has, to date, taken few steps to guarantee this outcome. Jacob's Ladder Community Development Corporation, representing a poor residential area adjacent to the site, proposed the negotiation of a community

benefits agreement between the developer and the affected neighborhoods. With the support of local institutions and elected officials, an effort was made to mitigate the negative impacts of the project through local hiring preferences, minority business set-asides, park improvements, affordable housing provision, energy conservation assistance, and a new charter middle school.

Supportive Environment

Where powerful institutions readily acknowledge the influence that local residents and institutions exert over critical resources (e.g., land, buildings, capital, media coverage, and local government institutions such as planning commissions), residents may be able to pursue a more collaborative approach to planning. In these cases, residents, along with representatives of these outside interests, can cooperate with local economic and community development organizations as co-investigators, co-designers, and co-developers.

Since establishing its Neighbors Building Neighborhoods (NBN) Program in the early 1990s, Rochester, New York, has delegated increasing levels of responsibility and power over critical economic and community development decisions to local residents and institutional representatives participating in community planning councils. Initially seeking input over the use of Community Development Block Grant funds for brick and mortar projects in their neighborhoods, the NBN Councils are now routinely involved in setting priorities for the city's ongoing service delivery programs and capital budgets.

Future Initiatives

In order to move the field of resident participation forward, research is needed in the following areas.

- **how various resident participation strategies, pursued in a range of contextual environments, result in particular outcomes**—To what extent are resident efforts resulting in productive partnership arrangements that provide additional opportunities to enhance resident empowerment?
- **how the range of cultural backgrounds represented in a given community relates to participation strategies**—To what extent do

views of resident participation vary depending on race, ethnicity, or other attributes and how can diverse populations become involved?

- **how to engage youth in community development**—What can we learn about how community planners have promoted youth involvement in economic and community development policy-making and planning?

At a more applied level, another initiative could build on existing knowledge and research to develop guides to assist planners working in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors to support more productive resident participation strategies. These might also prove to be useful texts in graduate planning programs. The guides could also assist residents by providing information on the range of participation strategies and highlight the role context plays in determining which approach would be most appropriate in a given environment.

Concluding Note

When the Ladder was created, the practice of incorporating residents in community development, as well as a broad range of other planning activities, was brand new. Practitioners at that time often viewed federal directives to engage residents in planning efforts as a nuisance required to secure federal funding. Increasingly, planners have come to understand that better plans will be created and better outcomes achieved if those most likely to be affected are involved throughout the process.

This exploration into the Ladder, viewed from a contemporary perspective, is intended to underscore both the importance of a broad range of resident participation strategies and the complexity of these efforts. The Ladder has been an enormously helpful tool, but ultimately its set of rungs does not adequately support the subtlety or complexity of resident participation in the twenty-first century. Revisiting the Ladder provides an opportunity to better understand its many strengths and to articulate the need for a broader framework of resident participation.

We end with two questions. Can this new conceptualization of resident participation provide us with insights and tools for tapping the extraordinary grassroots organization so critical to the successful election of President Obama, to undertake the often daunting task of community revitalization? And, can this framework help educate policy-makers, government officials,

and private stakeholders concerning the ways residents can play productive roles in community efforts?

Notes

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1. Now *Journal of the American Planning Association*.
2. We make special note of a particularly ambitious effort to engage residents in Israel. Project Renewal, implemented from the late 1970s through the mid-1990s, embraced citizen participation as its central principle and underscored the need for residents to participate "bottom-up," as opposed to the "top-down" framework presented by Arnstein. Nevertheless, the forms of participation advocated by Project Renewal may have been more "top-down" in practice: Local Steering Committees, encouraging residents and public officials to confront one another directly, or by encouraging the formation of "leading groups" (Weinstein 2008).
3. Observation by Cornell University Professor Clement Lai at the July 2008 ACSP-AESOP meeting in Chicago.
4. Both cases presented, as well as the vignettes on context noted later in the paper, are based on the professional experiences of one of the authors (Reardon).
5. This point was emphasized by Cleveland State University Professor Norman Krumholz at the July 2008 AESOP-ACSP meeting. He asked: "Does the best citizen participation involve simply participating in the electoral process and getting people elected to office, where the numbers of voters would allow that?"

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