Democracy And Bureaucracy in a Community Planning Process

Robert J. Chaskin

Abstract

The implementation of efforts to revitalize poor communities through participatory, collaborative planning efforts is often problematic. In part, this is because the organization of these efforts embodies an inherent tension between an ideology of associational action and local democracy on the one hand and an adherence to essentially rational-bureaucratic approaches to planning and implementation on the other. This article conceptualizes this tension and examines its unfolding and implications in comprehensive community initiatives through an in-depth case study of one such effort.

Keywords: participation; representation; democratic planning; bureaucracy; community development

Robert Chaskin, Ph.D., is an associate professor at the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration and a research fellow at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University. His research focuses primarily on the role of community and community-based efforts to improve the lives of children and families. Among other topics, his publications have explored the conceptual foundations and principal strategies of contemporary community practice; issues of participation, planning, and neighborhood governance; and approaches to knowledge utilization and the challenges of learning from complex community initiatives.

Community intervention takes a range of different forms, encompassing various combinations of development, organizing and advocacy, and planning, service provision and coordination (Rothman 1995; Dreier 1996). Although differing in strategy, scope, and organization, much of this practice, from the work of settlement houses to that of community development corporations (CDCs), has held in common a few broad principles to guide action. These principles include a geographic focus on local communities (often neighborhoods in cities), an attempt to address comprehensively the needs and circumstances of people in these communities, and a focus on citizen participation, along with professionals, in the planning and implementation of community-change efforts (O'Connor 1999; Halpern 1995).

Starting in the late 1980s, a number of targeted, community-change efforts have been launched that came to be known as comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs). CCIs have both revisited and revised the structures and approaches to meeting community-change goals that earlier and ongoing efforts have engaged (for overviews, see Kubisch et al. 1997; Stagner and Duran 1997; Kingsley, McNeely, and Gibson 1997; Stone 1996; Jackson and Marris 1996). In particular, they have sought to reemphasize the link between social needs and the provision of human services on the one hand and physical and economic development on the other. They have also explored different forms of governance, placing a significant emphasis on structuring collaboration among community organizations and residents and connecting them to "partners" in positions of power and with access to resources beyond the neighborhood. It is almost invariable that this involves the creation of initiative governance structures that incorporate a diverse body of "stakeholders," including neighborhood residents and business owners, representatives of various community-based organizations (CBOs), members of public-sector agencies, and members of the private and nonprofit sectors in the broader community (Chaskin and Garg 1997).

However, the implementation of these efforts has been problematic in part because of a set of fundamental tensions inherent in their design and implementation (Kubisch et al. 1997). At the root of these tensions is the initiatives' reliance on two conflicting frameworks for action that are embedded in the organizational structure and planning processes that frame them: One is an ideology of associational action and local democracy associated with fluid grassroots movements and voluntary associations; the other is

an adherence to rational-planning, essentially bureaucratic approaches common to the world of government, philanthropy, and the professions. The dissonance resulting from the interplay of these frameworks in action has had a powerful impact on the shape and conduct of CCIs.

Although the empirical focus of my analysis is CCIs, the problem I explore is relevant to a broad range of other community planning processes as well. Indeed, the CCI experience is particularly instructive because of the ways in which the nature and particular structure of stakeholder engagement and planning brings a set of common tensions into particularly sharp relief. Much of the literature on the complexities of neighborhood planning processes often focuses on the dynamic interaction between professional planners or representatives of public agencies and community groups (e.g., Rohe and Gates 1985; Briggs 1998; Tropman 2001) or on the problems associated with expectations for participation and approaches to representation in planning processes (e.g., Gittell 1980; Gittell and Newman 1998; Day 1997; Scavo 1993; Arnstein 1969; Piven 1966). Analyses of particular planning processes tend to focus on the discourse of planning (Tauxe 1995) and the ways in which power dynamics are played out through "patterns of social performance" (Briggs 1998). This article extends these analyses by focusing on initiative design and organizational structures and dynamics that help condition these exchanges.

The article is organized in three sections. First, I briefly outline the major differences between associational and bureaucratic assumptions and methods, and I describe how these two frameworks are brought together in the work of CCIs. Second, I examine how this interaction unfolds through an analysis of an in-depth case study of a multiyear, multisite CCI called the Neighborhood and Family Initiative (NFI). Finally, I discuss the role of ambiguity and mediation in shaping this interaction, and I draw out some implications for practice.

► **Data and Methods**

The analysis presented in this article looks back on the experience of NFI from data collected throughout a ten-year implementation study of that initiative, and it reviews the CCI experience in general terms through the evaluation literature and interviews with a range of CCI practitioners. NFI data include a range of written documentation (reports, proposals, correspondence, field notes) and data collected during extensive field research that included both periodic observation and in-depth interviews with a broad range of respondents. These data sources include virtually all of the initiative participants

and a set of key informants in each site not directly connected to NFI (e.g., city government officials, directors of local CBOs). The review of CCI experience beyond NFI is based on a review of evaluation reports and a small set of key-informant interviews with evaluators, funders, and staff of each of 15 initiatives.

Interview questions were open ended, and interviews were guided by a semistructured protocol that guaranteed responses by all respondents to a core set of questions while providing the opportunity for the respondents to communicate any unforeseen issues and observations. Documentary data, field notes, and interview transcripts were coded and analyzed on the basis of an analytic scheme that organized data around a set of themes drawn from the stated principles and objectives of the initiative and emerging dynamics observed and identified by respondents over time. Analysis also took into account the role and position of each respondent to understand patterns in differing perspectives by type of respondent. Summary matrices were developed to plot the range of responses to particular sets of questions and to understand the magnitude of agreement or diversity of perspectives on a given issue, and the text was analyzed for content and to draw conclusions.

► **The Problem: Democratic Principles and Organizational Dynamics in Community-Building Practice**

Although CCIs emphasize self-help, community asset development, and local empowerment, they pursue complex goals that build alliances with other organizations, and by virtue of their sponsorship and structure, they operate with reference to a dominant culture of bureaucratic problem solving. This dynamic is reflected partly in their organizational structures. CCIs often operate through a kind of hybrid organizational form and combine aspects of collectivist and voluntary association structures and processes with those of more bureaucratic organizations.

In collectivist organizations, authority tends to be vested in the entire group rather than a particular individual, and decisions are made through participatory processes. Role definition and differentiation among roles tends to be minimized. Social relations among members are personal and affective, and social control is based on moral appeal to collective values rather than direct supervision or objectively defined rules (Rothschild-Whitt 1979). Voluntary associations often share many of these characteristics and tend to be characterized by a degree of uncertainty and limitation along several dimensions. For example, role expectations among members are often

unclear, informal, and shifting; participation is often episodic and subject to only limited supervision or regulation; and the ability to sustain organizational activity is highly dependent on the voluntary contribution of members' time and the resources (human, social, capital) they may bring (Knoke and Wood 1981).

In contrast to voluntary associations, the structure and processes of most formal organizations are based on some variant of a bureaucratic model of operation. In its classic definition, bureaucratic organizations are goal-oriented collectivities that are formally organized to coordinate action rationally toward the achievement of defined objectives. Organizational behavior is guided by rules that place participants within a particular (often hierarchical) structure in which duties are defined and carried out. Codified rules preserved in written documents guide administration (i.e., decision making and action). Participants are generally selected on the basis of technical qualifications and are remunerated for their performance. There is a separation between personal and official life among organizational participants. Finally, authority derives its legitimacy primarily on the basis of legal-rational assumptions, and it is vested in a particular office rather than in the personal attributes of a particular individual (Weber 1978).

The two models described above are obviously ideal-typical; organizations in action, whether they adhere principally to collectivist notions of process and democratic authority or to bureaucratic ideas of role specialization, formal authority, and means-ends efficiency, are likely in practice to combine elements of each. CCIs, however, represent a purposive and dramatic combination of these elements. By combining (1) a value orientation that stresses participation and local control, (2) a rational-instrumental orientation that stresses efficient progress toward particular outcomes, and (3) the complexities of a mixed-participatory model that includes professionals and nonprofessionals, residents and nonresidents, cross-class and cross-sector participation, CCIs set in motion and throw into relief a fundamental tension between the values and methods of voluntary-associational action and those of bureaucratic-organizational behavior.

The Lure of Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy dominates the organizational landscape. Although the voluntary sector remains relatively free of bureaucratic constraints compared to the public sector (Douglas 1987), voluntary associations and collectivist organizations operate within a broader field of organizational endeavor that for the most part is based on the assumptions of

and uses the methods and protocols of the rational-bureaucratic model. Their location in and necessary interactions with this environment, as well as a number of internal pressures, tend to lead over time to particular kinds of organizational change—namely, increasingly formalized structures, more explicitly defined organizational goals, and decreasing levels of participatory governance.

Internal pressures include the difficulty of establishing and maintaining participatory organizations, the difficulty of monitoring and orchestrating the activities of participants, and the fluidity and process-oriented nature of these organizations, which makes it difficult to regularize relations with outside organizations (Milofsky 1988). External pressures can be seen from both a resource-dependence and an institutional perspective. From a resource-dependence perspective (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), voluntary associations alter their structures and goals in response to the demands (current or anticipated) of funders (Milofsky 1987). From an institutional perspective, increasing interactions with other organizations in their organizational field create "widely shared assumptions about what the organization should look like and how its work should be performed" (Powell and Friedkin 1987, 182; DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

The combination of internal pressures, resource dependency, and institutional influences may pull a voluntary association to present itself as an organization with a dedicated, cohesive membership (which funders are more likely to support) and to develop administrative structures that both strengthen the ability of the organization to compete for funds and serve to project an image of competence (modeled by organizations that are successful in the field) to potential sources of outside resources (Knoke and Wood 1981; Milofsky 1987).

Initiative Governance and Organizational Strategies: Inherent Tensions

The pressures to bureaucratize felt by participatory organizations are complicated significantly by the mixed-participatory models and existence of significant ambiguity—of intention, expectation, organization, authority, and role—that infuses initiative action and participant interaction in CCIs. Voluntary associations are independent collectivities that tend to have relatively homogeneous memberships and simple organizational structures and to exist in relatively clear funder-grantee relationships to sponsors. The organizations that govern CCIs, in contrast, are often attached to or embedded in other organizational entities, have profoundly heterogenous memberships, engage in frequent structural reorganizations,

and are involved in highly complex and intimate relations with their sponsors (Chaskin and Garg 1997). This set of circumstances leads to an ongoing tension between participatory-democratic modes of operation and more formal, bureaucratic approaches.

►A Case Study: The NFI

In 1990, the Ford Foundation launched the NFI, which is one of the earliest examples of the current generation of CCIs. Operating for more than ten years, NFI sought to strengthen a neighborhood in each of four cities—Detroit, Hartford, Memphis, and Milwaukee—and improve the quality of life of the families who live in them.

The neighborhoods are all urban and poor, with between 29 percent and 52 percent of the population living below the poverty line at the time of the initiative's inception. All neighborhoods are principally African American, though both the Milwaukee and Hartford neighborhoods have sizeable Latino populations and a significant proportion of the black population in Hartford is West Indian. And with the exception of the neighborhood in Detroit, all four neighborhoods are principally residential.

Each site was part of a national initiative that provided some common institutional support and mechanisms for cross-site information sharing and collaboration. The Ford Foundation was the principal funder and architect of the general framework for the initiative, and community foundations in each city acted as the fiscal agent and local intermediary. The Center for Community Change (CCC), a national intermediary based in Washington, D.C., provided general technical assistance to all sites and facilitated communication among them for the first five years of the initiative.

Although the Ford Foundation and its advisors centrally developed the governing principles and the general operational structure, the goals and principles were stated broadly. It was the role of local actors to identify the particular outcomes that were to be generated and to determine the appropriate strategic approach for accomplishing them. The desired outcomes were based on an assessment of local needs and priorities and on the opportunities and constraints provided by the local environment.

In each city, the community foundation identified a target neighborhood, hired a project director, and convened a neighborhood collaborative. Each collaborative served as both the primary link between the target neighborhood, the community foundation, and the larger local community and as the governance structure responsible for planning, implementing, and overseeing the local initiative. However, the neighborhood collaboratives were not created as financially independent, functionally autonomous organizations. Rather, each was created to work, at least initially, in conjunction with the local community foundation and under its aegis.

Each collaborative began with a similar structure and was convened according to similar guidelines. Initial selection of members was guided by a simple matrix that defined three categories of participant: low-income residents ("grassroots leaders"), neighborhood professionals and entrepreneurs ("bridge people"), and representatives from the broader spheres of public and private organizations, including municipal government and corporate representatives ("resource people"). This basic framework provided ongoing guidance as the collaboratives' membership turned over and as the groups expanded and evolved over time.

Fundamental Tensions

The guiding principles and initiative structure of NFI provided a set of "givens" that interacted with the assumptions, interpretations, value orientations, and perceived constraints incorporated into initiative activity by the various players involved. These dynamics played out in several ways.

First, they played out in the dynamics between local organizational behavior and the structure of the national initiative. Whereas most nonprofits and voluntary organizations are clearly influenced by the (real and perceived) interests, values, and requirements of funding organizations (e.g., Milofsky 1987; Marquez 2003), the NFI collaboratives were *products* of the initiatives, and they maintained a unique relationship to the funders that sponsored them. On one hand, the constraints on the collaboratives to make progress toward long-term goals within relatively short-term grant periods provided both the necessity and the incentive to engage in the formalization of operations and to be driven by a product-centered goal orientation. On the other hand, the rhetoric of the initiative about participatory planning and community involvement and the role that the Ford Foundation and (especially) the CCC played in reinforcing this value continued to infuse a participatory-associational value orientation into the processes and dynamics of organizational behavior.

Second, the dynamics played out in the collaboratives' response to the organizational ambiguity under which they operated as an initiative governance body working under the auspice of (and subject to the constraints provided by) their convening community foundations. Because the collaboratives began as neither autonomous institutions nor

merely advisory groups, there was ambivalence among participants about how to approach their role and mission. Some collaborative members (principally professionals) preferred to see the collaborative as a policy-setting board of directors that was charged with the overall direction and monitoring of the initiative and that relied on staff support to conduct research on alternatives and present options, to make recommendations, and to follow through on board decisions regarding implementation. Other participants (principally residents) preferred to think of the collaborative as an implementing body more in the mold of a voluntary association. Here, collaborative members would "roll up their sleeves" and take on the necessary responsibilities of making sure collaborative plans were translated into action. The contrast between these positions was nicely summarized by one resident:

> Everybody needs order. But for the relatively small tasks that require both head and hand, you can't use totally the same kind of structures and attitudes and segmentation that you would use with a huge entity or even something as small as the [community] foundation, because [those] jobs are so huge and can be segmented. But this is our community job, a small group of people. Everybody has to employ head and hand.

Ultimately, this tension pulled the collaboratives in different directions: three of the four incorporated as independent nonprofit organizations, two created other nonprofits in their neighborhoods, and one disbanded, leaving the work of continued planning and implementation to other CBOs.

Third, the dynamics played out in the organizational reshufflings of collaborative structure, moving from unitary planning bodies to shifting assemblages of standing and ad hoc committees. The attempt to break down the broad task of planning "comprehensive" development into manageable components led to the strategic differentiation of issues along categorical lines defined by function—housing, economic development, education, health, social services—with plans for each component strategy delegated as the responsibility of a defined committee (Chaskin, Joseph, and Chipenda-Dansokho 1997). But these substructures remained protean. Committee leadership had convening, but not decision-making, responsibilities; there was significant overlap of membership among committees; the committee structure was immensely fluid and subject to revision almost without constraint; and committees had only limited autonomy to make decisions and allocate resources, as most decisions required the consent of the full collaborative.

Finally—and perhaps most complexly—these dynamics played out in the process of decision making and the negotiation of authority in the collaboratives. Here, the issues of role,

values, goal orientations, expertise, legitimacy, and representation came into direct interaction and were negotiated. The remainder of this article explores this interaction.

Decision Making and Authority

Framed by the dimensions of initiative organization summarized above, the tension between associational and bureaucratic values and approaches was reflected and reproduced in the NFI by the structure of membership, the dynamics and assumptions about representation, the interpretation of roles, and the dynamics of participation among collaborative members. It was also heightened, as previously noted, by the existence of significant ambiguity built into the initiative at several levels.

Membership

Most collectivist-participatory organizations tend to select for homogeneity of membership to promote solidarity and the likelihood that moral appeals to cooperation will be more readily heeded (Rothschild-Whitt 1979). In contrast, the NFI (like other CCIs) intentionally selected membership on the basis of diversity. The collaboratives brought together different kinds of people (defined by race, class, residency, occupation, and expertise) with presumed access to very different networks of association (such as resident groups, funding sources, government agencies, and service providers).

There were two principal reasons behind this mixed-participatory model. First, it was an attempt to reconnect poor neighborhoods, which had seen increasing disinvestment over the previous 40 years, to the broader systems in which they exist and thereby to a broader range of opportunities and resources. Second, it was an effort to break down categorical approaches to problem solving that characterize much social and economic policy. By bringing together a wide range of participants with different experiences, different fields of expertise, and different access to information and resources, all around the same table and on "equal footing," categorical thinking was to be challenged and revised, and the collaboratives were to be able to catalyze neighborhood change that was both grounded in the needs and priorities of its residents and connected to the broader systems that have an impact on its operation. But this structure also brought into play a series of tensions regarding representation, role, and the process of decision making.

Representation

Collaborative members were not appointed as formal representatives of the organizations for which they worked or (in the case of organizationally unaffiliated residents) of the neighborhood. Yet participants assumed some responsibility, and carried some expectation, that they were to speak for and act on behalf of those constituencies.

However, this representative role was ambiguous: For whom were individual members presumed to speak and with what authority? Although it may be tempting to assume a unified community voice (cf. Briggs 1998) to be provided by community members ("insiders") and to presuppose clear institutional representation provided by some key resource people ("outsiders"), in fact, there were different ways of constructing inside and outside, and participants interpreted their place and role—and those of others—in different ways.

Although some of the resource people (several of whom were appointed by their corporation or city department to participate) saw their role relatively narrowly as representatives of their firm or agency, most saw their role as multivalent. In the words of a corporate participant,

> I think I represent several different perspectives. . . . [I'm] somebody who is interested in that participative model, someone who has a history of knowing what the neighborhood was once and what it could be again. . . . And then also a stakeholder in the neighborhood because we have an office there that's very successful. And then I think a private-sector perspective.

Residents, too, often described their role in terms of some combination of perspective, connection, and the functions they could perform. In addition to playing a role in protecting their own stake or investment in the neighborhood, residents often saw themselves as a critical link to the neighborhood, both instrumentally—"I can help spread news, tell residents what's going on, get them to buy into it"—and in terms of representation. For most residents, this representative role was one that only they were positioned to play:

> How can you come in and say this is what I'm representing and put it on the table when you're not actually out there actually talking to these people, socializing with these people, knowing where these people are. . . . Everybody has good intentions and I want to say everybody around the table wants to see change, but sometimes you just have to live it to understand it.

But getting to neighborhood representation was far more complicated. Residents were not elected to their posts, and across sites, there was periodic concern about the absence of sufficient representation from certain groups: Latinos in Hartford and Milwaukee, women in Hartford and Memphis, men

in Milwaukee, youth across sites. In addition, nonresidents with certain kinds of relationships to the neighborhood (e.g., some business owners and service providers) considered themselves "direct" stakeholders with as much legitimacy and connection to the neighborhood as if they lived there. One business owner described it as follows:

> I regard myself as being a resident business [in the neighborhood]. I don't live there. I don't sleep there. But I am tied by almost an umbilical cord to the neighborhood and my home in [the suburbs]. Because if the alarm goes off, I have to leave my home and come down here immediately. When there's a shooting, I feel it. If there's a fire next door, it touches me too.

Conversely, for some participants, simple residence was insufficient to put to rest the issue of community representation. Speaking of some of the professional, middle-class residents that served on the collaborative, some low-income participants questioned the extent to which they "truly" represented the neighborhood. In the words of one,

> They're residents, true, but they don't have to deal with the day-to-day struggle that a lot of the residents have to deal with. And since they don't have to deal with it they might miss some of the struggle.

Although the issue of broader awareness and involvement among residents at large was raised frequently, the persisting concern about resident involvement most often centered on the issue of direct participation in the governance structure. It was reflected in a sort of internal, ongoing process of accounting among members, particularly among those representing the "grassroots," and served to heighten the perceived importance of the role of those residents who were involved. For resident participants with the will to use it, this concern also provided some ideological leverage, which was backed by the stated charge provided by the Ford Foundation, that played out in the form of particular concessions, such as the collaboratives' yielding to pressure for additional resident members or accepting particular project priorities.

Role Definition

The issue of role is directly connected to the issue of representation. Again, ambiguity plays a critical part because although some informal assumptions about what members represent in the way of connections, knowledge, and access were known, it was unclear what this formulation should mean in terms of rights and expectations: What were participants expected to bring to the table, and what could they expect to take from it?

The provision of knowledge, information, and resources serves as a good case in point. Professionals with institutional affiliations provided substantive knowledge and strategic information on particular issues (such as funding opportunities) and often brought to their institutions information on collaborative plans. They also had access to capital and administrative resources that were made available to the collaboratives at different points in time. However, the level of commitment and the mechanisms for tapping into these resources were often unclear. With a few exceptions, such representatives had limited discretion over their organization's resources, and were not able to speak freely for their institutions at the planning table. A city official who served on one of the collaboratives said,

> I think that I have to be very careful in my personal capacity or my official capacity about making commitments that I can't follow through on because invariably when we do that, we run into trouble down the line.

Grassroots residents mostly brought human resources (in part through informal outreach activities to get other residents involved in particular activities), and they provided knowledge of neighborhood dynamics and neighborhood concerns. In addition, they acted as conduits of information to and from the neighborhood, or at least to and from their particular networks of association in the neighborhood. Again, this central role was by definition representative:

> I must be the conscience of the people who live in this neighborhood to the NFI. I must be the central processing unit. They must be able to get the information from me of how things are here, what people need down here, what are the conditions of people down here. I must make sure that there are no assumptions made.

The flip side of contribution—that is, what individuals and institutions would be able to take away from the table—was also ambiguous, and was the source of some controversy across sites. Although there was little attempt to codify the responsibilities of individual members and the nature of their contribution, the possibility that members or their parent organizations might profit from initiative activities did lead to formalized sets of rules concerning potential conflicts of interest. In the sites where this issue was raised, conflict-of-interest rules were ultimately established that were designed to keep individual organizations from profiting unfairly by their representation on the collaborative, but would not preclude them from engaging in substantive activity (or being funded for such activity) under the umbrella of NFI. Collaboratives addressed these issues primarily by requiring an open acknowledgment of a conflict of interest and recusal from discussions in which decisions were made.

The problem proved more complicated when the potential beneficiary was an individual collaborative member rather than an organization. When collaborative members took on implementation responsibilities as individuals, they were primarily understood as part of their role as volunteers on the project. As volunteers, however, their time and the degree to which the collaborative could appropriate their energy was obviously limited. To address this issue, some collaborative members were hired as consultants on particular projects or as additional staff for the initiative.

Different rules applied, however, for different individuals. Collaborative members who were professionals were hired as consultants to provide specific services on particular projects for an agreed-on fee. In doing so, they remained active as full members of their collaborative. Where nonprofessional (grassroots) participants were hired, however, they were hired as staff and were asked to resign from the collaborative accordingly. In some cases, they continued to participate in collaborative deliberations, but they were relieved of decision-making or voting power.

Participation

The ambiguity surrounding the nature of representation and role expectations and the complexities introduced into the organizational dynamics of the collaboratives by the diversity of their membership were further reflected in the nature of participation and the interactions among participants. Driving these dynamics were differences in status and perceived expertise, the ability of particular individuals to mediate between interests and groups, and reference to an ideology of inclusion, consensus building, and democratic process.

In essence, residents were at a disadvantage in several respects. Although brought to the table on the assumption of equality under the ground rules of the initiative, the collaboratives operated in the context of essential inequalities—of privilege, income, education, experience, access to power. They also were organized to work within a framework of the dominant culture's version of decision making and planning that was used by collaborative members who held positions of higher social and economic status beyond the collaborative, as well as by representatives of the community foundations, by the Ford Foundation, and by technical assistance providers, evaluators, and consultants with whom the collaboratives worked.

This situation revealed some fundamental differences in both experience and worldview and reflects a facet of Habermas's distinction between "purposive-rational action," in which strategic or instrumental acts are taken on the basis of

analytic knowledge and the evaluation of alternatives and "communicative action," which is more fundamentally governed by norms and expectations crafted through social interaction and shared symbolic meaning in a specific context (Habermas 1971, 1981; Hummel 1977). In some sense, because collaborative members drew from different "cultural stock[s] of knowledge," the possibilities for communicative action were complicated; there were fundamental differences of expectation and of "individual *skills*—the intuitive knowledge of how to deal with a situation—and of customary social *practices*—the intuitive knowledge of what one can count on in a situation" (Habermas 1981, 2:221; some emphases removed).

In this context, forging cohesion and productive working relationships among collaborative members was difficult and time consuming, in particular because of three factors. The first was the interaction of significant differences in styles of communication; the second concerned disjunctions in goal orientation and bases of knowledge; the third was the tension between a search for consensus and a push for efficient decision making. How each of these factors played out reflects the relationship between residents and professionals and their roles on the collaboratives and illustrates the interplay between associational and bureaucratic values and means.

Communication. This tension is reflected, in part, in the interplay of different styles and substance of communication and of differential influence that endured throughout the initiative. Early in the collaborative-building process, the "grassroots voice" was relatively small in collaborative deliberations. In part, this was a function of numbers (grassroots residents being in the minority), partly due to levels of comfort. Levels of comfort were influenced, in turn, by two issues. First, there was the perceived difference in power and prestige among members. This was particularly salient at the beginning of the process. As one resident put it,

> We had one member [whose] self-esteem was so low. At one time, we decided that we had to introduce ourselves [at a meeting]. As we went around, [everybody had] all these big titles. When it came to her, she said, "Well, I ain't nobody". . . . She felt like she wasn't in her league. Wasn't anything done to reassure this woman or work with her and keep her a collaborative member. She stopped coming and that's where they left her—not coming.

In addition to these perceptions, there were more active, instrumental networks among bridge and resource participants than among grassroots participants. Professional collaborative members had significant histories of association through their jobs, served together on boards of various organizations, and had commerce with one another through past and current funding relationships.

The second issue influencing levels of comfort concerns differences in styles of discourse and operation. These differences were partly a reflection of the dominant use of a "language of expertise" (cf. O'Connor 2001; Tauxe 1995). But they were also a reflection of the substantially different orientations and assumptions among participants. The language and procedures that drove collaborative deliberation were not, for the most part, the language and procedures familiar to grassroots residents, whose approach to prioritizing need and deliberating strategy was informed more by interpersonal relationships, reciprocal obligation, and personal accountability. One resident put it this way:

> It took me years to build my reputation, for people to trust me. This is my livelihood. If we don't have our stuff together and come out here, it could be detrimental to a lot of us. If it falls through the cracks, I will get hurt the most because I am more connected.

Over time, the grassroots voice grew stronger in most sites because of the combination of an increase in the number of grassroots residents involved, the recruitment of resident cohorts, the individual attributes of new resident members, and the length of tenure of continuing grassroots participants. But ultimately, this dynamic was addressed through more fundamental organizational reorientations, which led in one of three directions. In Milwaukee, the collaborative ultimately disbanded, leaving the continuing task of neighborhood development (and any remaining funding) to other formally constituted CBOs. In Hartford and Memphis, the collaboratives incorporated as independent nonprofits with largely (if not exclusively) resident boards of directors, intending to establish themselves essentially as community membership organizations focused on organizing and community interaction. In Detroit, the collaborative incorporated as an independent nonprofit with a largely professional board and organized itself to more effectively compete for funding as a neighborhood service provider.

Goal orientations and bases of knowledge. The tension between resident and professional orientations also reflected differences in priorities, goals, and means-ends assumptions. The central issue here stems from a tension between a focus on short-term, visible achievement and long-term, systemic change. There was a clear (if not absolute) division among participants in this regard, with residents less content to wait for long-term planning to run its course and professionals attempting to follow a more global strategic-planning model focusing on larger, longer-term, more capital-intensive endeavors. In the words of one resident,

We want things like less crime, better housing, cleaning up the neighborhood. Business people look more at the banking and financing aspects of the project. . . . We look at things which affect us immediately and the business people plan for the future. I don't know which is right or wrong, but they are different ways of looking at things.

The kinds of projects spearheaded by grassroots residents bear this out. A street-lighting effort in Hartford, a scholarship program connected to the local high school in Memphis, and small grants to support recreational activities in Detroit were all principally resident-led projects, and all focused on providing some immediate benefit to some identifiable set of recipients. Projects initiated by professionals—CDCs in Milwaukee and Memphis, a health-care training and job-placement program in Detroit—tended to be larger, longer-term, more capital-intensive endeavors.

Consensus and decision making. The evolution of the accepted process of decision making across sites was another reflection of the tension between associational and bureaucratic values and approaches. The decision-making process across sites began with the intent to make decisions by consensus; all participants were expected to agree to any decision.

There were competing views about the relative benefits of consensus-based decision making and majority-rule decision making among participants (cf. Baum 2003). On one hand, striving for consensus was seen as a way to protect the voice of less powerful or less comfortable constituencies.

> We discuss it so we can at least understand what the disagreement is about. With the consensus process, people [who] are skeptical of the intentions of NFI, or the Ford Foundation, or the [community] foundation, or the city . . . can discuss their fears. Consensus flushed out the fears about the position taken by the majority.

In particular, given the initially small proportion of resident collaborative members in most sites, operating by consensus was meant to protect against residents simply being outvoted by the nonresident majority.

On the other hand, adherence to a pure consensus model was seen by some to evoke the "tyranny of the minority":

> Let's just have a process where, when we get to a point where we need to cut off a conversation or a discussion, ask everybody if they can live with it. What we've found was occurring is that a vote of one saying 'I can't live with that' was stopping some very important decisions from being made.

But the extent to which consensus was ever achieved on most issues remained open to question. In the words of one collaborative member,

They've been [describing the decision-making process] as consensus—it's the word that everybody knows. My observation is that it is primarily by influence. People passionately put things on the table and they argue it out and eventually people tire of the conversations, say 'let's make a decision,' and we sort of guess.

And across sites, even when consensus was sought and no explicit vote was called, the pace of decision making and the unexamined assumption of consensus in some cases led to a gentle squashing of dissent. The evocation of consensus, in the words of one respondent, kept "someone from speaking up because they think they're going to break the consensus. So you don't get that input." In response to these dynamics and the increasing pressure, as the initiative evolved, to show programmatic progress, all the collaboratives ultimately moved to a majority-vote framework for decision making.

▶ Ambiguity, Mediation, and the Associational-Bureaucratic Tension

The process of decision making and the nature of authority under NFI were infused with ambiguity regarding the nature of representation, participant roles and expectations, and collective intention. Collaborative operations were further complicated by the attempt to engage a highly heterogeneous group of participants in the planning process. Informed by the ongoing strength of the ideology of collective, consensual decision making that came up against a need and pressure to "get things done," collaborative operations moved between associational emphases and bureaucratic ones.

The resultant dynamic was a complex one. Decision-making processes were organized around a strategic-planning model meant to facilitate deliberations toward instrumental ends. At the same time, they were informed by concerns about representation and interpretations of the roles played by various participants. This was reflected in the ongoing pressure to engage greater numbers of resident members; the multiple ways in which participants defined their roles so as to place themselves within the framework of associational, neighborhood-based action; and the ongoing pull between developing projects that focused on long-term goals and those that focused on short-term goals.

Operating within this context of ambiguity, however, certain mechanisms of mediation provided an opportunity for negotiating these tensions. When most successful, such mediation was able to support at least a partial reconciliation of democratic means and instrumental ends. When ineffective or unsupported, organizational behavior was dominated by

oligarchy or consumed by a constant focus on process and a constant struggle for a balance of power.

One mechanism of mediation in the NFI developed at the collaborative level, provided principally by the strength of resident participation and the role of "bridge people." Another took place at the administrative level and centers primarily on the skill and continuity of staff. A third occurred at the level of auspice and concerned the degree to which community foundations operated with relative clarity, flexibility, and openness to negotiation.

At the collaborative level, mediation between associational and bureaucratic modes of operation and negotiation of the ambiguities of role, representation, and intent was best facilitated by two factors concerning membership and participation. One was the strength of resident participation. In part, this was simply a question of numbers; resident participation needs to be sufficient for such members to act from self-perceived strength and thus be able to balance (or consciously embrace) the strong pull toward rational-bureaucratic administration of collaborative operation. Strength of resident participation was also facilitated by other factors, such as the incorporation of new members into the collaborative as cohorts rather than individuals, the personal attributes of resident members, and the length of time they remained engaged. All of these factors helped "level the playing field" in a way that provided grassroots participants a greater voice in deliberations and a greater capacity to act as equal partners in the organizational endeavor.

The second factor concerned the role of "bridge people" and the relative benefit of having an engaged core of professionals who both worked in and were residents of the neighborhood. This dual connection provided a combination of expertise and legitimacy unmatched by other participants and offered one mechanism for translating between "grassroots" and "resource" perspectives. In contrast, where bridge people were connected only by professional ties to the neighborhood, residents tended to see these participants' contributions as reflections of their agency's agenda rather than as contributions grounded in an understanding of neighborhood needs and priorities.

At the level of administration, negotiating the organizational ambiguity of the collaborative fell to a large extent to the staff director. Where this was most successful, mediation at this level was promoted by three factors: individual attributes, the structure of accountability, and continuity.

Critical individual attributes included the organizational skills, leadership abilities, and political acumen of the individual playing the role of project director. Collaboratives operated with greater clarity of purpose and less conflict where staff

was able to play an explicitly mediating role, facilitating relationships among collaborative members and between the collaborative, the community foundation, and other corporate actors involved in the initiative. In addition to the "people skills" and personal attributes required to play such a role, the position required a strong generalist orientation to the substantive tasks of promoting neighborhood development.

The second factor supporting successful mediation at the administrative level was the existence of enough organizational clarity to place the staff within clearly understood lines of accountability and expectation. Staff held a structurally liminal position between the community foundation and the collaborative (working for the collaborative but hired as staff of the community foundation), and within the basic organizational ambiguity of the collaboratives (simultaneously of and not of the community foundation), the question of staff accountability was never completely resolved; but where the structure and expectations of staffing were most clearly stated, it was most easily negotiated.

Third, the degree of staff continuity played an important role in helping to negotiate ambiguity and the interplay between associational and bureaucratic values and means. When staff members were involved over the long term, trust was built, and a baseline of understanding regarding roles and expectations was developed on which participants grounded their actions and framed their understanding of organizational behavior. When there was significant staff turnover, each transition opened the door to a reevaluation of expectations and assumptions regarding accountability.

At the level of institutional auspice, the role played by the funders also provided a potential mechanism for negotiating ambiguity and mediating between value orientations. The community foundations' role and the clarity with which their relationship to the collaborative was understood was critical in setting the framework for organizational action under the initiative. The most successful negotiation of the complexities of intent and organization occurred where community foundations were less risk averse, more flexible, and more inclined to open negotiation with the collaborative.

The principal criterion of "success" that lies behind my assessment of these mechanisms of mediation concerns process—the extent to which they served to establish collective understanding within the ambiguous context of power and authority established by the initiative and to negotiate the tension between grassroots, associational expectations and approaches and bureaucratic, professional ones. To an extent, however, they also facilitated project implementation by enabling collaboratives to move to successful closure on planning decisions and by supporting the realization of plans in

action. This worked because of the way successful negotiation facilitated collaboratives' connections to resources and implementation mechanisms, both by fostering instrumental participation of a number of different collaborative members and through the more effective use of their networks and the access to resources (of various sorts) such networks provided.

▶ Conclusion

This article is about the convergence of contrasting ideals and their translation into action. Within the strategic context provided by initiative structure and organization, this convergence generated a complex dynamic in which practical action was propelled and constrained by the ideology that was to guide it and by the interpretations and actions of the participants in its unfolding. This led to an ongoing interplay between orientations: a dynamic push-and-pull between democracy and bureaucracy, top-down and bottom-up, inside and outside, long term and short term.

The translation of policy ideas to social action is always imperfect. The ideas that frame policy approaches and the rhetoric used to explain them are often generally stated on the basis of broad principles meant to guide but not dictate implementation on the ground. When such ideas come into play in the complex social reality in which they are to be realized, contextual factors and the existing, highly political dynamics among players combine with those promoted by the institutional structures through which an effort is to be implemented in complex and often confounding ways (e.g., Pressman and Wildavsky 1984; Lipsky 1980; Brodkin 1990, 2000).

In efforts like the NFI and other approaches to community intervention, reconciling the tension between ideals and action requires recognizing these complexities, explicitly addressing unintended ambiguities, and promoting mechanisms for mediation that can foster their negotiation. In turn, this may involve practical action on several fronts.

First, there needs to be clarity about the assumptions behind and expectations for resident participation. Many different kinds of involvement fall under the rubric of "resident participation." These include participating in a program; answering a survey; providing general advice in a broad, open forum; being part of a resident mobilization campaign for instituting change; participating as decision-making members of a community governance body; and working as staff to implement programs. But these various modes of participation are not equivalent. Broad rhetoric about resident empowerment and capacity building followed by token or advisory participation of residents leads to disillusionment and loss of interest on the part of residents.

Second, where participation in planning and governance is required, increased support for residents to be effectively engaged is likely to be necessary. This entails both ensuring their participation in sufficient numbers to participate with confidence and attending to the fundamental imbalances in the levels of power and influence with which participants begin. The latter may entail either negotiating a mode of discourse and action that is founded on assumptions and processes with which residents are comfortable (cf. Tauxe 1995) or providing them with information about and training to work effectively with the nature of deliberation and decision making that will guide action. It may also include training for professionals to more effectively work with residents within these contexts.

Third, leadership needs to be supported in different ways, including identifying and promoting leadership that can bridge differences and mediate between resident and other interests.

Finally, expectations for contributions and benefits need to be negotiated and made explicit, and the representative role of organizational participants needs to be made clear. Instrumental collaboration through joint planning is best facilitated when organizational participants are formal representatives of their organization, have authority to speak for and make commitments on behalf of their organization, and are involved in the implementation aspects of their organization's likely contribution. This may mean engaging representatives from different levels of the organization.

These suggestions come from a perspective of presumed bureaucratic dominance and focus on efforts largely catalyzed or significantly influenced by professionals (planners, government officials, foundations) rather than emerging from grassroots movements. They also offer only a partial response to addressing the fundamental dynamics that I have described. But they respond to a common reality, which is reflected in the way that community practice is often organized—and continues to be organized—across a broad range of interventions. They are attempts to draw pragmatic lessons from imperfect practice, recognizing that implementation is by nature problematic, that power dynamics are pervasive, and that processes to promote community change are inherently complex and political.

▶ References

Arnstein, S. R. 1969. A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 35 (4): 216-24.

Baum, H. 2003. Community and consensus: Reality and fantasy in planning. In *Readings in planning theory,* 2nd ed., edited by S. Campbell and S. S. Fainstein, 275-95. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Briggs, X. 1998. Doing democracy up close: Culture, power, and communication in community planning. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 18:1-13.

Brodkin, E. Z. 1990. Implementation as policy politics. In *Implementation and the policy process: Opening up the black box,* edited by D. J. Palumbo and D. J. Calista, 107-18. New York: Greenwood.

———. 2000. Investigating policy's "practical" meaning: Street-level research on welfare policy. Working paper. Chicago: Joint Center for Poverty Research.

Chaskin, R. J., and S. Garg. 1997. The issue of governance in neighborhood-based initiatives. *Urban Affairs Review* 32 (5): 631-61.

Chaskin, R. J., M. L. Joseph, and S. Chipenda-Dansokho. 1997. Implementing comprehensive community development: Possibilities and limitations. *Social Work* 42 (5): 435-44.

Day, D. 1997. Citizen participation in the planning process: An essentially contested concept. *Journal of Planning Literature* 11 (3): 421.

DiMaggio, P. J., and W. W. Powell. 1983. The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review* 48:147-60.

Douglas, J. 1987. Political theories of nonprofit organization. In *The nonprofit sector,* edited by W. Powell, 43-53. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dreier, P. 1996. Community empowerment strategies: The limits and potential of community organizing in urban neighborhoods. *Cityscape* 2 (2): 121-59.

Gittell, M. 1980. *Limits to citizen participation: The decline of community organizations.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Gittell, M., and K. Newman. 1998. Empowerment Zone implementation: Community participation and community capacity. Second year report to the MacArthur Foundation and the CUNY Collaborative Research Program, New York, Howard Samuels State Management and Policy Center at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1971. Technology and science as "ideology." In *Toward a rational society: Student protest, science and politics,* edited by Jürgen Habermas, 81-122. Boston: Beacon.

———. 1981. *The theory of communicative action.* Two volumes. Boston: Beacon.

Halpern, R. 1995. *Rebuilding the inner city: A history of neighborhood initiatives to address poverty in the United States.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Hummel, Ralph P. 1977. *The bureaucratic experience.* New York: St. Martin's Press

Jackson, M. R., and P. Marris. 1996. *Collaborative comprehensive community initiatives: Overview of an emerging community improvement orientation.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Kingsley, G. T., J. B. McNeely, and J. O. Gibson. 1997. *Community building: Coming of age.* Washington, DC: The Development Training Institute, Inc and the Urban Institute.

Knoke, D., and J. Wood 1981. *Organized for action: Commitment in voluntary organizations.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Kubisch, A., P. Brown, R. J. Chaskin, J. Hirota, M. Joseph, H. Richman, and M. Roberts. 1997. *Voices from the field: Learning from comprehensive community initiatives.* Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute.

Lipsky, M. 1980. *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Marquez, B. 2003. Mexican-American political organization and philanthropy: Bankrolling a social movement. *Social Service Review* 77 (3): 329-46.

Milofsky, C. 1987. Neighborhood organizations: A market analogy. In *The nonprofit sector,* edited by W. W. Powell, 277-95. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

———. 1988. *Community organizations: Studies in resource mobilization and exchange.* New York: Oxford University Press.

O'Connor, A. 1999. Swimming against the tide: A brief history of federal policy in poor communities. In *Urban problems and community development,* edited by R. F. Ferguson and W. T. Dickens, 77-138. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

———. 2001. *Poverty knowledge: Social science, social policy, and the poor in twentieth-century U.S. history.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Pfeffer, J., and G. R. Salancik. 1978. *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective.* New York: Harper & Row.

Piven, F. 1966. Participation of residents in neighborhood community action programs. *Social Work* 11 (January): 73-80.

Powell, W., and R. Friedkin. 1987. Organizational change in nonprofit organizations. In *The nonprofit sector,* edited by W. W. Powell, 180-92. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Pressman, J. L., and A. B. Wildavsky. 1984. *Implementation.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rohe, W. M., and L. B. Gates. 1985. *Planning with neighborhoods.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Rothman, J. 1995. Approaches to community intervention. In *Strategies of community intervention,* edited by J. Rothman, J. L. Erlich, and J. E. Tropman. Itasca, IL: Peacock.

Rothschild-Whitt, J. 1979. The collectivist organization: An alternative to rational-bureaucratic models. *American Sociological Review* 44:509-27.

Scavo, C. 1993. The use of participative mechanisms by large U.S. cities. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 15 (1): 93-109.

Stagner, M. W., and M. A. Duran. 1997. Comprehensive community initiatives: Principals, practices, and lessons learned. *Future of Children* 7 (2): 132-40.

Stone, R. 1996. *Core issues in comprehensive community-building initiatives.* Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Tauxe, C. S. 1995. Marginalizing public participation in local planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 61 (4): 471-82.

Tropman, J. E. 2001. Value conflicts and decision making: Analysis and resolution. In *Tactics and techniques of community intervention,* edited by J. E. Tropman, J. L. Erlich, and J. Rothman. Itasca, IL: Peacock.

Weber, M. 1978. *Economy and society,* Two volumes, edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.