

Are We Still Going Through the Empty Ritual of Participation? Inner-City Residents' and Other Grassroots Stakeholders' Perceptions of Public Input and Neighborhood Revitalization

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journals.sagepub.com/home/crs**Robert Mark Silverman** 

University at Buffalo, USA

Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.

University at Buffalo, USA

Li Yin

University at Buffalo, USA

Camden Miller

University at Buffalo, USA

Pascal Buggs

University at Buffalo, USA

Abstract

This article revisits Arnstein's "ladder of citizen participation" focusing on inner-city residents' perceptions of public input in neighborhood revitalization projects. It draws from data collected in Buffalo, New York for a larger project that aimed to address negative externalities caused by neighborhood change. Data were collected using focus groups in neighborhoods in the early stages of revitalization. Nine focus groups took place across three neighborhoods experiencing encroachment from hospitals and universities. Data analysis was guided by standpoint theory, which focuses on amplifying the voices of groups traditionally disenfranchised from planning processes. The findings suggest that the shortcomings of public input identified by Arnstein a half century ago

Corresponding author:

Robert Mark Silverman, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University at Buffalo, 329 Hayes Hall, Buffalo, NY 14214-8030, USA.

Email: rms35@buffalo.edu

remain problematic. Residents continue to perceive limited access to urban planning processes and believe outcomes do not prioritize their interests. This is particularly problematic in minority, working-class neighborhoods when institutionally driven development occurs. Recommendations emphasize enhancing planners' fidelity to strategies that expand citizen control.

Keywords

citizen participation, displacement, neighborhood revitalization, urban planning, urban studies

Introduction

A half century ago, Sherry Arnstein (1969) made the seminal statement about public participation in urban America in her article titled, "A ladder of citizen participation." In that work, she asserts that participation is often an empty ritual. Arnstein had a specific thing in mind when making this assertion, highlighting that:

[P]articipation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the powerholders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo. (Arnstein, 1969: 216)

This observation drives our critical analysis of the public participation process and the recommendations for planning practice that grow out of it. In this article we return to Arnstein's central question, is the public participation process an effective tool for empowering disenfranchised groups? Arnstein produced a stinging critique of public participation in the Community Action Program and the Model Cities Program during her era, which led to a half century of exchange between academics, community organizers, and planning practitioners about how to promote greater community control in the participation process. We revisit this debate and argue that despite sustained academic and professional dialogue, participation continues to be an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. Faced with this quagmire, we reconsider Arnstein's central question as it applies to the contemporary context.

This article begins with a review of selected social science and planning literature relevant to public participation. The literature review focuses on key concepts linked to Arnstein's original critique. The purpose of the literature review is to better illuminate how planners' fidelity to enhancing the efficacy of the participation process is treated in the literature. We believe this is a dimension of public participation discourse that has been somewhat peripheral in prior work. The lack of a critical examination of planners' fidelity to the public participation process has had two implications. First, it has nurtured the false premise that planners are predisposed to value meaningful public participation in planning processes. Second, this assumption has led to a cursory treatment of public participation in the professional education of planners. As a result, planners continue to lack fidelity to public participation processes. When participatory techniques are used, the emphasis tends to be on implementing them in an instrumental manner. In essence, planners tend to see public participation as a means to an end, rather than an organizing principle in the urban planning process. In this article we emphasize the importance of strengthening planners' fidelity to the public participation process. We argue that there is a need for increased advocacy among academics, community organizers, and practitioners to expand planners' fidelity to the public participation process, since it is foundational for broader efforts to increase the scope of community control in planning processes.

After reviewing and reframing existing planning literature on public participation, we describe the methods and data used in our analysis. The research is based on a qualitative analysis of data

collected in Buffalo, New York. These data were collected as part of a research project focused on neighborhood change and displacement. The findings from our analysis explain how a lack of planners' fidelity translates into various facets of what Arnstein describes as the empty ritual of participation. We present evidence that a lack of planners' fidelity transforms public participation into a pro forma exercise where grassroots stakeholders are worn down in routinized meetings and subjected to divide and conquer strategies that culminate in unfulfilled promises from public officials. Building on these findings we explore how planners, with coaxing from progressive academics and community organizers, can intervene and enhance strategies used by grassroots stakeholders to promote greater community control in the public participation process.

“Fidelity is the Sister of Justice” (Horace)

During the 1960s, a number of seminal articles appeared in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* that advocated for greater activism among planners and more meaningful participation by the public in the planning process. Two of these articles have become mainstays in community development and planning education. One is Davidoff's (1965) discussion of advocacy and pluralism in planning, the other is Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation. Together, these articles formed a call to arms for planners, highlighting the importance of planners' fidelity to effective policy making and public participation. Davidoff and Arnstein identify planners as pivotal to empowering disenfranchised groups in the community development and planning processes. Since these contributions were made to the social science and planning literature, subsequent scholars have elaborated on the essential role that planners fill in efforts to promote citizen control in community development and planning.

Shiple and Utz (2012) provide an extensive literature review of the rationale and tools used by planners to promote public participation. Their review encapsulates much of the thinking about public participation since Davidoff's and Arnstein's contributions.¹ Through this analysis they conclude that although the necessity for public participation has become ingrained in the modern planning ethos, how to best apply participatory techniques is not well evaluated or understood. Further, although mandates for participation are found across planning functions, planners typically lack formal training in participatory techniques. In essence, participation is presented as a value in the planning discipline, but the refinement of techniques and the preparation of planners to engage the public is lacking. This suggests that there is a lack of fidelity to public participation as an organizing principle in the planning discipline, and this translates into the hollowing out and ritualization of participation in planning practice.

In her review of the literature on public participation, Roberts (2004) comes to similar conclusions. However, her emphasis is less focused on the refinement of participatory techniques and more focused on the role that citizen participation plays in addressing power differentials in public policy making. She argues that citizen participation “intentionally seeks to level the playing field among the participating social actors” and that it is necessary for planners to invite more grassroots interests to the table as part of any citizen participation process (Roberts, 2004: 343). Roberts goes on to argue that in the contemporary period there is a growing need to expand the scope of participation, since society is confronting increasingly complex problems that entail an inequitable distribution of costs and benefits. She refers to these as “wicked problems” (Roberts, 2004: 340). The prospect of omnipresent wicked problems in public policy discourse makes a lack of planners' fidelity to the public participation process even more problematic. In this respect, Shiple and Utz (2012) and Roberts (2004) echo earlier calls for planners to advocate for disenfranchised groups and to use the public participation process as a tool to redistribute power and benefits from urban development. However, these renewed calls for advocacy have greater urgency due to the changing

policy context and the growing challenges of wicked problems. Such advocacy can be principle driven, as well as focused on the adoptions of stronger mandates for grassroots participation in local planning processes and the garnering of additional resources for planners to use in the implementation of public participation programs (Brody et al., 2003; Chaskin, 2005; Peterman, 2004).

When planners do not fulfill this type of an advocacy role, the public participation process remains relatively inaccessible to grassroots groups. Instead, it is dominated by stakeholders whose privileged status is based on expertise, money, or position, and the process becomes one driven by top-down directives from legislative and executive authority (Roberts, 2004: 343). Numerous empirical studies support this conclusion and link it to broader implications growing out of austerity in contemporary urban settings (e.g. Lederman, 2019; Overfelt, 2012; Rousseau, 2009). At a more programmatic and parochial level, Chaskin's (2005) analysis of comprehensive community initiatives discusses how the tension between grassroots interests driven by democratic principles and public officials operating from a rational planning framework compromise the public participation process. Likewise, Silverman's (2009) case study of Buffalo describes how entrenched patronage politics fosters the political cooptation of public participation in the governance of non-profit housing organizations. Similarly, McGovern's (2013: 310) analysis of waterfront planning in Philadelphia found that even progressive local regimes lack fidelity to public participation, and consequently "scale back outreach efforts, co-opting citizen advocacy, and manage public forums in ways that dampened critical reflection and deliberation."

Our analysis builds on these observations by highlighting how more circumscribed approaches to public participation are not simply a reflection of benign adjustments made to the participation process in order to accommodate status quo interests. Instead, we argue that more circumscribed approaches to public participation reflect a lack of fidelity to grassroots participation itself. In essence, we argue that there is no satisfactory middle ground between citizen control and nonparticipation. As Arnstein's ladder suggests, the middle ground is occupied by various degrees of tokenism. Others have built on Arnstein's ladder and suggest ways to bridge the gap between tokenism and full participation. For instance, Connor (1988) offers extensions to Arnstein's ladder, identifying the need for capacity building, technical assistance, and the formal empowerment of grassroots stakeholders in the public participation process. Likewise, Silverman's (2005) extensions to Arnstein's ladder show how public participation becomes less instrumental as grassroots stakeholders gain greater control of agenda setting and decision-making processes. This article offers another extension to Arnstein's ladder. We argue that planners' fidelity to public participation is an essential supportive structure for citizen control. In essence, advocacy for citizen control in the planning processes cannot be sustained without planners exhibiting unwavering fidelity to public participation.

Although there is a need for planners to advocate for citizen control of the planning process in all contexts, we argue that it is paramount in an inner-city context, particularly in places that have experienced systematic, structural decline due to deindustrialization which fall into what Rousseau (2009) classifies as "loser cities." Arnstein recognized this in her seminal work, which focused on the limited scope of public participation in Community Action Programs and Model Cities Programs. During the decade following the publication of her work, these programs were dismantled. However, planning for inner-city revitalization has remained a focal point in debates concerning community control of the public participation process. Early on, in the wake of waning support for community control of the inner-city revitalization process, Worthy (1977) chronicled how grassroots interests asserted themselves to challenge hospitals, universities, and other institutional investors that were pursuing neighborhood revitalization. More contemporaneously, grassroots advocates have been on the frontlines of efforts to voice opposition to a lack of planners' fidelity to the citizen participation process and promote more equitable inner-city revitalization (Baxamusa, 2008; Danley and Weaver, 2018;

Overfelt, 2012; Silverman et al., 2007; Silverman et al., 2014). Our analysis builds on this stream of thought in the literature, presenting a more focused analysis of how the lack of planners' fidelity to the citizen participation process is reflected in the scope of techniques adopted to engage the public. We also examine how residents' and grassroots stakeholders' perceptions of their impact on revitalization strategies in inner-city neighborhoods reflect the limited scope of planners' fidelity. Our analysis focuses on minority, working-class neighborhoods where institutionally driven development is occurring, in order to generate recommendations focused on enhancing planners' fidelity to public participation strategies that expand citizen control.

Measuring Perceptions of Public Participation in an Inner-City Context

This article draws from data collected in Buffalo for a larger research project called "Turning the Corner", which was carried out in collaboration with the Urban Institute and partners from other cities across the USA (Taylor et al., 2018). The focus of that project was to identify planning strategies to address negative externalities caused by neighborhood change and heightened risks of displacement due to revitalization. Data used in this analysis were collected through a series of focus groups with renters, homeowners, and other stakeholders in three minority, working-class neighborhoods in Buffalo that were identified as being in the early stages of neighborhood revitalization. The three neighborhoods examined in this analysis were identified in collaboration with city-wide stakeholders from local government, the non-profit development community, and higher education using an adaptation of the methodology developed by Lisa Bates (2013) to identify neighborhoods at risk of gentrification and displacement.

After selecting the three study neighborhoods, the research team worked with a community advisory panel composed of representatives from each of the study neighborhoods to identify renters, homeowners, and other neighborhood stakeholders to recruit for focus groups. A total of nine focus groups were held across the three neighborhoods experiencing encroachment due to institutional investments. Separate focus groups were held in each neighborhood with renters, homeowners, and other stakeholders. This was done to capture the perspectives of renters, homeowners, and other grassroots stakeholders respectively. Table 1 displays the characteristics of the focus group participants. The focus groups were held during the fall of 2017, each had an average of 6.4 participants, and each lasted approximately two hours. About two-thirds of the focus group participants were women, senior citizens, and African American respectively. The data collected from the focus groups were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using ATLAS.ti software. The analysis was guided by standpoint theory, which focuses on amplifying the voices of groups traditionally disenfranchised from the planning and policy processes (Adler and Jermier, 2005; Anderson, 2017; Sprague, 2016).

The three neighborhoods (Fruit Belt, Lower West Side, and Ellicott) in which focus group data were collected for this analysis are shown in Figure 1. The neighborhoods are all located adjacent to downtown Buffalo and large anchor institutions like hospitals and universities. Although the pace of revitalization and gentrification in each neighborhood is somewhat unique, all three neighborhoods are impacted by similar drivers that underlie neighborhood change. In each neighborhood, anchor-driven revitalization is occurring (Ehlenz, 2016; Silverman et al., 2014). For instance, the Fruit Belt neighborhood is impacted by the expansion of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC) and the University at Buffalo Medical School. The Lower West Side neighborhood is impacted by the expansion of D'Youville College and development in downtown Buffalo. Similarly, the Ellicott neighborhood is impacted by development adjacent to downtown Buffalo. Combined, revitalization in each neighborhood is part-and-parcel of a broader downtown regeneration effort emanating from initiatives led by the public sector and other large institutional stakeholders (Taylor

Table 1. Characteristics of the focus group participants (N=58).

Variable	Value
Average focus group size	6.4
Percent homeowners	34.5
Percent renters	29.3
Percent other stakeholders	36.2
Percent male	38
Percent female	62
Percent age 18-35	8
Percent age 36-64	32
Percent age 65 and over	60
Percent White	22.5
Percent Black	63.3
Percent Latino	10.2
Percent other	4

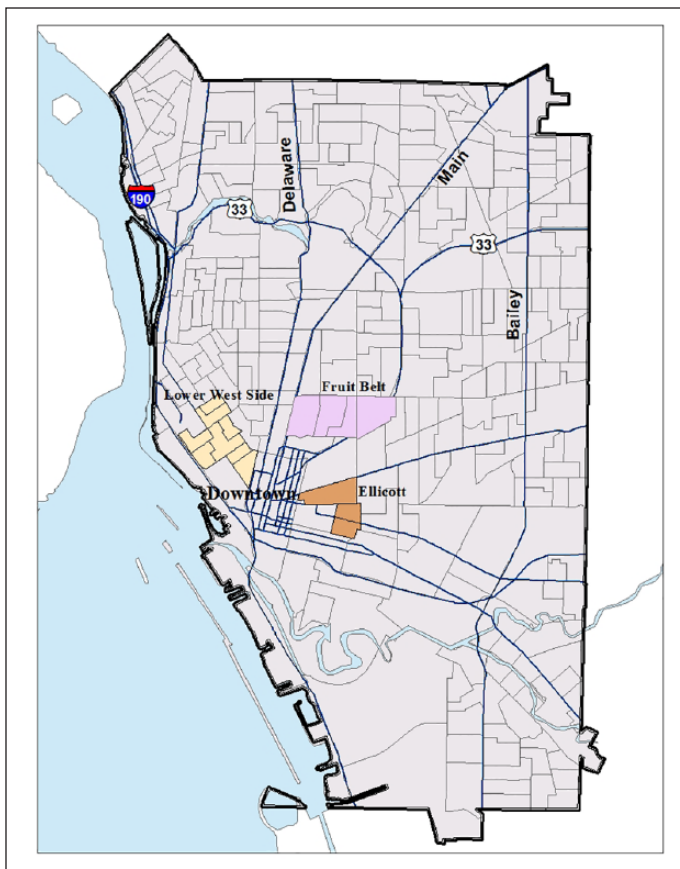
**Figure 1.** Three study neighborhoods in which focus groups were held.

Table 2. Population and housing characteristics of the study neighborhoods, the City of Buffalo, and Erie County.

	2010			2016		
	Neighborhoods	Buffalo	Erie County	Neighborhoods	Buffalo	Erie County
Total population	12,494	266,012	921,202	10,528	258,989	922,129
Age						
Under 18 years	3,398	64,961	204,786	2,255	59,181	191,332
<i>Percent under 18 years</i>	26.4	24.4	22.2	21.4	22.9	20.7
Median age	33.1	33.9	40.0	36.0	32.9	40.4
Race						
White	4,012	137,897	741,195	3,656	124,581	722,667
<i>Percent White</i>	32.1	51.8	80.5	34.7	48.1	78.4
Black	6,170	102,236	123,134	4,324	96,576	123,382
<i>Percent Black</i>	49.4	38.4	13.4	41.1	37.3	13.4
American Indian	161	1721	4979	51	1094	4353
<i>Percent American Indian</i>	1.3	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.5
Asian	117	6,686	22,858	97	12,611	30,607
<i>Percent Asian</i>	0.9	2.5	2.5	0.9	4.9	3.3
Hispanic ethnicity						
Hispanic	3,443	24,177	39,332	3,481	28,118	46,752
<i>Percent Hispanic</i>	27.6	9.1	4.3	33.1	10.9	5.1
Total housing units	7,098	139,174	420,432	6,312	130,977	421,361
Vacant	1,542	26,330	42,352	1,300	21,309	38,539
<i>Percent vacant</i>	21.7	18.9	10.1	20.6	16.3	9.2
Occupied housing units	5,556	112,844	378,080	5,012	109,668	382,822
Renter occupied	4,049	64,017	127,842	3,642	64,274	133,007
<i>Percent renter occupied</i>	72.9	56.7	33.8	72.7	58.6	34.7
Median value owner occupied	\$60,751	\$65,700	\$117,700	\$92,370	\$72,600	\$134,600
Median gross rent	\$493	\$646	\$686	\$584	\$710	\$752

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey five year estimates for 2010 and 2016.

et al., 2018). This pattern of neighborhood change driven by downtown regeneration is similar to those described by Adams (2014) and Mallach (2018). For this reason, we aggregated data from our neighborhoods in order to capture focus group participants' overarching perceptions of citizen participation in the neighborhood revitalization process.² Table 2 displays population and housing characteristics of the study neighborhoods, the city of Buffalo, and Erie County, New York. Table 3 summarizes trends between 2010 and 2016 in the data across the three geographies. Examining the data for these three geographies allows for an analysis of core-city neighborhood change with reference to the municipal and regional context in which it is embedded.

Several things stand out about population trends in Tables 2 and 3. First, the overall population declined most dramatically in the study neighborhoods, where 15.7 percent of the population was lost between 2010 and 2016. This decline was largely attributed to the loss of residents under the age of 18, resulting in a noticeable increase in the median age of the population between 2010 and

Table 3. Change in the study neighborhoods, the City of Buffalo, and Erie County, 2010–2016.

	Change 2010–2016			Percent change 2010–2016		
	Neighbor- hoods	Buffalo	Erie County	Neighbor- hoods	Buffalo	Erie County
Total population	-1,966	-7,023	927	-15.7	-2.7	0.1
Age						
Under 18 years	-1,043	-5708	-13,454	-31.6	-9.8	-7.0
Median age	2.9	-1.0	0.4	8.8	-3.0	1.0
Race						
White	-356	-13,316	-18,528	-8.9	-10.7	-2.6
Black	-1,846	-5,660	248	-29.9	-5.9	0.2
American Indian	-110	-627	-626	-68.3	-57.3	-14.4
Asian	-20	5,925	7749	-17.1	47.0	25.3
Hispanic ethnicity						
Hispanic	38	3,941	7,420	1.1	14.0	15.9
Total housing units	-786	-8,197	929	-11.1	-5.9	0.2
Vacant	-242	-5,021	-3,813	-15.7	-19.1	-9.0
Occupied housing units	-544	-3,176	4,742	-9.8	-2.8	1.3
Renter occupied	-407	257	5,165	-10.1	0.4	4.0
Median value owner occupied	\$31,619	\$6,900	\$16,900	52.0	10.5	14.4
Median gross rent	\$91	\$64	\$66	18.5	9.9	9.6

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey five year estimates for 2010 and 2016.

2016. The racial composition also shifted most dramatically in the study neighborhoods where the largest racial group, African Americans, declined by 29.9 percent between 2010 and 2016.

Some distinct trends related to housing characteristics were also visible in Tables 2 and 3. First, the number of housing units declined most dramatically, by 11.1 percent, in the study neighborhoods. Moreover, despite losing 15.7 percent of its vacant units between 2010 and 2016, the vacancy rate remained higher than the city and county at 20.6 percent in 2016. The study area was predominantly renter occupied, even though the number of rental units declined by 10.1 percent between 2010 and 2016. Most noticeable, the study neighborhood experienced the highest increases in median property values and rents of the three geographies, with property values increasing by 52 percent and rents increasing by 18.5 percent between 2010 and 2016.

The data in Tables 2 and 3 suggest that the population in the study neighborhoods became older and lost minority residents at a more rapid rate than the rest of the city and region. Tables 2 and 3 also suggest that the study neighborhoods experienced more pronounced increases in housing cost and rents as anchor-based revitalization unfolded between 2010 and 2016. These changes were noticeable when compared with the rest the city and region. Two factors helped to explain the spike in housing costs and rents in the study neighborhoods (Taylor et al., 2018). First, the reduction in the total number of housing units in the study neighborhoods was largely the product of stepped up demolition. This had a disproportionate impact on the supply of lower cost housing units. Second, market-rate housing made up a large portion of renovated and newly construction housing units in the study neighborhoods. Within this distinct inner-city revitalization context, focus group participants' perceptions provided us with key insights about the relationship between planners' fidelity and citizen control of the public participation process.

A Lack of Fidelity to the Citizen Participation Process

Our analysis argues that a process characterized by what Arnstein describes as nonparticipation and tokenism is a reflection of a lack of planners' fidelity to the promotion of full participation. This argument does not discount work done to encourage the adoption of deliberative planning and other techniques to augment citizen input (Creighton, 2005; Evans-Cowley and Hollander, 2010; Forester, 1999; Jones, 1990; Overfelt, 2012). Despite genuine efforts by some to design tools and techniques to enhance public participation, we stress that these innovations remain relatively peripheral and have not penetrated planning curriculum and practice in ways that encourage what Arnstein identified as citizen control. Moreover, as Rousseau (2009) and Lederman (2019) argue, there is a growing tendency for the scope of public participation to be abridged due to local fiscal constraints, market-driven approaches to public policy, and broader neoliberal paradigms that have become part of the status quo in local policy discourse, particularly in 'loser cities'. In this section, we describe how public participation falls short of promoting citizen control and is transformed into a pro forma exercise where grassroots stakeholders' concerns are muted in ritualized meetings. These meetings and other parts of the process function to pit divergent interests against each other and insulate the status quo. At the end of the process, grassroots participants are dissatisfied, disempowered, and view broken promises from public officials as evidence of limited efficacy.

Citizen Participation as a Pro Forma Exercise

Focus group participants from neighborhoods in Buffalo that were in the early stages of neighborhood revitalization perceived a lack of planners' fidelity to the public participation process. One common perception was that the public participation process was treated as a pro forma exercise. One grassroots stakeholder made this comment about how public officials approached citizen participation:

They do it as a formality because it's a requirement as a part of their proposal. They have to have community input. I've seen them put together a small group just to satisfy that requirement, "we've met with the community and everything was good," and they just move on. But the plans are already drawn.

This comment reflected a general perception among focus group participants that they were consistently left out of the early stages of the planning process, and that public participation was simply done to notify residents of plans that were already finalized in other settings. As one grassroots stakeholder observed:

We sat at a meeting recently and were told that there was no plan. But, you have a developer, you have a planner, you have all these pieces together. But, you don't have a plan? I've been around too long to believe that. I know better. There is a plan. But we can't get information. You want us to be a part of this focus, but you don't really want to tell us what your plan is and we're supposed to buy into it. It's just not fair.

There was a clear perception among the focus group participants that public participation was used as a tool to get the community to "buy into" neighborhood revitalization plans that grassroots stakeholders were not involved in drafting. Another focus group participant expressed acrimony about this dilemma, pointing out that "the community doesn't really have a voice, even when you sit at a table with somebody, the plan's already drawn, it's pretty much just a formality."

The perception that citizen participation came late in the planning process, after critical decisions were made by planners, elected officials, and developers was seen as prima facie evidence of a lack of planners' fidelity. In addition to the time or point at which grassroots stakeholders were invited to meetings and involved in the planning process, focus group participants also argued that

the structure of public participation impeded grassroots input. In particular, focus group participants observed that planners applied participatory tools and techniques in an instrumental manner without fidelity to using them to achieve citizen control. One homeowner made this comment about how public meetings were structured:

I remember going downtown and they've got these beautiful blueprints. They're going to draw this development. And it looks great. And I thought, "we're having a meeting, but there's no meeting, people are just walking around looking at these boards." And I'm walking through and I went back and looked again. And then I went back and looked again. And I had to go and get the fella and I said to him, "excuse me, can you tell me what's there?" And he looks at me and says, "um well, send me your information and I'll send it down to City Hall and they'll send you back an answer." And I said to him, "do you know there's a historic neighborhood that sits behind there, you don't know that?" He had no clue. You know what they sent me back from the City? They sent me back a listing of the dates when they were going to show this blueprint thing again at other locations. So now I'm Chicken Little running around with my head cut off.

Focus group participants felt that public meetings were structured around existing plans in which residents and other grassroots stakeholders lacked input. In part, they perceived that public participation occurred late in the planning process. Moreover, they perceived that once residents and grassroots stakeholders were given access to the public participation process, their efforts to influence plans were often thwarted by planners who lacked fidelity to the process. Instead of structuring public participation in a manner where grassroots stakeholders were empowered and engaged in plan making, they were simply invited to view a prepackaged plan. For grassroots stakeholders, participation was reduced to a spectator sport.

Other stakeholders commented on how the lack of planners' fidelity to public participation has been the City's modus operandi for decades. One renter described attending planning meetings over the years as a form of "deja vu", where similar presentations were recycled with limited opportunities for public input. Repeated cycles of truncating the scope of public participation in the planning process were perceived as an approach designed to wear down residents and discourage future participation. As one homeowner put it, "I know people that have been going to meetings 30, 40 years and nothing has ever happened, so why should I continue to go?" The institutional memory of public participation being treated as a pro forma exercise led to disillusionment and distrust among the majority of residents and institutional stakeholders.

Dividing and Conquering

In addition to viewing citizen participation as a pro forma exercise, focus group participants viewed the public participation process as designed to divide and conquer grassroots interests. Rather than using public participation as a community organizing tool to strengthen grassroots coalitions, focus group participants perceived planners to be using the public participation process to exploit community cleavages and weaken grassroots opposition. One renter observed that the public participation process allowed public officials "to just knock you off at any time." The renter went on to describe how this was facilitated by the fragmentation of grassroots interests:

The people don't have the mind to come collectively in numbers, to make it more profound. We get dismissed because we're not taken seriously. Then, we have like five different coalitions. I mean, I can see block clubs. But at least at some point in time, you have to collaborate and come together, and be on the same page, to get some results.

Instead of using the public participation process to organize communities and forge grassroots coalitions, planners left community groups to their own devices. This led to increased fragmentation of grassroots interests within and between neighborhoods. Because of limited levels of planners' fidelity to the public participation process, participatory techniques were not used by planners to organize residents or encourage grassroots collaboration. In contrast, focus group participants viewed planners, elected officials, and developers as sharing a consensus and being unified in their vision and approach to neighborhood revitalization. By the time public participation occurred in the policy process, institutional stakeholders had forged a unified voice and presented it to the public for buy-in. At that point in the process, grassroots groups were at a disadvantage and forced to compete with one another when negotiating side deals with institutional stakeholders.

In addition to perceiving institutional stakeholders as unified, focus group participants believed that planners, elected officials, and developers had an advantage in terms of knowledge and expertise. In contrast, focus group participants felt that planners made little effort to provide grassroots groups with technical support to bridge the gap in knowledge and expertise. One renter made this comment about the lack of a level playing field in the planning process:

You put all these different people and organizations together to try to iron something out, and these people didn't even have any knowledge about building, about codes, about the development. They didn't have any background in development or building. They didn't have any background in parks and streets. Nobody knew what they were doing. Some people may have read a book or read something online and thought they had the answers. This caused a lot of confusion here. So the City is the incubator of all this confusion that's going on here. So, it looks like Black people here can't get together and get a solution to something that they don't even know the beginning of the answer to. So they can say, "okay they couldn't come up with an answer or solution, so we're going to do it our way."

The lack of fidelity to the citizen participation process meant that planners did not assist grassroots groups in building capacity and developing technical expertise. Limited capacity and technical expertise reduced their ability to engage in the planning process effectively. This lack of technical support led some to perceive that grassroots groups were being set up to fail.

However, the degree to which grassroots stakeholders were frustrated with the process varied. Those with more experience engaging in the planning process were more apt to be disenchanted, while those newer to the process retained some level of trust in it. Rather than viewing public participation as a mechanism to build trust in the planning process, focus group participants felt that it was designed to wear people down and divide grassroots interests. As focus group participants gained more experience with public participation, their trust in local government waned. One renter made this comment about the deterioration of the community's trust in the City and the public participation process:

You have people who are ready to mobilize and you have other people who are saying, "well this is what they said, let's give them time," and then they wear the whole crowd down. As they wear people out, they are moving people out, because more and more time is going by. So they are dividing and conquering us. Some of us believe in the system. That it will work. That we just have to work with it. Other people see the reality as they created this problem. So we're going to the same people who created the problem expecting them to provide a solution. But all they are doing is providing us with smoke and mirrors that keeps us divided.

In contrast to what would be expected in settings where there was a high degree of planners' fidelity to public participation, focus group participants became less trusting in government with increased experience with the public participation process. The use of participatory tools and techniques to capitalize on grassroots divisions was perceived as a conscious strategy deployed by

planners, elected officials, and developers in order to wear down opposition to proposals for neighborhood redevelopment. This type of misappropriation of the participatory process is illustrative of a lack of planners' fidelity. As one renter put it, "some of us don't take the time to see the big picture and we get a little complacent, then we get steamrolled every time, and then we wake up at the end of the 11th hour and say, 'oh, what happened?'"

Broken Promises

We argue that treating citizen participation as a pro forma exercise and the use of divide and conquer tactics are two outgrowths of a lack of planners' fidelity. The capstone to this approach to disempowering grassroots groups in the planning process is the failure to implement proposed concessions to grassroots stakeholders when plans are adopted. Several focus group participants described how in the past planners and public officials had promised amenities such as: improved street lighting; street and sidewalk repairs; new grocery stores; small business assistance; and new community centers to accompany neighborhood redevelopment. However, it was widely perceived that these amenities never came to fruition.

Repeated experiences of watching private development occur with the endorsement of the public sector, while amenities that had been promised to accompany it were not delivered, led to disillusionment. Focus group participants saw a close coupling between these types of promises and the existing public participation process. Often, amenities linked to proposed development projects were introduced during public meetings when neighborhood revitalization plans were presented and community buy-in was sought. However, focus group participants described how linkages and other concessions never materialized after they were offered during public meetings. As one renter put it:

I think when developers decided to come into a community, and if the community is forthright, if they're there sitting at the table, at the drawing board, and make some very profound requests, and they don't come to fruition, it's kind of disheartening.

These outcomes were perceived as evidence of a lack of planners' fidelity to the participation process and the inability of public officials to "keep their word" and deliver on promises. In essence, planners had little fidelity to using public participation as a tool to negotiate for community benefits during the neighborhood revitalization process. Instead, focus group participants felt that public participation was used to manipulate the process and the level of grassroots involvement in it. As a homeowner put it, "they're making a lot of promises like typical politicians, but nothing ever follows through."

From Patronage Politics to Citizen Control

Confronted with developer-driven planning and citizen participation processes, some grassroots stakeholders described how they attempted to influence neighborhood redevelopment plans through direct contact with elected officials, leveraging insider information, and accessing informal patronage channels. Falling back on these types of traditional political tactics was strategic in an environment where public participation processes were perceived to be ineffective. As one homeowner pointed out,

"I do have my little employee badge from my Preservation Board that I sit on at City Hall, but it also gives you a lot of information about what people are doing in your neighborhood that nobody tells you about."

Other focus group participants described how they engaged in direct political action by attending Common Council meetings, maintaining a local media presence, and engaging in protests. As one renter observed, these types of public activities had some degree of effectiveness since, “the squeaky wheel gets oiled.”

Notwithstanding the relative effectiveness of traditional political tactics, other focus group participants recognized that efforts to increase grassroots influence in the planning process through these types of individual actions were somewhat disjointed and short-lived. They argued that there was a need for more sustained, institutionalized forms of political engagement to build a grassroots powerbase in the city. This entailed strengthening neighborhood associations, encouraging community-based nonprofits to be more engaged in advocacy, and forging partnerships with like-minded people in larger institutions. Focus group participants indicated that a nascent foundation for a grassroots powerbase was forming in the city, but this was an incremental and unfinished progression. As one grassroots stakeholder observed:

I think there is a sense of community. The leadership has to be attuned to that. There has to be a working relationship between those like developers and others. The political agenda. The community development agenda. There has to be a sense of community where you have community-based organizations, where you have people who have come together because they see the value in rebuilding and reinvesting in their community.

Despite movement in this direction, the development of a grassroots powerbase cannot take place in a vacuum. In addition to building the capacity of grassroots organizations, enhancing nonprofit advocacy, and forging institutional partnerships, we argue that planners must exhibit explicit and continued fidelity to enhancing citizen control in the public participation process.

As described in our analysis, planners need to proactively invite grassroots participation at all stages in the planning process in order to achieve the type of citizen control Arnstein advocated for half a century ago. The expansion of public participation should focus on addressing the shortcomings of the process identified in our analysis. For instance, planners need to institutionalize participation earlier in the neighborhood redevelopment process and bring grassroots interests to the table when agenda setting is in its earliest stages. Planners need to ensure that public meetings are more than pro forma exercises and that the citizen participation process is not structured in ways that divide and conquer grassroots interests. To achieve this, planners need to reengage in community organizing and capacity building as a precursor to the planning process for neighborhood revitalization. This is essential since the citizen participation process begins long before planning for neighborhood redevelopment is initiated. Community organizing and capacity building are necessary tools to level the playing field and equip grassroots stakeholders with the requisite knowledge and expertise to fully participate in the planning process. Making community organizing more central to the work that planners do also strengthens the foundation for planners’ fidelity to public participation.

The expansion of the participation process requires the restoration of planners’ fidelity to the promotion of citizen control, which is built on well-organized grassroots groups with the knowledge and capacity to engage at every stage of the planning process. In order to promote a greater emphasis on community organizing and public participation in planning practice, greater attention needs to be paid to the core principles of equity and advocacy planning during the formal education of planners. Unfortunately, urban planning curricula and academic training often falls short of achieving this. As Harris (2015: 1) found, although planning students

... care about issues related to social justice and equity and [are] interested in incorporating those issues into their professional practice ... graduate academic instruction may fall short in supporting students with the useful integration of social justice and equity issues into their professional practice.

A critical component to build planners' fidelity to using participation for promoting citizen control of the planning process is the re-centering of it in ethical codes and professional training.

Strengthening planners' fidelity to full participation will provide practicing planners with some insulation from potential backlash that they may encounter from developers and elected officials who are resistant to expanding citizen control in the planning process. The inculcation of planners' fidelity to public participation in professional norms and codes of ethics also insulates planners from pressure to acquiesce to the demands of institutional stakeholders. In addition to institutionalizing fidelity to citizen control as a core principle of planning practice, there is also a need for stronger mandates for participation at federal, state, and local levels. As Brody et al. (2003) found, strong mandates for citizen participation result in greater access to the planning process for grassroots stakeholders. Supportive infrastructure in the form of professional norms and legal mandates is a necessary component to enhance planners' fidelity to participation in the planning process. This supportive infrastructure bolsters planners' fidelity, which forms a foundation for marshaling in citizen control and ending the empty ritual of participation.

In addition to increased advocacy among academics, community organizers, and practitioners to expand planners' fidelity to the public participation process, this article had identified new avenues for research to advance this work. Building on Harris' (2015) results, future researchers need to examine the curricula of professional planning programs more systematically to understand how content related to the public participation process is delivered. This type of analysis would include the collection of archival data from academic programs, as well as qualitative data collection with students, faculty, and members of professional organizations that are involved in the accreditation process. Similarly, our analysis focused on the perceptions of grassroots stakeholders, however there is little empirical analysis of planners' perceptions of the public participation process or analysis that measures their fidelity to it. The data for this article were drawn from a larger project where we interacted with planners, and through those interactions we observed instances where planners were resistant to the use of participatory techniques and where some planners questioned the veracity of the perceptions of grassroots stakeholders. However, to fully understand the basis of these attitudes and their implications for planners' fidelity to the public participation process, a more systematic analysis is needed. That type of analysis would include participant observation research and analysis of how planners implement public participation processes, as well as qualitative interviews with planners that focus on identifying factors affecting their level of fidelity to those processes. We believe these lines of inquiry represent some next steps that would support the efforts of academics, community organizers, and practitioners to advocate for increased planners' fidelity to the public participation process.

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Notes

1. In their literature review, Shipley and Utz (2012) provide a detailed taxonomy of the empirical and theoretical work done on public participation. Their analysis spans over four decades of scholarship. It

includes the meta-analysis of over 160 articles that cut across twenty-eight theoretical constructs. This review provides useful background to our analysis, but a point-by-point discussion of it is beyond the scope of this article.

2. The decision to aggregate the data across the three neighborhoods was, in part, influenced by focus group participants' predilection to draw comparisons and reference across the neighborhoods. This signaled that changes occurring at the individual neighborhood level were linked to those emanating from broader downtown regeneration efforts.
3. Launched in January 2016, the project piloted a research model that monitors neighborhood change, drives informed government action, and supports displacement prevention and inclusive revitalization. Local teams in Buffalo, Detroit, Milwaukee, Phoenix, and the Twin Cities conducted independent research to understand neighborhood change and displacement risk in their communities. The Urban Institute, funded by the Kresge Foundation, is synthesizing lessons across the five cities. For more information, see <http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/turningthecorner>.

ORCID iD

Robert Mark Silverman  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2155-7871>

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