



Community Participation in Regeneration and Development

Andrew MacLaran
The Centre for Urban & Regional Studies
Head of Geography, School of Natural Sciences, TCD

- UK: 1970s economic stagnation led to a reduction in the power of planning
 - **Permissory**, power lying in the approval of planning applications
 - Power reduced as few development applications
- “**Planners now appear as rather weak, perhaps irrelevant, pawns in an economic and political environment which is much more hostile than it was twenty years ago**” (Goldsmith, 1980)
- Urban planning had become an inconsequential administrative exercise

- **1980s neoliberal politics** provided the context in which urban planning changed under ‘**Thatcherism**’ (UK), ‘**Reaganomics**’ (USA) and neoliberal policies in Australia & NZ
- Role of the state (central & local government) became **more overtly** geared to **servicing the interests of capital**
- Increasingly, **urban planning** became infected with an **ethos of entrepreneurialism** in the 1980s
 - Characterised by new and more **flexible forms of engagement** between planners and developers
 - Involving **fiscal incentives, outsourcing & PPPs (Public-Private Partnerships)**

- Created
 - a **RELIANCE** on private-sector participation to achieve plans
 - thereby obliged planning to **COMPLY** with the goals & interests of private-sector profitability
- Thus, magically, the ‘**viability**’ of public policy became transformed into the facilitation of private-sector **PROFITABILITY**

- Achieved by ensuring that
 - **plans conformed to developers profitability considerations**
 - by ‘**pump-priming**’ public-sector expenditure on infrastructures
 - or **subsidising** development costs through **fiscal incentives**

- In a period of intensifying competition between cities, the imperative was **city marketing**
 - “**selling**” the city to attract international capital
- **City planning** became part of a strategic process guiding urban development according to **agendas set by urban ‘boosterism’ lobbies**
 - business and real estate sector
- **Strategic alliances** were forged between **urban planning**, the economic **growth lobby** and the forces of **property development**
 - **To re-invent the image (and reality)** of the city
 - To create an urban landscape which was **iconographic of economic success, growth and change** (“**Can-Do City**”)

- **Local government functions frequently by-passed altogether**
 - Key functions vested in alternative, often centralised /quasi-private **agencies (CHDDA, TBR etc)**
 - Planners functions within Dublin Corporation further marginalised by **Inner-City Development Team**
- **Urban planning increasingly reinvented as a form of development planning**, locked into a **pro-growth agenda**
- **Broader social, cultural and environmental objectives marginalised or diluted**
 - overridden by a centralised agenda of **competition, growth and entrepreneurialism**

Simultaneously, we have had 10-years of concerted effort at “participation” by Dublin local authorities

- ‘*Let’s Hear it for Dublin!*’
- A dedicated Community Development Department
- Publication of ‘*Dublin: A City of Possibilities*’
- Integrated Area Plans

- These **proclaimed** a new era of **active citizenship and community participation** in Dublin.
- Engagement with public was extensive
 - But the **format** appears often to have precluded communities from meaningful input into policy....
- “these initiatives served as **smokescreens, while development, under the newly flexible development plan, continued apace**” [Former DCC Chief Planning Officer]

Research Context

- Creation of new **regeneration authorities** (e.g. Ballymun Renewal, Dublin Docklands Development Authority, Temple Bar Renewal)
- The introduction of new planning schemes (**Integrated Area Plans**)
- New structures for social-housing renewal, involving **Public-Private Partnerships**

Background Research

- Research sponsored by
 - **The Combat Poverty Agency**
 - **Centre for Urban & Regional Studies TCD**
- Research team working under advice from a panel of 12
 - Senior Planning Adviser, Dept. of Environment
 - former Chief Planning Officer of DCC
 - A community-based planner
 - Academics from Planning, Sociology & Property (TCD, UCD, DIT)
 - Community workers & community activists
 - Combat Poverty Agency

- 7 Case studies
- Interviews with policy-makers, planners, urban managers, community leaders and community workers :
 - **Dublin waste-to-energy project**, Ringsend (incinerator)
 - **Dublin Docklands regeneration**
 - DDDA & Community Liaison Committee
 - **2 Integrated Area Plans (IAPs)**
 - Liberties-Coombe IAP
 - Tallaght IAP
 - **3 social housing renewal schemes**
 - St. Michael’s estate (Dublin)
 - Ballymun (Dublin)
 - Ballybeg Estate (Waterford)

- All the participation **initiatives originated with urban managers**
 - *Praiseworthy.....BUT....*
- None had sought input from communities at an early stage regarding
 - Either the **format** for participation
 - Or the **function** which participation would play
- These were pre-determined
 - **communities had to accept the rules** if they were to enter the process
- So, from their very origins, the 'participation' being envisaged was very **narrowly defined**.

PROBLEMS WITH PARTICIPATION

- **Some** communities had a **positive and rewarding** experience of participation
- This was **not** the experience of the **majority** and **none** reported satisfaction with **every** aspect of participation
- Communities typically identified **enormous deficiencies** in the participation process, creating huge dissatisfaction, disillusionment and, sometimes, feelings of **utter betrayal**
 - Leading to political radicalisation of many participants

1. Timing of Participation

- Community participation was often sought only **after** key strategic decisions had been taken (St. Michael's, Ringsend, Ballybeg)
- Absence of disadvantaged communities from strategic planning
 - meant many **key decisions had already been made** before the views, concerns and interests of communities was sought.

2. Past Experience

- Previous unsatisfactory experience in dealing with local-authorities militated against engagement (Ringsend, DDDA).

"As far as DCC is concerned, it's easier to ask forgiveness than request permission"

– Mr. Aidan Smith, Balbutcher-Balcurris Forum, *Directions for Social Housing in Dublin City Conference*, Nov. 2004)

- Some pointed to a **clear but slow change** in local-authority attitudes to participation (Ballybeg, Tallaght - but none from DCC area!)

3. Different Concepts of Participation

- Communities often entered into participation with **much wider aims** than local authority officers were willing to concede
 - who seemed often to pursue an **agenda of protecting private-sector profitability** (St. Michaels, DDDA, Liberties IAP, Ballymun).

- Some thought the motive for engaging in participation was a **'public-relations'** exercise
- Some felt that the council was simply **'going through the motions'**
- While the council's **language had changed** to appear more open to involving communities, this was **not accompanied by a change in practice**.

4. Community's Capacity to Engage

- The **lack of expertise** in dealing with planning, architecture and property development was a ubiquitous obstacle
(St. Michael's, Ringsend, DDDA, Liberties IAP, Ballybeg)

Fundamental limitations on capacity:

- **Absence of resources**
- **Lack of access to independent technical advice**
- **Lack of informal access to networks of appropriate professionals**
- The **formality** of consultation meetings
- The **lack of allowance given to inexperience** of community representatives

- But **some** organisations (DDDA) had gone to considerable lengths to facilitate genuine participation
- While in Ringsend, the scale **information overload** was considered a major problem

5. Attitude of those in Authority

- Tendency to privilege 'expert' information over local knowledge & understanding
- Anger at the **attitudes of superiority & authoritarianism** evident in community treatment by managers and professionals

- Participants from the Four Cities Project soon discovered that the **reality of Irish urban planning bore little resemblance to what they had been led to expect**
(Liberties IAP)

6. Shortcomings of the Participation Process

- Included serious **structural deficiencies** ranging down to the absence of simple **common-sense** procedures
 - These indicate that little consideration had been given by officers to likely problems.

- eg: **Failure to record oral contributions** from the floor and to rely only on participants' *written* comments is not appropriate for communities with low literacy skills.

- The manner in which community **groups** and **community representatives were selected** for participation was sometimes not transparent
(Ringsend, DDDA, Liberties IAP).

- Substitution of promised IAP **Steering Committee** (directive, agenda-setting and decision-making role) by a **Monitoring Committee** (observer role) was **never justified/explained** (Liberties IAP).
– Transformed into an *ex post facto* **rubber stamp**
- The **terms of reference** of participation bodies often **vague** or never formally established (Liberties IAP).
- IAP Monitoring Committee meetings sometimes **timetabled** to discuss matters **already decided** in meetings of the Council (Liberties IAP, Tallaght IAP).

- **Facilitator** perceived as steering the group according to the local authority's agenda rather than issues important to the community (Ringsend)
- **Unreasonably tight deadlines** for community reps. to report back and get feedback from their communities
(St. Michaels, Ringsend, Ballybeg)

- **Timing key announcements** to coincide with summer holidays, Christmas or local elections, when activists busy with other matters was seen as manipulative/underhand
(St. Michael's, Ringsend).

7. Provision of Information

- **Inadequate** nature of information
- **'Impenetrable'** way technical information was presented
- Local authorities' trying to **'sell' their already-determined plan** rather than giving information in a balanced way

- [Problem of **information overload** was encountered as being just as serious] (Ringsend)
- Lack of clear information about **which planning documents had legal precedence**
 - Development Plan
 - IAP document
 - DoEHLG Residential Density Guidelines

8. Shifting Goalposts

- *“The City Council said to us on the monitoring committee **“Things have changed since the IAP. The residential guidelines have been brought in and they must be adhered to”.***

*I said **“Look, guidelines are guidelines and that’s all they are; guidelines. But the city development plan must surely outrank any guidelines coming in. What’s laid down in the development plan is more than a guideline. What’s laid down in the IAP is more than a guideline”.***

- *“I said ‘Even if what you’re saying is right, even if the residential density guidelines do override’ - or supersede is the words they used - ‘the city development plan’, I said, **‘those guidelines came in over a year ago and you’ve never mentioned them to us here, as a Monitoring Committee.***
- ***You never told us that now the plan that we are monitoring has been superseded by the residential densities guidelines”.***

9. Failure to Take on Board Community Concerns

- Tendency of officials to **give precedence to technical and professional expertise**
- Compared with attitudes amounting to a **‘casual disrespect’** for community concerns (St Michael’s, Ringsend, DDDA, Liberties IAP, Ballybeg, Ballymun)

- Reaction of L.A. officials to community concerns over the participation process were often **defensive, dismissive and derisory** (St. Michael’s, Liberties IAP).



QuickTime™ and a Motion JPEG OpenDML decompressor are needed to see this picture.

10. Mendacity

- Dissillusionment & distrust sometimes led to **feelings of being ‘duped’ by a process which seemed aimed at legitimising local-authority policy and property development interests** rather than genuine participation.

- Common belief that there had been a **lack of transparency** in the participation process
 - associated sometimes with **dishonesty** and **duplicity** of local-authority officers (Ringsend, St. Michaels, Liberties IAP, Ballybeg).

11. Misleading Information

- *by accident, I found out that I could buy the verbatim report of the Environmental Impact Study, where they swore. So, I went down and I bought it.*
- *Now, when I produced that at another IAP meeting I said 'Well, look, I know what I am saying is the truth because I've gone and bought this and there it is there! And there's your name and there's what you swore to'.*

12. Outcomes

- At its most extreme, the process created feelings of
 - **complete betrayal**
 - **a loss of credibility** for community leaders
 - **a radicalisation** of perspectives on the nature of the participation fiasco and the **real** role of the state
 - and a **shattering of trust**

- IAPs sometimes became perceived by **communities** as acting as one-sided agencies facilitating the property development sector

Why Some Fail to Engage?

- Some saw **apathy** as important.
- Others pointed to **demoralization and alienation** resulting from **a political culture and power structure which support the status quo & preclude genuine participation**
(St. Michael's, Liberties IAP)

Talking Shop or Power to Decide?

- **True participation is about having POWER - not just 'a voice'**
 - It is about citizens **controlling** their lives and their neighbourhoods
 - This involves the **delegation of power** & the establishment of true **partnerships** of equals

- Some saw genuine participation as **incompatible** with the interests of the Irish state

- which instead contented itself with **“rhetorical commitments”** and
- **“spurious participation exercises”** without any real devolution of power to local communities

Where does one place this on Arnstein's (1969) LADDER OF EMPOWERMENT

Which equates genuine participation with the **redistribution of power between interest groups** through negotiation

1. Degrees of Citizen Power
 - Citizen Control
 - Delegated Power
 - Partnership
2. Degrees of Tokenism
 - Placation
 - Consultation
 - Informing
3. Non-Participation
 - Cynical Consultation
 - Civic Hype

- We found 'Participation' could commonly be termed **'tokenistic'** at best,
- frequently **highly cynical**
- and sometimes amounted to little more than **'civic hype'**
 - where 'participation' became perverted into a **public-relations exercise** for those with real decision-making power.
- So, what future for participation?

- Kieran Allen has shown the increasing **subjugation of much public policy to the demands of international capital**
 - and the marginalisation of social need considerations.
- In this context where government and large corporations seem to have all the power
-**is participation possible** or even desirable for disadvantaged communities?

Warning: Handle With Care!

- How real is the likelihood of substantial gains for disadvantaged communities ?
- How large is the risk from the incorporation of protest, the suppression of dissent and conflict ?

- **So, how far have we come since early 1990s?**

- **McGuirk (1991)** seminal work in Dublin showed planning was characterised by a "managerialist agenda" largely dismissive of public participation in which **planners saw themselves as guardians of the public interest**, with little time for community input.

“What's the point?...Participation is like buying a dog & barking yourself ”

– Re the Development Plan :

“We are expert enough to make it complex enough for the average person not to understand”

- Some planners openly recognise their inherently politically conservative role as:
 - “...the legitimization of the existing economic order: to give the impression of rationality that does not exist and of democracy that’s not there” (see M:Guirk,1991)

Echoing Mazzioti’s belief that:

“...there exists an institutionalized bias in a society dominated by concentrations of economic and political power which makes the theory of pluralism (democracy) nothing more than a euphemism for corporate capitalism”

So, Is Participation Possible?

- What we *can* say is that participation is *impossible* :
- If **resourcing** & impartial professional **advice** is inadequate
- When there is a lack of **respect** from officers (“As experts, we know best”)
- When **terms of reference** are absent/poorly defined
- If ‘**ground rules**’ change (especially without notification)
- When participation **procedures** are inappropriate
- If provision of **information** is inadequate
- When misleading information and **untruths** destroy trust
- And when character assassination and the **undermining** of community representatives is carried out.

- “Indeed, it could be argued that **the state is now acting as a broker for capital in this process, while co-opting dissent and assuaging working-class combativity by diverting it into safe channels of participatory and consultative structures.**
- Once ‘on the inside’ of such consultative committees or boards, it is likely that many tenants and community representatives will feel less able to speak critically about any of the policies or projects, however uneasy or alarmed they might be.
- Moreover, these consultation processes are not as a rule subject to much external scrutiny, nor do they greatly influence the outcome beyond a few marginal concessions (for example, the appropriateness of a PPP demolition and redevelopment is never up for negotiation – minor concessions within this framework might be won or lost, but the bigger project itself is beyond challenge).”

Drudy and Punch (2005, 178)

- Managers, planners and local-authority officers tend to be drawn predominantly from a middle-class background.
- Little experience or conception of the role of family and community in combating the hardships of a life of chronic economic disadvantage and personal devaluation in an intensely hierarchical society which fails to recognise the value of anything other than ‘middle-class’ lifestyles, culture and aspirations
- And which even pursues policies which undermine fundamental elements of working-class community life and family ties that make life bearable for residents in deprived localities.

- Planners and urban managers must ensure that deprived communities do not have to bear the additional burdens arising from change.
- Unlikely that the treatment extended to the deprived urban communities examined in this research (under the guise of ‘community participation’) would have been attempted for middle-class areas
 - where expertise, political links and economic power are far greater.
- It certainly would not have been tolerated by them.