
Resident Participation, social cohesion and sustainability in neighbourhood renewal: developing best practice models¹

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Abstract

This paper reports research by the Urban Frontiers Program at the University of Western Sydney for AHURI. It is based upon six case studies conducted in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. The paper describes the rationale presented by state housing departments for involving residents in decisions about neighbourhood renewal, the structures and processes they have put in place to encourage participation and the experiences of local people affected by these initiatives. A distinction is made between physical renewal and initiatives aimed at social or community objectives and the views of active residents are contrasted with those who have not been directly involved. Particular emphasis is given to the processes that have encouraged and discouraged local residents from participating.

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Introduction

While the notion of resident or community participation in neighbourhood renewal is not a new one, it has assumed a new prominence in the policy agenda of the Commonwealth and State Governments of Australia over the last ten years. This resurgence has been influenced by the emergence of a 'third way' post-socialist position (Scanlon, 2000) on the left and the continuation of a conservative emphasis on family and community on the right (Giddens, 1994; Giddens, 1998; DFCS, 2000). It is also clear that the practice of 'community development', that emerged in the late 1960s, has continued to influence a wide range of government and non-government services and that communities themselves have maintained their long tradition of organising around local problems (Meekosha and Mowbray, 1995). A recent review of state and federal policy documents confirms extensive support for the principle of involving local people in community and urban renewal initiatives. It also notes, however, the absence of a clear rationale for this perspective and raises questions about the extent to which this support has resulted in substantive changes in practice (Wood *et al*, 2001).

This paper is based upon a preliminary analysis of interviews and focus groups conducted in New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland in August and September 2001 as part of an AHURI funded study² (see Appendix 1). Interviews were conducted with housing and community development professionals and where appropriate with any private developers that were involved. The focus groups were conducted separately with active community representatives and a randomly selected group of residents in each of the six case study areas (two in each state). The paper seeks to explore the rationale adopted by renewal professionals for resident participation, describes the processes they have introduced and the structures they have put in place to facilitate participation and highlights those factors that have either encouraged or discouraged resident participation.

Points have been illustrated by extracts from the interviews and focus groups but these have not been attributed to individuals or labelled by case study area, at this stage, so as to retain anonymity.

The rationale for participation

It is common to identify two broad sets of reasons to support of resident participation in renewal (DETR, 1997; Wood, 2000). The first set comprises the managerial or pragmatic benefits of involving local people. This includes the fundamental idea that local people are best placed to identify what is problematic

² Analysis of transcripts has not yet been completed. A more detailed analysis will be available in the final AURI report due towards the end of the year. This will be available at www.ahuri.edu.au

in their locality and therefore what issues should be prioritised. This argument is normally developed to include the view that it is more financially effective to spend resources on that which is deemed to be needed by local people rather than on the perspective of an outsider. While this might be taken to be self evident, this is not always the case. Some, for example, have claimed that the culture of regeneration professionals is dominant (Duncan and Thomas, 1999) and findings from this study suggest that while they expressed a clear commitment to participation they also wished to assert their expertise. From this perspective participation may have a role but only in as much as it is deemed to contribute to the perspective of the expert. The following two interview extracts illustrate this kind of distinction. While the first indicates the view that the community normally knows best, the second suggests that it is the professionals who are best placed to adjudicate on the relevance or otherwise of their suggestions.

... there's lots of Government funding going into an area, the last thing you want to do is go and build something or do something that the community doesn't want.

I can see that some of the comments that come forth are very relevant. You actually get the perspective of local people and they sometimes pick up on things [that] outsiders, if you want to call them that, miss out on.

The perceived managerial benefits derived from resident involvement thus include the efficiency and effectiveness of their spending. Housing managers also reported the gains to be derived from 'keeping tenants happy'.

And its good management from my point of view to have happy residents, content with their home, because that spins off in all sorts of areas: rent payments, maintenance properties, the whole thing. If they're happy in their home, they're happy in the area, they're likely to look after their home and their [neighbourhood] better than what they did. And they are also likely to accept their tenancies better than what they have - like paying their rent, making sure they're not making nuisance with noise and that sort of thing.

[T]he issues about evictions are reducing, and the issue about damage to properties are reducing so it actually makes the housing officer's life a hell of a lot easier, they're not out there spending all their time with neighbourhood disputes. Like rampaging youths through streets with machetes in hands, scaring the old people, all sorts of stuff, which was what was happening back then. So all that sort of stuff dies down therefore you can get on with doing work in the properties and everything else.

From a more strategic perspective there is an acknowledgement that local perspectives may affect property values. From this point of view tackling the issues of concern to residents has a direct impact on asset values. This is reflected in the perspective of private developers involved in building or converting property for sale.

If you're going to sell real estate its all about perceptions as well as realities and so if you can get the local community talking positively about the sorts of things that are happening well that has a major impact on saleability of properties

Private developers were also keen to minimise conflict and maximise the acceptance of the local community.

So having their involvement, *getting them on side* as a strong community was a crucial link to having the acceptance in the area, acceptance of [the] credibility of ourselves and really getting the right product and doing the right things (My emphasis)

This reflects concerns expressed elsewhere about the extent to which regeneration professionals desire genuine community participation or rather simply wish to generate the perception that local people are involved by tokenistic consultation and through the co-option of antagonistic groups in order to provide an impression of legitimacy (Taylor, 2000a). While these views were not prominent among housing and community development professionals the suggestion by some housing officers that participation gave them an easier life may also be indicative.

This should be contrasted however with the other broad set of reasons provided, that might be described as the "citizenship rationale". From this perspective, residents should be involved because it is their political right to influence the decisions that are made about their neighbourhood. This was most frequently described by the statement that it is 'their place'. One officer explicitly recognised the normative nature of this perspective as the following extract reveals:

[I]t is their community, it's their lives that are affected by the renewal process, so from a moral point of view it's absolutely critical that they are involved.

Closely associated with this perspective is the notion of 'empowerment'. That is the view that community involvement encourages people to act individually and collectively to take control of their destiny. For some, the notion extends further to the idea that if local people are 'empowered' changes introduced through the renewal process will be more sustainable. This view is summed up by a community development professional:

we see [community involvement] as the basis of empowering people to take control over their own lives. We believe that it only through involving local communities in decisions that affect their lives can we make sustainable change in the local area. And we believe that any alternative options such as imposing what we thought should happen on the area wouldn't work, would fail. [They're] fundamentally flawed. So we've ... promoted resident involvement for those reasons.

Another housing officer described the importance of community ownership but explained that this meant the broader community – 'tenants, community agencies, employers and employees of the agencies'.

Unsurprisingly, local residents that were actively participating in renewal initiatives tended to stress the citizenship perspective. When asked why local people should be involved the response was adamant:

It's our bloody place - it's as simple as that.

Well because we've got to live here

Some active residents were clearly committed to higher levels of direct control, such as the development of housing co-operatives where tenants managed the properties and estates themselves. This perspective was based on the view that corporately 'you've got to be responsible for our own problems'. The following view was expressed by an active resident who was concerned, for example, about welfare dependency.

I've got sons who are the mortal combat generation and that's what the overall message of mortal combat is, isn't it? Look after their own destiny or should be.

While these were the dominant views among active residents, many questioned the extent to which these views were shared by the renewal professionals with whom they were involved. One local community representative argued vehemently that their interests were motivated by a desire to reduce opposition to their plans:

No it seems to me the main driver for any community involvement has been so that they can move people out without hassle because it was [the developer who said they were] ... in it to make money, and the [Housing Authority], they didn't want people barricading themselves in their homes and refusing to be relocated they wanted plain sailing and that was ... their only impetus at ... making some attempt at community consultation.

Others expressed cynicism with the process of consultation:

When they told us they really wanted community involvement it was only lip service. We could talk as much as we liked but they'd do it their way.

What they wanted was a few people for photo opportunities and to sign on agreements and things so that they could make it look good because [the developer] apparently has won awards for its community development side of its housing developments. That's all they wanted out of it was that marketing stuff.

This was not a view shared by all active community representatives, however. Some expressed the view that the consultation had been inadequate but that the intentions of the renewal professionals were genuine. From this point of the frustrations were treated as a learning process and while active residents felt their influence had been modest they believed the renewal agencies had learned from them and that they had at least ensured a degree of 'damage limitation' through their interventions.

What emerges is a complex web of relationships where the rationale and motivation for resident participation is split. Even within the same housing authority it is possible to identify contradictory perspectives about the value of participation, from those who advocate an 'empowerment model' to those whose motivation is more tokenistic and self motivated.

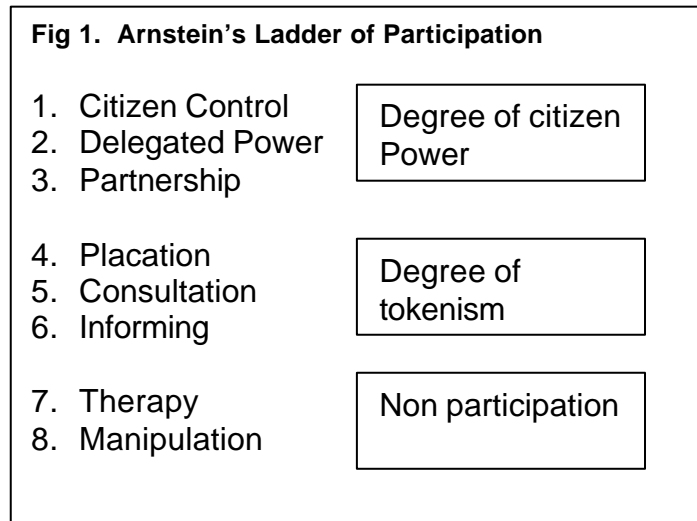
Structures and Processes

The structures and processes adopted for resident participation were investigated in each of the case study areas. The aim was to establish the actual nature of participation. It is common in any review of participation to identify a hierarchy or ladder from lower to higher levels of resident involvement. This tradition is derived from the work of Arnstien (1969).

For Arnstein, citizen participation is predicated on:

The redistribution of power that enables have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future (1969, p. 216)

Arnstien was writing from a planning perspective but the model (see Fig. 1) has



been applied and adapted to various situations including personal social services (Benn, 1981 and Hallet, 1987), housing management (Ward, 1974 and Duncan and Halsall, 1994), regeneration (Stewart and Taylor, 1995 and DETR, 1997) and public services generally (Wilcox, 1994).

The idea, in brief, is that there is a scale of involvement from providing participants with information about their services, for example, to a level where they have direct control over decisions and outcomes. At the lowest point the level of influence is minimal, if present at all. At the upper end participants have high levels of influence. This model is, therefore, based upon the degree of participant power.

However, these sorts of models are in some respects confusing because they conflate power with process (Cooper and Hawtin, 1998). So, for example, consultation is a process which may permit high degrees of influence if the views received are noted and acted upon, whereas 'delegated power' may be severely circumscribed. Delegating the responsibility to decide how a small budget is spent may, by way of illustration, be less empowering than giving residents influence over the way the budget is set. In other words the form of participation does not necessarily determine the final level of influence and there are a whole set of external factors that may place a restriction on the outcome.

Ladders of participation are also criticised by Cairncross *et al* (1997) who suggest that it is impossible to construct a hierarchy because the processes vary on more than one dimension. Writing from the perspective of tenant participation in public housing management in the UK, they overcome this problem by developing three types of landlord-tenant interaction. This is based upon structures or methods (from letter writing to tenant representation); processes (from providing information to giving control); and objectives, such as better housing and housing management, more choice and power to tenants, tenant satisfaction. From these three dimensions Cairncross *et al* construct three ideal

types of participation; namely, traditionalist, consumerist and citizenship models. In summary, the thesis is that the structures and processes adopted relate to the political culture of the local administration. This, to some degree, reflects the division in rationale revealed in the earlier analysis, above.

Initial analysis of the case study material supports the assertion that structures and processes, in and of themselves, are a poor indication of the actual power relationship that transpires.

The fundamental structure adopted in the three states studied included the creation of forums whose function was to represent the views of the wider community. In all of the cases, these forums comprised representatives of local agencies and voluntary groups in addition to local resident representatives (i.e. they were not restricted to local residents). The selection process for the local (rather than agency) representatives varied significantly across the cases. The normal procedure appears to have been to begin with a public meeting advertised locally through the use of letters, newsletters and articles in the local press. The intention in each case was to encourage a number of local residents to attend a regular meeting (normally monthly) at which they could represent the views of local people. In Queensland, the Community Reference Groups (CRGs) were open to all residents who wished to attend, whereas elsewhere the forums were restricted to specified delegates. Even in Queensland, however, only a limited number of people actively took part in these meetings and there was some suggestion that the initial 'recruitment' of representatives at the public meeting would need to be repeated to ensure that those attending were fully representative of a changing population. The representatives interviewed during the fieldwork also saw themselves as 'the community reps' rather than 'a community rep'.

In NSW and in one of the South Australian cases the local representatives were nominated by a broader 'resident only' community group but the number of resident delegates varied and in one instance was limited one person only.

Table 1: A comparison of renewal forums across the case studies.

	NSW 1	NSW 2	SA 1	SA 2	QLD 1	QLD 2
Initial public meeting	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Delegates from resident only group	☑	☑	☑			
Open to all residents					☑	☑
Mix of agency representatives	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Approval mechanism				☑	☑	☑
Delegate(s) sit on project steering group		☑		☑		
Chaired by resident					☑	☑

In both NSW and SA it was anticipated that there would be a turnover of delegates but the mechanism for achieving this was not clearly expressed. There was some evidence to suggest that the scale and enthusiasm for getting involved in community activity was limited and that consequently it made more

sense to talk about 'self-nominated' volunteers rather than delegates. As one renewal professional in South Australia commented:

In both areas it was really a case of who was willing to come forward ... to participate and to be involved. So essentially it has evolved on that basis.

In one of the NSW case study areas the structure was more elaborate. Smaller 'precinct' level groups had been established with the intention of promoting a more democratic approach to selecting delegates. Fieldwork suggests however that it was difficult to maintain levels of involvement at the 'precinct' level. As one delegate explained:

The thing that happened, as Chris³ said, they had their meeting to be voted back in again. Nobody turned up so they continued [as delegates].

One of the case study areas in SA had deliberately decided to restrict community representation at the implementation stage to a reference group, although they too felt that the current make-up of the group should be renewed after a two-year period. When asked what had happened to the level of participation over the course of the project one respondent made the following response:

I guess they are involved less individually [now] because you've moved beyond that phase of public consultation and meetings. Once the decision [has been] made about how the project would look then you get on with implementing it and the issues that come up along the way - I suppose you deal with them as they come up. So there's no framework in the community development program to hold public meetings or to have specific focus groups about where we're heading because we see the community reference group ... as serving that role. And I guess that's why we renew the participation on a two-year basis to recognise that the project does move on and there may be other issues.

In support of this position it was claimed that the housing authority had done everything possible to ensure that the process was legitimate.

... we had an information shop in the local shopping centre from before there was a project. We had that resourced by staff. We [did] newsletters *ad nauseam*. We, as I said, we got individuals assigned to be available for communication. We got a formal structure that gives them a legitimate role.

However, there was a clear feeling across all the forum representatives, clearly expressed in the following extracts, that it was always 'left to them' to play the

³ All names and place names have been changed to protect the identity of respondents and focus group participants.

role of community representative and that no one else understood or took an interest:

I don't know whether I speak for all of us. I feel as though if I put myself in the firing line as the saying is. We do take calls at odd hours from those people that do not understand that we can only do so much. We can't go and demand things to be done.

We're called stakeholders ... often I (feel) held at the stake

This was felt acutely at the times when they had sought for others to fulfil this role. As a community representative explained in South Australia:

They were given the opportunity this year, when we called for the new people to come on board [but no one came forward].

There is however another side to this story and this reflects the research experience elsewhere (Wood and Vamplew, 1999 and Wood, 2000). Often those residents who are not involved can feel excluded by a dominant group of local activists. As randomly selected focus group participants explained:

It wasn't ... representative of the whole area

Yeah, they were only selecting people who probably would agree with them mostly

Efforts were clearly being made to maintain the momentum of involvement as a regeneration professional in Queensland explained but the difficulty of maintaining a representative group was clearly present in all areas.

... if you don't send out the additional newsletters through the area, if you don't continue to go to interagency meetings and other key areas if you don't continue that, then things will drop off. Then people only come to you when there's an urgent need ... You'll get the same mix of the clique of 50 or 20 people who show up for everything. And that is still the problem with this area. You've got the same 20 or 50 ... people who are in all the various meetings and when we go to meetings we see the same lot and you keep saying jeez it'd be nice if we could get it bigger, broader, get other cultur[es] other younger people etc.

Barriers to resident participation

A series of factors emerged from the fieldwork that demonstrate the difficulties involved in promoting and facilitating the participation of local people in the renewal process. In each of the three states that have been examined there has been a strong emphasis on participation whether motivated by a citizenship or

managerial/consumerist perspective and each have engaged in a wide range of activities to try to overcome these barriers. The findings from this study suggest, however, that there is potential for further progress. A series of issues were raised by residents (both active and non-active) and by renewal professionals which continue to put barriers in the way of genuine and extensive public participation. It should be stressed, however, that in the majority of cases these problems had been recognised and efforts were being made to tackle the problems. The following section considers ways of overcoming the barriers and encouraging authentic participation. Many of these ideas were being extensively utilised across the three states. The problems are examined in this section before considering potential solutions.

Formality of process

Professionals, according to active residents, are in danger of falling into two traps. On the one hand they may assume that residents are familiar with their world of meetings and the protocols with which they are familiar and consequently that there is nothing to prevent them from engaging with enthusiasm in these arenas. On the other, there is the dangerous practice of assuming that local people have no relevant knowledge at all and that they therefore need to be 'educated' in order to ensure that they behave in the correct manner. Between these two stereotypes there lies the potential to nurture and encourage without patronising. This is a difficult path to tread and the tension was present in many of the experiences that were recounted during the fieldwork.

Numerous accounts were provided of the anxieties created by the invitation to participate. Participation structures placed expectations upon residents and frequently led to feelings of inadequacy. Even the focus group itself proved to be a concern for some.

RES Can I just say. My wife was actually terrified about this meeting she doesn't like coming.

INT This one here?

RES Yes this one here. Didn't want to come, she's the one who made the appointment. But she was actually scared of this and the one that Housing Commission did she wouldn't go to that either. She finds it very daunting.

On occasions this was because of anxieties about their ability to express themselves clearly:

I find it a little bit difficult because I'm not a real articulate person

Also, in one very frank account, this concerned problems with basic literacy:

I have to say for myself, personally, I prefer [these] sorts of meetings (the small focus group) because I'm actually illiterate. I can't read or write. Now I have to specify that because illiteracy means something different to the educated people; [for them it] means that you have difficulty reading and writing. No! I can't read or write. That's what it means to me. And when I can just come and voice my opinion or voice what I feel, I jump at the chance when I can. But if I [was] to come in here and you said here fill this form out, I would have said 'look I'll see you guys later' (My brackets).

It was also clear that there were other language barriers for some. Several people commented about the difficulties of involving people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

These issues had been recognised by renewal professionals, particularly those with first hand experience of community development. These officers pointed to a training deficit in the processes that had been adopted to facilitate participation.

there's a low level of educational achievement so the ability of some residents to participate would have been hampered to some degree by those barriers to involvement.

I think, to a degree, a lot of people ... may not have had a great deal of experience of involvement and consultation and [didn't have] the confidence to [represent] the community in a situation where they were dealing with ... senior officers from government and from the private sector. So I think some people would certainly ... have been intimidated and put off from being involved in the process on that basis. I think there's probably been a lack of training put in place at the early stages to ... facilitate the community to participate.

Other renewal professionals simply posed the question:

If you look for instance at education, now how do you stimulate people who have been dormant for decades to start upgrading their skills or developing new skills or going for courses etc and that's a difficult one.

It may be, however, that these barriers are more entrenched than many would care to believe. Wood (2000), writing from the UK perspective, has argued that programs often fail to recognise the previous life experiences that cause disaffection. It is claimed, for example, that 'life experiences of residents on low incomes in marginalised localities reinforce low self-opinions and lead to feelings of inferiority and powerlessness'. This is attributed in part to the processes which stigmatise people because they live in areas with a poor reputation. The psycho-social effects of the feelings of failure that result from this experience, it has been claimed, 'invariably lead to apathy, withdrawal, depression and aggression' (Wilkinson, 1994). There was plenty of evidence to suggest that residents in the case study areas faced similar levels of stigma and regularly had to cope with severe problems for example connected with the criminal and anti-social consequences of drug addiction.

This was summed up succinctly by a community worker:

I think you've got to recognise that often in a renewal project you're ... undertaking a renewal project because ... it's been an area where people have gone ... as a last resort. There's high issues and people are dealing

with their own personal issues, they've got a lot more than most people. So their interest in what's happening out in the broader community is zip and that's understandable, they're just trying to get by from one day to the next. So it's not surprising that some people are [not] interested.

A further problem experienced in areas where people are successfully recruited is that they are in effect 'co-opted' into the arms of the establishment, begin to conform to their codes of practice and cease to fully represent the views of the local population. This reinforces the feelings discussed above. Outsiders feel excluded and insiders feel an onerous responsibility and split loyalties.

A series of neighbourhood studies, conducted as part of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Area Regeneration Programme in the UK, highlighted problems associated with representative structures. It was claimed for example, that the wider population was 'suspicious of them', that some felt excluded, that the local population were unsure who was representing their views and they had limited experience of the representatives asking their views (Forrest and Kearns, 1999). The randomly selected focus group participants had limited knowledge of the established forums and they too were not entirely confident that they were accurately representing their views.

Practical factors

In addition to these issues, residents noted practical difficulties with attending the meetings. Timing and location were particularly contentious issues, particularly for those with a disability. In the focus group recruitment process it was necessary to offer lifts to ensure that certain people were able to attend. Others related how they had been put off by the time and venue.

Well unfortunately most of the meetings are held at [a youth centre] I don't drive at night because I can't see. I've got night blindness so I can't see where I'm going and I guess I'm a hazard to other people so I can't drive at night and this is when most of these sort of meetings are conducted, usually. Or in the middle of the day, when you can't attend it, or for young mothers it's usually when the kids are there. They need to be with the children so they can't attend. So the time that they set down [for] the meetings for are not appropriate [for] the people living in the area. They don't seem to take that into consideration.

There was no consensus about what the best time for a meeting would be, however, and the conclusion was that there was possibly a need to hold meetings at different times to allow for wider participation or to provide facilities for childcare during meetings.

Much of this discussion assumed that people were actually aware of the various forums and meetings that had been held in an attempt to encourage participation. This was not always the case. Only a limited number of residents recruited randomly in each of the case study areas were aware that meetings had been held and local forums established. This is often despite the extensive communication strategies adopted (e.g. personal letters, newsletters, newspaper articles and local radio coverage). This situation seems to have been exacerbated by a subsequent decline in communication with the wider population once community forums had been established.

Participants experiences

Those that had become involved were often incredibly resilient. A series of stories emerged from the case studies which revealed how persistent active residents had been despite their frustrations. However, inadequate consultation and poor previous experiences led to cynicism and scepticism in the minds of many. The following extract picks up this tension

I really feel that the prevailing feeling in the community now is that they will do, *they* will do what they want and there's no point in becoming involved in community consultation because the decisions have all been made. And the best thing we can do is make sure that we get a decent house for ourselves out of it and the only reason the rights of current tenants are protected at all was because of the [community organisation], the tenants organisation.

Often the cynicism is derived from being asked and then ignored or from lengthy delays that lead people to question whether anything will eventually be done.

Cynicism because ... as I said before because the whole thing took so long to get off the ground, there was a lot of political capital made out of 'it's going to happen, we're going to do something' but then nothing happened and there was a lot of rumour[s], a lot of mis-information fed to the community.

Often this was the main reason for people deciding to withdraw.

INT Why was it that you stopped going?

RES Because they was faking [the meetings] because they [say] one thing, they say that you'll get a chance to have what colour schemes you want and everything and then they just do it for you.

When they did Mary Street we all got brochures about what they were going to do and we did have a letter for our input about what we wanted - what we would like to have seen done - and I think

most people were like me, they were very keen and would have liked to have seen [this] happen in the street itself but none of it happened. They just went along and did what they wanted to do anyway.

These experiences lead to disillusionment and frustration. The more this happens the less it is likely that people will get involved again.

Overcoming the barriers

Community development emerged from this study as the most significant factor in overcoming the barriers and ensuring genuine participation. This was described as an intervention which began with the local people and the issues that they were concerned about. By starting with the issues that were important to local people, it was claimed, the community could see that you were genuine about involvement. It was clear that there were a whole set of skills that were required in order to follow this process and many stressed the need to listen and the ability to facilitate in an unpatronising way the learning of others. This is a process that requires considerable experience of facilitating group development and high levels of inter-personal skills. Furthermore, however, respondents stressed the need for a particular attitude:

I think you need someone that's skilled, experienced but also has the right attitude towards community empowerment, rather than 'I'm the expert so I will you know [tell you what to do], ... I'll get you organised and I'll help you along the way and I'll be here to support you right through. I think that's critical.

Others claimed that if you didn't have a social justice value base you would not be able to handle community development work. An officer in South Australia reflected, for example:

[They have to] have a predisposition that they're going to do themselves out of a job. That they're not setting themselves up as being the community spokesperson and the sort of a pillar underneath them. And [a respected community worker] will tell you that she views her role as a connector and a promoter and a facilitator and she'd dearly love the day when she can step aside and what's been put in place will just continue. And that's sustainability. But the fact that our newsletter is now written, published and distributed by the local community ... In fact we have to try and get some space in that newsletter for [our] project information. ... But that's a fantastic outcome.

What was being envisaged here, was that it was only through building up the skills of local people that you could ever get to a stage where the community itself was sustainable. This is often now described as capacity building or

creating social capital. For some, capacity building is considered to be an important precursor to effective involvement and refers to the process of developing the abilities of local people to organise themselves so that they have more influence over the process and involvement in the outcomes. It stems from a recognition that the pace and nature of renewal initiatives can contrive to exclude local input. As Duncan and Thomas note, capacity building 'helps [local people] better define and achieve their objectives and take an active and equal role in partnership with other agencies' (2000). For them, the process includes aspects of training, consultancy, organisational and personal development, mentoring and peer group support. But the term should be used with care. Local people might, for example, find the implicit assumption that they need to increase their 'capacity' insulting or patronising. All too often the assumption is that local people lack the wherewithal to deal with the 'complexities' of the renewal process. As Henderson and Mayo note, 'to imply that local people are 'empty vessels' simply waiting to be filled via training/capacity building ignores the wealth of existing knowledge and skills within communities' (1998).

On the other hand, the term acknowledges the very real power relationship that exists between professionals and residents and the need to ensure that local people are in a position to take as much control as they wish and are equipped with the knowledge and skills to do so. This is not, however, a simple and straightforward process. Some residents may have had years of experience of community action but others may be entirely new to the exercise or have been excluded as a result of institutional racism and/or discrimination on the basis of gender. Unless capacity building actually begins to challenge these power relationships then exclusion will continue.

Power, it has been suggested, is not something that can be given to someone but rather something which is created by people when they 'act collectively to transform their world' (Freire, 1970). If this is accepted, it follows that a long-term commitment is needed to facilitate a process that enables local people to work through their understanding of the problems they face and develop and implement the programmes they see as necessary. It should also be recognised that capacity building is futile without the associated cultural changes that are required within regeneration agencies, local authorities and those funding regeneration (Silburn et al, 1999; Duncan and Thomas, 2000 and Taylor, 2000b).

There is a growing recognition that interventions of this nature need to be adequately resourced and this was reflected in the views of some of the renewal professionals interviewed.

I think if you're seeking community participation then you're meant to resource that properly and I think we've done reasonably well but there's probably areas where we could have done more on.

When asked what was the main thing that could have been done to improve participation one respondent replied:

I think first of all some training and training to enable them to be involved. So training and for example communication skills, committee skills, negotiating skills, and some training to raise their awareness of the various stakeholder issues and broader objectives of the projects. ... [This] would have enabled them to participate from a position of strength of greater strength I would have thought.

Training is central to the process of involving communities in regeneration and is often what people are referring to when they talk about capacity building. But it is not just local people that require training. It is equally, if not more, essential for policy makers and regeneration professionals. Many of the topics that need to be covered in training programmes are common to all parties and there is a strong argument for joint training but care needs to be taken to ensure that community groups have the space to identify their specific training needs. Henderson and Mayo, for example, refer to the need for provision to be rooted in the adult education tradition, where opportunities to learn start from a community's definition of their needs and where space is allowed for 'critical reflection and political education for citizenship'. They also note the lack of provision targeted at oppressed groups such as women, disabled people and ethnic minorities (1998). There are, historically, strong links between informal learning strategies with disadvantaged groups and the community development process (See Freire, 1970).

Often this work is conducted in small groups and this reflects the views expressed by a focus group participant in one of the case study areas:

Well a small group it works. You can sit there and you can talk openly to people.

This kind of intervention requires local resources and intensive support.

When asked how it might be possible to overcome the cynicism that has result from poor experiences in the past many argued that it was important to demonstrate early on in the process of renewal that 'you were genuine'. This was particularly aimed at addressing the problem caused by already establishing the agenda before local people had been recruited. Renewal professionals reported more success where the residents had been involved from the earliest stages.

Well I think the fact that we went to the community at such an early stage in the process. That we absolutely didn't have any plans under the table which we often get accused of. It was made, they were made well aware

that they were going to be involved right from the start in shaping what might evolve as a project

One of the things that [the lead officer] did was [to] involve the clients initially in the setting up of the brief, ... before they actually turned a sod of earth or drove a nail, firstly found out exactly what the tenants wanted. What was the underlying thing that was upsetting them most that we could resolve by this program, rather than just go the old way of getting what we thought they needed and they'd be happy with that it was a reversal of that whole process.

While this, combined with swift and identifiable early successes, are often identified as crucial for getting through the early and difficult phases, residents in the case study areas were also keen to point to the maintenance of mainstream services as an essential indicator of how genuine the renewal process was considered to be.

Collectively, the residents of the case study areas, both active and non-active, listed a whole range of mainstream services which had been closed or, in their view, 'run-down'. This included a reduction in public transport, the closure of banks, shops and local swimming pools and inadequate water supplies. The combined effect of the reduction and deterioration of services in their locality reduced morale and led to the feeling that their neighbourhood was of less significance than others that were better serviced. In this context the introduction of community and urban renewal initiatives was seen as largely irrelevant in the greater scheme of things. This reflects the findings of similar studies in the UK where the re-establishment of mainstream services has been seen as a priority over and above special initiatives (SEU, 2001).

Poverty and social exclusion

Beyond the erosion of mainstream services there was a general recognition that unless the underpinning problems of poverty and social exclusion that increasingly marginalise the affected neighbourhoods are tackled by addressing growing income and health inequality (Gregory and Hunter, 1995) then there is a danger that the renewal will not ultimately be sustainable. However, while there was a significant focus on employment creation in the various renewal initiatives studied it should be noted that these were fairly small scale and temporary initiatives. Furthermore there was no explicit recognition that employment creation alone was not the solution for many marginalized people living in these settings. Levitas, for example cautions against equating social exclusion with unemployment since this ignores the problems of the low waged or un-paid workers (work done principally by women) (Levitas, 1996).

Conclusion

The evidence suggests that the three states have all pursued strategies aimed at increasing the participation of local people. However, the impression emerging from the initial analysis of the fieldwork is that there continues to be some confusion surrounding the rationale for the approach and some difficulties with implementation. On the one hand, there is the pragmatic/managerial perspective that asserts the (self interested) efficiency savings that might result from participation and on the other is the citizenship perspective that local people have a right to influence the local context and should be empowered to do so. It is the latter perspective that is dominant among community representatives but it is often their perception that renewal professionals are pursuing participation on the basis of the former. This research is based on the perceptions of professionals and local people. It is not possible, therefore, to adjudicate between truth claims but it would appear that the assumptions about motivations have a significant influence on behaviour of resident participants.

There is a danger that the structures and processes established to facilitate participation, while aiming to devolve power, actually maintain existing power relationships by co-option and exclusion. In South Australia and New South Wales the representative structures were restricted to selected/elected delegates and, despite valiant efforts on the part of local housing and community development officers, these were often perceived by other non-involved locals, as unrepresentative of the wider community. These perceptions can lead to the disaffection of the wider community and might ultimately discredit the process. Even in Queensland where the meetings were open to all, fieldwork suggests that many were ignorant of the arrangements for resident participation and therefore likely to question the extent to which their views were being represented.

The lack of broader involvement also has implications for active residents. Fieldwork suggests, for example, that where there were only limited numbers participating, individuals might begin to feel overburdened by their responsibilities. For some the combination of this burden with the feeling that they had not been listened led to a withdrawal of support. A significant barrier to participation therefore stems from the poor previous experiences of participants and the cynicism that emerges from perceptions of tokenism.

The formality of some consultation forums was also seen as a barrier by some. There are two dangers associated with this. The first is that only those community members who feel able to participate in this type of representative forum do so. This inevitably excludes those who are unable or refuse to conform to that type of organisational pattern. The second is that would-be participants feel that they need to conform to the culture and mores of the forum. This may cause them to make concessions that the wider community would oppose.

This research has also highlighted a range of practical barriers that indirectly exclude certain groups. While considerable efforts have been made to ensure that meetings are well advertised and held in appropriate locations at appropriate times there was, nevertheless, evidence that key groups were underrepresented. Particular attention needs to be paid to those from non-English speaking backgrounds. A wide range of interventions was being utilised in an attempt to overcome these barriers.

Given the life experiences of participants described in brief, earlier in this paper, and the impact that this has on individual and collective agency, it might be argued the central barrier to participation that has emerged from this initial analysis are fundamentally a consequence of social exclusion. Many of the accounts of life in the case study areas revealed how day to day survival consumed much of the residents' available energy. Only the resilient appeared able to maintain the levels of activity that were demanded of them.

In examining how these barriers might be overcome the fieldwork points to community development and training initiatives. In particular those interventions that were focussed on the problems defined by local people were regarded by respondents as key to attracting broad support in the initial stages of participation. Continuing community development support was also regarded as crucial if early progress was to be maintained. This is generally seen as a long-term process which aims to 'level the playing field' and provide communities with the resources that are necessary to develop their collective agency and tackle the problems that they consider important. While inequality remains, it will however continue to be segregated spatially. If disadvantaged neighbourhoods are to be renewed then broader socio-economic issues will also need to be addressed.

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Appendix 1 - Fieldwork

Interviews and focus groups conducted in New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland in August and September 2001. Some interviews included two or three respondents. The total number of interviews conducted in each case study is indicated.

South Australia

Key actor interviews

Community Renewal Manager (Housing)
Project Managers (Housing) x 2
Council Officer
Community Reference Group Chair (Community rep)
Private developer x 3
Relocation Officer x 2
Community/Neighbourhood Development Officers x 2

Group interview

Community Reference Group – Community Reps (4 respondents)

TOTAL interviews = 11

Focus Groups

Randomly selected residents x 2

Queensland

Key actor interviews

Community Renewal Manager x 2
Project Managers x 2
Community/Neighbourhood Development x 4
Housing Officer x 2
Council Officer x 4

TOTAL interviews = 9

Focus Groups

Randomly selected residents x 2
Community Reference Groups x 2

New South Wales

Key actor interviews

Community Renewal Manager x 2

Housing Manager x 2

Community/Neighbourhood Development Officer x 2

Project Manager x 3

Local Councillor

TOTAL interviews = 9

Focus Groups

Randomly selected residents x 2

Community Reference Groups x 2