

Empowered Participation in Urban Governance: The Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program

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ABSTRACT

In the early 1990s, the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) allocated \$400 million in public funds for Minneapolis neighborhood groups to spend on improvement projects over the coming twenty years. NRP created the most financially empowered structure of neighborhood governance in any American city. This article describes the institutional design of NRP and then explores several of its political, social, and economic consequences. In particular, we examine the character of participation, deliberation, and conflict in several NRP neighborhoods, the tensions between neighborhood groups and city offices over this decentralization initiative, the effects of decentralization upon neighborhood level social capital, and nature of goods funded under the Program.

Keywords: urban politics, planning, citizen participation, democracy, deliberation, Minneapolis

I. Introduction¹

The United States has a robust tradition of local government in its cities and towns. In many of those cities – such as Portland, St. Paul, Dayton, Cincinnati, Chicago, and Los Angeles – there have been in recent decades initiatives that invite residents to participate directly in urban governance at the neighborhood level. Many have argued that it is here, at the level of the neighborhood and locality, that residents encounter the most tangible consequence of public decisions and thus have the motivation and knowledge to engage government and other citizens (Kotler 1969; Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993; Macedo et. al. 2005).

Citizen engagement in local decision-making gained momentum as a mainstream policy approach both in national and state programs after policies in the 1960s and 1970s reinvigorated community participation in neighborhood planning (Fainstein and Hirst 1996; Teamworks 2000).² There are some 155 mandates in federal legislation requiring increased citizen engagement from the federal to the local level (Kathi and Cooper 2005). If Alinsky (1971) saw the interaction between community organizations and city

¹ The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation, and the A. Alfred Taubman Center for State and Local Government at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government provided generous support that made this research possible. We thank Robert Miller, the staff of the Minneapolis Revitalization Program, and the community leaders of Minneapolis for helping two out-of-towners understand their practices and forms of local governance.

² Bottom-up protests denouncing centralized control and calls for minority empowerment combined with top-down federal pressure for "maximum feasible participation" in Community Action Programs and the War on Poverty compelled city governments to adopt initiatives that increased resident participation. These programs gave birth to thousands of neighborhood-based organizations who used federal aid for development through programs such as Model Cities, revenue sharing, and housing programs. Additionally, the Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG), introduced in 1974, channeled resources which sustained participatory planning. See Fainstein and Hirst (1996) and Teamworks (2000). The political successes of these initiatives as well as their effectiveness with regard to substantive goals such as poverty reduction, is a matter of long standing controversy (Peterson and Greenstone 1976; Moynihan 1970; Sirianni and Friedland 2001).

government as conflictual, a more collaborative approach evolved after the 1970s (Kathi and Cooper 2005; Sirianni and Friedland 2001). Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993) explored the relation between neighborhood organizations and local administration in five American cities with highly structured and formal neighborhood governance arrangements. More broadly, Scavo (1993) documented that hundreds of city governments utilize an array of mechanisms to increase citizen participation in tasks ranging from consultation to the co-production of public goods. Strategies to involve stakeholders and citizens in the work of government are now recognized as components of a so-called new governance that emphasizes horizontal collaboration among public agencies, citizens and organizations, as opposed to more hierarchical bureaucratic models (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O’Leary 2005).

Within the American local government experience, the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota offers a distinctively well-financed instance of citizen participation. In the early 1990s, the state and city agreed to devolve some \$400 million—to be spent over 20 years—to neighborhood planning under the rubric of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP). With over ten years of operation, the Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) is a mature case that offers an excellent opportunity to examine an institutional design for citizen participation and to compare the consequences of that institutional design against the optimistic and critical expectations of democratic theorists (Goetz and Sidney 1994 a; Goetz and Sidney 1994 b; Nickel 1995; Fainstein, Hirst, and Tennebaum 1995; Fainstein and Hirst 1996; Teamworks 2000; Martin and Pentel 2002).

The next section offers a brief description of the program and its history.³ Section III focuses upon institutional design. NRP did not simply devolve funds and public authority to neighborhood organizations. It created new relationships between neighborhood associations and the city's NRP office that Fung (2004) has described as "accountable autonomy." Whereas an earlier generation of activists and scholars viewed the distribution of power and authority between neighborhood and city hall as a zero-sum game, the relationship between the city's NRP office and Minneapolis neighborhood associations was intended to be synergistic. Centralized assistance and supervision were designed to improve the quality of neighborhood plans and projects. Political forces in the city did not conform to any neat or stylized institutional design, however. Section IV explains the tensions between NRP's proponents and those who favored centralizing development strategies and decision-making.

Section V moves from these larger institutional and political issues to neighborhood dynamics. NRP demands many hours of commitment and special skills from its most active participants. These demands can create strong biases that favor advantaged residents over those who, for example, lack education or income, rent their dwellings, or are culturally marginal. This bias among the most active, however, is somewhat mitigated by the presence of less demanding opportunities for participation in

³ Our analysis is based on secondary literature, program evaluations, program reports and neighborhood data. The NRP office gave us access to their internal database to customize data on neighborhood demographics as well as allocations and expenditures of NRP resources. We also conducted individual and group interviews with around sixty informants, including neighborhood volunteers and neighborhood organizations staff, the NRP director and staff, city administrators and elected representatives, selected jurisdictions participating in NRP, scholars, and foundations. Finally, to get a better understanding of the deliberations, we attended two neighborhood meetings, in the East Harriet and McKinley neighborhoods.

NRP. We suggest that participation in NRP, and perhaps other urban governance initiatives, should be conceived as occurring in concentric circles. A small number of very active participants occupy the smallest circles in the center, but institutions should also create opportunities—in peripheral circles—for those who will not or cannot meet those high demands to nevertheless register their preferences, learn about neighborhood activities, and contribute to local public goods in more occasional or less costly ways.

Section VI describes the conflicts that occurred among organizations and residents within neighborhoods and describes the provisions for deliberation as a way to settle some of these differences. Section VII evaluates one crucial indicator of the outcomes of these disputes — the spending priorities that emerged from neighborhood decision-making. Investment results are one way to answer the question of benefit — *cui bono?* — and so to examine the criticism that NRP predominantly, or even exclusively, serves the interests of middle class and wealthy residents. Finally, section VIII explores a less tangible consequence of NRP: increased neighborhood capacity for collective action and local development.

II. History and Impetus

In the mid 1980s, suburban flight and consequent central city depopulation ranked high among the concerns of Minneapolis residents and leaders. Many neighborhoods faced declining housing stock, increasing crime, failing schools, and even blight. Minneapolis seemed to be following the unhappy path of many American cities: spatial polarization in which those with means fled to the suburbs and the poor were left behind (Goetz 2000). During the 1970s alone, Minneapolis lost 14% of its population to growing suburban areas (de Souza Briggs and Mueller 1997). The 1984 city election brought new

council members with neighborhood constituencies who were mobilized to reverse the decline of residential areas (Nickel 1995). This coalition organized a series of task forces to develop proposals and find solutions to neighborhood decay. A serious effort, these groups said, would cost the city more than \$3 billion. That price tag far exceeded the city's means. Instead, the groups turned to an innovative approach that would capitalize on the energies of residents themselves. Delegating power and authority over revitalization planning to neighborhood residents, they thought, would improve public services design and delivery through citizen input, lead to cooperation among city agencies, and increase neighborhood capacity.⁴ The central logic of the NRP's design was to accomplish a *substantive* objective—revitalizing neighborhoods in order to stem and reverse the residential exodus by making “the city’s residential areas better places to live, work, learn and play” (NRP Primer)—through the *procedural* innovation of empowering residents of neighborhoods to set local priorities, design projects, and implement them in collaboration with the city departments.

In 1990, the Minnesota Legislature and Minneapolis City Council translated these ideas into law and policy that established the Neighborhood Revitalization Program. They used tax increment funds to finance the program at an annual level of \$20 million for a period of twenty years.⁵ The program was divided in “Phase I” for its first decade

⁴ A combination of factors prompted the adoption of a neighborhood-centered approach. First, in the 1970s and 1980s, downtown Minneapolis became a modern and vibrant business district thanks to substantial public and private investment. While resources had targeted the downtown area, other innercity neighborhoods were facing serious decline. The contrast between the flourishing business area and the deteriorating neighborhoods that surrounded it started to prompt criticism among citizens. Second, many of the business leaders who had favored the development of downtown Minneapolis withdrew in the 1980s, at the same time as community organizations mobilized to support a neighborhood-oriented agenda. Third, the federal aid component of the city development budget dropped sharply, calling for innovative solutions to stop neighborhood decline. See Nickel (1995).

⁵ Generally, tax-increment financing (TIF) uses tax revenues generated by development projects to fund further development. The initial projects are funded through the issuance of bonds, which are repaid by the

and “Phase II” for the second one. It categorized eighty-one neighborhoods of Minneapolis, which differed greatly in population size, income level, and racial composition into three groups: “protection” – sound neighborhoods, “revitalization” – sound neighborhoods at risk of decline, and “redirection” – areas most at risk and in need of decisive intervention.⁶ Areas most in need received greater funding.

III. NRP’s Institutional Design

The structure of the NRP illustrates how even the most local of participatory programs in complex societies involves many layers of supra-local and centralized institutional machinery. The program is composed of five governing jurisdictions: the City of Minneapolis, Minneapolis Public Schools, Hennepin County, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, and Minneapolis Public Library. Operationally, the NRP office is staffed with a director and ten staff members, most of whom are neighborhood specialists who provide assistance and facilitation to neighborhood organizations. The NRP office also interacts with city departments involved in neighborhood projects and promotes a decentralized planning approach. At the heart of NRP, then is a relationship of *accountable autonomy* for neighborhood associations (Fung 2004). They are to an extent

additional tax revenue generated by development. In Minneapolis, the downtown revitalization was subsidized through TIF and the extra tax revenues generated by the downtown redevelopment were plowed back into TIF. In the 1980s, amendments to the TIF legislation redistributed TIF revenues to other neighborhoods, making tax increment funds available also to areas outside of the TIF district. See Nickel (1995). Any difference between the tax revenue increase and the amount needed for debt service could be used to finance development in other areas –including NRP projects. Tax-increment resources went to a fund called “Common Project”, administered by the former Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA), which has recently been replaced by the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED). Common Project resources fund both NRP and MCDA –now CPED- initiatives. For an explanation of how tax-increment financing was used for funding NRP projects, see Fainstein, Hirst and Tennebaum (1995 pp.16-17). For a more general discussion on tax-increment financing and its implications, see Kritiz (2003).

⁶ Neighborhoods self-selected in which category they belonged, therefore it may have happened that neighborhoods with very similar characteristics ended up in different groups. In some cases, neighborhoods joined forces to participate in the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, forming sixty-seven neighborhoods under the Program. Of these neighborhoods, twenty-seven are protection areas, twenty-eight are revitalization areas, and twelve are in the redirection group.

autonomous actors who specify priorities, develop project plans, and allocate funding over a range of neighborhood development decisions. However, their autonomy is supervised and checked by the central office of the NRP. That office reviews and approves plans, provides various kinds of technical assistance, and attempts to insure that those who participate in neighborhood associations actually represent a full range of interests and populations within those neighborhoods.

NRP's rules require neighborhood associations to be incorporated as non-profit organizations.⁷ The lion's share of NRP planning activity occurs through these organizations. They manage the local processes of interest articulation and deliberation. Even before they begin their internal planning deliberations, neighborhood organizations must execute "Participation Agreements" with the central NRP office that specify how they intend to include diverse residents in local deliberations to develop and approve neighborhood plans. This requirement was introduced to diversify participation and control of neighborhood associations beyond the circle of "usual suspects" composed of familiar neighborhood leaders and activists.

In the first part of the planning process, neighborhood associations gather information about the concerns and priorities of residents to identify "the issues of local importance" (Williams 1985: 114). Typically, neighborhood organizations mail surveys to residents. Some also conduct door to door canvassing; others organize focus groups to solicit input from demographic groups who are likely to be otherwise under-represented, such as renters, minority groups, seniors, and youth. The planning process also involves substantial discussion during neighborhood meetings. Here, residents not only voice their concerns and propose ideas for improving their localities, but also learn about the

⁷ 501c(3) under the US tax code.

diversity of needs coexisting in their area. Some residents reported altering their sense of neighborhood priorities after listening to the needs highlighted by other participants.⁸ Eventually, priorities gathered through these discussions, surveys and focus groups, coalesce into Neighborhood Action Plans that detail neighborhood needs and list concrete “actions” to achieve those objectives.

On average, 3.2 years elapsed from planning inception to final plan approval by the city (Teamworks 2000: 44). Because they were generally led by resident volunteers, planning processes consumed many months. These volunteers has to master city standards, negotiate with the city departments that will implement neighborhood projects, and leverage their NRP funds to attract additional resources. After a plan is drafted, it must be ratified in a general assembly involving the whole neighborhood, and obtain approval from the NRP Policy Board and Minneapolis City Council.

The role of neighborhood residents, however, does not end with plan approval. Residents stay involved during implementation through committees that supervise the execution of action plans. Additionally, in order to maximize NRP resources and abate project costs, residents offer their volunteer labor to carry out projects such as clean-ups and community policing.

IV. Neighborhoods and the City

Proponents of participation have argued that “there is no better way to ensure the long-term success of public involvement than to institutionalize a decision-making role for that involvement” (Thomas 1995: 163). The design of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program institutionalizes the deliberative role of neighborhoods in local

⁸ Group interview, Minneapolis, 2004.

planning by delegating to residents the authority to prioritize local needs in deliberative meetings and allocate NPR resources for development projects. Though NRP relies upon cooperation between neighborhood organizations and a host of city agencies, these interactions are for the most part not formalized or systematic. Nevertheless, this layer of interactions importantly structures the possibilities and limitations of local empowerment and action.

Residents frequently characterized their interactions with city departments as “fluctuating.” Working relationships depended idiosyncratically upon individual officials’ propensity to cooperate with neighborhood residents and their organizations rather than on the operating procedures of city departments. Some department staffs are committed to working with neighborhoods and recognize the value of collaboration because “citizens have learned a lot more about local government, and local government has learned about citizens and how to listen to them.”⁹ Others consider it an unnecessary burden. Residents are particularly wary of working with high ranking officials. Some perceive them to be more likely to be “political” and hostile to citizen engagement. However, when they constructed positive relationships, residents found it quite useful to have a “contact” officer whom they could call upon to resolve obstacles during plan implementation. Additionally, residents take great pride in having “a seat at the table” where decisions are made. Many long time activists felt that NRP helped to level the relationship between neighborhood associations and city agencies.

City agencies have joined with neighborhood organizations as co-investors in many development projects. When agencies seek additional funds to complete projects on their agendas, they sometimes join with neighborhood associations as partners in

⁹ Interview with city official, Minneapolis, 2004.

designing as well as financing those projects. However, at the central level there is no consensus on the appropriate *locus* of development decision-making in Minneapolis.

Some proponents favor NRP's decentralized and participatory approach, while others prefer the more common centralized and professionalized track that was in place prior to the NRP. The former argue that neighborhood involvement added a level of realism to addressing local problems and created a civic infrastructure of vocal and engaged citizens. The latter raise numerous *caveats* regarding neighborhood control.

First, supporters of the centralized approach argue that the neighborhood approach can favor parochial interests, while some policies need the *vision d'ensemble* of centralized planning. Second, the scarce participation of groups such as renters and minority residents severely undermines the program's inclusiveness. Inevitably, when dealing with neighborhood groups, critics ask "who does this group of people really speak for?" (Thomas 1986: 97) Many pointed to the threat of homeowner domination as a reason to favor a centralized approach that relies upon political representation through broad elected bodies such as the city council. However, blaming neighborhoods on the grounds of poor representation "hold[s] neighborhoods accountable to a standard that no one else is accountable to,"¹⁰ since participation in other kinds of politics is also biased in favor of homeowners and high-status people. Third, some favor a more centralized track because neighborhoods became "over-empowered" and came to have unrealistic expectations. As one informant described "we really empowered neighborhoods, now they have a political will, and people in city hall may feel uncomfortable with that."¹¹ Fourth, one political vulnerability of NRP is that it is difficult for politicians to gain

¹⁰ Interview with city official, Minneapolis, 2004.

¹¹ Interview with city official, Minneapolis, 2004.

electoral benefits from supporting NRP or making it work well. Neighborhoods play such a pivotal role in planning and implementation that “city councilors see they don’t get credit for making this happen.”¹² Fifth, Phase II resources have been drastically reduced as a result of a 2001 Minnesota tax reform. In a climate of tight budgets, the city has tried to regain control over its resources and some have criticized NRP for wasting resources on wealthy neighborhoods. Finally, NRP’s loose governance structure created a vagueness where city departments did not receive clear guidelines and hence could not be held accountable for not accommodating neighborhood planning. Since “nothing in the legal framework of the NRP positively bound [...] agencies to give priority to the neighborhood plans not even to act on them at all” (Fainstein and Hirst 1996: 102), NRP did not succeed in changing the practices of bureaucratic bodies. Some maintain that agencies would have changed behavior only under the pressure of “statutory authority [...] for revised budgeting processes that would take into account territorial units, for assignment of personnel to places rather than functions, and for job descriptions and incentives that would mandate service to neighborhoods” (Fainstein and Hirst 1996: 107).

V. Participation

Despite these objections, the Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program created unprecedented opportunities for residents to engage in the co-production of services and public goods. Although the program’s resources and authority mobilized many who had not previously engaged in neighborhood organizing (Goetz and Sidney 1994b; Martin and Pentel 2002), NRP is often criticized for its limited and biased participation. At the most demanding level, some 1,675 residents throughout the city

¹² Interview with city official, Minneapolis, 2004.

serve on the governing boards and working committees of NRP's organizations.¹³ At a wider and potentially more inclusive level, each neighborhood association hosts general open meetings to discuss and ratify action plans. On average, less than 2% of neighborhood residents attended these meetings, with lows of 0.4% and highs of 3.3%; the average turnout was 75 residents per meeting (Fainstein, Hirst, and Tennebaum 1995: 47). NRP recorded and combined the numbers of voters in meetings where Neighborhood Action Plans or First Step¹⁴ plans were approved, and attendance varies from 20 voters to over 500. In a total of 93 meetings, 12,585 people participated, averaging 135 individuals per meeting.¹⁵ In order to track participation over time, NRP staff counted participants in neighborhood meetings held during the month of June every year, from 1994 to 1999 and found a steady increase in citizen participation, from an average of nearly 15 attendees over 131 meetings in 1994, to 57 attendees over 59 meetings in 1999.¹⁶ Citizen participation increased sharply in redirection neighborhoods over this period. Rates of participation for protection areas increased between 1994 and 1996 and then leveled after that, but remained substantially flat in revitalization ones over the same period (Teamworks 2000: 119-120). Beyond these avenues, many neighborhood associations attempt to solicit the views of groups who do not participate through these channels by sponsoring targeted focus groups and special meetings to attract them.

¹³ According to NRP staff, a very conservative estimate of how many residents are involved in organizations' boards and committees in every neighborhood leads to an average of 25 people per neighborhood. If we multiply 25 times 67 (number of neighborhood organizations participating in NRP) we obtain 1,675, the number of neighbors who are actively involved in the more demanding and time consuming NRP activities.

¹⁴ First Step is a program that NRP developed in 1993 to facilitate planning by providing limited funding to neighborhoods so that they could start working on the most urgent priorities before the completion of the formal planning phase.

¹⁵ Data provided by NRP on Resident Participation to Approve First Step and Neighborhood Action Plan Participation as of 7/10/2003.

¹⁶ Data provided by NRP on May Meeting Survey Results.

These data capture participation at annual neighborhood meetings. However, the actual planning and implementation processes are handled by a much smaller group of residents who are willing to commit the time and energy required to sustain the program. Other observers agree that volunteer work in NRP is largely carried out by white homeowners while renters and minorities participate much less. As one study put it, “homeowners and business owners became the staunchest NRP participants, dominating the NRP boards and committees” (Martin and Pentel 2002: 437). Although program staff strongly encouraged tenants and members of racial minority groups to participate, such residents were much less active in NRP (Fainstein and Hirst 1996). A typical pattern is that a core group of volunteers (15 to 20, 30 to 40, depending on the neighborhood size), most of whom are homeowners, do the bulk of the “heavy lifting” in NRP. Most of the resident activists we interviewed are homeowners who have been involved in NRP since the program’s inception. All of them lamented the scarce participation of renters, minorities, and other groups. While some argued that residents cannot be forced to participate, others maintained that more affirmative measures should be taken to ensure that neighborhood committees reflect the community’s diversity and that also soft voices are heard.

Four mutually reinforcing considerations explain this pattern of participation.

First and foremost, NRP was conceived, if not explicitly then certainly implicitly, as a program *for* homeowners. From that conception, it quickly became a program *of* homeowners and *by* homeowners. Its central aim was to improve the quality of residential neighborhoods through local planning. As research suggests, people who own a home are more interested in local policies that may determine the future value of their properties,

renters, on the other hand, “lack a comparable stake because the value of their personal wealth is unlikely to be linked as directly to what happens locally” (Thomas 1986: 10).

Secondly, beyond differences of need and interest, some kinds of participation in NRP impose great demands upon individuals. Those who serve on neighborhood association boards and committees frequently invest many hours each month in NRP activities such as meetings, planning sessions, negotiations with city agencies, and research.¹⁷ NRP, then, unintentionally creates “offices” or “positions” that limit participation in several ways – by drawing those with greater interests, more extensive capabilities, and those who are more comfortable participating under such circumstances.

Third, there are also cultural barriers to participation. Some residents we interviewed recognized that, especially for new-comers, it might be challenging to participate in a meeting with a close knit group of residents who have been engaged in local planning for years and speak an intimidating technical jargon. These barriers are compounded for minority residents with limited English proficiency.

Finally, beyond these factors, political scientists have long recognized that “resource constraints” impose substantial barriers to participation. The background distribution of resources – such as wealth, education, status, and time – makes it more difficult for those who are less well off to participate in all kinds of political activity compared to those who are better off. Because NRP is more demanding in terms of skills, time, and information costs, the lack of resources poses an even greater barrier to disadvantaged groups than less exacting forms of participation such as voting.

¹⁷ When asked how many hours they devoted to NRP-related activities, many interviewed residents responded around 5 hours every week. Some residents reported volunteering as many as 10, 15 or even 20 hours per week when working on major projects.

VI. Neighborhood Conflict and Deliberation

Predictably, the injection of public resources and funds into Minneapolis neighborhoods stirred substantial conflicts regarding the best use of these funds and contending conceptions of “neighborhood improvement.” NRP increased the relative political participation and activism of a particular kind of resident—those interested in neighborhood, spatially-focused development who were disproportionately homeowners. To the extent that community organizations compete for members, influence, agenda control, and resources, this new mobilization perhaps came at the expense of other kinds of groups that had occupied the organizational ecology prior to NRP.

Especially in some redirection neighborhoods, those most afflicted with blight and crime, conflict emerged between homeowners and existing organizations. In these areas, community organizations had been active well before NRP to provide affordable housing and social services to low-income residents. When NRP granted funding and the opportunity for *all* residents to have a say in their allocation, latent tensions became visible. In some cases, homeowners, property owners, and business owners mobilized when they saw neighborhood organizations using NRP funding for additional subsidized housing. Many opposed low-income housing because they associated it with negative externalities, such as greater concentration of poverty and decline in nearby property values (Goetz and Sydney 1994 a). Some suggest that residents have a “visceral dislike” of rental housing, and NRP allowed “inherent prejudices (against renters and density) to emerge publicly” (Martin and Pentel 2002: 446).

Property owners frequently maintained their neighborhoods already had a “fair share” of affordable housing and that it should be de-concentrated to other areas of the city. To improve their neighborhoods, this group supported stabilization policies based

upon expanding homeownership, rehabilitating the existing housing stock, including rental properties, and strengthening commercial corridors.

In some neighborhoods, such as Whittier and Phillips, tensions between property owners and existing community organizations became so vehement that they resulted in the replacement of older organizations with new ones that emphasized the preferences of better off residents.¹⁸ The intense conflict in some neighborhoods in NRP's early days seems to have faded. In some neighborhoods, white homeowners have literally taken over NRP activities and refrained from seeking wider participation that would slow down their work. In other neighborhoods, however, associations took steps to make their boards and plans more inclusive.

There is no reason to suppose that these battles between factions within neighborhoods and among different community-based organizations were resolved deliberately. To the extent that NRP triggers deliberation, that deliberation—understood here as reaching collective decisions through a process of reason giving (Bohman 1996)—occurs in the context of formulating and implementing the development plans that are funded through NRP rather than in the struggle over the control of organizations. Groups of residents, under the auspices of neighborhood organizations, gathered over a series of meetings in each neighborhood to identify issues of local importance by giving reasons to support one choice over the other. During this process, residents exchange information and learn from one another about their neighborhood needs. Deliberation, however, does not end with mutual reason giving. It is also “a process of seeking... and reaching a mutually binding decision on the basis of those reasons” (Gutman and Thompson 2004: 134). In the case of NRP, deliberation

¹⁸ For an early analysis of the power dynamics stirred by NRP, see Goetz and Sidney (1994, a).

among residents—and also between neighborhoods and the city jurisdictions—culminates in a detailed action plan that specifies neighborhood objectives and projects.

As we have discussed, diversity is one major challenge to deliberation in NRP. Some neighborhood associations took strenuous efforts to engage minorities and less advantaged residents in deliberations and the formulation of plans, while others did little. A few organizations reserve some board seats for minority groups, and recognize the importance of having at least some minority leaders on board who can act as intermediaries to their respective communities. The McKinley neighborhood board election for 2004, for example, besides having several African American candidates, also had representatives from the Latino and the Hmong communities.

Still, many observers regard the criticism of exclusiveness as accurate. “It’s a white homeowners’ thing,” commented one of our informants. To some extent, there is no way for a program such as NRP to completely overcome this difficulty. While it is entirely appropriate that urban government should provide opportunities for residents of the city to participate in decisions to improve the quality of housing and other long-term public and private goods in their neighborhoods, such opportunities will always be more attractive to homeowners than to renters. This problem could be addressed by creating other influential channels of participation that address concerns of other residents. Other cities, for example, have created opportunities for citizens to participate in strategic planning and budgeting around public safety, education, the arts, and regional issues.¹⁹

¹⁹ AmericaSpeaks, an organization based in Washington, D.C., has convened Citizens Summits where residents in the District of Columbia discuss the city’s strategic plan and identify spending priorities for a two year cycle. AmericanSpeaks has also engaged the American public in a nation-wide discussion on the future of Social Security. Other examples of issues that transcend the sub-local scale are citizen involvement in school governance and policing in Chicago, and, internationally, participatory city budgeting in Brazil and decentralized governance in West Bengal and Kerala, India, to name a few.

When such programs address needs that are especially important to disadvantaged residents, those residents often participate at high rates.²⁰

Within the context of NRP, central authorities such as the city's NRP program office and its policy board might nevertheless offer more guidance regarding both the substance of planning and neighborhoods' participation processes to make deliberation more fair and inclusive. There is evidence that the NRP office has shifted from the more hands-off approach of its early days to offer more support and guidance regarding matters of both substance and process. In terms of substance, it is entirely appropriate for mandates to require that neighborhood plans address certain social priorities to which neighborhood associations are likely to be inattentive, such as affordable housing and social services. In addition to requiring neighborhood associations to stipulate Participation Agreements, they might also be encouraged to reach out to other community organizations that enjoy better contacts with those less likely to participate in NRP.

Neighborhood associations should incorporate multiple *modes* of participation so that those who are unable to invest the enormous energy required at the highest levels of NRP activism can nevertheless participate and be heard. When neighborhood associations first embarked upon the NRP, they were highly focused on developing effective plans. Having mastered plan development, many associations are now refining strategies to include more residents and perspectives in their deliberations and plan implementation. Some neighborhoods complement face-to-face deliberations in meetings — which may be scarcely attended — with surveys, door-to-door canvassing, meetings and focus groups to hear from all neighborhood constituencies. Others translate NRP

²⁰ See Fung (2004); Baiocchi (2005).

materials into languages spoken by minorities, and use interpreters to facilitate meetings. During the implementation phase, neighborhood organizations sponsored volunteer activities such as clean-ups, plantings, cook outs, and art festivals. These events are very useful not only because they provide volunteer labor for NRP projects, but also because they build community and a “sense of neighborhood” that is very valuable for NRP work. Accurate data gathering to ensure that all voices are heard in the planning process, combined with outreach and specific events to engage those who have just limited time to devote to volunteering, are very important strategies to offer various “layers of engagement” in NRP activities.

But how unfair or exclusive were neighborhood decision-making processes? Because we did not directly observe the discussions to formulate neighborhood action plans, we lack direct evidence of their deliberative character. However, in the next section, we turn to an important indirect indicator — the spending priorities that resulted from these neighborhood deliberations.

VII. Follow the Money

In light of substantial biases and limitations of participation, one might expect the program to have operated as a machine to generate private benefits for the very residents who participate intensively in neighborhood activities. Surprisingly, NRP seems to have delivered benefits of a much more general, even redistributive, nature.

Although NRP distributed resources to all neighborhoods, from the most deprived to the wealthiest, not all areas received equal amounts. NRP systematically favored disadvantaged neighborhoods through a progressive funding allocation formula

In their Action Plans, neighborhood associations lay out residents' priorities and plans for spending NRP resources to advance those priorities. In some cases, however, initial allocations do not match actual expenditures because plans are sometimes revised to address emerging issues. We therefore analyzed data on actual allotments rather than initial resource allocations. In order to examine variations in neighborhood uses of NRP funds, we used NRP data that were up to date as of spring 2004. Between NRP's inception and spring 2004, neighborhoods allotted over \$168 million. Revitalization neighborhoods allotted a total of \$78 million, followed by \$61 million for redirection neighborhoods, and protection areas with a total of \$29 million.²¹

Given the participation biases noted above, the undue influence—even capture of the planning process—of homeowners and other advantaged interests poses an acute challenge. To understand the extent to which resource allotments were concentrated to benefit homeowners, we isolated strategies that generate distinctive gains for homeowners and created a new category named “Housing for Homeowners.”²² One *caveat* is important in considering this category. These programs consist largely of revolving loan funds such as home improvement loans that residents repay. In some cases, the initial allocation was repaid and re-invested in the form of new loans more than one time. Consequently, the “Housing for Homeowners” category may be inflated by revolving loan funds as the same resources were expended more than once to support home improvements. Since we consider neighborhood expenditures and not their original

²¹ In order to understand how neighborhoods spent resources, we used NRP's coding system. NRP developed ten standard categories, numbered from 0 to 9, to define the neighborhood strategies present in action plans: 0. NRP Coordination; 1. Housing; 2. Economic Development; 3. Community Building, Art; 4. Crime Prevention; 5. Transport and Infrastructure; 6. Environment; 7. Parks and Recreation; 8. Human Services; 9. Schools and Libraries.

²² We separated these programs from more general housing programs and created a tenth category: 1.5 Housing for Homeowners.

allocations, category 1.5 faithfully reflects all resources that were *expended* for homeowners.

Chart 2 below illustrates how neighborhoods spent their resources in aggregate, while Chart 3 analyzes how neighborhood types (protection, revitalization, redirection) allotted NRP funds according to their different priorities.

Chart 2: Aggregate NRP Allotments as of Spring 2004

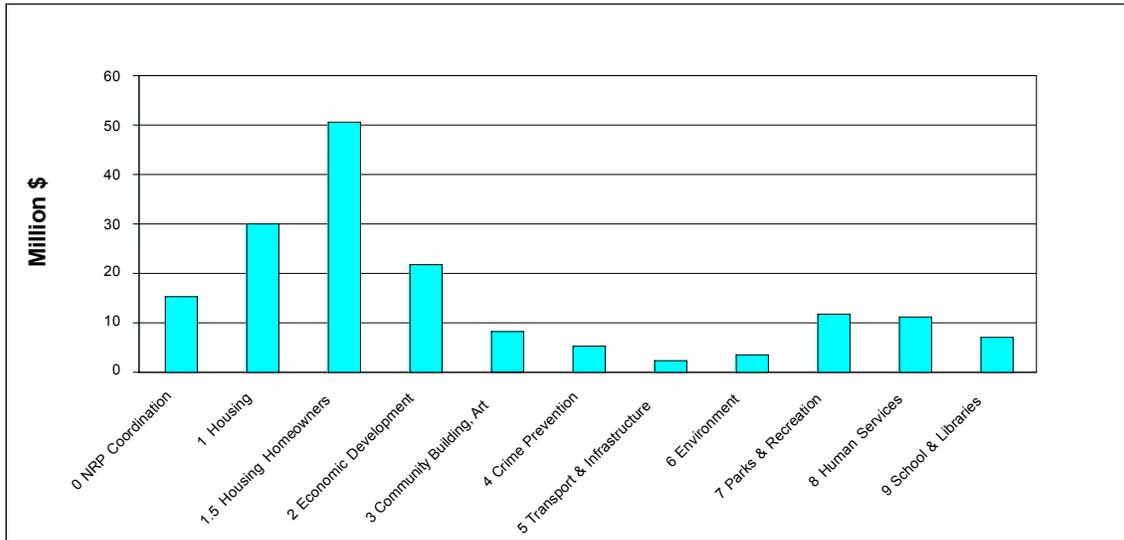
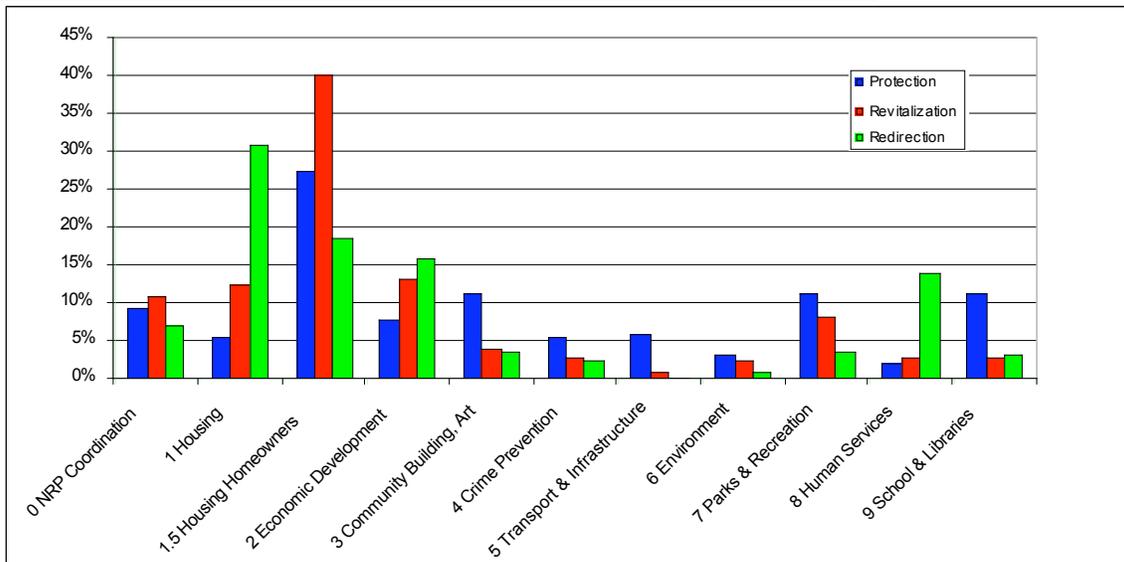


Chart 3: NRP Allotments by Neighborhood Type as of Spring 2004



Housing projects benefiting homeowners –mainly in the form of home improvement loans and grants- were allotted over \$50 million, or 30% of all NRP resources in this period, making this category the one which expended the most NRP funding. As explained above, this category may be inflated by repaid loans which are

returned to residents in the form of new loans.²³ A prior evaluation analyzing neighborhood allocations confirms that about 30% of all NRP resources were assigned to housing rehabilitation and renovation projects –mostly for homeowners (Teamworks 2000: 50).

In the second largest category, allotments were devoted to a variety of housing projects, such as demolition of blighted dwellings, construction of low income housing, and programs to support new homebuyers with mortgage subsidies, to name a few. More than \$30 million were expended for housing projects. Combining categories 1 and 1.5, neighborhoods expended almost half of their resources, 48 percent, in housing projects. Though this fell short of the 52.5% requirement for housing investment imposed by NRP guidelines, overall housing projects –including those addressing homeowners- constitute by far the largest expenditure. Support for homeowners was especially high in revitalization neighborhoods, followed by protection and redirection. Although homeownership rates are higher in protection neighborhoods (60%), residents in wealthier areas may be accustomed to expending substantial private funds to maintain their properties and prefer to use NRP funding for projects that would be difficult to fund individually, such as parks, schools and libraries. The allotments for some protection neighborhoods are also too small to create substantial housing improvement programs. In revitalization neighborhoods, on the other hand, where homeownership rates are at 50% and median household incomes were some \$12,000 lower than in protection

²³ Revolving loans have proven a valuable neighborhood resource, especially in times of curbed funding for NRP, as they provide a reserve residents may utilize when other sources dry out. In October 2005, the NRP Policy Board decided that program income deriving from investment in a neighborhood can be reserved for future use in the area.

neighborhoods,²⁴ home improvement strategies seemed to address more urgent needs and accounted for over 40% of all expenditures. Finally, redirection neighborhoods – which have the highest proportion of renters, and homeownership rates around 21%, spent 18% of resources on strategies benefiting homeowners and over 30% on other housing projects. As of 1999, a total of 4,775 home improvement grants and loans were released to home owners under NRP and 675 rental units were built or renovated (Teamworks 2000: 13). Homeownership rates increased, especially in redirection neighborhoods, which also experienced greater home sales. Also housing prices increased from 1990-92 to 1996-98, across all neighborhood types, but especially in protection ones, showing greater consumer confidence. As research found, “Minneapolis performed well during the 1990s in outcomes related to housing investment that might be expected to reflect stability, confidence, and a sense of a place” (Teamworks 2000: 100-101).

The third largest expenditure category, with over \$22 million, is economic development. This includes activities to revitalize commercial corridors and create new businesses and employment opportunities for residents. Strategies vary from enhancing streetscapes and parking improvement projects to make corridors more attractive, to assistance for commercial rehabilitation and business development. Highly deprived neighborhoods, with few retail establishments and services due to poverty and crime, invested in economic development activities to improve the livelihoods of residents, provide them with more choice, and possibly new jobs.

NRP coordination expenses follow, at approximately \$15 million across the program. This category covers most of the costs related to the organizational maintenance

²⁴ In 1990, median household income was around \$24,600 in revitalization neighborhoods, as opposed to \$37,000 in protection ones.

of neighborhood associations, such as staff, administration and resources for planning and implementing action plans. These investments facilitated neighborhood outreach, mobilization, and planning activities and are probably responsible for stabilizing many neighborhood associations and reinvigorating others that were dormant prior to NRP.²⁵

The analysis of how different neighborhood types allotted resources suggests that, by and large, expenditures arguably mirror neighborhood needs, with more disadvantaged neighborhoods concentrating resources in high priority areas, such as housing, economic development and human services and better off neighborhoods focusing more on amenities. Since more affluent neighborhoods do not have such urgent needs to tackle, they distribute funds more evenly across activities to enhance neighborhood environment and amenities, such as community building activities, renovations of parks, schools and libraries. While homeowners are very significant beneficiaries from NRP – 30% of overall expenditures were devoted to programs for home improvement funds – they were by no means the only beneficiaries. In light of Minneapolis’ home ownership rate of roughly 50%,²⁶ it is not at all clear that homeowners are inappropriate beneficiaries of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program

VIII. Neighborhood Capacity and Empowerment

The NRP has contributed to the development of substantial capacities for planning, project implementation, and collective action at the neighborhood level. Prior to NRP, community organizations were present in most neighborhoods, but only some were well staffed and effective. The resources, support, and authority provided by NRP,

²⁵ Section VIII below describes how NRP coordination expenses contributed to increased neighborhood capacity.

²⁶ 2000 Census data, see: <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/citywork/planning/Census2000/2000-Mpls-ProfileofGeneralDemographicCharacteristics.asp>.

however, contributed to the formation of associations in neighborhoods where there were none, and strengthened existing associations throughout the city.

Though most neighborhoods have functioning associations as a result of NRP, these organizations vary greatly by membership, professionalism, and effectiveness. Generally, large neighborhoods with more generous NRP resources can afford an office and one or more staff. Smaller neighborhoods, on the other hand, may not have a physical space for the organization, and hire part time staff to work on NRP matters. Other neighborhoods prefer to save some of their NRP resources by not hiring any staff and have volunteers carry out all the work.

NRP relies upon stable neighborhood organizations with robust planning and implementation capacities to do the work of local development. The evidence shows that professional neighborhood organizations do indeed pave the way for success under NRP. For example, areas that spent more money on personnel during the planning phase had their plans approved faster than other neighborhoods.²⁷

Neighborhood organizations are also the main venue for resident participation in NRP and their efforts — in providing information, mobilizing volunteers, and creating opportunities for engagement — can improve the quality and quantity of citizen participation. As scholars have observed of other contexts, “People who live in neighborhoods with strong organizations tend to participate more, and people who live in neighborhoods with weaker associations tend to participate less” (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993: 95). Strong organizations are especially important in communities of

²⁷ Almost all neighborhoods spent resources on community organization personnel during the planning phase, but on average less than \$10,000 every year. Redirection neighborhoods, the ones that invested the most in personnel, had their plans approved in 2.8 years, revitalization ones in 3.4 years, and protection ones in little over 3 years. See *Teamworks*, 2000, p.86.

lower socio-economic status to offset their other barriers to participation. As research suggests, “The degree of citizen participation is directly correlated with the presence of organizers [...] there will not be self-sustaining organizations among the poor unless there are paid staff to continually breathe life into them” (Williams 1985: 252-253). However, because of NRP’s decentralized approach, not all Minneapolis neighborhood organizations emphasized outreach and engagement. Some organizations have professional staff working exclusively on community outreach, while others —especially those relying only on volunteers — tend to neglect outreach and focus more on plan implementation.

Because neighborhood funding will decline under NRP’s Phase II, many associations have already begun to plan for staff reductions and limiting activities. This downsizing is likely to be particularly detrimental in low-income neighborhoods.

By supporting local organizations across the city and institutionalizing neighborhood planning, NRP laid the building blocks of a widespread community organization. As research suggests, support from the city is fundamental to solve the collective action problem that afflicts most neighborhoods, since “the greatest difficulty neighborhoods in local politics face in influencing city hall is simply getting organized in the first place” (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993: 287). Additionally, NRP’s devolution of resources made the program credible to residents and created strong incentives for them to participate. Resources also created incentives for city departments to heed residents’ concerns; it gave residents “a voice at the table [...] whereas they might have always had a voice, it’s just that money speaks louder,” as one resident commented.

NRP favored local empowerment also because of the demands it placed on residents. During their involvement in NRP, residents acquire a variety of skills — from technical to leadership ones becoming a group of knowledgeable, vocal, confident residents who can sometimes be very demanding with their administrators. Some even suggest that NRP changed the “power structure” in the city, because “elected officials know that their constituents are much better informed about many aspects of planning and development than they were before the NRP was established, and they are consequently much more answerable to more constituents” (Martin and Pentel 2002: 447).

The fact that NRP distributes resources to *all* neighborhoods created a wide constituency for the program. Scholars attribute particular importance to this design feature because “Programs that are aimed at disadvantaged neighborhoods will not have the same credibility or legitimacy as citywide programs” (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993: 296).

Conclusions

The Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program is a highly innovative program that involves citizens in planning and delegates substantial powers—more substantial than any other comparable U.S. urban initiative—to neighborhoods. NRP’s designers hoped that delegating power and resources to citizens would enable a new approach in which city departments cooperate with residents and among themselves in the implementation of neighborhood objectives. Involving residents in planning would also renovate social fabric and create a sense of ownership of the neighborhood and, more broadly, of the city. More than ten years have elapsed since the approval of the first

neighborhood plans, and NRP achieved some of these objectives, while it has been less successful on other dimensions.

The plan has revitalized many parts of the city, improving its housing stock and commercial corridors. It has facilitated the construction and improvement of schools, parks, and other public facilities. Property values have risen in Minneapolis, and this may be in part due to NRP activities. Furthermore, bottom-up design has improved services and occasionally facilitated inter-agency collaboration. Many aspects of this collaborative vision, however, remain unrealized.

First, while innovative ways of planning and implementing action plans were created in the neighborhoods, city departments have not undergone complementary reforms to reorganize themselves in ways to accommodate neighborhood input in their planning and decision-making. Since NRP's success depends in large measure upon cooperation with the city, incentives could have been designed for city departments, such as pools of dedicated funding to spend exclusively on NRP projects. Similarly, the governance structure defining the interaction between the city and the neighborhoods should have been spelled out more clearly.

Second, by devolving substantial power and resources down to the neighborhoods, NRP has increased the quantity and quality of participation and civic engagement among Minneapolis residents. Residents can be divided in two categories. The first consists of a small group of around two thousand highly dedicated and invested activists, who have been involved in NRP activities since the program's inception. Outside of this group, there is a much wider penumbra of residents who are only occasionally involved in neighborhood activities, but are nevertheless essential to

neighborhood life as they provide input to planning, volunteer work for specific campaigns, and neighborhood solidarity.

There are foreseeable systematic biases and exclusions in the kind of participation that NRP has generated. Several reasons, including the local character of planning, demands on volunteer time, background distribution of resources and cultural factors make the program naturally more appealing to homeowners. For the same set of reasons, renters are less likely to take part in very demanding volunteer work, but are nonetheless willing to engage in less labor-intensive activities, such as *ad hoc* events and annual neighborhood meetings. Given these general patterns, several neighborhoods take specific measures to ensure that all priorities are considered during planning and that all neighbors are, at some level, engaged and connected. Some neighborhood associations reserve board positions for renters and people of color. Beyond quotas, much more might be done to create connections and draw involvement from all residents, such as working more closely with organizations of under-represented groups, as they can easily reach out to their constituencies. Associations should consciously create agendas that are relevant for *all* residents, not just a subsection of them. Issues such as crime and school quality generate broad concern, and might engage the entire community in dialogue and deliberation.

Third, the activities of neighborhood organizations importantly affect patterns of participation and inclusion. Unfortunately, not all neighborhoods have placed the same emphasis and resources on activities to engage those who do not participate. Although NRP has strengthened its participation requirements overtime, a more formalized

structure of guidelines and accountability mechanisms could ensure deeper and more uniform citizen engagement.

Fourth, NRP's detractors often criticize the program for its inability to advance citywide objectives such as affordable housing, provision of social services and incorporation of new immigrants, to name a few. When organized as neighborhood residents, they maintain, citizens express local and highly self-interested priorities. Critics fault NRP specifically for failing to advance the affordable housing agenda. It should be noted that NRP was created and designed for a very different purpose—for neighborhood revitalization and to reverse residential exodus. The appropriate question, therefore, is whether the governance principles of NRP – neighborhood planning and resident participation – are compatible with concerns for affordable housing and equity more generally. The extent to which neighborhood governance and social justice can be reconciled remains to be explored as a matter of policy and political practice. Several considerations, however, suggest that neighborhood participation can be made to serve goals such as affordable housing to a much greater extent than commonly thought. Opposition to low income housing and social services often stems from misinformation and prejudice. Public deliberation offers an important tool to educate residents through dialogue and exposure to different opinions. Community deliberation may inform participants and reshape preferences creating a more favorable environment for projects that advance social justice. NRP could also adopt accountability mechanisms to ensure that all neighborhoods address social justice issues in consistent ways. More than top down approaches, which would likely encounter neighborhood hostility, an accountable

autonomy approach would use the deliberative model to allow residents to formulate their own preferences within a framework of guidelines and answerability.

Two elements lay behind NRP's success: the availability of resources and provisions for continuous resident participation at the neighborhood level. Power and resources were a tremendous stimulus for citizens to mobilize and participate not only in planning, but also with their "sweat equity" in thousands of volunteer hours. NRP was designed to both require and foster sustained citizen participation. The availability of substantial resources to empower residents' decisions drew many in Minneapolis to engage in local planning and development decisions. They also used those resources to reinvigorate dozens of associations that connect volunteers and activists to city government. Despite its blemishes, the Minneapolis experience powerfully shows how public resources can be deployed to increase the civic and political engagement of citizens for public purposes.

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