

Public Participation in Urban Planning



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April 2013

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Executive Summary

This report utilizes case studies of two groups in South Los Angeles, Esperanza Community Housing Corporation and Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), as well as a study of urban planner James Rojas' "design-based learning" workshops in order to examine how organizations educate and involve community members in urban planning decisions. Emphasis is placed on the "lived knowledge" of community members, and the power that knowledge should afford community members to make informed decisions about their community. The "lived knowledge" enables community members to produce the best solutions to many urban problems, including poor housing conditions, exposure to environmental problems, and inadequate access to transportation options. Finally, this report recommends that community groups and city planners integrate more community input with the formal urban planning process.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the people that provided me with the information in this study. These same people also helped show me the potential power of participatory planning.

Sophia Kendall, Lakisha Hull, James Rojas, Beth Rodin, Nancy Halpern Ibrahim, Jen Caspar, Joe Donlin, Teresa Eilers, and Isidro Cerda. The rest of the staff at Esperanza and SAJE.

My professors were an invaluable resource throughout this year long process.

Bhavna Shamasunder, Robert Gottlieb, and Martha Matsuoka.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family who were invaluable through the writing portion of this research.

Jasneet Aulakh, Alyssa Sittig, Jordan Delano, Clara Wheatley-Schaller, Clarissa Boyajian, Kiran Rishi, Noah Donnell-Kilmer, Dan C., my parents, and all of the 2013 UEP Majors.



Introduction

My first exposure to public participation in the planning process was during my internship with Esperanza Community Housing Corporation (Esperanza), a nonprofit affordable housing developer in South Los Angeles. Historically known as South Central, the area is constituted of a 70% Latino population.¹ The neighborhood is characterized by the working class residents; the University of Southern California (USC)—the largest private employer in Southern California; encroaching development as downtown Los Angeles moves south; and the recent opening of the Exposition Light Rail Line with five station stops in the neighborhood. Though the area is in the most dangerous quintile for violent crime in Los Angeles County², health related issues such as diabetes, hypertension, cardio vascular conditions, and asthma are the number one killers in South Los Angeles.³ For many residents, their housing resembles slum conditions, with comparatively high rents, poor building conditions, and dwelling overcrowding.⁴ These conditions persist despite continued efforts by local community-based non-profit organizations to protect residents from environmental hazards and human rights violations. As part of their wider organizational goal to address these health, safety, and accessibility problems, Esperanza has turned to participatory urban planning, which entails working with community members to create a dialogue about possible solutions.

Esperanza has taken an urban planning approach to fight the community's issues because the current planning system fails to properly accept input from community residents while simultaneously failing to fix the problems. As part of a larger trend, community-based organizations like Esperanza have had to assume more of the actual responsibility to provide

¹ Esperanza Community Housing, "Our Neighborhood."

² "Exposition Park"; "Historic South-Central"; "University Park."

³ RENEW Los Angeles, *Transit Oriented Districts in South Los Angeles*.

⁴ Esperanza Community Housing, "Our Neighborhood."

opportunities for participation by community residents in the planning process, stepping in where government has failed to.⁵ By educating and involving their members in issues of urban planning, Esperanza hopes to fix the environmental hazards, poor transit accessibility, and inadequate availability of open space that currently characterizes South Los Angeles.

The community-led planning exercises created by Esperanza fit into a larger, ongoing practice of participatory planning. It is interesting to note, however, that the methods used to apply participatory planning in practice are always in flux, affected by current planning practices, and are continuously contested by different political factions. In her book, *Organizing for Community Controlled Development* Patricia Murphy, advocating for a community-controlled process, describes this form of total citizen control and participation as “people coming together within their shared living place to plan and deploy resources in ways that enhance the local community, enrich society, and advance social justice.”⁶ In general, participation in the planning process plays the role of decentralizing decision-making by bringing the choices about planning to the community residents who live in the affected area. The findings from these community workshops can be used to educate planners about the needs and conditions of neighborhoods from which, in fact, those very planners are often absent.⁷

This research attempts to ascertain how community-based organizations can educate and involve constituents in urban planning and how the residents can then influence the planners shaping policy and land uses at the local level.

By situating the roots and existing models of public participation in the planning process in the literature review, this paper will provide an overview of the current official process of planning in Los Angeles. To answer how community organizations are educating and involving

⁵ Gonzalez, “Resident involvement in advocacy and consensus planning.”

⁶ Murphy and Cunningham, *Organizing for Community Controlled Development.*, P 311.

⁷ Pomeroy, “The planning process and public participation.”

constituents in urban planning, this paper analyzes three case studies of contemporary participatory planning workshops. These three workshop case studies are presented to serve as models for other organizations looking to build power within their communities and to facilitate participatory planning workshops.

The first planning workshop case study is the Los Visioner@s,⁸ the Spanish gender neutral term for *the visionaries*, which were workshops put on by Esperanza in the summer of 2012. Esperanza is a Community Development Corporation that owns and operates nine affordable housing buildings in the South Los Angeles neighborhood. Esperanza prides itself on offering affordable housing options that satisfy health and safety standards for its tenants. Esperanza focuses on empowering their residents, and initiated these participatory planning workshops to involve and ask questions to community members as well as to foster educated, frank, and open conversations about the future of development in the area. The purpose of the workshops was to identify a community-driven approach to future development and to build human capital through participant-driven envisioning exercises. The main focus of the workshops was the areas immediately surrounding the new light rail stops along the Exposition Line that had opened in the neighborhood.

In the second planning workshop case study, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), another non-profit in South Los Angeles, facilitated a People's Planning School. SAJE is a tenant's rights advocacy group that organizes building-by-building to fight for resident rights to safe and healthy living conditions. People's Planning Schools are meant to be forums to educate tenants about how SAJE works to solve issues of land-use and planning, and to teach

⁸ The "@" symbol in this word is simultaneously an 'a' and an 'o'. This allows the word to be gender neutral, thus neither men nor women feel left out by the group name.

residents how these issues are applicable in South Los Angeles and in the other health and human rights campaigns that SAJE runs.

The third planning workshop case study features a unique planning activity facilitated by urban planner James Rojas. The workshop offers extremely humanistic and participant-driven explorations into urban design. The process leads participants on a “design-based learning” experience; participants learn about urban planning by analyzing the way that they and their fellow participants construct and talk about model cities that they construct out of found objects.⁹

This study presents analysis and description of Esperanza’s envisioning exercises, SAJE’s educational sessions, and Rojas’ design workshops—while interlacing analysis within the frame work set forth in the literature review. Next, this study will offer final recommendations for both city policymakers setting community input processes and for community organizations that plan on facilitating participatory workshops. The recommendations create a guide for organizations considering participatory planning workshops to work together with and build the power of community members, while simultaneously learning from the community members and their ideas for improving their community.

⁹ Hass, “James Rojas: The City as Play.”

Literature Review

The players in city planning are the city planners who write the codes and zoning information, the developers who push and propose projects, and the community who live in and around the projects and land.¹⁰ Additionally, as this research will argue, community-based organizations as well as other non-governmental organizations have a high potential to affect the planning process. Due to unequal power dynamics, however, development projects are often planned by the developers and city decision makers and do not incorporate the opinions and ideas of the community.

Those who believe that planning should be done by professionals with multiple degrees and years of practice assign planning “some ethereal quality that cannot stand being subjected to the rugged process of democratic government.”¹¹ However, in a democratic society, many progressives believe that the planning of a community should be dictated by the people who are living in it. The surge in recent years of participatory planning has been in response to the recognition of the undemocratic and top-down nature of the old system. Franklyn Lisk, author of, *Popular Participation in Planning for Basic Needs* argues that the level and potency of participation is contingent not only on the players in the direct planning process, but also on important considerations such as cultural factors, socioeconomic factors, and overarching political structures. Taking these factors into account that some types of participation are inherently more progressive or conservative, understood differently by different cultures, or differently by different classes. For example, people of different classes or different affiliations to a neighborhood may inherently have differing opinions about who should be considered a community member and thus who should be consulted on community projects.

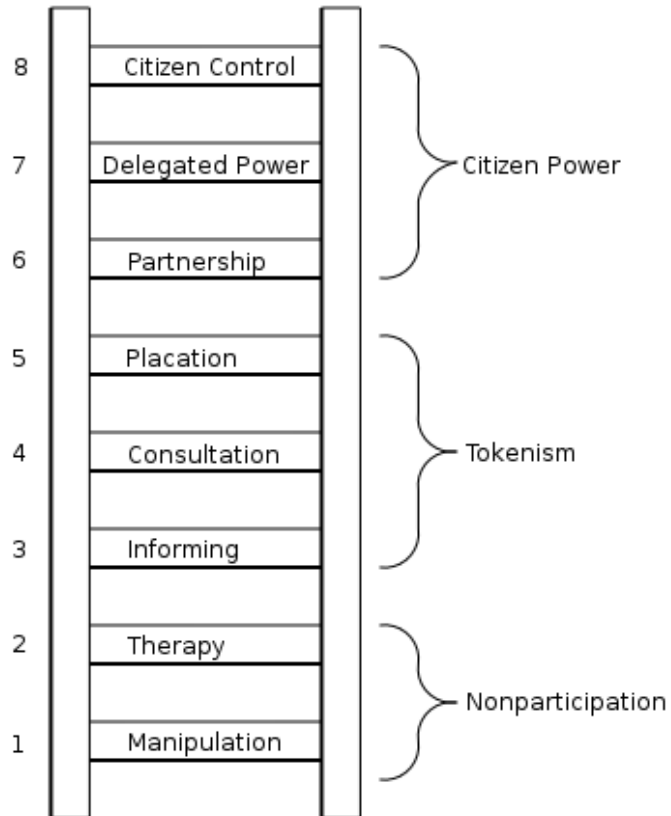
¹⁰ Nicholls, Raye, and Forsyth, “Lessons from the Corridor Development Initiative.”

¹¹ Pomeroy, “The planning process and public participation.” P 14

Participatory planning has several broad and differing definitions. In the creation of policies and programs, it is defined as “active involvement of the broad mass of the population,” including disadvantaged people in particular.¹² Mark Francis, editor of *Participatory Planning and Neighborhood Control* describes the participatory process as a “freeing, social, community-building, consensus-building, and

legitimizing” process that is in fact an inalienable right.¹³

Participatory processes can encompass a wide range of programs, but must actively seek out the involvement of those most affected by the project’s outcome in the planning stages. For this reason, not all participation is equal. Sherry Arstein’s Ladder of Participation is a crucial analytical tool when judging the participatory



processes. The ladder encompasses several types of citizen participation ranging from manipulation to therapy, informing, consulting, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control.¹⁴ Many professionals view the role of the public in participation as

¹² *Popular Participation in Planning for Basic Needs*. P vii

¹³ Neighborhood Participation Conference et al., *Participatory Planning & Neighborhood Control*. P 10

¹⁴ Ross and Levine, *Urban Politics*.

empowering.¹⁵ However, the ladder indicates that while a participatory process may engage community residents, there exists a scale upon which their participation can be measured.

Clearly defined goals and outcomes of participatory efforts must be set forth in order to conduct an accurate measurement and analysis. Modern-day planning is criticized for falling too often along the tokenism range of the ladder, which goes from informing to consulting to placation.

The participatory planning movement that is reacting to the tokenistic planning system and is observed in this research examines practices that advocate, aspire towards, and exemplify the partnership and delegated power rungs of the ladder. The purpose and goals of this type of community participation have been the topic of much debate. A liberal perspective, defined by Lisk, places the goals of participatory planning as promoting employment, alleviating poverty, and satisfying basic needs. Erualdo Gonzalez in *Resident Involvement in Advocacy and Consensus Planning* describes a more centrist perspective that defines the goals of participation as democracy and utilitarianism. Community-member participation can also be seen as a main aspect of “sustained economic growth and social progress,”¹⁶ with the hope that involvement in development will result in wider and more equitable dispersion of the benefits of development.¹⁷

The Evolution of Participatory Planning

Urban planning in the United States has evolved over time to reflect the ever-changing political climate, evolving cultural make-up, and the transitory nature of wealth. Recognized by the “clarity of objective, explicitness of evaluation, a high degree of comprehensiveness of overview, and, whenever possible, quantification of values for mathematical analysis,” the

¹⁵ Barletta, “The role of three public participation processes in promoting neighbourhood planning in South Point Douglas, Winnipeg.” P 1

¹⁶ *Popular Participation in Planning for Basic Needs*. P vii

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p 8

rational model was the predominant planning model in America before the 1970s.¹⁸ The planners operating in the rational model were the experts whose technical training, problem recognition, and problem solving capabilities positioned them to decide what was in the best interests of the public.¹⁹ Walter Schoenwandt in *Planning in Crisis* characterizes the rational model of planning by the separation of the planning process from the community and the thought of communities as physically constructed as opposed to socially constructed. The idea of physical construction allowed the planners to justify having enough knowledge to plan for the future by simply looking at zoning and land use maps in their offices. At this physical place, communities were said to have, “objective knowledge, rational decisions, [and] optimal solutions,” and this framework lays out a process for planning that disregards the social aspects of a community and belittles the social knowledge that community residents have about their neighborhood.²⁰

Starting in the 1960s, planners began to shift away from the rational model. Schonwandt criticizes the rational model as being “technocratic” and top-down, embracing a more socio-politically focused approach to urban problems.²¹ Thus by the 1970s advocacy planning became popular.²² The advocacy model recognition that the public is not homogeneous is partially due to the larger voice of minority communities that became more prominent in planning debates after the civil rights movement. Thomas Angotti, author of *New York for Sale* notes that at around the same time, the Federal government was focused on public participation as a key aspect of President Johnson’s 1960s War on Poverty. The inclusion of more voices in the planning system began to be viewed as fundamental to a healthy democracy, and the advocacy

¹⁸ Schoenwandt, *Planning in Crisis*? P 4

¹⁹ Ibid. P 5

²⁰ Ibid. P 5

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Popular Participation in Planning for Basic Needs*.

model seemed to be the best way to give a voice to the historically disadvantaged, silenced minorities and low-income citizens. Schoenwandt likens the foundations of advocacy planning to the legal system; the planner is seen as the advocate for the “the weak,” whose views often contrast those of “the powerful” or the developers.²³

Advocacy planning also hinges upon the realization that the public has different and dissenting interests, inequitable access to resources, and different political orientations. When this happened, the political aspects of planning systems began to get acknowledgment. In fact, one goal of advocacy planning was to bring democracy to decisions about the urban environment.²⁴ While many saw the benefits of charging planners with specifically advocating for the rights of the disadvantaged, conservatives and progressives questioned that system. Conservatives, represented by Pierre Calvel in *The Evolution of Advocacy Planning* questioned whether planners, who are funded by all taxpayers, should have a role representing only the interests of specific groups. Progressives on the other hand, noted that the predominately white and middle-class planners only “found ways to dramatize the difference, and bring back a *sense* of diversity to core institutions.”²⁵ The fundamental failure of the advocacy model was that, while it recognized the diversity of community voices, it did not change the existing planning system that was fundamentally biased towards those with power. Instead, the communities that it proposed to empower still had to operate within the boundaries set by those outside of their community and those with drastically different interests.²⁶

The initial tests of advocacy planning led to many fragmentations and new planning models that ranged from extremely conservative to extremely progressive. Pro free-market

²³ Schoenwandt, *Planning in Crisis?*. P 8

²⁴ Goodman, *After the Planners*. P 20.

²⁵ Calvel, “The Evolution of Advocacy Planning.” (Italics added for emphasis)

²⁶ Goodman, *After the Planners*. Schoenwandt, *Planning in Crisis?*.

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planners advocated for a decrease in the role of planners and for the creation of a “liberalistic model of planning” that is observable in cities that do not have zoning codes. The (neo) Marxist model emphasizes the connection between a capitalist society and planning. With little change from the original advocacy planning, equity planning pushed planners to ally with politicians to advocate for the voice of the voiceless in planning. Thus, equity planning acknowledges that planning is part of the political system. Additionally, the social learning and communicative action model pushed to bring together the planners for their expert knowledge and the community for their “lived knowledge”. Finally, the radical model of planning focuses on planners who left the system so that they could work without fear of repercussion if their advocacy went against the politics of their politically elected boss; it builds off of the work of social learning and communicative action model but actively works against the established planning infrastructure. Planners are expected to “become a part of, or at least assume solidarity with,” groups they are working with.²⁷

Community participation can be seen in most of the aforementioned models of planning that emerged after the rational model came under scrutiny for its lack of community input. However, it is important to remember Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation—all participation cannot be taken at face value; the different forms fall into different rungs on the ladder of participation.

Benefits and Shortcomings of Participatory Planning

Participatory planning is a goal of many organizations because of the widely acknowledged potential impacts of planning. The efforts by organizations to be involved in planning decisions acknowledge that planning “is capable of profoundly influencing the very

²⁷Schoenwandt, *Planning in Crisis?*. P 15

nature of the community, as reflected in its physical form and character.”²⁸ If the community is involved in the planning process, especially the setting of goals and objectives, then that community will have control over its form, character, and manner of life.²⁹ With citizen participation, planners can learn from the community members about their goals and objectives.

Additionally, public participation contributes to the decentralization of the planning process.³⁰ Past planning practices that were common in the rational model were largely criticized for concentrating all decisions in central authorities who lacked knowledge of the communities that the decisions affected. Public participation also empowers participants.³¹ Since many organizations that facilitate participatory planning workshops have been building power as an organizational goal, it follows that these organizations will want to push for and encourage participation in participatory planning exercises. Participants who come out of participatory planning workshops also have an increased sense of place and consciousness regarding the urban environment.³² Another benefit to participatory planning is that it results in plans that are generally supported by the public.

Admittedly, there are thoughtful criticisms against participatory planning initiatives. Even those who frequently promote public participation recognize the nuanced approach to the actual process:

You can always get the interest of those who have some special concern in planning proposals, but the inarticulate people of the community, who in some ways have more at stake because there is less that they can do on their own resources, need a means of expression in this process of citizen participation.³³

²⁸ Pomeroy, “The planning process and public participation.” P 9

²⁹ Ibid. P 25.

³⁰ Neighborhood Participation Conference et al., *Participatory Planning & Neighborhood Control*. P 12

³¹ Ibid. P 12

³² Ibid. P 12

³³ Pomeroy, “The planning process and public participation.” P 35

A challenge is presented when trying to convince people who are not directly involved in planning projects to attend planning meetings. This illuminates another concern that some have voiced about placing public participation as a goal in the formation of plans. Some would argue that setting and working to meet participation standards can distract from other goals to create a plan that is equitable for all or one that achieves total neighborhood control over the planning process.³⁴

Though some may fight for total neighborhood control, others are concerned that too much neighborhood control, without taking into consideration the greater regional needs, can cause problems.³⁵ With concerns about exclusionary policies and the adoption of “not in my backyard” stances, some community residents may fight to push traditionally unwanted land-uses such as freeways, large developments, and affordable housing out of their neighborhood. In these situations, residents band together to, in effect, say “not in my backyard” to projects that often serve a greater good to a region. If total neighborhood control were to occur, there is concern that neighborhoods competing against each other to block a locally-unwanted land use would fight and weaken their collective political strength.

Many who are in favor of greater public participation acknowledge this critique but argue that with greater education about planning, the public will be able to recognize the need for certain locally-unwanted land uses. Thus the question of how much education is needed to participate in planning exercises is raised. Many participatory planning manuals advocate for education of the participants prior to planning exercises.^{36, 37} This is in direct contrast, however, with the more radical planning models that emphasize the “lived knowledge” of the community

³⁴ Neighborhood Participation Conference et al., *Participatory Planning & Neighborhood Control*. P 11

³⁵ Ibid. P 2

³⁶ Reconnecting America, *Preservation in Transit Oriented Districts*.

³⁷ Public Counsel, *Getting There Together: Tools to Advocate for Inclusive Development around Transit*.

participants.³⁸ Training constituents in planning jargon indoctrinates them into the system that they are in fact fighting against.

Similarly, there are other critiques of the power dynamics between planners and formal participatory workshop participants. If the planners are initiating, planning the logistics of, and creating the content for the participatory meetings, then the workshops are not set up to incorporate very many community ideas. While this is not always the case, this argument hinges on an analysis of the power dynamics within a particular workshop. The planners are inherently assigned agenda setting power when they initiate community meetings. Lukes would argue that this agenda setting power controls both what is and what is not talked about with the community members, and thus there cannot be complete community control under this system.³⁹ With the formal planning system set up with these inherent flaws, many groups and organizations have turned to work outside of the formal planning structure.

Certain types of citizen participation are required by law in the formal planning process such as public hearings, required referenda, and limited action due to protest.⁴⁰ These assurances lack established processes to incorporate the views of the participants into policy decisions.⁴¹ However, outside approaches to participatory planning are common and often necessary to respond to an uncooperative planning department. Lisk argues that broad participation can be accomplished just as effectively through informal processes. However, Lucio Baccaro, author of *The Promise and Perils of Participatory Policy Making* sees attempts to work with planners as futile, saying “in general, protest and litigation seem more effective than discourse.”⁴² Both

³⁸ Schoenwandt, *Planning in Crisis?*.

³⁹ Lukes, *Power*.

⁴⁰ Pomeroy, “The planning process and public participation.” P 32

⁴¹ Ross and Levine, *Urban Politics*.

⁴² Baccaro, International Institute for Labour Studies, and International Labour Organization, *The Promise and Perils of Participatory Policy Making*. P 3

inside and outside approaches to participation must be considered. Inside and outside approaches have differing goals as well as differing potential outcomes, but neither can be done in isolation. As Hugh Pomeroy in *The Planning Process and Public Participation* notes, no matter how organized outside groups are, carrying out a plan “must be done through, or as a result of, government action.”⁴³

Community organizations have a large role to play in the outside approach to participatory planning as well as a potential to influence processes.⁴⁴ However, it is important that organizations build strong reputations with both community residents and planning officials before becoming involved in planning issues.⁴⁵ This strength can come from membership and past organizing victories. While organizations can work with formal decision makers, it is important that they maintain their independent strength and that community organizations “do not lock themselves into a strategy of institutional participation but keep a credible exit option open and, associated with it, strong mobilizing capacities.”⁴⁶

Planning in Los Angeles

Planning in Los Angeles began with a regional planning conference for the County of Los Angeles in 1921 and 1922.⁴⁷ In the early days of planning, interested groups produced their own plans. In 1929, the Citizen’s Committee on Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches of Los Angeles County released a plan they created that focused on recreation in the city, and it ended up gaining traction as some of their projects were realized.⁴⁸ Even though the specifics of the

⁴³ Pomeroy, “The planning process and public participation.” P 33

⁴⁴ Neighborhood Participation Conference et al., *Participatory Planning & Neighborhood Control*. P 14

⁴⁵ *Popular Participation in Planning for Basic Needs*.

⁴⁶ Baccaro, International Institute for Labour Studies, and International Labour Organization, *The Promise and Perils of Participatory Policy Making*. P 3

⁴⁷ Pomeroy, “The planning process and public participation.” P 28

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* P 28

planning processes are always subject to change, the current planning system in Los Angeles is highly government-focused and involves many regulations, committee hearings, and layers of implementation. There is a city-wide General Plan that governs the overarching goals of the City of Los Angeles. Within that, there are 35 community plans in which the specifics of zoning and land use are parsed out. The community plan for South Los Angeles was last updated in 1990.⁴⁹ Esperanza and SAJE are both organizing their constituents to influence the next South Los Angeles Community Plan. The official draft plan is scheduled to be released in the spring of 2013, which will begin most of the public comment phase.⁵⁰ The official Community Plan process is outlined in Figure 1. The figure shows that some group meetings are held early in the process, if called for. Other than those meetings, however, only the neighborhood councils are involved in the plan development phase. Next, the elected councilperson for the district has a chance for input and there is the opportunity for public involvement. This involvement typically comes from organized groups where general members of the public are limited to brief speeches and written comments.

Many of these participatory practices such as public hearings are ensured through law. In California, the open meeting law is the Brown Act. This law, along with other city and state policies, dictates the minimum requirements for citizen involvement in governmental processes. Any formal comment must be preserved in the public record and thus preserved for the future.⁵¹ The theoretical orientations of planning have changed drastically over time, influenced by popular social trends and larger social movements. The planning models that are presented as case studies in this research help to situate modern-day planning practices. These organizations are facilitating their workshops while the United States is in the process of recovering from the

⁴⁹ Workshop Observation notes, Summer PPS #3

⁵⁰ LA Department of City Planning, "Plan Status - SouthLAPLAN."

⁵¹ Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, *Los Angeles Resident's Guide to Land Use, Planning, and Development*.

major recession of 2008, and in a political environment dominated by political elites engaging in inside games to push political agendas through Los Angeles City Hall, and at a time when South Los Angeles is beginning to gentrify due to its proximity to downtown and USC.

Community Planning Public Participation Process

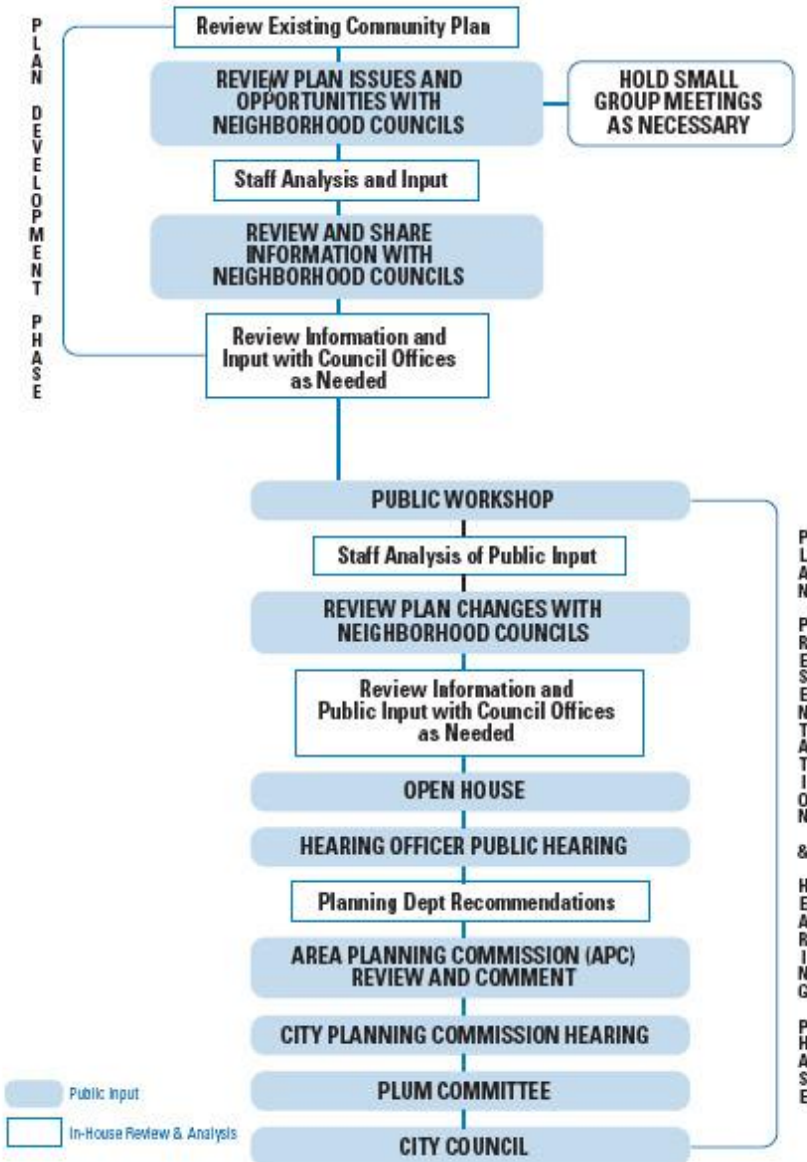


Figure 1 Community Planning Public Participation Process

Methodology

This paper focuses on Los Angeles-based groups facilitating participatory workshops in order to examine the role of an organization that aims to involve and educate members in participatory planning workshops. This paper utilizes case studies of two groups in South Los Angeles, Esperanza Community Housing Corporation and Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), as well as a study of urban planner James Rojas' *City as Play* "design-based learning" workshops.⁵² Esperanza Community Housing Corporation has hosted workshops for its constituents to discuss urban issues in their neighborhood, both in the field and in a workshop setting. These workshops culminated in an envisioning exercise that involved maps and movable objects aimed to get recommendations and insight from the participating community members about how to best plan their area. The conversation often used the participants' previous knowledge of their area and other aspects of urban planning that they learned through the workshops. The lead facilitator of these workshops, Sophia Kendall, was interviewed to elaborate on these issues.

The next case study focuses on non-profit, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE). SAJE is also based in South Los Angeles and works closely with Esperanza. SAJE hosts People's Planning Schools to educate and mobilize their members around issues in their community. The People's Planning School incorporates presentations by experts in planning and development, small group discussions, and story sharing. The school aims to educate SAJE members on the strong links between community issues such as health and safety, land use, and planning. Lakisha Hull, a main facilitator and coordinator of these workshops, was also interviewed about this process.

⁵² Hass, "James Rojas: The City as Play."

The final case study is a smaller example of a specific model of participatory planning, facilitated by James Rojas. Rojas facilitates an activity he calls the *City as Play*, and it is designed to break down the walls of formal planning and encourage participants to think about how they feel when they are in public spaces. Rojas has approached SAJE to include this activity as part of their People's Planning School but it has not yet been incorporated as of May 2013.

The case studies featured in this paper are not exhaustive of each organization's efforts to educate and involve community members in planning in Los Angeles, let alone the United States as a whole. These case studies and interviews seek to understand and examine how organizations are educating and involving members in local and city planning. Since many of the campaigns discussed in this paper are ongoing, analysis of the level of influence of the workshop participants is limited by the time period involved in this research.

Findings and Analysis

These case studies are examples of currently practiced modes of educating and involving constituents in planning. Most of the cases incorporate activities with moveable objects, some form of planning education, and an exploration of the participant's feelings in a designated environment. The activities, or charettes, place an emphasis on participatory planning and on gleaned ideas about urban planning from the participants. The educational materials, such as PowerPoints, handouts, and lectures are meant to emphasize a need for participant education about the issues involved in planning—often with a particular emphasis on the specific neighborhood that the organization works in. Finally, these workshops ask participants *how your body feels in certain environments*. By asking this question, participatory planning advances beyond common planning methods that have been perpetuated by local governments. The governmental planning practices focus on functionality, planning jargon, and rigidity.

Esperanza – Los Visioner@s and Interview with Sophia Kendall

Esperanza Community Housing Corporation is an affordable housing developer based in and focusing on the community of South Los Angeles. This community is defined by the 10 freeway to the north, Alameda Avenue on the east, Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to the south, and Western Avenue to the west. This area of Los Angeles is called the Figueroa Corridor and is just south of downtown Los Angeles. The area has a 70% Latino population and the remainder is mixed African-American, Asian, and White populations.⁵³ Though initially founded to provide affordable housing and fight displacement in South Los Angeles, Esperanza has since expanded its mission to better fit the needs of the community. The organization has created community health trainings, after-school arts programs, economic development projects

⁵³ Esperanza Community Housing, "Our Neighborhood."

with vendor space and office spaces for non-profits. Additionally, Esperanza has taken political action, often as part of larger coalitions of South Los Angeles organizations, to fight for the voice and rights of South Los Angeles residents in policy issues at the local level. Through all of its work, Esperanza aims to build hope through community.

In the summer of 2012, Esperanza hosted a series of participatory planning workshops entitled Los Visioner@s, which is a Spanish gender-neutral term for *the visionaries*.⁵⁴ The lead facilitator of the workshops was Sophia Kendall, a staff member at Esperanza. According to Kendall, the goal of these particular workshops was to educate community residents about how to influence the South Los Angeles Community Plan. The impetus for the workshops was two-fold. Primarily, Esperanza is concerned that the current development trends in South Los Angeles will continue to displace local residents, characterized as lower income and predominately Latino, in favor of university students and wealthier residents who can afford more expensive rental properties and are also seeking to live close to downtown and close to the new Exposition Light Rail.

The second goal of the workshops was to prepare residents for the Community Plan update process. The City of Los Angeles is updating the specific community plans in South and South East Los Angeles, both of which overlap with the geographic working area of Esperanza. Esperanza sees the need to prepare residents for the update process by beginning a dialogue about the future development of the community and helping local residents think about what they desire to see in their neighborhood. This is to prepare residents to enter public meetings hosted by the planning department with ideas of what a community-focused plan may look like.

⁵⁴ The “@” symbol in this word is simultaneously an ‘a’ and an ‘o’. This allows the word to be gender neutral, thus neither men nor women feel left out by the group name

The curriculum of the workshops covered many of the historical events relating to the built environment in South Los Angeles. The Expo Line opened in 2012; in the past three years there has been a luxury condo development on the site of an old hospital (The Lorenzo Project at Flower and 23rd St), a new large student-only condo development (University Gateway at Figueroa and Jefferson), and a handful of other redevelopments and new developments that continue to arise. There was a scare that a large affordable housing complex would be converted to market rate rental units across the street from the Vermont Station of the Expo Line.⁵⁵ Similar market rate conversions are threatening many affordable housing complexes in South Los Angeles, as their affordability assurances, or covenants, will expire in the upcoming years. Kendall thinks that the five new light rail stops in the area from the Expo Line should instill some form of responsibility to the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Authority for the future of the neighborhood. Kendall stated that she will push Metro to relinquish any land that they acquired for the project to community serving resources.

The workshops gathered a group of proven and active community leaders by drawing from other established organizations to ensure informed and varied opinions. Kendall is still debating if the focus on established community leaders was wise or not. These community members may have been over-booked and that could explain the lower-than-expected turnout. The use of established leaders, however, meant that the leaders were likely discussing what they saw and learned that day with more people than a less established leader would have, and that they brought back the knowledge they acquired to their other groups. Esperanza sought participants in the workshop from groups such as Esperanza's Community Health Promoters, members of the United Neighbors In Defense Against Displacement Coalition, members of the Right to Health Coalition, participants in SAJE's People's Planning School, and local business

⁵⁵ TRUST South LA, "Victory for Affordable Housing in South Los Angeles."

owners. The name of the group was *Los Visioner@s* and was meant to get participants thinking out-of-the-box as soon as they heard about it. The inaugural summer series was four sessions. Two of the sessions were done in partnership with Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE) as part of their People's Planning School.⁵⁶ Kendall notes that the integration of the community exercises and envisioning exercises with the Planning School was one of the strengths of the program, since the two complemented each other well.

For the first session of *Los Visioner@s*, participants were asked to attend SAJE's People's Planning School on August 2, 2012 from 6 pm to 8 pm. The goal of the session was to introduce the residents to the concept of Transit Oriented Development (TOD), or developments that are near transit stations and actively work to encourage more transit use, and why it is important in their neighborhood given the impacts from the Expo Line. The main activity at this workshop instructed participants to place a sticker on a map to demonstrate where they live. From there participants used stickers to identify places where they often travel such as the grocery store, schools, or churches. They were also asked indicate means of transportation they used in order to arrive at their destination. Most of the participants relied on the bus system. The goal of the main exercise at this workshop was to get participants thinking about the ways that they use transportation in their daily lives. This session involved around 60 people.

The second session of *Los Visioner@s* was offered on August 4, 2012 for four hours in the morning. There were about ten community residents and two facilitators from Esperanza that met at Esperanza's Mercado La Paloma (Figure 2). The Mercado was chosen as the starting point as it embodies the type of community benefiting transit adjacent development that Esperanza's workshop planners wanted to show the participants. The participants were given

⁵⁶ This research covers two sessions of SAJE's People's Planning School, one in the summer of 2012 and another in the spring of 2013.



Figure 2 Inside the Mercado La Paloma. The vending stalls are rented out to local entrepreneurs and the second story of the building serves as office space for various non-profits.

clipboards and map packets (See Appendix 1). The participants were instructed to make notes on the maps and on the margins about what they saw that was good, what they thought needed to be preserved, what was missing, and what did not fit into the area. There were also participants with cameras who took pictures of the good and bad things that they saw. The group walked from the Mercado to the Jefferson Station on the Expo Line. The first stop was the Vermont Station. This station is situated at the intersection of two major streets, Exposition Boulevard and South Vermont Avenue, which is also the corner of the USC and Exposition Park, both of which attract a large number of people daily.

The walking route went up Vermont Avenue along the edge of USC's campus and past the Billy G. Mills apartment complex that offers affordable housing. The Bethune Library site, where the Bethune Library once stood but has since been demolished, is also on the street. The community has fought for years to have the library rebuilt, but the lot continues to sit empty. At the corner of Vermont and West 36th Place is a church, and across the street is a strip mall with a Smart & Final and a Taco Bell. The group then turned around to head back to the station

through the neighborhood. This part of the tour showed many of the housing conversions in the area. In the past ten years many single-family homes have been destroyed in order to build multi-unit apartment housing for USC students. One of the participants shared the story of a friend who saw all of her neighbors' homes torn down for this type of development. Walking through the neighborhood, the group also experienced the USC safety patrol. USC pays people to stand on strategic corners to maintain safety in the area. One of these campus security guards approached the group to inquire about their activities. The group also found a few open lots which they got excited about and immediately began to brainstorm what could possibly be built to improve them. The group then filed back on the Expo Line and took it up to 23rd Street Station. At 23rd street station the group headed straight to Estrella Park. Over snacks and water, the group discussed the history of the community struggle to create the park. The group discussed other important landmarks as well: an oil well site that is polluting the air and water, two of Esperanza's affordable housing buildings, Texere Plaza as a potential site for the type of development Esperanza is pushing for, the Lorenzo Project to show that the community can secure strong community benefits through community benefit agreements, an intersection with a check cashing place to emphasize the need for banks in the area, and the unsafe reconstruction of a sidewalk along Adams connecting the Expo Line to the sidewalk (Figure 3).



Figure 3 Unsafe sidewalk conditions encountered on the walking tour along Adams Blvd.

After a long day of walking, the group returned to the Mercado via the Expo Line to have lunch and debrief. On the way back to the Mercado, the group discussed the Gateway project, which is a large mixed-use development that only serves the needs of the students and not the existing community. The group also noticed that parts of the streetscape that USC students use is often times much nicer than others because USC pays to install amenities such as pedestrian crosswalks, trees and plants, streetlights, and even safety call boxes.

The third session of Los Visioner@s was again at SAJE's People's Planning School on August 9, 2012 from 6 pm to 8 pm. The goal of this session was to show examples of how TOD

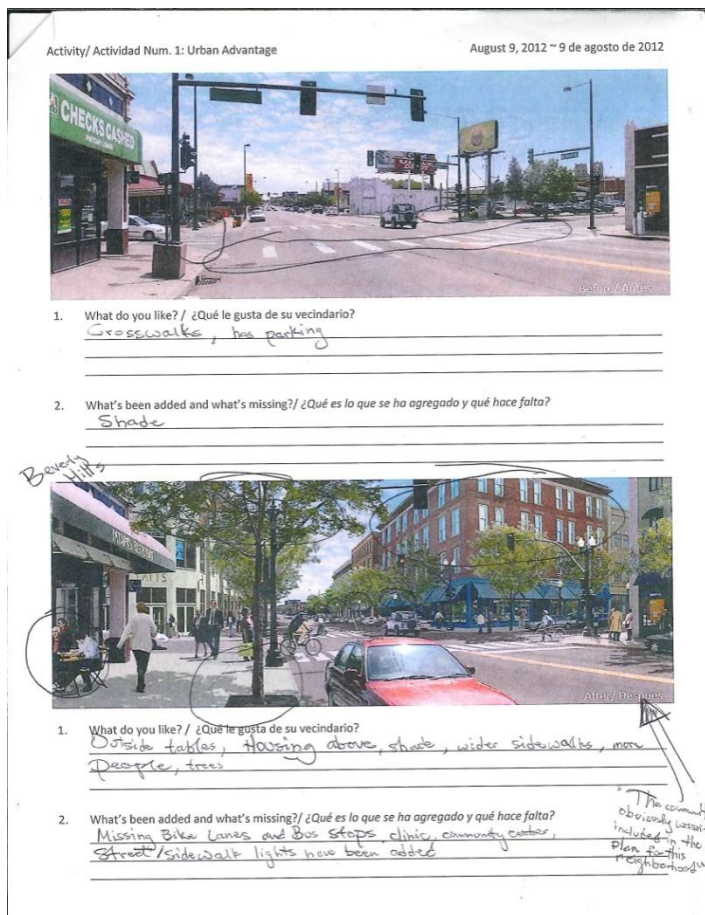


Figure 4 Scan of Urban Advantage Exercise from session 3 of Los Visioner@s at People's Planning School August 9, 2012

can be done equitably. The session started with a slideshow of some of the pictures that were taken on the walking tour by participants. The participants pointed out that they took most of the pictures to demonstrate the poor conditions of the streets. After this, participants discussed the urban advantage exercise (Figure 4) in table groups. Participants talked about what they liked in the transformation and what they did not like. Some groups were concerned that the

neighborhood seemed to have gentrified in the time between the two pictures and people asked

what had happened to the businesses from before. The exercise was meant to help people recall memory about the last People's Planning School Session where they learned about the features of TOD. Then the session went into a PowerPoint by SAJE's TOD Coordinator, Lakisha Hull. Much of the material that was covered in the PowerPoint detailed the planning process in Los Angeles as it was described in the literature review section of this paper. To review the lessons from the day and have some fun, the workshop ended with a game of Family Feud.

The fourth session of Los Visioner@s was on August 11, 2012 from 10 am to 2 pm. It involved an envisioning exercise where the goal was to collect feedback from participating community members about what they wanted more or less of in the community and to understand what community members envision as their ideal neighborhood. Kendall made sure to focus this session on specific places so as to direct the conversation from general statements to solid recommendations that could be synthesized and tracked. Eight community members and six Esperanza facilitators attended the session. The day started with a review of pictures from the walking tour, a re-emphasis of some of the lessons learned from the past sessions, and a presentation of development prototypes (See Appendix 2). The room was then split into small groups of four residents and three facilitators. First, each group worked separately on redesigning the Smart & Final strip mall near the Vermont Station. This involved drawing the façade of the building and talking about what the group wanted to put in. On this lot, one group wanted to build an underground parking lot and a tall multi-use building with affordable housing on the upper levels, an interior courtyard, and retail on the bottom level. Then the group was given a larger map of the half-mile radius around the station and asked to insert pushpins with different logos showing what they wanted in various locations (Figure5).



Figure 5 One group talking about their plan for the area surrounding the Vermont Station stop.

The pins included streetlights, housing, and bike lanes while others were left blank to allow for new ideas. One group identified a need for more childcare and increased access to services to prevent gangs. To address these issues, they put in push pins for child care facilities, a police and a fire station. Each group shared their map with the other group, and after lunch, the two groups repeated the activity for the 23rd Street Station. This was the other station visited on the walking tour.

One group wanted to change the parcel with the check chasing and liqueur stores by adding bike lanes, trees, and diagonal parking. They wanted to add levels above the shops to accommodate affordable housing to the people who work in the adjacent factories. They also said that a grocery store or a clinic is needed in the area. Looking at the half-mile area around 23rd Street station, one group wanted to create more schools for young kids (kindergarten and middle schools). They wanted to get rid of the oil well site in that area and improve the streetscape with more trees, trash cans, and pedestrian cross walks.

They also thought that there was a large opportunity for more commercial sites along the main streets like Figueroa, Adams, and Washington. Another idea that gained group support was shutting off car access to certain streets such as 28th between Grand and Hill.



Figure 6 A final map of the area around the 23rd Street Station from one group

The open street could be used for Farmer's Markets or other

community activities. They thought that the area around Los Angeles Trade Technical College, which is right across the street from the station, could use more mixed-use developments to accommodate the students from that school. They also emphasized more economical dining options, mostly for the people who work in the factories and get short lunch breaks.

At the end of the day, the whole group came back together for a final group discussion. The discussion covered topics such as the need to maintain affordability for any new housing the need for green spaces, and the need for affordable childcare. A participant also raised the issue of amenities such as group homes for seniors and convalescent hospitals. The group mentioned the streetscape and the need for bus benches and shade-giving awnings. The community raised the need for economic development through small business support and workforce centers where people can gather to learn skills such as computer operations and cooking. The group also wanted Metro to work to integrate the community more into the stations by building signs from the stations to community assets like the Mercado La Paloma. The group would also like to see

YMCAs and YWCAs that can act as child and family centers and possibly house programs that organizations like Esperanza operate (such as the Healthy Home Program).

Final observations of the Los Visioner@s workshops showed that the community already has a somewhat united vision of what their community should look like. At the end of the envisioning session, the two groups, that had worked separately, presented somewhat similar designs for both the parcel exercise and the overall station design.

The workshops, Kendall says, were meant to be a preemptive measure to encourage community residents to have opinions on the community plan update process. While noting that the Metropolitan Transportation Agency did have community meetings, Kendall reiterated that only her boss at Esperanza went to it—no other community members did. Kendall shared what is currently happening in Little Tokyo as an example of what Los Visioner@s aspires to do. In Little Tokyo, the city council is approaching the community with the development plans rather than the community fighting to have their voices heard. In South Los Angeles, however, Kendall notes that the city council is listening to the wishes of corporations and not the community members. Los Visioner@s is a stepping stone, Kendall says, to begin to get the right people talking about the built environment in South Los Angeles. A concluding theme was the desire to keep money and land in the community's hand.

Esperanza's Los Visioner@s workshops were severely limited by staff constraints. Subsequently, the planners and facilitators of the workshops expressed that they could have done more outreach and also more preparation. However, that is not to say that the workshops were not successful in their goal. The turnout was lower than desired but the conversations and envisioning exercises were in no way limited by this. The goal of educating the participating community members was met. The goal of influencing the community plan however, remains to

be seen. Kendall created a final write-up of the workshops to present to both the city planning department as well as the County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. To read the recommendations section of the write up see appendix 3.

Strategic Actions for a Just Economy – People’s Planning School

Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE) is a tenant’s rights advocacy organization in the South Los Angeles neighborhood. SAJE has a very similar geographic emphasis area to Esperanza and the two organizations have a strong working relationship. Through their tenant organizing, SAJE works towards a goal of promoting public health and economic development. In all that it does, SAJE works to promote a better neighborhood with the same neighbors.

Recognizing a need to familiarize its members with the urban planning issues affecting their community, SAJE created the People’s Planning School. Each incarnation of the People’s Planning School focuses on a specific issue within urban planning and the geographic area of South Los Angeles. The Planning Schools also serve to connect issues of social justice to the built environment and emphasize to participants why planning is important. The Planning Schools also serve as a tie to the other issues that SAJE is organizing around at the time, ranging from Health and Human Rights to anti-displacement. The session of People’s Planning School that was done in the summer of 2012 and was tied in with Esperanza’s Los Visioner@s focused on anti-displacement efforts and tied into the fight for community benefits in the USC-specific plan update process. The next set of Planning School workshops happened in the spring of 2013. This incarnation of the Planning School focused on tying health and human rights into urban planning, and on preparing community members for the upcoming community plan update process.

With those goals in mind, SAJE created a series of four Friday night sessions that ran from February 22, 2013 to March 15, 2013. The first session meant to serve as an introduction to planning and a time to explore certain terms and the process behind planning. The first session on February 22 had around 60 people in attendance; participants were all sitting around a table with five to ten other people. The facilitators adapted the characters from a very popular Spanish language children’s show, “El Chavo del Ocho,” to fit into the story of the backroom deals, greedy developers, and corrupt public officials that often play out in planning. In this skit, a developer paid off a council member for permits and the community residents were not properly consulted about the selling of their land for redevelopment. After the skit, each of the tables held discussions about what they had just seen. One table noted that the winners in this situation were the big businessmen and the corrupt officials. No one listened to the community members that were crying out that their needs were not being met. The community did not get a chance to provide input into the project because they were not told about it until it was too late.



Figure 7 The cast of the “El Chavo del Ocho” skit.

After the discussions, there was a PowerPoint presentation about the community plan process. The presentation covered the history of zoning including restrictive covenants and

rezoning efforts, and the differences between the land uses in zoning code. The presentation also referred to historical examples of displacement in Los Angeles like at Bunker Hill and Chavez Ravine. The presentation explained that it had been 20 years since the last community plan for South Los Angeles was updated. In the summer of 2013, however, the draft of the next plan will be up for public comment.

The next activity was a planning game called Block and Lots. The version used was adapted from an online planning game that was actually developed by the founder of SAJE, Gilda Hass.⁵⁷ SAJE adapted the game to fit into their community by adding a transit stop to the game map, reducing the number of characters to make it less complicated, and drawing a physical model to hand around the room. The cast of the skit was a developer, a councilperson, a factory owner, and a factory worker's wife. The factory owner first bribed the councilperson to turn one entire side of the tracks into industrial zoning and then used bribery to get the developer to zone the whole other side as commercial. Then the factory worker's wife came out and noticed that she no longer had a place to live. After the skit came small group discussions. One table focused on the negative impacts of the rezoning on the community. One participant brought up that the land was becoming so much more desirable to the developer and factory owner because of the transit station. The community members at the table discussed that the only way to fight back would be to stand together; the group said that the developers may have the money but we have the people.

Skit continued on in a second act where the factory worker's wife got people from the audience to come up and stand with her as she pressured the council member whom they elected to keep the zoning beneficial to the community needs. In the group discussion after, the group noted that there was no handing off of money when the people were standing united. The first

⁵⁷ www.blocksandlots.net

People's Planning School session then ended with a brief introduction to the South Los Angeles Health and Human Rights Declaration.

The second session on March 1 also started with a skit with the cast of "El Chavo del Ocho." In this skit, one of the residents of the apartment building explained how she recently had a heart attack as a result of environmental factors in her home (rats and mold) and the neighborhood (accessibility and food options). The lady did not have health insurance but they thanked 'Obamacare' because she soon will get health insurance. She also complained about the fumes from the polluting oil well that were giving her headaches and other ailments. In small groups, participants talked a lot about exercise and how it is not always safe to run around their blocks. One person said that she did not feel safe at the Laundromat because that is where drunks congregate. Other groups talked about public safety and how it is the responsibility of the city to ensure safe parks and streets, but it is the responsibility of the landlord to ensure safe and healthy building conditions.

Next, there was a presentation about human rights. They explained that the goal of human rights is to ensure dignity, equality, justice, and peace. There are many kinds of rights such as Health, Education, Employment, Safety and Security, and Food Sovereignty. The director of SAJE, Paulina Gonzalez, came up front and shared her story about how and why she is working at SAJE. Each group was then instructed to go around their tables and tell their stories about how and why they are at the planning school and what decisions they made to get there. The goal of this exercise was to encourage people to think about why they are involved in this work and why they are at planning school on a Friday night rather than at home watching a soap opera. The goal was to connect community members and get people comfortable sharing their stories so they can tell and invite other people to the next planning school.

The third People's Planning School happened on March 7, 2013. This session focused on TODs in South Los Angeles, specifically around the new Expo Line stations. A presentation introduced participants to elements of TODs such as safe streets and sustainability. There was a short discussion about the Expo Line in the South Los Angeles area and then more emphasis on the community plan update process as a time to change the zoning to demand affordability, anti-displacement, and equitable development. Since the community plan that they are creating will last for another 20 years, it is very important to have strong community input on the process. The presentation outlined SAJE's goals for the community plan: 1-to-1 replacement of affordable housing; promote quality affordable housing through organizations like Esperanza; place the housing near the transit stations; mix in affordable housing with private developments; and create rules for equitable development. The presenter identified targets in an effort to educate the participants about the campaign that SAJE plans to push. The targets of these campaigns will be: Los Angeles Department of City Planning, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and Los Angeles Housing and Urban Development for their large involvement in the process of producing and approving the community plans. Other key players identified included USC, other non-profit groups, and the participants in the room.

The session ended with the remainder of the "El Chavo del Ocho" skit. The building residents had a meeting to organize and try to stop their building from being destroyed however not many came because of sickness due to their unhealthy living conditions. The Chavo character showed up and shared his story. Chavo was an orphan and got kicked out of his apartment when he could not pay the rent. Everyone in the building, however, took him on as a group responsibility to show that they stood with him in solidarity. In the small group debriefing of the skit, participants were asked to share their stories.



Figure 8 A small group discussion.

In the share-outs, participants spoke of the moment when they realized they were a part of a larger movement for greater community security, currently ignorant of many of the laws that are there to protect them, and they needed to communicate more to become more united. By working together, the participants spoke of creating a vision and a plan of action. On sheets of paper, the small groups discussed what made communities healthy and affordable and where in South Los Angeles they noticed these attributes. The participants noticed and placed healthy and affordable things in their community like the security guards around USC, good schools, parks, jobs, good food, education, and bike lanes. The participants noted that their community was unhealthy and unaffordable for reasons such as the pervasiveness of liquor stores, the widespread unemployment, the oil well, and increasing homelessness.

The fourth and final session of the People’s Planning School took place on March 15 from 6 pm to 8 pm. There were about 40 participants in attendance. In this final chapter of the “El Chavo del Ocho” skit, the actors gathered at a house meeting to discuss the realities of immigrating to the United States and experiencing the motivation of money rather than

community. The actors in the skit realized that only together can they move the community forward. In the small table discussions, facilitators talked about Chavo's house meeting and how they would like participants in the Planning School to have house meetings with their neighbors to share stories, discuss common issues, and build solidarity. The formal presentation part of the session focused on clarification of more planning terms for the participants. The differences between Transit Oriented Districts, General Plans, Community Plans, Specific Plans, and implementation overlay zones were delineated. There was then a discussion of what rights SAJE was fighting to protect, such as the right to housing, healthy homes, good jobs, and the right to accessible green spaces. Then in a group activity, participants voted on what right was the most important to them. Many participants acknowledged that it was a tough decision, but decided to prioritize more health care, better schools, preservation of affordable housing, expansion of affordable housing, increasing access to healthy foods, better transit options, and access to good jobs with room for growth. There was a small graduation ceremony for the people who attended all four of the Planning Schools in this session, as a small reward for their commitment.



Figure 9 The graduates of People's Planning School with their certificates.

SAJE's People's Planning School provides a space to educate community members about urban planning concerns in their neighborhood. The diversity of activities, skits, lectures, and discussions all help to ensure that everyone gets knowledge out of the workshops. The education around the planning issues in the workshops was understandably pointed towards the organizational goals of SAJE. There was a line that was explored between listening and extracting the community member's input and telling the participants what they should prioritize and think about in regards to certain issues. The lectures served as a time to learn about planning, but the workshops also included time to share personal stories—and this is when the participants felt most connected to one another. Most of the people involved with SAJE have at one point used the organization's help as advocates for their rights as tenants, so most people had stories of the poor conditions that they were living in and how the community and solidarity at SAJE helped them push against their landlord.

The People's Planning School seems to fit under an equity planning model. Though it does not fit exactly in the environment of these planning models, since the planning schools take an outside approach, an understanding of the need for participation and a recognition of the political aspects of the planning system place it in the equity realm. However, since the agenda of the People's Planning Schools is determined by the SAJE staff, the school should be placed on the upper-middle rungs of the ladder of participation. Community members are undoubtedly influencing the organizational goals and agendas at SAJE, but decisions are not fully democratic as the staff has a much larger influence and direct decision-making power. While this concentration of decision making may hinder new community leader growth that Kendall pushed as an important aspect of these types of workshops, the campaign agendas of these organizations

is worked into the Planning Schools. The schools mainly serve the purpose of bringing together community members with common stories to build community, solidarity, and power.

Both the Esperanza and the SAJE workshops, as described in the case studies, are trying to influence education and involvement in the South Los Angeles community plan update process. That process is only just starting up, however, so assessments as to the workshop's effectiveness cannot yet be made.

James Rojas – The City as Play and Interview

James Rojas has an innovative “design-based learning” workshop called *City as Play*. He facilitated one of these workshops at Occidental College in the fall of 2012. Rojas stated that he created these workshops in response to the overly complicated and confusing planning models in



Figure 10 *City as Play* participants construction their ideal community.

place in Los Angeles. The planning structure in Los Angeles is bureaucratic and exclusive; Rojas uses his workshops to show that planning can be more accessible and inclusive.

The room was set up for 20 participants who were students and faculty at Occidental. After a short lecture, Rojas instructed everyone to design their ideal community (Figure 10). Each person was then given a colored sheet of paper to act as the ground of their city. Rojas does not use maps in his activities because many people are easily confused

by maps. Maps, Rojas says, are abstractions that can turn people off, make them scared to participate and stifle their creativity. With only time as a constraint, participants used the

hundreds of objects that had been laid out on the table to create their response to the prompt. The objects had been collected by Rojas over many years and were subject to no codification or filtration process. Some were obvious building material while others were seemingly too large or unruly. After twenty minutes of building, each participant was given one minute to explain their community, the amenities that they had included, and a bit of their rationale. As Rojas noticed, “each participant surprised themselves, and inspired each other with their ideas. Creativity, bonding, and building made the workshop high energy and enjoyable to all!”⁵⁸



Figure 11 One participant's ideal community.

Rojas proposes that if work is desired to be done in a specific location, it is good to start with a general exercise like “design your ideal community” and then narrow it down to the specific area after the first exercise. At the Occidental workshops, there was no specific geographic focus, so Rojas created three groups for the second half of the session, and each was instructed to create Los Angeles in the year 2050. Working in a group seemed more difficult to

⁵⁸ Rojas, January 29, 2013.

many people. However, each group came up with large and elaborate plans and models of their vision for the future of Los Angeles.⁵⁹

Rojas sees mainstream planning as “telling a person you can’t sing until you read music. It’s like planners are telling people you can’t plan until you read my planning guidelines.” Instead, Rojas emphasizes the importance of recognizing the feel of the human body in a space, as it responds to the physical form of an area. Planners just do not care about diversity and social engagement in their plans.

The *City as Play* activities that James Rojas facilitates, while potentially applicable to certain areas and certain plans, are not directly trying to influence certain plans—certainly not in the classroom setting observed for this study. Rojas also points out that in his workshops, he enables participants to facilitate the agenda, and as a result, they talk about what they want to. Often times, he does not even start off the workshops with a lecture; rather he lets the participants set the agenda through their own models. Rojas’ workshops emphasize the importance of the way that one feels in a particular environment. Thus, the best way to ascertain such data is to have people create their own spaces. Planners inherently cannot provide that type of information since it is so personal and can vary greatly based on culture, class, and past experiences. Rojas fits into the category of radical planners who have left the planning system to actively fight against it.

Rojas has expressed interest in participation in SAJE’s future People Planning Schools. Rojas thinks that the Planning Schools focus too much on making “planning mumbo-jumbo sexy.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Pictures from the January 29th James Rojas City as Play workshop are available here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/latinurbanforum/sets/72157632635007445/with/8425221863/>

⁶⁰ Rojas, interview.

Interview – Lakisha Hull

Lakisha Hull is currently a planner in the City of Los Angeles' city planning department. Prior to this job, she was the Transit Oriented Development Coordinator at Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE) and the main facilitator at the summer 2012 People's Planning School. This gives her the unique position of having worked both inside and outside of the planning process and thus being able to speak to the way the two facets work together.

Hull stated that the city planning department uses a myriad of outreach methods, such as mailers, door-to-door notifications, surveys through their website, and even social media. Hull said that "planning is driven by the public," and that is why the planning department is pushing to perfect community input processes. Hull also mentioned that the final approval of most plans is done by public decision makers (elected officials and commissioners) whose job it is to weigh input and recommendations from the planning department against the input of the community through public comments and other testimony before their final approval. This was not to say that the planning department and the communities are not working together, Hull argued. She also said that oftentimes task forces are created with community leaders and organizations for large plans. However, the scope of the project determines the necessary level of community input. Though not strict requirements, Hull states that projects often desire two-thirds positive responses from the community. At the same time, most of the outreach efforts by the planning department have only a 5-10% response rate. This rate is lower than the average voting turnout in local elections. Efforts should be made by the city planning staff to raise their response rate.

Hull warned that, "politics have a big play in planning." The ability of public officials acting as decision makers can allow power to personal agendas, but Hull cautioned that since planners often need to build large coalitions there is generally compromising and concessions

which leave less room for personal agendas. Participatory planning workshops like the case studies have a role in planning but Hull also thinks that it is important that the city not rely solely on these types of organizations to educate and involve community residents in the planning process. Efforts to increase public participation in the planning process should be pushed by government and non-governmental organizations. The non-governmental groups have a great capacity to educate participants about planning because they can get participants out to multiple sessions. There is a lot to learn about planning and it needs to be broken up into different sessions over time so that specific interests can be discussed.

From her time working at SAJE, Hull recalls the main objectives of the summer 2012 People's Planning School to educate and mobilize. SAJE wanted the community participants to be aware of existing issues and developments such as the Lorenzo project. While also preparing residents to become engaged and prepared for the upcoming community plan workshops and public meetings where their comments are crucial to ensuring that the community plan has all of the provisions that SAJE is advocating for. The workshops worked towards this goal of mobilizing by also being involved in the USC Specific Plan update process which was going through the City Council's Planning and Land Use Management Committee immediately following the summer 2012 sessions.

Assessment

In assessing citizen participation, it is important to differentiate between activities related to planning and actual participatory planning. Some theorists would not assign the title of participatory planning to any of the case studies, and would describe them instead as activities related to planning. Activities related to planning can be considered general education about planning and organizations supporting the planning process, while participation in planning can

actually only occur as part of the official set of activities in formulating a plan.⁶¹ This thought process suggests that everything outside of official participatory planning cannot truly be called participatory planning.

Yet, the potential power of organizations to work with constituents to create plans while also educating constituents about planning issues should not be understated. Outside organizations in the current planning infrastructure play a major part in empowering traditionally disadvantaged communities to stand up for their rights as equal citizens. Often times the organizations are working towards something greater than an individual campaign win, rather they are fighting to build hope, community, and solidarity amongst their constituency. Thus, the organizations are able to bounce back from defeats and remain strong—having built up their constituency.

⁶¹ Pomeroy, “The planning process and public participation.”

Recommendations

City planners need to work to incorporate the voice of the community at all stages of the planning process, not just after the draft plans have been created. Ongoing engagement is desirable over limiting engagement to certain points in a planning process.⁶² New participatory efforts should make direct attempts to work closely with disadvantaged groups to promote a more equitable urban environment for all. The necessary conditions for a more equitable planning environment are: two-way communication between citizens and planners, decentralization of decision making, and organized grassroots groups.⁶³ Those pushing for decentralization must also push for strong frameworks that allow for a level of standardization so that plans developed on a neighborhood scale can come back together in a coherent fashion to influence other projects like a city general plan.

If there is to be more reliance upon organizations that allow their constituents to set agendas at participatory workshops, then there needs to be adequate funding to pay for the materials and staff time that goes into workshops. Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) provided grants for both Esperanza and SAJE. However, these grants are highly competitive and should be made more widely available through either other corporations or city grants, since the groups are aiding with a city service.

With ties to funders, it is important for community groups to not lose sight of their role. The role of the organizations should be to survey the community, interpret and synthesize the opinions of the community, and directly involve the community members in their decision making.⁶⁴ Through these processes, organizations can involve community members in planning

⁶² Neighborhood Based CDC Coalition, *Transit Oriented Development Best Practices*.

⁶³ *Popular Participation in Planning for Basic Needs*. P 10

⁶⁴ Pomeroy, "The planning process and public participation."

and extract the “lived knowledge” from participatory planning participants. It is preferred for groups facilitating participatory planning workshops to synthesize and record the community knowledge they gather from their participants, rather than simply educating participants.

Conclusions

The models that advocate for heavy inclusion of the public in planning, such as the Social Learning and Communicative Action and Radical models do not emphasize the education of participants. As observed in James Rojas' *City as Play* workshops, the participants bring to the table a "lived knowledge" that is unique and valuable in its own right.⁶⁵ There is no attempt in the Social Learning and Communicative Action model, Radical model, or in Rojas' *City as Play* workshop to educate the participants with "expert knowledge" that is typically assigned only to planners. However, the community groups (Esperanza and SAJE) working in the field to fight against inequitable development in their neighborhood have all factored in educational components to their workshops. The exception is James Rojas, who is not tied to specific organizing campaigns or a direct constituency base.

Rojas is operating not only outside of governmental structures but also outside of the current planning system by not actively mentioning zoning, land use, or any other type of code. By doing this, Rojas believes that his workshops allow participants to open up more and to connect to their emotions more than in other regimented planning processes where participants may withdraw their creativity due to confusion about planning jargon. However, Esperanza and SAJE are forced to work within the current planning system in order to enact the change in zoning and development that they want to see. Thus the method, content, and application of participatory planning facilitated by these groups is a direct response to the outcome that they want to see from the workshops. The outcome-oriented nature of participatory planning, however, reflects the power that the organizations have to set the agenda at the workshops to reflect organizational goals. This poses issues when the organizations are asking the workshop

⁶⁵ Schoenwandt, *Planning in Crisis?*. P 12

participants for input. The agenda-setting power of the organization and the apparent decision-making power of the participants in the workshop create an environment where coercion by the organizations may influence the participant choice.

Citizen participation in the planning process clearly does not lead to citizen control in the planning process of today. Though the community plan update process is currently ongoing, it is clearly understood by the community members that their proposals and propositions, if considered at all, will be stripped and watered down before final approval. However, from the energy of the participants in the Planning School and Los Visioner@s workshop the residents understand the need to fight.

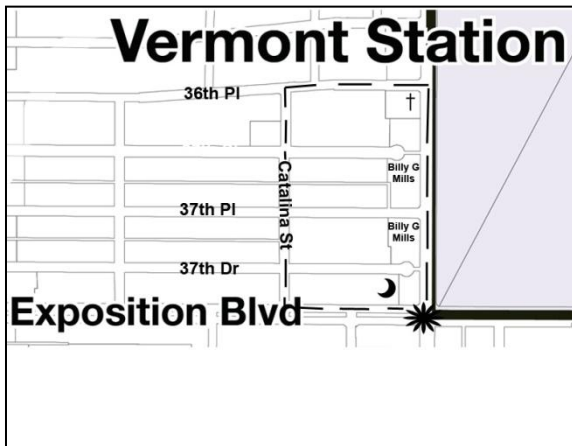
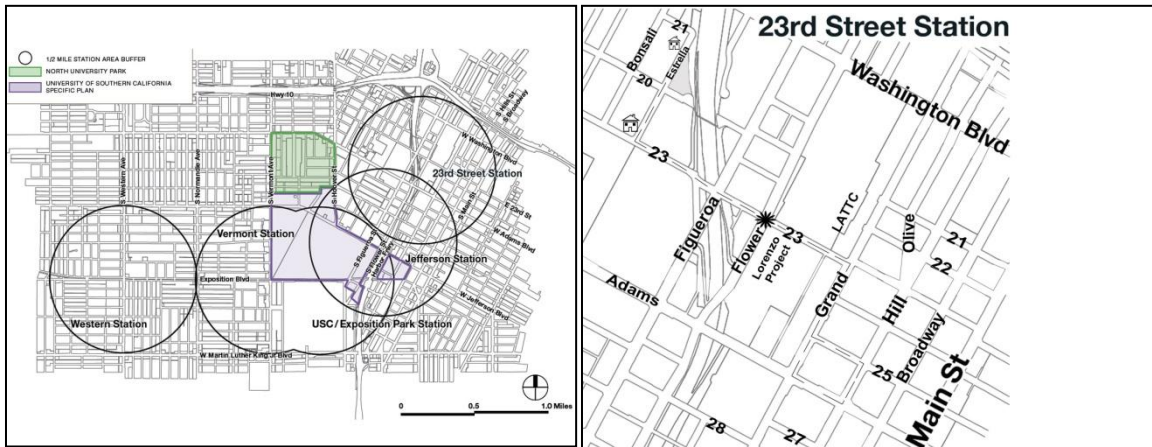
Further research should follow these case studies as the organizations do more to educate, attend planning meetings, and attempt to change the plan to be more in the community's interest. Other research could approach the same question of how organizations educate, involve and influence plans in areas other than Los Angeles. Additionally, further research should be done to comprehensively investigate the outreach and participation methods and levels of city plans. With this knowledge, better recommendations can be drawn up to dictate successful methods of community participation and inclusion in the planning process.

Appendix 1

Map Packets: Map of the five South Los Angeles Expo Line stops and their half-mile radiuses; detailed map of Vermont station with large landmarks and the walking route; detailed map of the 23rd Street Station with large landmarks and the walking route. See

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.667050758231.2096221.46001842&type=3> for

more pictures of the walking tour.



Appendix 2

The below photo shows the print out of the slides that were used in Esperanza's fourth workshop—the envisioning exercise. The print-outs show mixed use, residential, residential, commercial, and other land uses. See

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151093237779857.456855.39274644856&type=>

[3](#) for more pictures of the envisioning exercise.



Appendix 3

This is the recommendations section of the final write up of Esperanza’s Los Visioner@s workshops, created by Sophia Kendall. It details issues surrounding housing, health and environment, employment and local small businesses, and community engagement.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY COMMUNITY	RECOMMENDATIONS THEY’VE MADE BASED ON THESE ISSUES
<p>Housing: There is not enough affordable housing, residents are being displaced.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">~ Preserve existing affordable housing and rent stabilization ordinance-subject housing opportunities near light rail and Bus Rapid Transit~ Increase the amount of affordable housing being produced~ Support zoning for mixed-use developments that include affordable housing~ Require new developments to provide a certain percentage of affordable units~ Support neighborhood-based community development corporations such as Esperanza~ Implement programs to help renters into homeownership to prevent displacement
<p>Health and Environment:</p> <p>Issue: Our children and families lack appropriate green and open spaces to gather, play, and exercise.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">~ Build more open green spaces and support development projects that incorporate public open space~ Support funding for programming at parks~ Plant more trees in our neighborhoods
<p>Issue: We lack access to fresh food and produce.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">~ Support neighborhood farmers markets~ Support urban farming programs and campaigns~ Support market conversion programs
<p>Issue: Our community has higher rates of chronic illnesses yet access to preventative health care is scarce.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">~ Provide preventative care clinics~ Support Promotor de Salud health hubs throughout South and Southeast Los Angeles, which apply culturally appropriate communication strategies to the issue of health care delivery

<p>Issue: Our street conditions are discouraging and unsafe for pedestrians and bicycle riders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Repair damaged sidewalks ~ Provide street furnishings such as benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, street lighting, trees and awnings to provide shade ~ Build more crosswalks ~ Create more bike lanes
<p>Issue: Bus stops and bus frequencies discourage us from taking it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Provide benches and awnings at bus stops with lighting for improved comfort and safety ~ Build bus stops closer to train stations ~ Increase consistency and frequency of bus services ~ Improve light rail and bus stop programming that tells when the next train or bus will arrive
<p>Issue: Traffic and oil and natural gas drilling sites polluting our air and water are making us sick, poisoning our environment, and are contributing to global warming</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Stricter regulation of air and water contamination ~ Plant more trees and native plants to mitigate air pollution
<p>Employment and Local Small Businesses:</p>	
<p>Issue: Our local small businesses are increasingly being displaced by rising property values and competition with larger companies, making it harder for us to work and invest in our community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Provide financial and technical resources for local small businesses in commercial corridors and mixed-use developments ~ Establish safe street vending zones ~ Provide way-finding signage to community assets such as Mercado La Paloma ~ Incorporate contracts with developers that encourage employment and contracting within local businesses, such as Joint Development Agreements

<p>Issue: We need jobs and workforce training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Create a Local Discount program for families who live and work in the community to incentivize them to shop locally ~ Promote local small business corridors and/or markets ~ Support local hiring proposals in all new development ~ Encourage uses that create new jobs and support job training programs for local youth and the formerly incarcerated within commercial and industrial development projects
<p>Community Engagement:</p>	
<p>Issue: Our wants, needs, and voices are not considered in the development that affects us, and must be incorporated in the Community Planning process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Expand community input procedures for future City Planning processes, including the New Community Plans ~ Engage more community members in similar trainings, tours, and visioning exercises ~ Publicize public input opportunities and organize to ensure community representation is robust and articulate

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Figure 12 Community resident on the Expo Line during the walking tours.