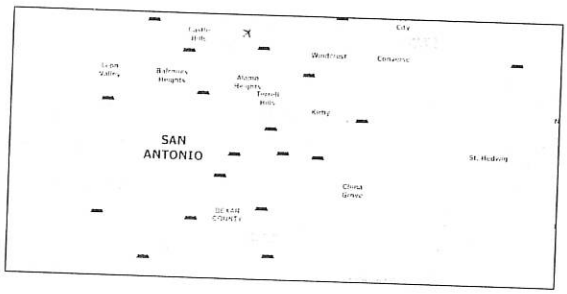
Citizen Participation and Decentralization

8



The reform movement placed decision-making power in the hands of professionally trained administrators. These officials, however, did not always pursue policies that were responsive to all citizens and neighborhoods. In the middle of the twentieth century, racial minorities were especially vocal in charging that their needs were being ignored by white middle-class–dominated police departments, public school systems, and welfare agencies. City officials pursued urban renewal projects and new highway connector projects that destroyed neighborhoods and displaced people from their homes.

Soon, other citizen groups joined the chorus, criticizing government for being overly bureaucratized, indifferent, and remote. Environmentalists protested new development projects that consumed green space and promoted sprawl. Suburbanites worried about the impact of growth on traffic congestion and school overcrowding. Middle-class parents sought to make school systems more responsive to their concerns. Homeowners fought to put a lid on rising taxes.[1]

A virtual citizen participation and bureaucratic decentralization revolution took place. Like private business firms, public sector agencies came to see the benefits of structuring more flexible organizations responsive to the wishes of the citizenry, their customers. Citizen participation and administrative decentralization became permanent institutionalized features of the urban political landscape. Yet as we shall see, participatory mechanisms face severe limitations when it comes to redistributing power in the metropolis.

Citizen Participation: Classical Theory and Today

The idea of citizen participation is as old as democracy itself. The ancient Greek city-states emphasized the virtue of having all citizens participate in decision making. In the city of Corinth, when the senate met, any citizen of the city could come forward and propose a piece of legislation. If it passed that same day, the citizen who proposed the bill would be rewarded with a sumptuous banquet in his honor, including food, drink, and entertainment. However, as

the story has it, if the proposed piece of legislation failed to pass the senate, the person proposing it was brought to the public square, where one of his hands was chopped off. Aside from its obvious cruelty, this unique system can also be seen as having two benefits: It markedly improved the quality of the legislation that was introduced, and it drastically reduced the amount of legislation the senate had to consider.

The United States is too large, in terms of both population and geography, to practice the classic, Greek-style form of **direct democracy** (also called **primary democracy** or **face-to-face democracy**). Instead, the United States has a **republican form of government,** in which elected representatives speak and vote for their constituents.

Primary or face-to-face democracy is practiced only in relatively small political jurisdictions, most notably in New England **town hall meetings,** at which the collective voice of the citizens can provide an alternative to representative processes that are too often dominated by well-organized interest groups.[2] In cities and suburbs of any substantial size, neighborhood organizations offer the best possibility for face-to-face citizen interaction.

In essence, **citizen participation** requires that citizens be given enough information so that they can participate in initial decisions on the allocation of resources that affect their lives.[3] Sherry Arnstein goes further, defining citizen participation as:

> a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contract and patronage are parceled out. In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant societal reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society.[4]

Suburban residents, too, value participatory mechanisms and the opportunities they allow members of the community to shape the character of the local schools and to influence the direction of local taxing, growth, and development.

THE ROOTS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS: THE WAR ON POVERTY AND THE FEDERAL ROLE

Urban renewal and a few other federal programs in the 1950s had perfunctory requirements for citizen participation and consultation. Yet the new emphasis on citizen participation did not really begin until the 1960s with Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and its goal of empowering poor people. The Economic Opportunity Act created the **Community Action Program (CAP),** which required the **maximum feasible participation** of the poor in locally guided antipoverty programs. The urban riots of the 1960s served to reinforce the urgency of involving the poor themselves in shaping the programs that affected their lives.

Disadvantaged urban residents saw citizen participation as a vehicle for redistributing power and authority in the city. But bureaucrats and elected officials, who often did not want to redistribute power, saw citizen participation programs as something that had to be undertaken only to the extent necessary to satisfy federal guidelines and appease local communities.

Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley and mayors around the country objected that federal antipoverty programs were helping local activists challenge the decisions of duly elected municipal officials. Congress responded by passing the **Green Amendment** (named after Congresswoman Edith Green of Oregon), giving local government officials the option of taking control of community action agencies. In Chicago, Daley used the program as a new source of patronage to reward his allies. He undermined citizen participation, shutting out those community activists who were critical of the city's performance.[5]

Attempts to increase citizen participation often proved quite frustrating. The formal mechanisms for involving citizens did not meet even the most minimal expectations. The voting turnouts for elections to community action boards were dismal: Philadelphia (2.7 percent), Los Angeles (0.7 percent), Boston (2.4 percent), Cleveland (4.2 percent), and Kansas City (5.0 percent).[6] Community advocates argued that there was little reason for residents to participate in elections when city officials refused to devolve meaningful decision-making responsibility to neighborhood institutions.

The 1970s saw a virtual explosion of federal requirements for citizen participation. In program after program, federal aid legislation required state and local agencies to "hold hearings," "involve citizens," or "seek consultation with affected parties." Requirements for citizen participation were written into a wide range of federal legislation, including the Coastal Zone Management Act, the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, the Regional Development Act (1975), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, to name only a few. By the late 1970s, 155 of the nearly 500 federal grant programs available to state and local governments required some form of citizen participation; these 155 programs accounted for over 80 percent of federal grant expenditures in fiscal year 1977.[7] The General Revenue Sharing Act required some 39,000 units of local government to inform citizens, hold open public meetings, or otherwise involve citizens in the decisions on how to spend the community's shared revenues.

By the latter part of the twentieth century, citizen participation had become more routinized, expected, and a less conflictual part of the governmental process. The Ronald Reagan administration, however, saw the federal regulations for citizen participation as unnecessary, expensive, and even undemocratic. Reagan sought to limit the burden that federal "red tape" imposed on local elected officials, the duly chosen representatives of local populations. Reagan believed that citizen participation requirements unfairly helped liberal activist groups challenge the decisions that were properly made by local elected officials.

Despite the Reagan assault, the citizen participation revolution continued. Citizen participation was just too valuable an idea. A Democratic-controlled Congress also kept in place most of the participatory requirements of federal aid programs.

As community organizations became regular participants in local politics, the style of local participation began to change. Grassroots and nonprofit groups adopted a negotiations approach in place of the conflict-oriented tactics of the 1960s.

In the 1990s, the Clinton Administration's goal of "reinventing government" served as a further impetus to the development of local—not just federal—strategies of participation and consumerism. In an effort to improve the performance of government, local executives sought to make citizen involvement part of agency performance measurement.[8] But their efforts were often met by the opposition of the police department, municipal labor unions, and other powerful constituencies.

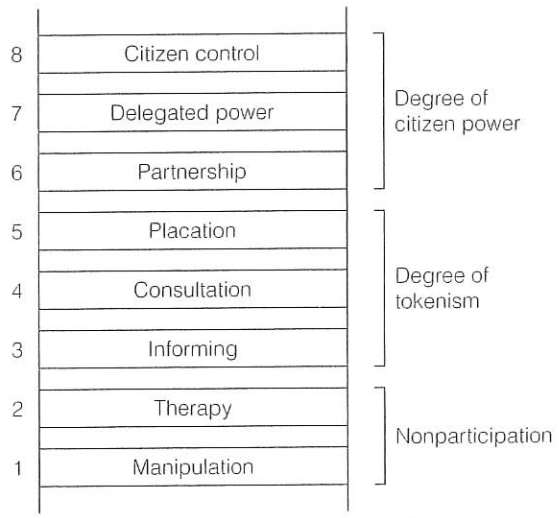
THE LEVELS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The concept of citizen participation covers a wide range of activities, running along a continuum from voting to violence. Letter writing, neighborhood organizing, testifying before the city council, lobbying, picketing, nonviolent demonstrations, and sit-ins and obstructionist tactics are all variants of citizen participation.

Sherry Arnstein has attempted to sort out the various meanings of the concept according to an eight-rung **ladder of citizen participation** (see Figure 8-1). She categorizes the bottom two rungs of the ladder, *manipulation* and *therapy*,

■ FIGURE 8–1

EIGHT RUNGS ON A LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION



SOURCE: Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35 (July 1969): 217. Reprinted with permission from the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, copyright July 1969 by the American Planning Association.

as **nonparticipation.** The middle three rungs indicate degrees of **tokenism,** which she labels *informing, consultation,* and *placation.* The top three rungs indicate various degrees of genuine citizen power, including *partnership, delegated power;* and *citizen control:*[9]

1. Under **manipulation,** citizens are appointed to advisory boards and committees where they are indoctrinated into accepting the rationale behind the local officials' plans of action. Oftentimes citizen participation mechanism are designed as instruments of **cooptation,** where citizens are brought into the decision-making process but are denied any real decision-making power; instead, they are given only the appearance or rituals of participation.
2. In **therapy,** powerlessness is seen to be synonymous with an illness. Citizens are brought together to discuss ways of altering their behavior instead of changing the behavior of public officials whose actions have helped to cause the problem at hand. Public-housing tenant meetings that focus solely on modifying tenants' behavior and attitudes are a good example of this quite limited conceptualization of citizen participation.
3. Under **informing,** citizens are made aware of program goals and recipients' rights, responsibilities, and options in a one-way flow of information from government officials to citizens. A governmental agency may merely inform the audience by holding a "dog and pony" show that allows little genuine audience participation. Oftentimes, the information is presented too late in the policy-making process to allow citizens an effective response; there is no real prospect for bargaining or compromise.
4. **Consultation** can be an important component of citizen participation. Citizen opinions are solicited through surveys, hearings, and neighborhood meetings. However, if no process is established for incorporating these views into policy decisions, consultation may prove superficial. Agencies may consult but not really listen to citizens' desires that conflict with an agency's priorities.
5. Under **placation,** a number of community residents are selected to sit on police, education, housing, health, and planning boards. However, these representatives are not necessarily accountable to their constituents. Few in number, these citizen representatives are likely to be outvoted by other board members on questions of substance.
6. Beginning with **partnership,** a city moves to the more significant forms of citizen participation. Under partnership, power is shared among citizens and local officials. Neither partner can act or alter arrangements without the other. In effect, both citizens and administrators possess a mutual veto over proposed actions. One form that a partnership can take is to give citizens and city officials equal representation on a decision-making board, allowing, for instance, school officials and

members of the community an equal say in the recruitment of a new school principal.

7. Under **delegated power,** citizen boards have the real authority to make certain decisions. They possess a degree of autonomy in certain specified program areas. Chicago's experiment with school decentralization was a short-lived attempt to give citizen boards specified budgetary and personnel powers. The experiment was ended when the citizen boards found themselves enmeshed in controversy and proved incapable of turning around the performance of Chicago's schools. The power that the government had delegated to the community boards was later withdrawn.
8. Finally, under **citizen control,** residents exercise final authority over a program, including making the ultimate decisions that affect how the program is to be run. In a number of cities, **neighborhood development corporations** can be seen as an important means of citizen control over funding decisions and neighborhood development projects.

The Arnstein typology shows that not all forms of participation entail real power sharing. Bureaucrats and city officials are generally more willing to utilize those forms of participation toward the bottom of the ladder. They are willing to give citizens only limited access and the illusion of decision-making power. Bureaucrats often see citizen participation mechanisms as a means of leading citizens to accept an agency's goals and plans. In many cities, the War on Poverty's community action agencies neutralized potential critics by giving activist citizens leadership positions on community boards or jobs with local action agencies. In other cities, however, neighborhood leaders chose to remain outside the government so that they would not be compromised in their efforts to represent the views of community residents.

Arnstein's ladder can be used to help evaluate the success of such innovations as community policing. **Community policing** seeks to forge a new partnership between neighborhoods and the police; citizens play a heightened role in helping to set police priorities. In Chicago, community policing entails monthly **beat meetings** at which the "cop on the beat" and neighborhood residents review problems and identify solutions. The goal, applying Arnstein's model, is to create a genuine police-community *partnership* with joint decision making. Too often, however, the beat meetings fell short of establishing a genuine partnership. In some instances, police officers used the meetings to build the public's support for traditional police practices, a form of participation that falls under the rubric of *cooptation* and *manipulation*. In other cases, officers were content with *informing* the public of police practices and had no real intent of making changes in response to audience concerns. In some instances, the beat officers could not even capably answer the public's questions, as cases had been handed off to detectives who were not responsible to district commanders.[10]

Arnstein's ladder is rooted in the experiences of the conflict-oriented 1960s; it portrays citizens and bureaucrats as engaged in a struggle over power. But might

bureaucrats and citizens be willing to work cooperatively in an effort to improve service delivery? A new generation of community activists has come to emphasize joint problem solving and effective service provision rather than confrontation. In the contemporary city, citizen participation often emphasizes education, information, consultation, feedback, joint planning, and mediation.[11]

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION: WHO IS SERVED? WHO PARTICIPATES?

Dayton (Ohio), Indianapolis, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Richmond (Virginia), Birmingham (Alabama), San Antonio, Phoenix, Portland (Oregon), and Santa Clarita (California) are all cities that have been lauded for their extensive citizen participation efforts.[12] New York City similarly has an extensive structure for participatory involvement, including 59 community boards focused on local land use and service delivery.

But who really participates in such programs? Do citizen participation mechanisms give a voice to the average citizen and to the poor? Or do better-off citizens take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new participatory processes? A quick review of the evolution of participatory programs in New York, Minneapolis, and elsewhere will help answer these questions.

New York's community board system has evolved greatly over time. Overall, community boards possess advisory powers and can be seen as a moderate form of decentralization.[13] The community boards give citizens influence in decisions affecting land use, the city budget, and service delivery; board recommendations have been seriously considered by other city agencies. Activist community boards, for instance, have been able to insist that developers scale back a project's size, rehabilitate a local subway station, or include increased parking or other amenities in their plans in exchange for a positive board vote.

Yet participation in such boards can also be seen as limited and, to a great extent, conservative. In Minneapolis as well as New York, community groups were largely pragmatic actors focused on neighborhood improvements; they did not constitute a larger social movement that challenged the city's overall priorities.[14] One study of New York's community board system reveals that "Poor and minority community districts do not fare as well as middle-class, predominantly white communities in securing their local budget priorities."[15]

Cities with extensive citizen participation efforts also tend to be those cities that are making extensive efforts to attract or retain geographically mobile, middle-class and upscale residents. Participatory efforts have become part of municipal strategy designed to attract and retain citizens who contribute to a city's tax base.[16]

In Minneapolis, community participation mechanisms were often dominated by white, middle-income homeowners. In Minneapolis as well as New York, citizen participation has taken on a middle-class character; participatory efforts have been used to promote concerns for service provision and preserving a neighborhood's attractiveness.[17]

Middle-class groups have clearly seized the new opportunities for influence offered by participatory mechanisms. As a result, citizen participation efforts often suffer from a pattern of class bias. Yet at times, participatory mechanisms can increase decision-making opportunities for the poor.

In Chicago, the residents of middle-class and highly educated neighborhoods took advantage of the opportunity to attend regular beat meetings offered by community policing. Yet attendance rates at beat meetings were the highest in African-American neighborhoods; attendance was also marginally higher in the poorer areas of the city. The salience of the gang and crime problems led the residents of impoverished neighborhoods to seize the opportunity to demand action.[18]

THE CHANGING STYLE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION: FROM CONFLICT TO COOPERATION

As the citizen participation movement matured, citizen groups moved away from the confrontational politics of the 1960s to a more consensual approach designed to build broad coalitions for housing construction, new economic development, and the provision of community social services.[19] The earlier politics of conflict was typified by the organizing approach of social activist Saul Alinsky and the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). But, as we shall see, a great many Alinsky groups now give their attention to the management of community services, not just to political protest.

The **Alinsky-style/IAF community organizing model** is rooted in the view that conflict and confrontation are essential parts of democracy. According to Alinsky, ordinary citizens need to build their own power resources in order to have control of their own destinies. Alinsky saw society as divided into distinct classes, each pursuing its own self-interests. The "haves" of American society will not voluntarily cede their privileges to the "have-nots" and "have-little-want-mores." Nor can the have-nots depend on alliances with outsiders who do not feel a community's pain and who will too often abandon or "sell out" a community in the middle of an intense struggle.[20]

The organizer—the person who seeks to mobilize the political force inherent in a community—works with a community's indigenous or native leaders to identify a neighborhood's problems. Religious congregations with their "social connectedness" provide a base of Alinsky/IAF-style organizing. Faith-based congregations help to give a new organizer, oftentimes an outsider, legitimacy in the local community; they also help pay his or her salary. IAF organizing around churches has been especially important in Hispanic communities, with their strong Catholic faith tradition, in Texas and the American Southwest.[21]

The Alinsky-style organizer pursues change by uncovering the source of grievances in a community. After uncovering grievances, the organizer then seeks to rub wounds raw, mobilizing the community to attack the target of the protest action. The organizer polarizes and freezes the target of the protest action, allowing the target no excuses or ability to shift the blame for inaction to others. The

organizer
struggle.
tion's mer
The W
notable c
to take o
chants w
targeted b
in major
ultimately
TWO fou
threatenec
By the
Protest to
became le
viding ser
life of con
by runnin
grams.[23] I
gave way
adopted a
with gover
resources t
By the
Alinsky/IA
confrontat

CORBIS

African-Ame
Tenant Patro
Housing Proj

organizer seeks a quick victory that will serve to mobilize followers on to greater struggle. The organizer skillfully chooses tactics that will protect the organization's members while disorienting and intimidating the target of the action.

The Woodlawn Organization (TWO) in Chicago is only one of the many notable community organizations that used Alinsky-style tactics in the 1960s to take on a number of targets. TWO dramatically publicized which merchants were shortchanging neighborhood residents, forcing change through targeted boycotts. TWO also transported ghetto residents downtown to browse in major department stores, threatening to scare off middle-class customers, ultimately convincing store managers to change hiring and promotion policies. TWO fought the expansion of the University of Chicago, an expansion that threatened to displace community residents.[22]

By the 1970s, TWO shifted its focus, as captured in its new slogan "From Protest to Programs." TWO, like numerous other IAF-style organizations, became less concerned with protest activities and more concerned with providing services that would make real and immediate improvements in the daily life of community residents, for example, by building low-income housing and by running day-care centers, dental clinics, and other neighborhood programs.[23] In the decades that followed, protest organizations across the nation gave way to a new style of **governing nonprofits**, community groups that adopted a more cooperative approach aimed at building working relationships with government, business, and other nonprofit groups in order to obtain the resources to run community-based programs.[24]

By the end of the twentieth century, even groups schooled in the Alinsky/IAF methods began to refine their approach, giving less emphasis to confrontation and new emphasis to running programs that could provide

CORBIS

African-American women of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) Tenant Patrol escort schoolchildren on the elevator at the Ida Wells Housing Project which is threatened by gangs.

better housing and community services. As community organizations gave a new emphasis toward the provision of housing, health care, and other services of concern to poor women and their children, women assumed an even greater role in community organizations. (See "Women and the Fight for Affordable Housing" below.) Community organizing lost some of the "macho" posturing that had characterized the style of an earlier generation of labor and community organizers trained in the Alinsky/IAF tradition.

WOMEN AND THE FIGHT FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In Chicago and many other cities, women have played a prominent role as tenant organizers in low- and moderate-income buildings. Women were especially visible in the fight to preserve housing affordability.

Why have women been so prominent as housing organizers? First, as poverty in the United States is a female-related condition, female-headed households make up a large portion of the population in subsidized housing. Second, women's activity in housing issues is also rooted in the traditional domain that women have been accorded as managers of the family and household sphere.[7]

In the ethnically diverse Uptown area of Chicago in the 1980s, landlords sought to take advantage of an early buyout provision of their HUD-subsidized mortgages. The buyout would have allowed landlords to evict large numbers of low- and moderate-income tenants from HUD-subsidized housing units, buildings that could then be renovated and leased to new tenants at much higher rents. Cynthia Reed, the president of Uptown's Sheridan-Gunnison Tenants' Association, explained her involvement as a matter of self-interest. Low-income, single mothers raising children have little real alternative in their search for quality housing. They must battle to preserve their subsidized homes, even if it means that they have less time for work and their children. Women played dominant roles on tenant governing boards and committees in the fight for affordable housing.

In the Carmine Marine building in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood, the fight was led by Kathy Osberger, who had previously been a community organizer in the Bronx for about 10 years. She organized her neighbors to fight announced rent increases. They also fought the sale of the building to a new landlord and forced their existing landlord to hire a new management company. The Carmine Marine Tenants' Association eventually succeeded in convincing HUD to allow the tenants themselves to purchase the building, the first such tenant purchase in the nation. The tenants not only succeeded in their protest; they made the transition to resident ownership and building management.

In Chicago, the role of gender in the fight for affordable housing seems to vary by nationality. In the African-American community, women played the dominant leadership role. Among Nigerians, Ethiopians, Pakistanis, and

continued

WOMEN AND THE FIGHT FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING (CONT.)

Indians, in contrast, men were more likely to get involved. Women from the Middle East, too, played a more restrained role in the housing struggles.

Despite the variations by race and ethnicity, the larger pattern is still worth noting: women—especially poorer women—are often the foot soldiers and the leaders in grassroots organizations. Larry Bennett has observed that "women are important participants of every neighborhood organization. . . . And within the literature of women's studies, it is axiomatic that political work directed at neighborhood-, housing-, and school-related issues represents a field where women, for generations, have had a conspicuous impact." As Bennett concludes, "gender, far more than social class and race/ethnicity, structures grassroots activism."

Sources: Philip Nyden and Joan Adams, *Saving Our Homes: The Lessons of Community Struggles to Preserve Affordable Housing in Chicago's Uptown*, a report completed by researchers at Loyola University of Chicago in collaboration with Organization of the Northeast, Chicago, April 1996. The quotations are from Larry Bennett, *Neighborhood Politics: Chicago and Sheffield* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), p. 246.

In New York's South Bronx, the Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association (named for the curved block on Kelly Street) similarly assumed new management and service responsibilities when it acquired distressed properties and ran low-income housing cooperatives. Banana Kelly had earlier earned a reputation for railing against landlords. Beginning in the late 1970s, however, the association shifted its emphasis from protest to housing management, rehabbing hundreds of units of affordable housing and, in effect, becoming the landlord who must collect overdue rents and somehow find the money for necessary repairs.[25]

Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) is another community-based organization in the Alinsky tradition that has sought to balance protest activities with a new service orientation. With the core of its membership in 45 to 50 churches in Baltimore's African-American community, BUILD reinvigorated local black activism and empowered the poor. BUILD used Alinsky-style confrontation tactics to fight bank redlining and unfair auto insurance rates. BUILD also organized mass membership meetings to pressure mayoral and council candidates into making important policy commitments.

As BUILD matured, it shifted much of its attention to education and human resource programs. BUILD even fashioned a cooperative working relationship with the Greater Baltimore Committee, an association of 1,000 of the city's top business leaders. BUILD's leaders came to recognize the advantages of establishing partnerships with members of the business community who possessed the ability to fund job training programs and who could promise jobs to high-school graduates with good attendance records and good grades. BUILD worked with private sector actors, parents, and volunteers to establish a "Child First Authority" to provide extended-day programs, homework assistance, and

a safe after-school environment. A 1,000-person BUILD membership meeting led Mayor Kurt Schmoke to promise that he would commit $1.5 million to the Child First Authority; Art Modell, the owner of the Baltimore Ravens football team, promised another $500,000. Another mass membership meeting led Maryland Governor Parris Glendening to make a similar commitment.[26]

The Alinsky/IAF organizing approach has been of invaluable assistance in enabling poor people to fight for meaningful improvements in their lives. Yet, while not abandoning protests, community organizations have moved beyond confrontation. Urban black churches, as typified by the First African Methodist Episcopal (FAME) Church in Los Angeles, have chosen to go beyond protest activities for the sake of partnering with government agencies in the delivery of services to the poor.[27]

In Dayton, Birmingham, Portland (Oregon), and St. Paul, citizen organizations have moved beyond the narrow neighborhood or localist focus that dominated much of Alinsky/IAF organizing. Neighborhood organizations in these cities have gotten involved in electoral politics and have entered city hall, while maintaining a cautious attitude from fear of being coopted by the city power structure.[28]

In an age of globalization, a new generation of activists sees the need for organizing efforts that transcend local borders. These critics see Alinsky's focus as too place-oriented, too rooted in neighborhood and individual self-interest to confront decisions made outside the community that help to produce gentrification, the disappearance of high-wage manufacturing jobs, and other urban inequalities. Organizing efforts, such as the 1999 demonstrations against the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, are an attempt to surmount self-interest and build a collective challenge to global decision makers across local boundaries.[29] Whether such protests against globalization produce more than "noise" and bring real benefits to the lives of the poor, as Alinsky-style organizing has done, remains to be seen.

COMMUNITY GROUPS IN A CHANGED SUNBELT AND PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Sunbelt politics was once relatively quiescent. More recent years, however, have seen the emergence of neighborhood organizations willing to challenge the priorities of traditional governing elites. In a number of cities, community groups have used the tools of direct democracy to check the growth initiatives of government officials.[30]

In Seattle and other communities in the Pacific northwest, grassroots activism has come to dominate local politics, with citizens pointing to the adverse impact of continued growth on quality-of-life and environmental-protection concerns. Critics, in turn, charge that NIMBY ("not in my backyard") activists overstate the harm brought by new growth, and that their fervent opposition can lead to paralysis in the vital arena of economic development.[31]

The Phoenix and Seattle examples point to the middle-class sources of citizen activism in many Sunbelt communities, where community groups have

pressed for environmentalism, good government, and homeowner concerns. In Tucson, college-educated professionals formed a neighborhood network in an effort to ward off the "LosAngelization" of Tucson.[32]

The Southwest's growing minority population has also led to a new neighborhood activism. In El Paso, a city with a population that is two-thirds Hispanic, EPISO (the El Paso Interreligious Sponsoring Organization) adopted an activist, church-sponsored, grassroots, Alinsky-style approach to organizing.[33]

In San Antonio, the competing agendas of middle-class citizen groups and poorer minority (especially Latino) groups have at times clashed.[34] San Antonio is a divided city, with a relatively well-off, predominantly Anglo north side and a less prosperous, predominantly Hispanic west side. In 1974, flood runoff from the Anglo neighborhoods inundated large sections of the poor, flat, west side. Incensed, over twenty neighborhood groups formed a federation, **Communities Organized for Public Services (COPS)**, to protest the underprovision of infrastructure and other services in the Mexican sections of town. Building on the organizational base provided by local churches, COPS relied on mass "accountability meetings" to pressure public officials. COPS used its organizing and electoral power to steer community development spending toward affordable housing, health clinics, and, in one case, away from the purchase of a golf course. COPS even clashed publicly with Mayor Henry Cisneros, a Mexican American, over his plans to build a 65,000-seat domed stadium and convention center. COPS argued that the project promised benefits to wealthy business executives while imposing new taxes on poorer San Antonians. The city, however, built the Alamodome despite COPS' opposition.[35]

On San Antonio's north side, middle-class and environmentalist groups mobilized in efforts to block new suburban development. The Aquifer Protection Association (APA) was organized to stop the construction of a new shopping mall over the recharge zone of the city's groundwater supply. Initially, COPS kept its distance from APA, as citizens in the wealthier parts of San Antonio had opposed increased public spending for improvements in the poorer sections of the city. Eventually, though, COPS decided to join the fight, hoping that limits imposed on suburban development would serve to channel investment and jobs back to the city's downtown.

COPS, too, has shifted its style over the years as the organization gained clout through voter registration drives and new acceptance at the bargaining table. Previously regarded as a protest group, the San Antonio city council has honored COPS for its years of public service.[36]

In Houston, The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) similarly used the pressure of a mass membership "accountability meeting" to convince Mayor Kathryn Whitmire to sign a compact with the organization. Whitmire agreed to meet with TMO's leadership once a month and to attend future TMO mass meetings. On the whole, though, TMO was less effective in Houston than COPS was in San Antonio. Minorities were a smaller part of Houston's population. Tensions among African Americans, Hispanics, and poor whites in Houston have also acted to impede the development of a strong grassroots coalition.

In recent years, TMO, COPS, EPISO, and other Alinsky-style organizations—including Austin Interfaith and the Allied Communities of Tarrant in Forth Worth)—have sought to increase parental involvement in school decision making. These groups have increasingly adopted such consensual tactics as organizing a "Walk for Success." Still, these groups are capable of organizing more confrontational actions as the situation requires.[37]

In the poor and gang-ridden neighborhood of East Los Angeles, a schism has developed between more explicitly political community groups and those community organizations that have chosen to gain a greater involvement in neighborhood service delivery. Neighborhood political activists formed the United Neighborhood Organization (UNO), a church-sponsored, Alinsky-style organization, in response to their sense that a more established group, The East Los Angeles Community Union (TELACU), had abandoned its citizen participation roots. TELACU, a community development corporation, depended on professional and technocratic skills in building contacts with funding agencies. Extensive citizen participation served to slow down and jeopardize the search for new program funds. As one TELACU official said, "Who cares about an organization that doesn't maximize citizen participation if in the end the job gets done?"[38]

UNO emerged after Bishop Juan Arzube visited San Antonio in 1975 to observe how COPS used mass meetings to pressure city council members into action. Ernesto Cortes, who had put together COPS, was hired as UNO's principal organizer. Cortes built his new Los Angeles group on the foundation of its citizens' Hispanic cultural heritage, including their attachments to the church. Home-to-home interviews by UNO organizers led the organization to discover the immense outrage over the exorbitant automobile insurance rates that East Los Angeles residents had been paying as a result of redlining by auto insurance companies. After UNO secured a 37-percent reduction in auto insurance rates, the organization turned its attention to the problems of education, housing, transportation, and gang violence.

What does a review of the activities of these community groups reveal? Primarily, it demonstrates the vitality of community groups in the Sunbelt and how the changing demographics of the region have begun to reshape the politics of many Sunbelt cities. Community organizations have relied on both conflict-oriented strategies and more consensual approaches to service provision and building alliances for change.

The new citizen voices, however, did not always succeed in stopping elite-led development projects. Neighborhood protests stopped numerous projects, only to see new ones soon emerge.

MAKING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION WORK

The citizen participation programs of the 1960s and 1970s were criticized for failing to promote widespread participation. The early programs were quite primitive as they provided citizens with little opportunity for face-to-face deliberation and no real control over government programs. As a result, local citizens saw no reason to participate.

Yet other citi
have initiated m
experience of th
can be built.[39]

What are th
real powers m
simply be plan
sess authority t
ipation as wort

Second, the
sure that admin
strators will re

Third, citize
grams impleme
discriminatory.
against the as
threatened by p

Fourth, citi
organizations v
can engage in s
pation often re
Neighborhood
and homeowne
Power Initiativ
ment, and the
organizations i

Finally, neig
with every neig
that a commun
face contact. T
that they have
decision makin

SUMM

The major arg
zen participatic

- CP is con
people in
officials a
- CP mecha
who othe
- CP mecha
building a

Yet other cities—including Indianapolis, Birmingham, Portland, and St. Paul—have initiated more recent and more successful citizen participation programs. The experience of these cities shows that effective community participation programs can be built.[39]

What are the keys to building effective local participation programs? First, real powers must be turned over to the citizen bodies. These bodies cannot simply be planning or advisory boards. Only when neighborhood bodies possess authority to allocate significant goods and services will citizens see participation as worthwhile.

Second, the city must employ the necessary rewards and sanctions to make sure that administrators interact with neighborhood groups. Otherwise, administrators will resist the loss of their power.

Third, citizen participation must be initiated citywide. Participatory programs implemented in only a certain few neighborhoods are seen as unfair and discriminatory. They lack the widespread public support to sustain them against the assaults that will be made by officials and interests who are threatened by participation.

Fourth, cities and charitable foundations must provide neighborhood organizations with the staff and financial resources so that these associations can engage in substantial outreach to bring residents into the process. Participation often requires outside assistance. The City of Indianapolis created a Neighborhood Resource Center, a center designed to aid new neighborhood and homeowner associations and spur grassroots activism. A Neighborhood Power Initiative, funded by the Annie Casey Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, and the Ford Foundation, helped to fund full-time staff for community organizations in targeted neighborhoods.

Finally, neighborhood organizations must have the ability to communicate with every neighborhood resident on an ongoing basis. The geographical area that a community organization serves must be small enough to promote face-to-face contact. Yet community organizations must not be so narrow-focused that they have no potential for electoral power and lack an ability to influence decision making beyond the neighborhood's borders.

SUMMING UP: ASSESSING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The major arguments advanced for developing a meaningful program of citizen participation (CP) can be summarized as follows:

- CP is consistent with democratic theory. It increases the number of people in the decision-making process and helps assure that government officials are more aware of and responsive to citizen concerns.
- CP mechanisms help to nurture the development of community leaders who otherwise might not emerge.
- CP mechanisms help to create political and social networks essential to building a community. Citizen participation rooted in faith-based

organizations can also build important bridges to community groups outside the community.

- CP acts to reduce feelings of powerlessness and create a sense of efficacy in a community. Government is perceived as more legitimate when city residents see that they have access to government and that public officials are listening to their point of view.
- By bringing citizen involvement in service production, CP also improves the efficiency of service delivery.

These arguments are impressive. Yet the expectations set for citizen participation must be realistic. Citizen participation efforts cannot, by themselves, correct serious resource deficiencies and overcome deep-seated community problems and resentments.

The major arguments against CP are:

- CP tends to heighten parochial concerns to the detriment of citywide concerns. At their worst, neighborhood actions can be narrow-minded and exclusionary.
- CP is never completely representative of the range of community interests. It can never be said with any certainty that citizen activists represent a community's point of view. Even in cities with noteworthy programs for citizen involvement, middle-class and professional citizens, not the poor, take the greatest advantage of participatory opportunities.
- CP is lengthy and time-consuming. It slows down the process of government, retarding service delivery and project completion. CP can be frustrating for government officials and citizens alike.

Community organizations are not always a force for progress. In neighborhoods across the United States, local associations have mobilized to bar the provision of shelters and assisted housing. Community organizations in gentrified sections of the city have also fought against low-income housing and other projects that they believe will introduce crime into their neighborhoods. Other grassroots organizations have opposed policy measures that will strain local services or raise local property taxes.[40]

Citizen participation derives its force from democratic values. Whatever the flaws and imperfections of participatory mechanisms, efforts to enhance citizen democracy will continue.

DECENTRALIZATION

Decentralization denotes efforts to devolve decision making closer to the people. The concept of decentralization is quite similar to that of citizen participation; both seek to increase the citizen's voice in municipal decision making.

Decentralization can be defined as an institutionalized arrangement that "involves the allocation of authority and responsibility to lower territorially based echelons of the established bureaucracy or to geopolitical levels lower than the

large municipality or school district."[41] Decentralization occurs when a central office yields authority to agency field offices or to neighborhood organizations.

The decentralization movement grew from a recognition that decisions are too often made in a bureaucracy's central headquarters by officials who are not fully aware of, or responsive to, the concerns of residents in the neighborhoods. In an attempt to make government more accessible, the decentralization movement sought to establish new municipal offices in the neighborhoods and to give greater decision-making authority to officials who worked in the neighborhood.

Oftentimes, municipal officials resisted calls for decentralization in policing, fire protection, and education, observing that their services were already decentralized. Evidently, public officials viewed decentralization quite differently than did the neighborhood groups. Public officials saw decentralization simply as a matter of devolving certain responsibilities to field offices. Citizen groups, in contrast, wanted to restructure urban decision making to increase the voice of community groups.

TYPES OF DECENTRALIZATION

One way to better understand the large variety of decentralization mechanisms is to categorize decentralization according to how much power is actually devolved.[42]

GEOGRAPHICAL DECENTRALIZATION

Geographical decentralization occurs when local governmental officials decide to locate a branch or field office closer to the clients who are being served. Under geographical decentralization, an agency may lease a storefront where a few staff persons do the initial intake of applications for service and pass citizen complaints along to higher administrative levels. Members of the field office staff have no real discretion to exercise political or administrative power on their own.

Such neighborhood offices function as city grievance centers or complaint centers. Citizens entering the office fill out forms describing their complaints and are told that they will hear from the appropriate agency in the near future. If they receive a quick response and serious efforts are made to redress their grievances, word will quickly spread through the community and other clients will begin to use the office. If citizen complaints go unanswered, or if responses are less than satisfactory, community interest in the services provided by the field office will soon decline.

This model of decentralization seeks to take government to the people. The storefront and neighborhood offices provide citizens with relatively convenient sites at which they can apply for new services or register their complaints. Because complaints are merely fielded and then passed downtown, there is no real devolution of authority. Final decision-making power remains in the hands of central office bureaucrats who may be out of touch with local citizens and insensitive to neighborhood needs.

ADMINISTRATIVE DECENTRALIZATION

Administrative decentralization vests significant administrative discretion in the hands of the staff members situated in a field office. Under administrative decentralization, field employees do not merely forward complaints downtown; instead they possess some real discretionary power in program implementation and the allocation of benefits. Under administrative decentralization, for instance, a social services worker can make certain decisions on the spot about a client's eligibility for program benefits. Administrative decentralization is also evident when a parole officer is given the authority to decide if a parolee will be allowed to travel out of the state for a short period of time to attend a relative's funeral.

Community policing provides an important contemporary example of administrative decentralization. The community policing model seeks to abridge the traditional hierarchical organization of police departments in order to give beat officers who work with neighborhood residents a new ability to set neighborhood law enforcement priorities. Community policing uses a variety of mechanisms—small neighborhood substations, community surveys, neighborhood advisory boards, officers on bicycles and on foot patrol—in order to establish a two-way flow of communication between the police and the public. Community policing seeks to transform the culture of local police departments by building a new partnership between customer-oriented law enforcement officials and neighborhood residents.[43]

Little city halls and multiservice centers are two long-loved examples of administrative decentralization. **Little city halls** were first initiated in the 1960s and 1970s by Boston Mayor Kevin White and New York Mayor John Lindsay; the innovation was soon copied in other cities. Under the little city hall arrangement, agency branch offices are located in an easily identifiable neighborhood facility; the mayoral appointee in charge of the center is empowered to make a range of administrative decisions on the spot. The program not only seeks to improve service responsiveness; it also allows the mayor to build the support of neighborhood residents.

Multiservice centers usually occupy large facilities and provide a fairly large menu of in-house services in a neighborhood. Residents can easily identify where they must go to apply for services. With multiple agencies housed under the same roof, the referral of citizens and coordination of services are also improved.

Administrative decentralization provides a speedier approach to service delivery compared to the time delays that occur under the geographical approach where additional paperwork is processed and sent downtown. Administrative decentralization also assures that increased decision-making power is vested in the hands of people located in the community who are more likely to know and understand a community's needs.

Yet under the administrative approach, final authority is still retained by city officials who may not yield to neighborhood concerns. In cities such as Detroit, little city hall administrators were not given the sufficient authority or resources to make meaningful improvements in neighborhood services.[44]

Under the little city hall arrangement, it is the mayor's appointee who retains final authority; in the multiservice center, it is a decentralized bureaucratic employee. Similarly, while community policing seeks to push numerous law-enforcement decisions down to the neighborhood and street level, final decision-making authority remains with the police department and not with neighborhood residents.

POLITICAL DECENTRALIZATION

Political decentralization implies a shift in power and authority from city and county agencies to recognized community groups. Elected or appointed community representatives join public officials in the development and implementation of policy. Political decentralization implies parity between the community and the city; neither can impose its programs on the other. An example of such power sharing occurs when a community board screens the candidates seeking to become the local school principal, and the superintendent must choose from the list of top candidates recommended by the board.

COMMUNITY CONTROL

Community control entails a clear shift in power from the government agency to the community group. Under community control, a community-selected subunit of government is given the authority to make policy, allocate resources, and veto unwanted governmental intrusions. One early instance of community control occurred in the late 1960s when Washington, DC created an independent school in the Adams-Morgan area and endowed it with power to hire its own teachers, determine its own curriculum priorities, purchase its own supplies, and establish its own local school board.

The volatile politics surrounding the New York City Board of Education's 1968 decision to establish three experimental school districts shows the controversial nature of community control. The local community board in the impoverished Ocean Hill–Brownsville section of Brooklyn hired community residents who were not members of the United Federation of Teachers. The board also sought to transfer teachers it did not want to other schools. The teachers' union objected, and teachers citywide went on strike. Police officers were called in to quell disturbances and to maintain law and order. New York was rocked by repeated citywide teacher strikes as the union and the community board fought over one issue after another.

Ideally, under community control, a neighborhood board should control the flow of revenues, which it can then allocate in its service decisions. But few if any inner-city areas are given such authority; community control districts are still dependent on the funding allocations granted to them by city hall.

To a great extent, community control exists in middle- and upper-class suburban communities, not in the inner city. Suburbs exercise the financial and political autonomy that is sought, but rarely attained, by lower-income, inner-city minority communities.[45]

This typology provides a framework for understanding the continuing debate over decentralization. Governmental officials prefer to minimize any shift of power away from their agencies; they prefer the geographical and administrative forms of decentralization. Community groups, in contrast, insist on the more extensive devolution of power inherent in political decentralization and community control.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS

One of the continuing bright spots on the urban scene is the emergence of neighborhood-based groups dedicated to the provision of housing and other important community services, organizations that work with political actors outside the inner city in order to increase corporate investment in lower-income communities. By the mid-1990s, over 2,000 **community development corporations** (CDCs) were established throughout the country. CDCs were particularly successful in constructing and rehabilitating housing in inner-city areas that had largely been ignored by private financial institutions.

Under the CDC approach, a corporate entity controlled by neighborhood residents is granted a charter from the state. The community corporation then assumes authority over designated economic development and physical rehabilitation activities. The CDC seeks to assist local entrepreneurs and stimulate neighborhood investment, especially in such areas as affordable housing and job creation. A CDC may also contract with governmental agencies to administer health clinics, day-care centers, and other social service programs.

CDCs stress cooperation more than confrontation. They seek to improve neighborhoods through **bridge-building activities** with banks, private investors, and nonprofit organizations. The actions of CDCs became especially vital to neighborhood health as the federal government decreased its own commitment to the provision of affordable housing.[46]

Bethel New Life in Chicago and the Nehemiah Project of the East Brooklyn section of New York are two nationally renowned examples of faith-based community development corporations committed both to the political empowerment of the poor and to the provision of affordable housing. Under the leadership of the Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood, the more-than-50 religious congregations of United Congregations of East Brooklyn have come together to support Nehemiah Homes, building over 5,000 affordable, single-family, owner-occupied homes in a once largely abandoned part of the city. Ray's organization also brought a new health clinic and school to the community and established job-mentoring programs to encourage students to stay in school and pursue a career.[47]

The success of CDCs, especially in the field of housing, has been outstanding. The Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association in the Bronx revitalized over 25,000 housing units since 1978, weatherized an additional 8,000 units, and sponsored the construction of 500 houses. The Mid-Bronx

Desperadoes (MBD) built or renovated another 23,000 housing units. Similarly, in New York, the Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC) created hundreds of units of housing and promoted the commercial revitalization of Harlem's famed 125th Street. All of these successes serve as testimony to the potential inherent in faith-based CDCs.[48]

While the CDC record of success is most notable in the area of housing (over 90 percent of all CDCs are engaged in housing projects), CDCs are also active in a whole host of community-building activities, including youth and education programs, after-school programs, community organizing, neighborhood clean-ups, tenant counseling, home weatherization, food pantries, and job placement. CDCs operate in comprehensive terms; they provide a multitude of services to narrowly targeted areas in order to restore the health of neighborhoods. CDCs are **gap fillers;** they respond to the problems created by the gradual withdrawal of financial institutions and other entities from declining neighborhoods.[49]

CDCs tend to adopt a "consensus organizing" approach, spurning the confrontational tactics and polarizations of IAF/Alinsky-style organizations and activist groups such as ACORN (the Association for Community Organizations for Reform Now).[50] The CDC strategy emphasizes self-help, cooperation, and the building of new bridges between a community and outside institutions. CDCs seek to bring together various organizations—private investors, corporate managers, financial institutions, nonprofit associations, governmental agencies, and community groups—to support consensual solutions to problems. Private and institutional investors are more willing to invest in neighborhood projects in which CDC coordination and know-how reduce the risk of failure.[51]

Critics of CDCs argue that the devolution of power falls short of true neighborhood government and community control. Critics also question the degree to which CDC staff members are responsible to the larger community. As the TELACU case in East Los Angeles demonstrated, sometimes a CDC's responsiveness to neighborhood citizens may be diminished by its need to cultivate its government and nonprofit foundation funding sources. Many CDCs are reluctant to attack private, nonprofit, or governmental institutions when their funding and support are needed for future projects.

Other CDCs fail as they pursue their social goals too aggressively, with little regard for maintaining their political support both in the immediate community and in the larger city. The Whittier Alliance in Minneapolis closed its doors after encountering "vociferous community opposition" to its plans to introduce additional units of very low-income housing. Similarly, the Oak Cliff Development Corporation in Dallas lost city funding when its plans for a new subdivision of 122 units of affordable housing aroused intense community opposition.[52]

Indeed, CDCs, whatever their stated social mission, will have to pay careful attention not just to political considerations but also to financial, managerial, and accounting constraints in order to avoid collapse.[53] The sad tale of Banana Kelly's demise in the South Bronx points to the limitations of what can

be expected from community organizations with poor managerial and planning skills. If CDCs are to do more, especially amid cutbacks in the federal commitment to subsidized housing, the public and nonprofit sectors must do more to train CDC board members and staff in such areas as property management, cost projections, and financial underwriting.[54]

CDCs must also be careful not to be overly reliant on HUD or any other single funding source. When the Reagan administration cut back its support of community organizations, the Mission Housing Development Corporation in San Francisco found that its ability to act was severely jeopardized, despite its award-winning record of building and managing safe and successful low-income housing.[55]

CDCs have also been criticized for adopting an "apolitical" approach that pays too much attention to bricks-and-mortar concerns—especially housing and real estate projects—and too little attention to political organizing and the development of more broad-scale attacks on social and economic inequities. The political involvement of CDCs is limited by the 501(c)(3) provisions of the tax laws, which allows them to accept tax-exempt grants from charitable foundations.

As CDCs have become service providers, developers, and landlords, their energies have been diverted away from more political organizing and protest activities.[56] As CDCs become more professionalized, with their directors by necessity giving greater attention to property management and financial planning concerns, the corporations risk losing their grassroots authenticity.

CDCs are also relatively weak as they pay low salaries that result in the loss of experienced executive directors.[57] Critics further question the representative nature of CDC staff and governing boards in those organizations in which nonresidents occupy key positions.

The presence of a CDC does not remove power from the hands of municipal agencies. The municipal bureaucracies ultimately determine just what services and responsibilities are delegated to a CDC in a management contract. The municipal bureaucracies can even abrogate management contracts in cases in which they feel a CDC has been grossly inefficient or incompetent.

Even when CDCs prove successful, traditional problems of organizational life sometimes reemerge and plague CDC actions. CDCs learn that bureaucratic organization is essential to any organization's existence; bureaucratic standards provide an accepted way of accomplishing tasks. In order to run programs successfully, CDCs and other community-based organizations must recruit staff, set pay scales, prepare job descriptions for employees, establish criteria for personnel evaluation and promotion, and maintain personnel and financial records. As the neighborhood organization grows and expands, it becomes more bureaucratic.[58]

Despite their imperfections, the overwhelming weight of the evidence is clear. In Boston, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Memphis, and other cities, community development corporations have pursued cooperative and comprehensive strategies in their efforts to provide affordable housing and services in working-class urban neighborhoods.[59] CDCs have become important actors in the urban arena.[60]

SUMMING UP: ASSESSING DECENTRALIZATION

Advocates of decentralization generally argue that:

- Decentralization brings government closer to the people, enhancing communication between citizens and government officials and making municipal service delivery more flexible and responsive to neighborhood needs and concerns.
- Decentralization increases the legitimacy of government, improving city-community relations by making people feel that government is closer to them and more willing to listen to their concerns.
- Decentralization fits in with notions of grassroots democracy. In decentralized service delivery, citizens enjoy a better chance of getting to know and gain access to local public officials.

Decentralization has proven to be an important tool in the efforts to combat both AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) and homelessness. Community-based care provides more humane treatment to people with AIDS at a lower cost than does institutionalized care. A decentralized approach to dealing with AIDS allows for wide-ranging experimentation in finding new ways to deal with this complex health and social problem.[61]

Similarly, a program of decentralized shelters permits homeless people to stay in the familiar and supportive confines of their communities as they deal with the problems that led to their homelessness, problems such as the loss of a job, substance abuse, marital tensions, and family breakup. Decentralized sites provide the homeless with a sense of normalcy as clients attempt to reestablish themselves.[62]

Yet despite these claims and stories, a number of empirical studies have drawn mixed conclusions about the success of decentralization. One early study, for instance, found little evidence that decentralization decreases feelings of powerlessness among community leaders.[63] Yet other studies found that similar efforts did build citizen trust and confidence in government.[64]

Critics of decentralization argue that:

- Decentralization is inefficient. The professional expertise of departmental experts can be overridden by lay citizens with their parochial concerns and lack of professional training. Economies of scale are lost when service decisions are made on a neighborhood, as opposed to a citywide, basis.
- Decentralization can exacerbate racial and ethnic tensions as a majority in a neighborhood may ignore the concerns of a minority. The polarizations surrounding New York City's Ocean Hill–Brownsville decentralization experiment serve as a notable case in point.
- Decentralization will result in lower standards of service. Decentralization allows for new opportunities for corruption as the vestiges of backroom ward politics reemerge.

The troubled histories of community school boards in New York City and Chicago attest to the mismanagement and corruption that can accompany

decentralization. In New York, teachers discovered that political ties to elected school board members and their powerful political friends were often the key to promotion. Community board members dispensed jobs as patronage to loyal campaign workers and family members, with little concern for education. State elected officials finally decided to rein in the community boards, giving new appointment powers and administrative authority to both the chancellor of the city schools and the mayor.[65]

Similarly in Chicago, corruption, mismanagement, and the general ineffectiveness of community school councils in the face of declining test scores and staggeringly low graduation rates led to a near-complete reversal of policy direction. The State of Illinois pulled the rug out from under school decentralization and gave Mayor Richard M. Daley direct authority over school administrators and budgets.[66]

Advocates of decentralization respond that corruption, waste, fraud, and inefficiency characterize centralized as well as decentralized systems. Advocates of decentralization further argue that professional expertise does not always produce superior decision making, that on a great many issues neighborhood residents do not need sophisticated training in order to evaluate the program choices that affect their lives.

Also, economies of scale are not readily apparent in all service areas. Policing, social work, and education are some areas in which services can be provided better and more efficiently by small-scale neighborhood organizations than by large, remote, citywide bureaucracies.

Nor is decentralization at the root of racial polarizations in the city. Neighborhood service delivery may even serve to reduce neighborhood tensions by increasing the sense of legitimacy of local government.

CONCLUSIONS: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND DECENTRALIZATION TODAY

The nation has undergone a minor governmental revolution; cities and counties across the country have adopted new processes of citizen participation and organizational decentralization. A new generation of professional administrators has also been schooled as to the legitimacy of client participation. Bureaucrats have come to recognize that decentralization improves communications, reduces lead time in providing services, and increases responsiveness to citizens. Middle-class as well as lower-class residents have an interest in decentralization and citizen participation measures that will make city decision making more responsive to their needs.

Much of the acrimony that surrounded the citizen participation efforts and decentralization experiments of the 1960s and early 1970s has faded, and a new, more cooperative spirit has come to dominate community organizations. Neighborhood groups that have assumed new service-delivery responsibilities are less focused on protest and more focused on building partnerships for better education, housing, job training, and health care. Community groups

redefined "empowerment." They no longer see their goal simply as "a struggle over contested issues (power over)"; instead, they increasingly see power as "the formation of relationships that provide a capacity to act (power to)."[67] Excessive conflict can eat away at a community's capacity to form problem-solving coalitions across racial and class lines.[68]

Neighborhood groups, including churches and faith-based organizations, help to form and shape a community's identity, including its desirability and marketability. Community organizations help promote network building. Local groups that have external ties serve as a bridge to resources outside the community—including potential contributors, investors, tutors, and other community partners.[69]

Los Angeles has turned to a system of neighborhood councils to diminish the distance between citizens and their government. Los Angeles officials hoped that the creation of neighborhood councils will diminish calls for secession by the residents of the San Fernando Valley and other outlying sections of the city. However, it remains to be seen if the new councils will be embraced by citizens and neighborhood activists. The financial dependence of the councils on the city also raises the prospect that activist voices will be coopted by the city.[70]

There are limits as to what citizen participation and decentralization can accomplish. Municipal bureaucrats and entrenched interests at city hall do not always warmly greet participatory efforts. Governmental bureaucrats and elected officials have generally been more willing to accept the lower rungs of citizen participation as opposed to genuine power sharing. They have been willing to accept administrative decentralization but not political decentralization.

Frustrated by the lack of responsiveness of large citywide housing authorities, tenants in a number of public housing projects in St. Louis, Chicago, Boston, Jersey City, Cleveland, New Orleans, and Washington, DC have turned to resident management of troubled public housing projects.[71] Under **resident management** (also called **tenant-run housing**), tenants in an individual building or group of buildings select their own management board. The tenant board then directs budgets and repairs to where they are most needed and ensures that service personnel complete repair and maintenance projects as directed. Resident management usually serves to increase citizen vigilance in keeping drug sales out of the projects and protecting public spaces against vandalism.

Yet the history of resident management also points to the limitations of participatory urban strategies. Resident management has not worked well in a great many public housing projects. The success of resident management is highly dependent upon the strength of tenant leaders as well as the technical assistance and level of funding given to the tenant groups.[72] The local housing authority is often reluctant to yield authority and budgetary power to tenant organizations. Nor have governments been willing to give tenant organizations the budgetary assistance necessary for structural repairs, building rehabilitation, and effective building security.

Citizen participation mechanisms are also essential for the representation of disadvantaged women. In cities such as Houston and Dallas, where corporate

leaders and their city hall allies have dominated decision making, the needs of women in the urban core for assured physical safety, access to transportation, and adequate day care were largely ignored. In contrast, in Orlando and San Diego, participatory mechanisms allowed women a greater influence in urban planning decisions, with the result that redevelopment efforts also gave a heightened emphasis to transportation, crime prevention, affordable housing, and the preservation of residential neighborhoods.[73]

Women are also strongly represented on the boards and staffs of neighborhood development organizations. The inclusion of such organizations in decision-making processes will help to ensure that urban revitalization efforts are responsive to women's needs.[74] Women-led community development organizations take a broad, inclusive definition of community development. They do not see themselves as solely as economic entrepreneurs. Nor do they value legal, financial, and technological expertise over other community voices that are normally excluded from development deal making. In rebuilding their communities, the women who headed CDCs found that their conceptualizations of community development did not always meet the expectations of bankers, other financiers, and construction contractors.[75]

Community development corporations attest to the importance of community-based organizations for a balanced urban policy. CDCs helped to fill "the vacuum in U.S. housing policy innovation created by the federal withdrawal" since the 1980s.[76] CDCs have an enviable record in promoting the construction of affordable housing. Yet the collapse of a number of CDCs and the mergers of others in the face of difficult financial problems point to the limitations of the CDC approach: "CDCs, alone, however, cannot rebuild these central city neighborhoods."[77]

Citizen participation and decentralization have reshaped urban programs but are not a total solution to the urban problem. As a result, cities and suburbs have begun to experiment with still other innovative mechanisms to improve urban service delivery, including the professionalization of service personnel, privatized management strategies, vouchers, and state-chartered schools. These are the subjects of our next chapter.

NOTES

1. Jeffrey Berry, Kent Portney, and Ken Thomson, *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1993), pp. 34–39; Hindy Lauer Schachter, *Reinventing Government or Reinventing Ourselves: The Role of Citizen Owners in Making a Better Government* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).
2. Joseph F. Zimmerman, *The New England Town Meeting: Democracy in Action* (Praeger, 1999); Frank M. Bryan, *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How it Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
3. Edgar S. and Jean Camper Cahn, "Citizen Participation," in *Citizen Participation in Urban Development*, ed. Hans B. Spiegel (Washington, DC: NTL and National Education Association, 1968), pp. 218–222.

4. Sherry I
Institute
Particip
(San Fra
5. In Chica
quite su
"minimi
Race an
Poverty
6. Lillian R
Status,"
7. Advisory
America
8. Richard
Governn
Review.
"Reinver
Council
Tat-Kei-I
Public A
9. Arnstein,
discussio
10. Wesley S.
(New Yo
11. Desmonc
Review 7
12. Berry, Po
"A Gover
pp. 48–5
E. S. Cra
Happen?
Affairs A
Stephen C
in his boc
Littlefield
13. Robert F.
York City
14. Susan S. F
Communi
New York
Sage Foun
"Neighbo
Neighborl
eds. W. De
University
15. Robert F. I
Based Bud
58–59. Al
in *Restruc*