Neighborhood Revitalization and the Practice of Evaluation in the United States: Developing a Margin Research Perspective

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The dominant framework of neighborhood revitalization in the United States that emerged in the 1990s is the comprehensive community-building approach based on a "theory of change" model. This framework posits that to improve neighborhoods and the quality of life of residents, programmatic efforts are needed that are "resident-driven" and holistic in their focus. While these types of initiatives flourish, neighborhood revitalization often results in the displacement of low-income families and marginal return for existing residents. Why this occurs in the context of initiatives purporting to aid existing residents is underexamined in the evaluation literature. We argue that researchers engaged in documentation and evaluation of revitalization initiatives need a broader framework to examine heretofore marginalized issues. We use a "margin research" methodology to demonstrate how this alternative form provides a more expansive representation of revitalization activities and outcomes.

Metropolitan areas in the United States have undergone a well-documented process of economic and social restructuring since the 1950s, characterized by out-migration of the middle class to suburbs, the segregation of low-income (primarily minority group) populations into inner-city neighborhoods (Gottdiener and Hutchinson, 2000; Jargowsky, 1996), and severe poverty, manifested in the decay of the inner-city infrastructure and the lack of opportunities for inner-city residents to improve their living conditions (Wilson, 1987, 1996). Contemporary shifts in public policies to address these issues include the "devolution" of decision-making power from the federal to local level, an emphasis on "grassroots" neighborhood planning, and the belief that holistic or comprehensive

community revitalization efforts must be employed in order to achieve positive, people- and placed-based changes (Kubisch, 1996; Kubisch et al., 1997).

These comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) aim to transform communities by simultaneously addressing virtually all aspects of neighborhood life. The conceptual hallmark of this model, which is based on the assumption that indigenous knowledge is a necessary ingredient for initiative success, is that neighborhood revitalization efforts should be "community-driven" (Kubisch et al., 1998). While this may appear to represent a shift of power from top-down approaches to "resident-driven" revitalization at the conceptual level, there is also the risk that these programmatic efforts, when played out, do not improve the quality of life for families in low-income neighborhoods. This is especially likely to be true when conceptualized models become a reality in word only, and neighborhood revitalization efforts are conceptualized differently from the realities of neighborhood life as seen by residents.

Our goal in this article is to emphasize that full examination and understanding of the impacts created by CCIs necessitates program documentation and evaluation efforts that address traditionally marginalized issues. These issues include the relationships between stakeholders in an initiative, the ways stakeholders assert power and authority (decision making), and the linkages between these dynamics and the different definitions of the situation that are held by stakeholders. In addition, we argue that central to understanding these issues is a methodology ("margin research") that permits analyses of how stakeholder relationships, including people engaged in conducting research, impact the representations of neighborhood revitalization initiatives (Fraser and Kick, 2001; Stone and Butler, 2000). We illustrate this approach in a case study of a comprehensive community-building initiative (CCI) that is underway in a middle-size, southeastern city in the United States.

COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY-BUILDING INITIATIVES

Comprehensive community-building initiatives are based on the assumption that to alleviate urban poverty in inner-city neighborhoods, community builders must address all the interrelated problems that people face living in poor neighborhoods (Walsh, 1997). "Community" refers to the belief held by supporters of these initiatives that local social problems can be adequately addressed only if neighborhood residents are intimately involved in the ameliorization process. Revitalization in the context of such initiatives refers to utilizing a combination of people- and place-based strategies in order to revive inner-city neighborhoods and assist the people who reside within them (Kubisch et al., 1997).

While the need for institutional-level change to address poverty and inner-city deterioration is acknowledged in CCIs, the primary emphasis of the CCI model is building "community capacity" to drive such

institutional and policy-level change. Community capacity has been defined in a variety of ways, but usually includes the following dimensions: sense of community; level of commitment among community members; ability to solve problems; and access to resources (Chaskin, 2001). This capacity is engaged at the individual level (i.e., skill, knowledge, participation), organizational level (i.e., community-based institutions that provide goods and services), and the network level (i.e., social capital or patterns of relations between individuals and organizations inside and outside the neighborhood) (Chaskin, 2001).

At the core of the CCI approach is the axiom that when community capacity increases and is mobilized, positive neighborhood outcomes may be achieved (Vidal, 1997). Particular emphasis is placed on social capital in mobilizing community capacity, and there is an understanding among many urban analysts that inner-city neighborhoods suffer from a relative and absolute lack of social capital (Putnam, 1993, 1995; Wilson, 1996). Because many neighborhoods are viewed as having only weak social infrastructures, urban policy recommendations now call for developing social capital in the "worst-off" parts of cities in order to aid revitalization efforts (Putnam, 2000; Wilson, 1996).[1]

While in principle mobilized community capacity in the context of neighborhood revitalization may evoke positive change for neighborhood residents, mediating circumstances can affect this relationship. Some social forces and practices, such as residential turnover, regional economy, migration, racial and economic segregation, and unequal distribution of resources, surely impact a neighborhood's ability to build and maintain community capacity (Chaskin, 2001; Rohe et al., 2000; Sampson et al., 1999). More to the point for present purposes, we emphasize that competing interests and "definitions of the situation" between various stakeholders and residents are common and can have pernicious effects on neighborhood-based initiatives as a whole, and on residents in particular. Dominant "theory of change" models, utilized by many CCIs, may appear to overcome these complexities, but we review this approach next and question such claims.

INTEGRATING DESIGN AND EVALUATION

A recent approach to the planning and documentation phases of neighborhood revitalization initiatives is the "theory of change" model. "Theories of change" attempt to link design and evaluation activities in an effort to increase the correspondence between what the CCI sets out to do and what outcomes stem from the initiative's efforts. A "theory of change" is a map for achieving initiative goals by hypothesizing what short-term and mid-term activities must be achieved to make long-term change possible (see Fulbright-Anderson et al., 1998). Through a process of stakeholder meetings, multiple "theories of change" may be articulated by a variety of actors, but the ultimate goal of this process is to eventually create a

singular, consensual plan on which to base action and evaluation. Practitioners note that the operationalization of the "theory of change" is usually revisited and modified during an initiative (Brown, 1998).

In addition to our argument for developing a broader research agenda as it relates to understanding place-based anti-poverty efforts (i.e., CCIs), we hold that the evaluation and documentation of an initiative are set in motion by the development of a "theory of change" (usually constructed in a linear temporal manner, i.e., short-, mid-, and long-term goals). The apparent benefits of this type of evaluation approach are that it: provides a forum where stakeholders, many times with different political commitments, come together to make explicit their assumptions about how neighborhoods operate (Milligan et al., 1998); assists with the development of a structure of accountability for stakeholders (Fulbright-Anderson et al., 1998); provides a map for scientific evaluation and a basis for creating relevant knowledge to bring back to stakeholders (Brown, 1995); and gives a measure of "clarity and singularity of purpose" (Philliber, 1998).

We contend that although CCIs in general, and "theories of change" in particular, propose strategies for resident involvement and processes for developing stakeholder consensus by guiding implementation as well as evaluation, this approach needs to be supplemented with related and autonomous research efforts. Such efforts would examine issues that may fall at the margins of the "theory of change" approach itself. This is because program documentation and evaluation are circumscribed by the very design of a "theory of change."[2] In other words, "theories of change" map out measurable goals, but these goals only refer to what is articulated in the "theory of change" and neglect the outcomes that have not been anticipated. The accomplishment of activities and goals that exist within the "theory of change" document is viewed by most initiatives as a sufficient foundation for evaluating the processes and impacts of community-building efforts, and aspects of the initiative that lie outside the measurability criteria as established by a "theory of change" (such as unintended consequences) are left unexamined.

While all stakeholders may be encouraged to participate in expressing their beliefs about the ways social phenomena operate, CCIs embody the hegemony of the community-building paradigm (Chaskin, 2001). The dominance of the "community-building" perspective in the discourse of CCI practitioners subordinates competing interpretations of the "definition of the situation" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Bourdieu, 1990).[3] Consider that building "community capacity" as a way to strengthen neighborhoods has achieved such a "taken-for-granted" status in the field of neighborhood revitalization that it serves as the foundation of most CCIs regardless of the perspectives of neighborhood residents.[4]

Further, the "theory of change" approach functions to legitimate some stakeholders' beliefs about the specific processes and goals that might lead to positive neighborhood and family-level outcomes. Two issues of concern are: What are the power dynamics between stakeholders during

the process of defining the situation (i.e., theory of change)? and What concepts or factors related to neighborhood revitalization are placed on the margins? Stakeholders who have material and cultural resources that outweigh the resources of other stakeholders have more power to realize their normative schema about how a neighborhood ought to be, and will be, revitalized. One indicator of this is that private foundations often drive the conceptual development and initial organization of CCIs despite the "resident-driven" language surrounding these efforts (Chaskin and Garg, 1997).

Given that the resources and power of private foundations and other institutional partners outweigh those of an impoverished neighborhood, it is not surprising that Stone and Butler (2000) remark:

> In American life and in the conspicuous concentration of comprehensive community-building initiatives (CCIs) in poor communities of color, it is remarkable how scarce formal consideration of race is, in particular, in CCIs, and how weak attention to race, power, language, culture, gender, and class have been in the practice and implementation of CCIs and other community revitalization strategies. (p. vii)

If the development of CCIs and associated "theories of change" are predicated on "honest dialogue" between funders and other stakeholders (Brown, 1998), then it is necessary to study this dialogue and to examine the power dynamics between stakeholder groups throughout a neighborhood revitalization initiative.[5]

The "theory of change" approach was developed to facilitate the design, implementation, and effectiveness of CCIs, and provide a framework from which program evaluation may be based. Nevertheless, given the issues outlined above concerning hegemony, legitimation, and representation, we argue that other forms of evaluation need to be in place to study the crucial neighborhood revitalization dynamics that all too often remain on the periphery of community development. Our examination proceeds using a margin research methodology.

MARGIN RESEARCH AND NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

Margin research focuses on the conditions and attending concepts that are pushed to the margins of explanations, as well as the significance of concepts that emerge as central to explaining social phenomena. Margin research focuses on peripheralized aspects of conducting research, such as issues of power and relationships in the field and the politics of representation. These emphases have been reviewed in detail elsewhere (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Gubrium and Holstein, 2000), but they have not entered the discourse of evaluation research as it pertains to studying the impacts that revitalization initiatives have on neighborhoods and a range of other stakeholders. We contend that this is a larger epistemological issue regarding the types of knowledge that are considered legitimate.

The dominance of scientific inquiry as the primary method to evaluate place-based initiatives situates other forms of knowledge on the margins. This is not unique to program evaluation of neighborhood revitalization initiatives, as the privileging of scientific practices and discourse is a characteristic of the larger society as a whole (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Studies show that some researchers engaged in evaluating CCIs are critical of this privileging of technical expertise over intuitive or experiential expertise (Stone and Butler, 2000).[6] Margin research acknowledges that it is important to understand relationships between actions taken and potential outcomes, but stresses that these perceived cause-and-effect relationships are a result of the meanings that people ascribe to them, and that meanings are connected to stakeholder identity and position within a power network.

A comparison of traditional program evaluation strategies (i.e., such as the type that emerges from the "theory of change" process) to margin research assists in clarifying how we constitute margin research as a distinct analytical strategy.[7] Typically, the "theory of change" that is created and modified throughout an initiative is the foundation from which researchers develop their modeling of cause-and-effect relationships. Such relationships are taken as unproblematic in that most often alternative models are not employed to examine other potential theories of how community-building efforts affect neighborhoods and people. This is a central distinction that demarcates a margin research approach. Investigators using a margin research approach do not privilege one interpretive schema for developing a foundation for program assessment over others.

Another point is that the "theory of change" approach to analyzing impacts stresses the need for scientific approaches to such an extent that these approaches drive what are (and are not) considered to be the appropriate metrics for making a final determination of an initiative's success or failure. The margin research approach may make use of quantitative or qualitative information to guide argumentation, but the goal of verifying the effects of an intervention is less important. Rather, the margin research approach emphasizes the processes that make it possible for stakeholders associated with these efforts to experience gains and benefits regardless of the prespecified relationships that more traditional analyses would address. Such an emphasis is a shift from studying the content to the context (and in doing so questions the assumptions needed to know what the content of such interventions are). Margin research de-centers the practice of verification and relationship testing by calling into question what different stakeholders achieve regardless of scientific accounts lending support for predefined potential interpretations of CCIs.

Furthermore, the "theory of change" model of program evaluation does not typically examine issues related to power, authority, and representation in community-building initiatives. Underexamined questions include: how "theories of change" in CCI efforts are developed between residents, local external stakeholders, and other funding agencies; what

types of leverage, including access to the media, do stakeholder groups employ to achieve their agenda; how do stakeholder groups claim authority to govern and make decisions regarding the everyday activities of CCIs; and what is achieved by constructing people and events in the ways that various stakeholder groups do?

Finally, margin research is an interpretive practice that seeks to examine the material realities people experience in their everyday lives and connect these to discursive practices that they use to frame situations. One way this framing has been conceptualized is by focusing on interpretive repertoires, defined as "broadly discernable clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images." These "building blocks" are employed by individuals to both manufacture legitimation and explanation, and serve to construct self, others, and various objects. That is, "they are some of the resources for making evaluations, constructing factual versions and performing particular actions" (Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p. 90). These repertoires are made available to individuals through a host of social institutions, which aid individuals in creating their own accounts from a much larger stock of cultural knowledge (Fraser and Kick, 2000; Lewis and Jhally, 1995). This discourse is not prepackaged and free-floating for individuals to evoke without reflection. Rather, these terms are commonplace sets of terminology that often are institutionalized. In the present case, these include terms such as "community building" and "resident-driven," which allow a broad range of interpretive moves.

Given our sketch of the types of issues that constitute the margin research approach as distinct from more traditional forms of program evaluation (especially the "theory of change" approach), we turn to an illustration of our own work in a mid-sized southeastern city, which has been publicly engaged in a CCI for the last three years.[8] This analysis is meant to provide an example of how a margin research approach can bring marginalized issues to the fore. We note that our representation of the CCI from our work is only one possible configuration of interpretations.

BACKGROUND

Our study of a neighborhood revitalization initiative in South City[9] was initiated in 1998. Revitalization Corp., a consortium led by a local foundation, began a neighborhood revitalization initiative in 1998 in four neighborhoods contiguous to the downtown business district of South City. We operated as consultants examining the impact of "revitalization" activities since the beginning of the project.[10]

We spent this time working, on a daily and then weekly basis, with neighborhood association leaders as well as other residents. We participated in the interview process in people's homes, shared meals with a variety of residents and other stakeholders, and fashioned a report from neighborhood resident information in a collaborative fashion, with

residents participating in the data analysis and write-up. In addition, we developed many enduring relationships with neighborhood associations, a low-income housing nonprofit, and staff with the revitalization initiative.

The following analysis is based on these data and data gleaned from interviews, focus groups, initiative documents, and dialogue presented in a meeting between Revitalization Corp. and Housing Corp., a public/private, citywide, low-income housing nonprofit organization. All data were collected in the fall of 2000, except for the initiative documents, which were produced by the lead foundation in 1998 at the beginning of the revitalization initiative. These data are part of a larger set of materials we collected beginning in 1998, and are used to illustrate the process of margin research.[11]

Four groups of stakeholders form the basis of this analysis: residents from a neighborhood, neighborhood association leaders, Revitalization Corp., and Housing Corp. We present the goals, indicators, and structure that Revitalization Corp. created and shared with stakeholders, narratives from neighborhood residents and association leaders, and a portion of a meeting between Revitalization Corp., the lead foundation, and Housing Corp.

REVITALIZATION CORP.

The following information comes directly from literature disseminated by the lead foundation of the neighborhood revitalization initiative. Revitalization Corp. is a public-private partnership of local funders attempting to engage in urban restructuring through neighborhood revitalization initiatives. Revitalization Corp. states that it is committed to mobilizing local resources and supporting people in distressed neighborhoods to develop and implement long-term strategies for improving the quality of life in their communities. This is accomplished, theoretically, by providing local neighborhood groups with financial and technical assistance to develop and implement strategic plans in a comprehensive agenda for change.[12]

We note that the allocation of Revitalization Corp. resources to neighborhoods initially was predicated on the residents achieving positive movement on a set of nine indicators that were developed by funders and the lead foundation prior to the initiative's implementation. Therefore, neighborhoods only receive an allocation of financial resources if Revitalization Corp. directors and funders assess that "progress" is being made. Neighborhoods were initially invited to select six indicators as their comprehensive agenda for change. Revitalization Corp. said it would provide results-based incentives for improvements. The comprehensive list of measurable indicators for social action included: increasing the percentage of kindergartners scoring above at-risk levels in all three categories on the First Step Screening; increasing the percentage of third graders passing the reading competency test; increasing the percentage of youth

under 21 who are in school or have graduated from high school; increasing the percentage of families who have at least one wage earner; decreasing the percentage of births to teenagers; decreasing the percentage of births to single parents; decreasing the percentage of total crime in each neighborhood; increasing the number of new or rehabilitated houses and businesses; and improving the physical appearance of the neighborhood.

Revitalization Corp. sponsored "learning exchanges" to address (structure) neighborhood planning. The learning exchanges were an intensive training program that included technical assistance from local and national advisors for neighborhoods to draw upon, and an opportunity for neighborhoods to learn from each other. Further, local coaches were placed in each neighborhood to work closely with the neighborhood leadership group by providing feedback and support. All the local and national advisors were invited to take part in the "learning exchange" process by Revitalization Corp., and all the neighborhood coaches/staff[13] were recruited and deployed by Revitalization Corp.

These are rather circumscribed guidelines, but Revitalization Corp. claimed that "neighborhoods drive this process, select their own indicators, formulate strategies, and decide how to implement them." It was also claimed that "[t]his initiative is only a tool—resources, technical assistance, community connections—to help neighborhoods bring about change that will enrich family life and individual well-being." Employing a margin research framework allowed us to examine how these, and other, claims were constructed, enacted, and contested by various stakeholder groups. Further, a margin research approach asks what is accomplished by the way stakeholder groups frame their relationship with the revitalization initiative.

HOUSING CORP. AND REVITALIZATION CORP.

The following narrative is from a meeting between Housing Corp. and Revitalization Corp. We note that the citywide housing nonprofit receives $1 million a year from the lead foundation as well as a sizable allotment of Community Development Block Grant funds allocated from the mayor's office of South City. Further, the Revitalization Corp.'s director sits on the board of the citywide housing nonprofit, Housing Corp.

Revitalization Corp.: The four main components of the revitalization strategy, umm, are focusing on neighborhood image, market, physical improvement, and neighborhood management. We have talked to neighborhood leaders and developed these plans from meetings over three days.

Housing Corp.: How do you get buy-in from all of the residents on this neighborhood revitalization plan?

Revitalization Corp.: This plan and the way we think about it is really designed to change behaviors. Umm. That's ultimately what

is the most important thing. Right now there are disinvestment behaviors that are in place, and we are trying to replace those with investment behaviors. So the thinking here is how do you change those behaviors. Well, you show people that the right things are going on. . . . And, you can never have enough buy-in, and everybody, I mean, this isn't an ordinance. People are not going to vote on it. Umm. But what's important is that enough people who sort of get the idea and are able to carry out the functions that are laid out in here that it begins to provide its own momentum. And, it becomes you know, the dis-investment tipping point changes and becomes an investment tipping point. . . . Look at just the [developers], I mean, they did a few houses and they got more that they're going to do. But they have done a lot to change the perception of the neighborhood, and they are getting people to spend a lot more money in the neighborhood than I would have thought they would spend. Once they do that they can then do more because people are already investing at that level.

This meeting between Housing Corp. and Revitalization Corp. was significant because of two factors: residents from the target neighborhoods were not invited or present at the meeting and it was the first time that Revitalization Corp. publicly announced that it had decided to make the beautification of the neighborhoods a priority, apparently over the people-based goals of working to improve the lives of current neighborhood residents. When questioned by Housing Corp., which has a history of working with low-income families in these target neighborhoods, about gaining "buy-in" or legitimacy from the neighborhood residents, the Revitalization Corp. representative admitted it was not important.

Using the margin research approach we note that this passage shows a difference in the goals of the entire revitalization initiative. This difference is accomplished by Revitalization Corp. in the absence of other stakeholder groups, including those who ostensibly represent neighborhood residents. "Absence" and "lack of decision-making authority" are two categories that become salient in our analysis given the manner the initiative said it was going to be "resident-driven" and the reality of meetings being held without any resident involvement. The categories highlight the margin research approach because they are derived from contradictions, and provide an opening to question the "work" that discourse achieves. We contend that this type of approach has been marginalized as an issue in conventional community development studies because of a variety of factors, including: research designs (i.e., theory of change or standard program evaluation model) that do not typically examine stakeholders' access to material and interpretive resources to enact power; and the relationships of evaluators, who must navigate strategic relationships with stakeholder groups that sponsor their work and are also supposed to be critically examined.

INTERVIEW WITH A NEIGHBORHOOD LEADER

The next narrative is from a conversation with a neighborhood leader in another target neighborhood, Highville. The population of the neighborhood in which the leader lived is predominantly poor and minority.[14]

First Author: What is the situation with the neighborhood revitalization effort now, and what do you think will happen in the short-term and long-term?

Neighborhood Association Leader (NAL): To me it is in the beginning stages of building a partnership. It was rocky but is getting better. Like, Revitalization Corp. stepped on a few toes and caused people to get upset, but sometimes that is what it takes to make an improvement.

First Author: Whose toes have been stepped on?

NAL: It was a growing process for Revitalization Corp. They came in here and started to boss people around, telling us how our neighborhood was going to be revitalized, but that didn't work, really, we have been organizing for over ten years and they have money but not the experience. Revitalization Corp. tended to be a little strong-armed in the beginning. Maybe they just didn't know better. They came with that attitude toward the neighborhoods at the beginning but the neighborhood said, "no, you will not tell us what to do." There will always be a struggle sometimes. When you have a group of thirty or forty trying to make a decision, then it becomes more difficult. Now, Revitalization Corp. does a good job working with the neighborhood. [Neighborhood Leader] and Revitalization Corp. person get into it, but things have improved.

First Author: What has happened in the neighborhood and what is going to happen?

NAL: There is a lot of improvement going on. The [Private Developers] do a good job but they scare me a little bit. They come from [Big City]. The part that scares me is that they do a great job and then market to people in [Big City]. These people get excited about the prices. But, as they remodel these houses and sell them for over $100,000 to folks in [Big City], then this will price out elderly in the neighborhood. My neighbor lives on social security and she will not be able to pay her taxes. We have a variety of families.

First Author: What is in place to stop people from being priced out?

NAL: Umm, we're working on it. There's nothing at the moment. We are looking for some ways to give relief to these people, but low-income renters are going to be priced out. You can't tell a landlord to rent low when other properties are renting for high. But, that is

a price we'll pay to make our neighborhood better. We are going to need to search for other expertise to tackle this problem.

The neighborhood leader's narrative suggests that Revitalization Corp. did approach the neighborhood with an agenda that was not as flexible as Revitalization Corp. documentation portrayed the process to be. In fact, conflict arose between the neighborhood and Revitalization Corp. Simultaneously, the respondent offers Revitalization Corp. a disclaimer by suggesting that in order to get things done some toes need to be stepped on. After Revitalization Corp. began to build relationships with the lead neighborhood organization, the revitalization idea seemed to be appealing. Yet, the respondent, evidently not in danger of being priced-out of the neighborhood, says that some people will not only end up getting their toes stepped on, but they will not be living in the revitalized neighborhood. But, according to the leader, this is a price that has to be paid in order to improve the neighborhood.

Among other things, the margin research approach highlights the metaphors that the respondent creates to represent the lead agency, and takes seriously the discursive practices that constitute the agency (i.e., give it meaning). First, this neighborhood leader characterizes the lead agency as "stepping on toes" and being "strong-armed." The respondent also offers an excuse to mitigate the lead agency's responsibility for acting in this manner by suggesting that "sometimes that is what it takes" and "[m]aybe they just didn't know better." One interpretation is that the respondent is trying to create a story that makes sense to her current definition of the situation: "Now, Revitalization Corp. does a good job working with the neighborhood." Our margin research approach, having identified (created through dialogue and interpretation) this discursive formation, sheds light on one way that neighborhood residents (leaders) represent the relationship between residents and the lead agency.

A FOCUS GROUP WITH RESIDENTS

This narrative comes from a focus group that we conducted with residents from a target neighborhood in the initiative, which we call Lowville. The focus group is with residents from a neighborhood of just over 700 people, about half of whom live below the poverty line.

First Author: What do you expect to happen short-term and long-term due to these revitalization activities?

Resident 1: (Laughing)

Resident 2: Well, hold on. Over time in the next few years we are going to end up with a brand new sparkling neighborhood, with new houses, and new streets, and all of that. Physically it's going to look great, but what is going to happen as far as from the community aspect? And, if new people are moving in and all, you know that's

what I think is going to happen. And, I guess it is sort of, I'm not the only one, I think other people fear, not fear, but see that happening too. It is just too much investment, too much is going on. . . .

Resident 3: Umm Humm, too bad.

Resident 2: This plan. I won't say succeed, but it gives the appearance of success that from the outside everything is going to look just fine, you know. And that it used to look like this and now it looks like that. We know that underneath that, you know it has really not strengthened the community.

Resident 3: Are the motives what they say they are? Yeah, it's kinda like the school situation. They say they are building the school for the Lowville kids. But in the wind, it's like, we know that [Large Corporation] and all the corporations downtown want a place for their employee's kids to go to school so they can just drop them off on the way to work. It is convenient for them, but they tell us that it is for us, that it is community-based for our kids.

Resident 1: Yeah, it's ah, you hear different things and different people make comments that they are not trusting what is said. And, I can understand that because even the whole thing. I mean it is as if the school is put next to the high-income place that is being built.

Resident 3: I think what they want is for us to agree to build this school, and then when it is built there is nothing we can do about it. And our kids still won't get to benefit from it. I think they're trying to accommodate the new people they want to have move in the neighborhood. That's their motivation.

These residents claim that the underlying motivations that other stakeholders have for "revitalizing" their neighborhood are questionable and, in fact, objectionable. For example, they view the activities of Revitalization Corp. as having little effect on community building, and that the representation of revitalization activities is hollow. We contend that it is likely that the lead questions posed by the First Author would not even have been asked in a nonmargin research design because standard evaluation designs (i.e., including the theory of change approach) focus on "objective" activities and outcomes.[15]

DEVELOPING A STORY BY LOOKING AT THE MARGINS

Using the margin research approach, we can account for the processes that constitute the evaluatory foundation of a community-building initiative (i.e., theory of change), and highlight what gets placed on the margins during the course of developing a consensual framework of things to measure. Furthermore, the margin research approach considers how this process does not occur on an equal playing field or in a vacuum sealed off from

broader social forces. Rather, the margin research approach produces data that permit attention to the power dynamics involved among stakeholders during the process of generating and implementing an initiative of this kind. By doing so, the margin researcher tells an alternative story of the revitalization effort.

The neighborhood revitalization initiative began with a group of funders contributing financial resources and one foundation leading the administrative end of the initiative. The initial documentation from Revitalization Corp. suggested that the initiative would be "resident-driven," but at the same time outlined a list of goals upon which the neighborhoods could choose to focus. Subsequently, after the first one and one-half years of implementation, Revitalization Corp. produced another set of documents it claimed were developed through learning exchanges and planning sessions over the past year. However, when we contrast the original goals of Revitalization Corp. (i.e., seven of the nine indicators being directly related to individual/family quality of life) with the revised goals presented in the fall 2000 Revitalization Corp.—Housing Corp. meeting (i.e., goals exclusively related to attracting capital investment via the real estate market), we find a significant shift in the focus of the "revitalization" effort to preparing geographic areas for valorization.

Pockets of resistance to the neighborhood initiative existed, as exemplified in our focus group with residents from Lowville. A paradox is found in comparing Revitalization Corp. documentation, which focuses on a "resident-driven" initiative, with the focus group data from Lowville. Lowville residents do not express dissatisfaction over the absence of their voice in the initiative. Rather, they express the view that their involvement will substantially change their life opportunities. Indeed, residents were required to participate in "learning exchanges" for over a year, and they were invited to a host of meetings that were carefully constructed by Revitalization Corp. What becomes apparent is that, for these residents, increased participation does not equate to an increase in trust, as the social capital thesis would hope (Putnam, 2000). Rather, these residents perceive networking, planning, and the call for involvement by the city and Revitalization Corp. as what we would call a "legitimation exercise." Recall, according to one respondent, "I think what they want is for us to agree to build this school, and then when it is built there is nothing we can do about it."

A "theory of change" inevitably posits that resident participation will lead to stronger community-based groups, which have the ability to self-manage their neighborhood, but the focus group residents state that there is "too much investment, too much going on." While these people agree that improving the infrastructure of their neighborhood will increase its appeal, they are fearful that such appeal will also bring in new and unwanted residents while community members are "moved out."

But, why do these residents seemingly distrust the initiative and say that many residents in their neighborhood lack faith in the neighborhood revitalization effort? We interpret the focus group narrative to suggest

that some residents really do not believe that there are adequate mechanisms for holding more powerful, or resource-rich, stakeholders to a standard developed by the neighborhood residents. In addition, these residents hold the belief that Revitalization Corp. has shifted its focus from what we call "human capital" development, centered on resident/family quality of life, to a more entrepreneurial set of goals, which relate to attracting economic capital investment to the neighborhoods.

The process of shifting priorities, from people- and place-based to mainly place-based development, has presented Revitalization Corp. with the challenge of bringing all local stakeholders in line with its mission. Revitalization Corp. has tried to mitigate potential resistance by placing staff in each neighborhood and focusing resource allocation in the most developed neighborhood, Highville. Our survey shows that the demographics of Highville are apparently more amenable than those of the other neighborhoods to the development initiative of Revitalization Corp (i.e., higher median income, existing neighborhood infrastructure between high SES residents).[16]

Our margin research approach brings together data from various sources to develop a story of revitalization that highlights the issue of overlapping land-based interests between middle-class neighborhood leaders, Revitalization Corp., and stakeholders desirous of capital investment and neighborhood beautification. Yet, even with stakeholder groups that have cross-cutting goals, conflict may emerge, such as parties conflicting over who will receive credit for the gentrification that is now in process in the neighborhood. The interview with the Highville leader suggests that the success the neighborhood association had, prior to the advent of Revitalization Corp., impacted the initial relationship between the two parties: "Revitalization Corp. came in here and started to boss people around, telling us how our neighborhood was going to be revitalized." From that, the respondent tells a story of how the neighborhood leadership set Revitalization Corp. straight. The neighborhood association already had relationships with key power brokers in the city. In fact, every interview we conducted with leaders in this neighborhood could be characterized by saying that while they appreciated the potential allocation of funds they might receive from Revitalization Corp., they did not need an outside agency trying to develop "community capacity." The framework of Revitalization Corp., focusing on building community capacity, seemed insulting to the Highville leaders and has been a constant source of strain between the neighborhood leaders and Revitalization Corp. As the respondent states, "There will always be struggles sometimes."

The margin research approach also highlights underlying goals of each organization as they relate to the revitalization effort. Consider that Revitalization Corp. was promising neighborhood leaders that no more low-income housing would be built in their neighborhoods, but that in order to fulfill this promise Revitalization Corp. had to make sure Housing Corp. halted its activities in the neighborhoods until they were told what to do. Revitalization Corp. also had to work with other nonprofit stakeholders

in order to gain consensus with their "theory of change" that focused on marketing neighborhoods to investors. Since South City government and other foundations were already on board, as indicated by the allocation of $500,000 from each of these stakeholders, the other major institution to engage was the citywide, low-income housing nonprofit (Housing Corp.).

Housing Corp. had been the primary nonprofit to work citywide in every neighborhood since the early 1990s. Our interviews and surveys with the target neighborhoods consistently showed that Housing Corp. was considered one of the only organizations that was willing to help neighborhoods improve the neighborhood. This organization has received acclaim for working with neighborhood associations and families in need of stable homeownership. The primary problem for Revitalization Corp. was that the mission of Housing Corp. was to provide affordable housing for low- to moderate-income families. Revitalization Corp. developed plans, as displayed in the meeting transcription, to attract investment of a different sort—middle- to high-income investment.

Prior to the two-day meeting with Housing Corp., Revitalization Corp. had worked intensively with neighborhood leaders in all the target neighborhoods to garner support for its marketing plan to increase outside investment into neighborhoods through the real estate market. In fact, during our interviews with neighborhood leaders, further questioning about the impacts of this type of strategy for revitalization revealed that the corporation realized this meant some people would be displaced. Similarly, the Highville respondent stated that, "We are looking at some ways of providing relief to these people, but low-income renters are going to be priced out.... We are going to need to search for other expertise to tackle this problem." Ironically, it was the neighborhood leadership who did not want Revitalization Corp. telling them "how their neighborhood was going to be revitalized," yet there was no plan in place to protect lower-income residents from being moved to another part of the city.

Similarly, in the meeting Revitalization Corp. held with Housing Corp., there was no mention of a plan to make sure existing residents (to whom Revitalization Corp. pledged support and resources in return for initiative participation) were not displaced. Rather, Revitalization Corp. responded to Housing Corp.'s concern about getting resident buy-in by stating that:

> And, you can never have enough buy-in, and everybody, I mean, this isn't an ordinance. People are not going to vote on it. Umm. But what's important is that enough people who sort of get the idea and are able to carry out the functions that are laid out in here that it begins to provide its own momentum. And, it becomes you know, the dis-investment tipping point changes and becomes an investment tipping point....

Revitalization Corp. understandably was aware that the majority of people in the neighborhoods were not going to participate in the initiative, and that it was primarily important for the people who "get the idea"

and we add, have the resources, to move ahead with urban restructuring rather than focusing on other low-income families.

Investment, according to Revitalization Corp., was the central goal that replaced people-based objectives or the goal of promoting a sense of community between existing residents. As the Lowville residents stated:

> This plan. I won't say succeed, but it gives the appearance of success that from the outside everything is going to look just fine, you know. And that it used to look like this and now it looks like that. We know that underneath that, you know, it has really not strengthened the community.

The phenomenon that seemed to pervade the consciousness of neighborhood leaders and other participants, to a greater or lesser degree within each neighborhood, was a sense that if they resisted the revitalization plans created by Revitalization Corp., then their neighborhoods would not receive resources. In every neighborhood, over the last two years, leaders stated that they did not know what would happen to their neighborhoods if they did not cooperate to some degree with Revitalization Corp. There was a point during the beginning of the initiative when leaders from each neighborhood came together and made a list of complaints about and demands of Revitalization Corp. These ranged from Revitalization Corp. needing to listen to the neighborhood leaders, to claims of inept program implementation by Revitalization Corp. staff and the program director. After the unrest, the Revitalization Corp. leadership reorganized and deployed "staff" to each neighborhood, and worked with other organizations in the city that had resources that would benefit neighborhoods.

These efforts on the part of neighborhood leaders cannot be given one meaning. Some leaders may really empathize with residents who stand to lose their homes due to "revitalization," but some leaders might have wanted more control over information and decision making during the process of "up-grading" their neighborhoods. The margin research approach allows for both possibilities to be themes in a representation on neighborhood revitalization activities, and suggests that adding this issue of stakeholder motivations to the discussion of CCIs is a move toward exploring the tensions that emerge for neighborhood leaders during an initiative.

This story, which we created from the data presented as well as with some of our knowledge about the CCI in South City, provides an example of how different perspectives may be woven together to develop a portrayal of a situation. The next step would be to present our story to stakeholders in order to understand their responses. The central themes that we created using the margin research approach are those that usually get placed on the margins of evaluation efforts. Themes such as how stakeholders strategize to shift the focus of revitalization, the ways different stakeholders interpret revitalization, and the contradictions that arise during a revitalization effort deserve more research attention. We note that not all neighborhoods could be described as experiencing the

revitalization initiative similarly, and not all residents could be defined as a group who held similar place-based interests or beliefs about the benefits of revitalization.

CONCLUSIONS

Cities around the United States are engaged in urban restructuring for a variety of reasons and comprehensive community-building initiatives represent a dominant restructuring mechanism in areas defined as impoverished inner-city locales. These initiatives operate within a paradigm that is founded on the belief that place-based revitalization initiatives need to be holistic and resident-driven in order to be successful, and that evaluating an initiative's success is predicated on numerous factors, including the development of a highly detailed "theory of change" (Connell and Kubisch, 1998). However, "revitalization" can be a euphemism for gentrification and the valorization of areas that were depressed by the same stakeholders who claim concern for low-income families who now live in abject poverty (usually female-headed, minority families).

A hallmark of the "theory of change" approach is community forums in which various stakeholders, including residents, share their beliefs about how a neighborhood and the families within it can realize positive benefits from participating in community-based activities. This method for designing and evaluating placed-based initiatives is useful in that it allows stakeholders to define the social problems involved in revitalization and then develop clear plans from which to base action. The process of the approach is also used as a way to engage stakeholders in building consensus around issues in the hope that relationships will be created and strengthened. In addition, the "theory of change" product is a "living document" because it can be revisited and altered based on experiences stakeholders have during the process (Fulbright-Anderson et al., 1998).

Nevertheless, some practitioners have noted that this approach can be improved upon by focusing on issues that have been "on the margins." These include examining relationships between stakeholders and researchers, as well as the role of power, class, and race (see Stone and Butler, 2000). While the stated role of a "theory of change" is to garner consensus from a group of stakeholders and then work in a concerted manner to alleviate neighborhood deterioration and improve resident quality of life, margin research aims to provide researchers with a set of interpretations about marginalized issues that affect neighborhood revitalization efforts.

The empirical study presented here illustrates the way a story about revitalization can be a useful representation to which stakeholders can respond. First, studying stakeholder perceptions and practices within a framework of beliefs about the identity of other stakeholders illuminates the "lived experiences" that comprise initiatives. Second, representing the diversity of experiences that residents have during a revitalization

effort avoids the tendency to conceptualize "residents" as a monolithic group with essential characteristics.

The conduct and evaluation of neighborhood revitalization efforts should be informed by the complex diversity of stakeholder motivations, desires, and goals. While some of these may be accessed using traditional scientific methods, researchers who have been involved in CCIs have aptly suggested that the dynamic set of relationships stakeholders have with one another is telling about the potential impacts of an initiative. Given that all initiatives of this sort involve multiple stakeholders with different cultural and material realities, identification of the intersections of their experiences through margin research is a complementary method to the "theory of change" approach.

This article has aimed to open a dialogue between disciplines, paradigmatic commitments, and epistemological stances. Evaluating efforts at poverty alleviation and/or urban restructuring inherently involves stakeholders with uneven access to resources and who experience the consequences of these initiatives in a different manner. Representations of initiatives impact all stakeholders, but in an era characterized by devolution and "individual responsibility" we emphasize that when initiatives do not produce positive neighborhood change, "community-building professionals" may very well move on to the next consulting project, whereas residents impacted by these initiatives remain permanently affected by "revitalization." This is at the heart of our call for more broadened evaluator strategies.

Acknowledgments

Notes

[1] This link between social capital and neighborhood-level social and economic conditions has been noted by community development analysts and practitioners. It is a central component of CCIs that has been developed over the last decade (Kubisch et al., 1998). The Committee for Economic Development (1995) argues that social capital development should be one of the emphases of Community Development Corporations (CDCs), and CDCs have broadened their activities to incorporate social capital. Indeed, there is general agreement that community development should involve more than housing. It should include the development of social capital along with other process-related activities (Kingsley et al., 1997; Vidal, 1996). While building social capital in inner-city neighborhoods intuitively seems helpful, empirical studies of the effect of social capital on urban neighborhoods are a relatively recent addition to the literature (Temkin and Rohe, 1997), and few studies focus on the ways individuals access opportunity through community-building initiatives.

[2] "The theory of change approach replaces the two principal, and often independent, types of evaluation reports with one that explicitly and deliberately covers both activities (formerly process and implementation) and outcomes (formerly long-term outcomes only)" (Connell and Kubisch, 1998, p. 36).

[3] However, we note that stakeholder groups cannot be adequately defined by simply determining whether a person lives within a target neighborhood. For example, residents of the same neighborhood may have different land-based interests. Therefore, it is a flawed strategy to treat the interests of all residents in a uniform manner (Davis, 1991). Further,

the fact that people shift identities and alliances over time creates an additional challenge for those engaged in documenting neighborhood revitalization initiatives.

[4] This begs the question of how many funders would allocate resources to initiatives that do not primarily pursue community building as important. One national foundation, currently conducting one of the largest comprehensive community initiatives to date, answers this query by saying that if neighborhoods are not willing to enact the conceptual model created by the foundation staff then these neighborhoods will be cut out of the initiative.

[5] Related issues surround the representations that stem from CCI activities and "theories of change." Documentation, evaluation, and representation are not disembodied processes. Authors have relationships and commitments to different stakeholders, and these affect the activities of conducting research and developing representations (Stone and Butler, 2000). Further, representations are used to legitimate the action (or lack thereof) on the part of various stakeholders involved in the "revitalization" of an area, and provide a storyline from which CCIs are represented to the public. While one response to such issues has been the inclusion of neighborhood residents in conducting research and producing representations, this alone does not address the very real power differentials that exist between residents and other stakeholders, such as funders.

[6] Stone and Butler (2000) also find that the practice of dealing with issues of access to low-income, minority neighborhoods by attempting to recruit minority-group member researchers does not adequately address the dynamics of race that are part of the historicity of the target neighborhoods and current programmatic efforts. We add that having minority-group member representation on the front lines does not equate to a meaningful transfer of power as it relates to determining how an initiative will be represented.

[7] We recognize that many of the distinctions we are making between the "theory of change" approach (i.e., based on neo-positivist program evaluation principles) and margin research originate from an ontological and epistemological commitment to constructivism (for overview, see Schwandt, 2000).

[8] Arguably, these initiatives are the culmination of interests and decision making that occur over time and in a historically and geographically specific moment.

[9] Pseudonyms are employed for the city, revitalization group, nonprofit housing group, and neighborhoods in order to protect the anonymity of stakeholders.

[10] At the beginning of the revitalization initiative in 1998 we were contracted by the lead foundation to collect baseline data on each neighborhood. This effort, which yielded data from a large probability sample of just under 1,000 neighborhood households, also provided us with an opportunity to train and work with nearly 100 residents to collect data. Subsequently, we have been conducting an evaluation of nonprofits and their impact on the target neighborhoods using a multimethod approach.

[11] The multimethod approach we have taken to analyze the situations and events that have occurred in the initiative and in the "target" neighborhoods includes survey research, participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and the collection of secondary data, including newspaper stories, initiative and community-based literature, documentation of foundation and nonprofit boards, as well as public records on land ownership and use in the metropolitan region. The different data collection and analysis techniques range from regression analysis and content analysis, to exploring the narratives stakeholders have provided on the reasons for revitalization and potential outcomes.

[12] Revitalization Corp. is comprised of three local foundations, a national foundation, and the local government of South City.

[13] The neighborhood coaches were chosen and funded by the lead foundation. These people tended to be middle-class minority-group members who are not from the target neighborhoods. While these coaches were charged with assisting neighborhood associations in developing and implementing strategic plans, they also served the function of monitoring neighborhood activities and reporting back to the lead foundation. In this sense a complex bureaucracy developed during the initiative (Fraser and Kick, 2001).

[14] Close to 30 percent of the population in this neighborhood live below the poverty line, and 65 percent are identified as minority-group members.

[15] We note that standard studies also ask "subjective" questions of stakeholder groups, including residents, but these are usually framed as individual perceptions of "objective" phenomena. The margin research approach consistently questions the constitution of categories that are given salience in community development initiatives and examines the discursive strategies surrounding these constructs.

[16] During our initial report to South City in 2000 we noted that there were between-neighborhood and within-neighborhood differences. Until then, Revitalization Corp. had

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been treating each neighborhood in a similar manner, but soon thereafter Highville was singled out as the "low-lying fruit" for Revitalization Corp. staff to pick.

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