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No Contest: Participatory Technologies and the Transformation of Urban Authority¹

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¹ I would like to thank one anonymous reviewer and one reviewer who chose to identify herself, Mary Pattillo, for their very helpful comments. I have not been able to address all of their comments here, but they will inform my thinking on other papers as well. I have benefitted greatly from the discussions that took place at the Democratizing Inequalities Conference. For this reason, I should also acknowledge the funders of that conference, the American Sociological Association Fund for the Advancement of the Discipline and New York University's Institute for Public Knowledge. This paper was inspired by many generative discussions with my always delightful collaborators, Caroline Lee and Edward Walker.

No Contest: Participatory Technologies and the Transformation of Urban Authority

Michael McQuarrie

The meaning of participation has been transformed in urban civil society. Once used as a tool for empowering urban citizens against politicians and growth-oriented elites, participation is now a tool for grounding political authority in the context of urban decline. Many sectors of urban civil society have become less independent even though they are well-funded and participatory. Large numbers of community-based organizations no longer empower neighborhoods, but weigh on them. Yet, we have trouble grappling with this transformation. Participation is still automatically associated with democratization, and community with authenticity and solidarity. Using a case study of the trajectory of participatory practices in community-based organizations (CBOs) in Cleveland, Ohio, I want to show how participatory practices have been transformed from tools of democratization into tools of elite authority.

Cleveland is a revealing site to examine this transformation and it presents a puzzle. Cleveland is a large manufacturing city that has been in decline since the late 1960s. This decline has posed a distinct challenge to the authority of the city's elites. Through much of the post-war period their authority had been premised on the promise of economic and population growth.² Decline made it impossible to deliver on that promise and the result was a general political crisis, capital strike, and municipal bankruptcy. In Cleveland, more than other cities, the tensions and conflicts that emerged from the crisis of elite authority were highly visible and highly contentious; indeed Cleveland has become the prototypical case of the "crisis of growth politics."³ This crisis opened the door to populist and neighborhood-based critiques of urban authority that undermined popular consent to the rule of growth-oriented elites. In response, governance was rescaled to the neighborhood and reorganized to be more participatory. In some cases this was done through changes to the formal apparatus of political representation, in others it took the form of a devolution of governance functions to civil society organizations and nonprofits.⁴

Despite leading the way in many of these transformations, and in spite of many premature celebrations of Cleveland's renaissance, in 2004 Cleveland became the poorest big city in America. The city's neighborhoods were again in crisis due to ongoing economic decline, outmigration, and predatory lending. Cuyahoga County, which contains Cleveland, had fifteen thousand foreclosures in 2007 alone. Along with foreclosures came a cycle of abandonment, demolition, and crime. Many of the city's neighborhoods were visibly collapsing. The scale of the destruction and the absence of

² John Logan and Harvey Moloch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

³ Todd Swanstrom, *The Crisis of Growth Politics: Cleveland, Kucinich, and The Challenge of Urban Populism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985).

⁴ These changes were not particular to Cleveland, see Jeffrey M. Berry, Kent E. Portney, and Ken Thomson, *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy* (Washington D.C.: Brookings, 1993); Lester Salamon, *Partners in Public Service: Government-Nonprofit Relations in the Modern Welfare State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995);

effective response evokes images of an “organizational desert,” an absence of “social capital,” and a dead civil society.

Yet on paper, Cleveland seemed well-situated to cope with the current crisis. Unlike in the 1970s crisis, the city is now armed with dozens of community-based organizations (CBOs) that are broadly supported by the city’s wealthy philanthropic community and the municipal government. Most of them exist to deal with neighborhood and housing issues. Many of them are self-consciously “participatory.” The problem, then, is not an absence of organizations designed to work on behalf of the city’s neighborhoods, or even an absence of participation by community residents in governance. The city’s civil society is thriving in organizational terms, but it is programmatically paralyzed. In fact, many of these organizations are only being kept alive through public subsidies, a significant indicator of the legitimacy of these organizations in the eyes of funders, if not their effectiveness.

This very fact is indicative. In a moment of declining revenues, why would municipal government use taxpayer money to subsidize the housing production of community-based nonprofits when there is already excess housing and collapsing prices? The answer given by an official in the municipal Department of Community Development was simple: they want to keep the infrastructure of nonprofit CBOs alive, even if it puts a dent in the municipal budget and even though the houses produced will have no measurable positive effect on surrounding communities. What this demonstrates is that the city’s CBOs are *legitimate* in the eyes of funders and community development professionals even though they are not programmatically *effective*. The contrast with the 1970s, when many CBOs were illegitimate to funders even though they were effective, is notable.

This shift poses a natural question: what is the legitimacy of CBOs based on if not programmatic effectiveness? The answer, in brief, is that they underpin the authority of urban elites when promises of growth are understood to be empty. In this context, CBOs facilitate elite authority, not based on their programmatic effectiveness, but on their claim to effectively represent the city’s neighborhoods. From this perspective, what matters is that the organizations are *participatory* and that they are organized at the scale of the *community* or neighborhood.

Unfortunately, most scholars of urban governance and civil society have not so much rejected the idea that these organizations underpin elite authority, they have not asked the question. The biggest obstacle to thinking about participation as a component of authority, whether democratic or hierarchical, is that participation is usually discussed as a practice that has some essence that produces determinate effects. Instead, I want to emphasize that “participation” is a flexible signifier the content of which is fought over for political gain.⁵ Advocates of participation claim that it results in more authentic deliberation, gives access to forms of knowledge that are marginalized among academic and policy elites, produces citizens that have greater concern for the general good, and furthers the democratization of society.⁶ On the other hand, critics argue that participation

⁵ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this characterization.

⁶ This literature is vast. Examples of contemporary work making these claims, in rough order, Jane Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Xavier de Souza Briggs, *Democracy as Problem Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities Across the Globe* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008); Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*

opens the door to extremism, enables the imposition of norms that can be exclusionary or repressive, corrupts the efficient operation of rational governance, produces political docility, and facilitates the management of the citizenry.⁷

There are related analytical problems. It is sometimes assumed that participatory practices are characteristic of distinct institutional spheres such as civil society while being antithetical to markets and states. A common narrative of civil society organizations recounts their colonization by technocratic and market logics. Such colonization undermines the “free spaces” that sustain broad-based protest movements or diverts the strategic focus of movement organizations and political parties into the pursuit of organizational survival.⁸ By describing the process as the colonization of civil society by more instrumental and rationalizing logics, we are encouraged to think of participation as inherently characteristic of civil society and more democratic social relations at the same time as we assume that bureaucratization, and technocracy are characteristic of markets and states. Increasingly, scholars are finding that these assumptions are unwarranted: bureaucracies and hierarchies are produced in movements and community organizations while participatory practices are now routinely found in corporations and government.⁹

Our assumptions about the effects of participation have a trajectory that reveals the source of some of these conceptual difficulties. After World War II, for example, totalitarianism was widely understood to be the product of mass mobilization—suggesting that expert management, not participation, was the best safeguard of democracy.¹⁰ The rebellions of the 1960s changed all that. Participation was invoked as a tool to overcome the arrogance of experts as well as the atomization and alienation that

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance* (London: Verso, 2003).

⁷ Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: Norton, 1994); Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922); Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grassroots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949); Steven Gregory, *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁸ See, for example, Suzanne Staggenborg, “The Consequences of Professionalization and Formalization in the Pro-Choice Movement,” *American Sociological Review* 53, no. 4 (1988): 585-606. On free spaces see Sara Evans and Harry Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and for a critical perspective see Francesca Polletta, “Free Spaces in Collective Action,” *Theory and Society* 28 (1999): 1-38. Also see Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1966) and Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), chs 8-9.

⁹ Nina Eliasoph, *Making Volunteers: Civic Life after Welfare’s End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower*; Caroline Lee, “Five Assumptions Academics Make about Public Deliberation, and Why They Deserve Rethinking,” *Journal of Public Deliberation* 7, no. 1 (2011): 1-48; Edward Walker, “Privatizing Participation: Civic Change and the Organizational Dynamics of Grassroots Lobbying Firms,” *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 1 (2009): 83-105; Joel F. Handler, *Down from Bureaucracy: The Ambiguity of Privatization and Empowerment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁰ David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (Piscataway, N.J.: Transaction, 2008); Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, (New York: Norton, 1993).

were the result of an overly rationalized and bureaucratic society.¹¹ In the face of widespread protests and calls for greater self-determination, governments experimented with democratic and decentralizing reforms. At the urban scale, the Community Action Program and the opening of urban politics to African-American and neighborhood participation were important and early experiments with expanded participation both in electoral politics and in governance.¹² Participation organized at the neighborhood scale was becoming a necessary part of institutional legitimacy in cities. Understanding how and why this happened reveals much about the nature of contemporary participation.¹³ Since that time, participation has been institutionalized in a variety of governance settings from education, to community development, to policing.¹⁴

This paper analyzes the changing role of participation in the constitution of urban political authority. I do this by tracing its institutional articulation in community-based organizations in Cleveland, Ohio, over the last 40 years. Broadly, the paper addresses the question: what makes participation worth fighting about in the context of urban governance? The short answer is that the collapse of the politics of growth and the emergence of populist and neighborhood-based critiques in the 1970s made it clear that expanded participation had become a necessary component of legitimate authority. Authority here is understood as beliefs that secure consent to the rule of another even when such consent is not self-serving. When consent cannot be justified rationally it rests on beliefs that legitimate rule.¹⁵ The promise of growth had underpinned urban authority in post-war America, but urban decline undermined the viability of growth as a legitimating belief. This vacuum was filled by the promise of neighborhood self-determination. Once this was understood, resistance to broad-based participation in governance diminished and was replaced by a competitive struggle to define *technologies of participation* that would make participation safe for use as a component of the authority of elites.

Treating participatory practices as *technologies* is a necessary step to break with tacit assumptions about the essential qualities of participation. By “technology” I mean a bundle of practices, metrics, discourses, and actors. “Technologies of participation” refers to arrangements of practices, metrics, discourses, and actors that perform community self-determination in ways that are designed to realize specific goals. From this perspective, participation should be thought of, not as a practice with essential

¹¹ The New Left’s Port Huron Statement is expansive on each of these points. For an extended consideration of participation and its long-term cultural effects, see Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005).

¹² Noel Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy: The Unlikely Success of the War on Poverty Community Action Programs* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007); Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008).

¹³ For the best analysis of this change see John Mollenkopf, “Neighborhood Political Development and the Politics of Urban Growth: Boston and San Francisco, 1958-1978,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 5, no. 1 (1981): 15-39.

¹⁴ For example, see Archon Fung, *Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978): 941-955; Richard Sennett, *Authority* (New York: Norton, 1980).

characteristics, but as a practice that derives its significance from how it is situated relative to other practices, actors, and meanings.¹⁶ Treating participation this way enables a break with the assumption, prominent since the 1960s, that participation yields democratization and the expression of the unmediated voice of the citizenry.

I focus on CBOs as the setting for analysis because they are often valued as ideal settings for participation. The analysis of participation in CBOs is one component of a broader study of the structure and genesis of the field of community-based organizations in Cleveland, Ohio. I analyze these shifts using a variety of sources including interviews with the leaders of every CBO in the city between 2000 and 2008 and archival research on the city's CBOs dating back to 1966. I also conducted dozens of interviews with politicians, bureaucrats, program officers, strategic business organizations, and economic development organizations to understand the institutional context CBOs operate in. Cleveland is not a representative case, but a revelatory one. The crisis of growth politics, the nature of the Civil Rights and populist challenges, the extreme nature of the breakdown of political authority, the decisiveness of the defeat of community organizing and the rise of community development are not unique in terms of content, but are unique in their extreme nature. The case, then, places these dynamics into unusually sharp contrast.

The analysis reveals three stages in the transformation of participatory technologies between 1970 and 2010, each characterized by a type of CBO. The first stage was characterized by community organizing groups which engaged in contentious politics and used participatory deliberation to make decisions. The community organizing groups were eliminated from the field in the course of competition with emergent community developers. The second stage was characterized by a competition between clientelist and technocratic CDCs. This resulted in the ascendancy of expert authority in the field. Finally, since 2000 consensus organizing has been deployed as a participatory practice that valorizes collaboration and partnership. Rather than serving as a challenge to elite and expert authority, participation is now deployed as a tool of that authority.

Why Participation Matters: The Crisis of Growth Politics in Cleveland

In the 1960s and 1970s Cleveland's politics were exceptionally turbulent. Notable events included Civil Rights protest followed by neighborhood-based populist protest, two riots, the election of the country's first African-American mayor, the election of a self-described "populist" mayor, a recall election, a capital strike, and municipal bankruptcy. These dramatic events were the product of a general crisis of growth politics. The politics of growth had secured the authority of urban elites when the city was thriving. However, with the refusal of African-Americans to continue to bear the costs of growth, and the collapse of American manufacturing, the promise of growth no longer had the ability to secure consent. The city became embroiled in a three-way struggle between mobilized neighborhoods, elected politicians and corporate elites over the right to define the content of legitimate political authority in the city.

¹⁶ The following demonstrate the analytical utility of a relational approach to political practices and participation: Gianpaolo Baiocchi, *Militants and Citizens: The Politics of Participatory Democracy in Porto Allegre* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005); Eliasoph, *Making Volunteers*; Gregory, *Black Corona*; Ann Mische, *Partisan Publics: Communication and Contention across Brazilian Youth Activist Networks* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Polletta, *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting*.

In the 1960s it appeared that race would define the primary political divisions in the city. Cleveland was a hotbed of Civil Rights activism and the city's electorate was the country's first to deliver the mayoralty to an African-American, Carl Stokes (1968-71).¹⁷ Yet, while race was the central question that divided the city in the 1960s, by the 1970s it had become a secondary issue and not simply because black civil society had been colonized by poverty programs.¹⁸ Of course, the politics of race never really goes away in a city like Cleveland. For example, the racial implications of various policies and programs, such as the funding of schools, the definition of real estate values, the definition of criminality, and the definition of civic corruption, are all entirely racialized. Moreover, the city is still one of the most segregated in the country and race is an issue in neighborhood politics.¹⁹ However, since the 1970s race has been secondary to the most important municipal alignments and battles. In the 1960s, African-Americans were allied to growth-oriented elites and white liberals in a reformist coalition opposed to the clientelist politics of the white, ethnic West Side. By the 1970s African-Americans in Cleveland were allied with West Side neighborhoods in a populist coalition opposed to politicians and growth-oriented elites.²⁰

The precipitating factor in this change was the economic crisis of 1973 which made it clear that American manufacturing was no longer competitive. For manufacturing cities like Cleveland the implications were dire and the city descended into a cycle of unemployment, declining revenue, declining neighborhoods, rising crime, and outmigration. This shifted the political dynamic from one focused on securing growth and dealing with its consequences, which had pitted white citizen against black, to a zero-sum competition for state investment to minimize the consequences of decline. For example, to preserve the value of downtown real estate Cleveland's governors scandalously spent tens of millions of dollars in Community Development Block Grant and Urban Development Action Grant money on white elephant projects, all while the city's neighborhoods collapsed. When added to the ledger of violence to the city's neighborhoods perpetrated via extensive highway building and urban renewal, these projects undermined the claim of elite private interests to be acting civically rather than out of self-interest. The city's neighborhoods, black and white, revolted.

The revolt took two forms. The most obvious one was the emergence of a new urban populist political coalition centered on the "boy mayor," as he was known, Dennis Kucinich (1977-79). His victory signaled the effectiveness of a platform that empowered neighborhoods against centralized bureaucracies and growth-oriented elites. His claim to

¹⁷ Leonard N. Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Kenneth Andrews, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and Its Legacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Gregory, *Black Corona*.

¹⁹ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

²⁰ Since the 1970s race has been a source of political coalition building at least as often as it has been a source of contention. Two African-American mayors have been elected since Stokes, Mike White (1990-2001) and Frank Jackson (2006-present). Both have had the classic problem of simultaneously representing a marginalized and stigmatized population and the interests of the city as a whole and both have used technocratic competence to manage this dilemma. For an excellent analysis of race and mayoral politics see J. Philip Thompson III, *Double Trouble: Black Mayors, Black Communities, and the Call for Deep Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

be the “People’s Mayor” signaled a new deference to the authority of neighborhood residents at the expense of experts and self-proclaimed civic leaders.

Unfortunately, mayors need the support of pro-growth fractions, like the bankers who provide the liquidity necessary to do things like pay police officers and firemen. Unimpressed with Kucinich’s pro-neighborhood platform and his valorization of “the people” as a voice in urban politics, the city’s bankers staged a capital strike and launched a recall election (the precipitating issue was the privatization of a public utility). Perhaps to his credit, Kucinich refused to be disciplined by these maneuvers, but the cost to the city was high. A crisis of governance was laid on top of the economic crisis, a combination which would result in municipal bankruptcy a few years later. Kucinich defeated the recall but lost the next election to the pro-growth Republican, George Voinovich (1980-89).

Kucinich’s mayoralty has been described as the institutionalization of Alinskyite organizing in formal politics.²¹ While this view can be sustained by a common valorization of “the People” and a privileging of neighborhoods at the expense of growth-oriented elites, it is incorrect. Community organizing in Cleveland was just as hostile to elected politicians like Kucinich as it was to the city’s growth-oriented elites. A new breed of community organization disrupted the simple opposition, proposed by Kucinich, between neighborhoods and downtown.

In addition to being a hotbed of Civil Rights organizing, Cleveland had also been home to early experiments in community organizing. By the mid-1970s, the city had several contentious organizations known as “Community Congresses. Like Kucinich, they claimed to represent “the People” and they wanted neighborhoods to have priority both in terms of policy and private investment. They were happy to use protest to realize their goals.²² While the organizations had a similar policy agenda to Kucinich’s, it quickly became clear that the new mayor and the Congresses were going to be enemies, not allies. Shortly after Kucinich was elected he agreed, after weeks of pressure, to attend a “Neighborhood Summit” to hash out a policy program with the Congresses. Kucinich failed to show and sent members of his administration instead. When they chose to lecture the audience rather than engage in a dialogue about policy a neighborhood leader seized the microphone and hit Kucinich’s representative on the head with it. The amplified whack sparked a brawl that spilled out onto the grounds of the church that hosted the event (it is probably significant that this brawl took place in a church). Relations between the two self-proclaimed representatives of the People never recovered and Kucinich was a target of protests by the Congresses for the remainder of his term.

The crux of the issue was the question of who had the authority to represent the People. It is not surprising that politicians claim that they do. What changed was the emergence of community organizations that also claimed to represent the People and that were intent on deploying their power to ensure that they were recognized. These organizations traded on New Left critiques of bureaucracy and Civil Rights critiques of political representation. Formal politics and government were not venues for the people to be heard, community organizations in civil society were. The breakdown of authority

²¹ Swantstrom, *The Crisis of Growth Politics*.

²² Randy Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland: The Rise and Fall of Community Organizing in Cleveland, Ohio, 1975-1985* (Cleveland: Arambala Press, 2007).

was complete. None of the competing mobilized interests, neighborhoods, politicians and their allies, and growth-oriented elites, were able to secure consent from the others.

While Kucinich disagreed with the Congresses' understanding of neighborhood representation, his successor, George Voinovich, did not. Unlike Kucinich, Voinovich was happy to devolve authority and governance functions onto new civil society organizations claiming to represent the communities they operated in. The idea of devolving governance functions onto civil society organizations was, until recently, as prominent on the anti-government Right as it was on the anti-government Left.²³ Voinovich traded this recognition for political space to recommit to the politics of growth. Some funds would be allocated to CBOs for neighborhood stabilization, but the bulk would go for economic development to support the city's two growth poles. City Councilors supported this devolution of governance in exchange for greater control over federal Community Development Block Grants and the prospect of having a CBO in their wards that would be reliant upon them for funds.

The demise of the Congresses paved the way for this emerging accommodation. As the Congresses won victories they became involved in neighborhood redevelopment programs and, in the process, they began creating community development corporations (CDCs) to implement the agenda of the People. At the same time, the Congresses became heavily involved in national and local campaigns to secure private investment in urban neighborhoods. One Cleveland campaign targeted the SOHIO Corporation, a large oil company (since purchased by BP). They protested shareholder meetings and pursued the company's CEO. Their demand: \$1 billion to reinvest in neighborhoods. The campaign culminated in 1982 at an elite suburban country club, the Hunt Club. With polo ponies as a backdrop, video footage of the event portrays amused Cleveland residents yelling slogans at the nonplussed and nattily-attired social elite of the city. But the protest divided the movement over the necessity of the "hit." The consequences of the protest became dire when outraged philanthropists rescinded their funding while reserving future funding for organizations engaged in "bricks-and-mortar" development, not organizing.²⁴ The Congresses died as a result of internal conflict and a loss of funding, but the civic leadership of the city was committed to funding neighborhood redevelopment through CDCs.

²³ See, for example, Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society* (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1977).

²⁴ Cleveland's growth-oriented elites have long pursued growth and governance strategies through community foundations and strategic business organizations, rather than through government. For example, the first community chest and the first community foundation were both started in Cleveland according to Peter Dobkin Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700-1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality* (New York: New York University Press, 1984). In the mid-1980s the Cleveland Foundation ran afoul of the Center for Responsive Philanthropy for precisely this reason, see Diana Tittle, *Rebuilding Cleveland: The Cleveland Foundation and Its Evolving Urban Strategy* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992). For a more complete discussion of the role of community foundations and strategic business organizations in these developments see Michael McQuarrie, "Nonprofits and the Reconstruction of Urban Governance: Housing Production and Community Development in Cleveland, 1975-2005," in *Politics and Partnerships in American Governance*, eds. Elisabeth Clemens and Doug Guthrie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); and Doug Guthrie and Michael McQuarrie, "Providing for the Public Good: Corporate-Community Relations in the Era of the Receding Welfare State," *City and Community* 7, no. 2 (2008): 113-139.

Growth was not restarted as an outcome of Cleveland's crisis of growth politics. Despite many and frequent announcements of recovery, the city has continued to lose jobs, corporate operations, and population (from nearly a million in 1970 down to 400,000 today). However, authority had been reestablished and since the early 1980s decline has not been associated with political polarization. Through community foundations and strategic investments, growth-oriented elites have acknowledged that neighborhood stabilization is important for economic development. Politicians have learned to coexist with organizations that claim to be more authentic representatives of community. Bureaucrats are happy to fund CBOs to provide governance functions that were once performed by government agencies. The population of CBOs rode this wave of legitimacy and funding to a peak of fifty-five in 1996, even as the community organizing groups died.

The question is: why were these organizations funded? Programmatic effectiveness has always been, at best, ambiguous. At the same time, community foundations and intermediary organizations have repeatedly demonstrated a commitment to the idea of participation in the CBOs they have funded and the idea that neighborhoods should have organizations that represent them. There are two reasons for this. First, the dual challenge of Kucinich's populist coalition and the Community Congresses made it clear that the authority of urban institutions would have to rely on some expansion of popular participation in decision making and a decentralization of responsibility. Effectively, the neighborhood revolt of the 1970s was not defeated so much as it was institutionalized, not in the way preferred by many movement activists, but institutionalized nonetheless. Second, collaborating with CBOs, funding them, training them, and recognizing their legitimacy enabled growth-oriented elites and political leaders to reestablish their own authority. Politicians had been criticized for being a distinct class that acted to realize its own particular concerns. Likewise, the capital strike against Kucinich undermined the civic credentials of growth-oriented elites. Support for CBOs, organizations that presumably represent the authentic voice of neighborhoods, legitimates the claims of growth-oriented elites and political representatives to be civic actors rather than self-interested ones. In Cleveland, funding and recognition for CBOs are being exchanged for the symbolic capital that enables civic leadership.

This eclipsed the question of whether or not participatory institutions were good or necessary in urban governance, it was acknowledged that they were. But a new question emerged: what sort of participation is best? This question was decided in inter-organizational struggles for recognition, funding, and legitimacy. Participatory *technologies* were being developed to meet a variety of ends within the basic constraint that participatory practices were necessary. It is to these technologies that I now turn.

Participation and Contention: The Rise and Fall of Broad-based Organizing

The Community Congresses were innovative and insistent experiments in citizen development. They challenged the way urban governance worked, forcefully arguing that neighborhoods should be heard and accounted for in policy. They privileged the power of people working together on issues of common concern and the power of confrontation and tension to alter the balance of power between urban communities and their governors. Participation by diverse neighborhood residents and stakeholders was essential to both of these aspects of the Congresses. Together, their internal deliberative

practices that constituted solidarity across race and class lines, their effort to address the people of the city as a whole, and their contentious rejection of both formal representative practices and the authority of growth politics meant the Congresses constituted a neighborhood-based counterpublic.²⁵

Community organizing began in Cleveland with the sponsorship of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese. The priests who led the effort were not particularly radical or confrontational, but racial tensions were a central issue and they worked hard to initiate dialogue across racial lines.²⁶ Things changed when a former United Farmworkers organizer, Tom Gannon, was hired to lead the effort. For Gannon, the problem was that whites and blacks blamed one another for their problems when they should be blaming politicians and bureaucrats. Gannon's organizing was premised on the idea that constituting "the People" across racial lines—and overcoming racial animosity—required confrontation with elites.²⁷ Gannon built the Buckeye Woodland Community Congress (BWCC) as a cross-race, cross-class, people's organization. When BWCC went public in 1975 it had 125 dues-paying organizational members, including churches, local businesses, fraternal organizations, and street clubs. Before long the Congresses multiplied and took up issues as diverse as vacant houses, policing, porn theaters and liquor stores, energy costs, arson, redlining, and health care. They operated in poor neighborhoods, transitioning neighborhoods, and even affluent suburbs.

Participation in the Congresses played two distinct roles. First, broad-based participation was utilized as a tool to constitute the community through internal dialogue, deliberation, and strategic work on issues. Street club meetings represented geographic aspects of the neighborhood. At the level of the Congress there were "issue committees" responsible for research on issues of concern. Some worked on community issues, others worked on city-wide or even national issues. Finally, there were committees that dealt with internal governance. All of these deliberative fora were supported by professional organizers who were paid with dues collections, foundation grants, or government grants.²⁸ Internal authority in the organizations was channeled through "leaders," unpaid neighborhood residents who had a broad following in the neighborhood or who became skilled practitioners of community organizing. They led internal deliberations and

²⁵ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992): 109-142; Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002).

²⁶ Harry Fagan, *Empowerment: Skills for Parish Social Action*. New York: Paulist Press, 1979; Dan Reidy, "Project Interface Proposal to the Campaign for Human Development," (Cleveland: Western Reserve Historical Society, *Catholic Commission on Community Action Archive*), 4-5. The best history of the Congresses is Randy Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland: The Rise and Fall of Community Organizing in Cleveland, Ohio, 1975-1985*, (Cleveland: Arambala Press, 2007). I have also made use of Cunningham's excellent and numerous interviews which he generously deposited at the Western Reserve Historical Society.

²⁷ Cunningham interviews with Tom Gannon, Dan Reidy, Doug Von Auken. Randy Cunningham Community Organizing History Collection (Western Reserve Historical Society: Cleveland).

²⁸ Cleveland's community foundations were intermittently supportive, but the Gund Foundation was more consistent than the Cleveland Foundation which preferred to fund the Local Development Corporations. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development was an early and consistent funder. Finally, the federal VISTA program funneled young volunteers into the Congresses. VISTA was imagined as a domestic version of the Peace Corps that was initially funded as part of Johnson's War on Poverty. During the Clinton administration it was rolled into the Americorps program.

negotiations with targets. Nationally, the Congresses operated under the umbrella of National People's Action (NPA), a Chicago-based community organizing network led by Gail Cincotta and Shel Trapp. NPA annual meetings were, like those of the member Congresses, representative, deliberative, multi-issue, and strategic. Whatever else they were, the Congresses were organized to ensure that the priorities of neighborhood residents would correspond with the goals of the Congresses, undiluted by experts or professionals.

Second, participation enabled the Congresses to perform the basis of their authority in confrontation with their opponents. This was intended to be pedagogical for people on both sides of the issue. Politicians were to be disciplined into respect for their constituents by the constant pressure applied by the Congresses. They were disciplined through protest actions, civil disobedience, and disruption. The Congresses shut down shareholder meetings and City Hall. They ran pickets against recalcitrant corporations and unresponsive city officials. For the members of the Congresses, these actions were classrooms of effective citizenship. One leader, Marlene Weslian, argues that "over time, organizing... did empower you." "The more I gained in self-confidence and self-esteem the... more assertive I was in all areas of my life... [and] the more open to issues like the environment and war."²⁹

By constructing skilled and knowledgeable citizens the Congresses hoped to reconstitute the polity and the economy, both of which had become enemies of neighborhoods and the People. Rather, than running candidates for City Council or negotiating new union contracts, this reform was to be accomplished from without by subordinating economic and political actors to the authority of neighborhood-based civil society organizations. In its newsletter, NPA claimed that in its member organizations the People were forged into a democratic instrument that could confront and be victorious against "bankers and bureaucrats." The newsletter promised that the callow and self-interested would ultimately submit to the will of the People now that NPA had "jammed open" the "revolving door" to "decision-making offices" thus allowing "the People to pass through" and reclaim their authority.³⁰

The Congresses developed a variety of internal metrics that were used as indicators of organizational health and effectiveness. Some of them are entirely standard organizational practice: turn-out for events and actions, the use of agendas, and the presence of a broad bench of neighborhood leaders making strategic decisions for the Congress. Others were less formal. One important indicator of organizational health was the willingness of neighborhood leaders to engage in confrontational protest. The Congresses claimed to be more authentic representatives of the people than politicians were, but that could only be performed if leaders could overcome their deference to their targets. Mobilizing African-Americans was also central, in part because they were understood to be easier to mobilize than whites. Building cross-race organizations also enabled the Congresses' to claim to be better and more authoritative representatives while simultaneously undermining the politicians' efforts to deflect issues of concern. However, just as important was the fact that the Congresses had difficulty recruiting African-American organizers. For white organizers the ability to mobilize African-Americans was a key marker of professional skill as was the ability to get whites to focus

²⁹ Cunningham interview with Marlene Weslian, Cunningham Collection.

³⁰ *Disclosure*, June 1976.

on their common opponents. Recalling this aspect of the Congresses, a BWCC leader's thoughts are indicative, "I'm not saying people weren't prejudiced, but they managed to put it in their back pockets long enough to deal with the issues that assaulted all of us."³¹ One of the symbols of the Congresses in the 1970s was a white hand shaking a black hand.

Discursively and dramaturgically, the Congresses made the case that they were more authentic representatives of communities than elected politicians and, therefore, they were the true source of political authority. It was the participatory and organizational construction of the People in the Congresses that gave them the right to hold politicians, bureaucrats, and corporate leaders accountable. Neighborhood leader Kathy Jaksic notes that the main issue was not policing, housing, energy prices or anything else. Instead, "it was a question of authority. Who was going to decide for this neighborhood?"³² For this reason, actions against these targets were never simply about resolving the issue in question, it was also about disciplining and reorienting the city's "power elite" to be responsive to the true source of their authority.

The People did not exist naturally as an actor on the public stage. It was constituted through these internal and external modes of participation. But to leave it there would fall into the trap of assuming that participation is able to produce any number of determinate effects. In the case of the Congresses participation became a tool for challenging urban elites and governors. It was a technology that enabled the creation of the People in opposition to "interests." However, this capacity is not inherent to participation or deliberation. Participation in the Congresses derived its meaning and its purpose from the particular context and from a wide variety of connections to other places, people, institutions, and organizations.

The Reagan era was generally not friendly to community organizing. However the central event in the demise of the Congresses, the Hunt Club protest in which funders announced an end to funding for organizing, was not merely a problem for the city's elite. The action also managed to fracture the People along two of the core fault lines of the movement: more and less radical Congresses (which partially mapped onto more and less African-American), and organizers versus leaders. Many in the less experienced and less radical Congresses felt the action served no strategic purpose and that they were manipulated into it by the professional organizers. The action also cost the Congresses the support of the archdiocese. Perhaps more important than these problematic tensions was that the participatory technology deployed by the Congresses was already losing some of its effectiveness. Most of the Congresses were already turning to physical redevelopment because it was a core part of their agenda and because their victories had secured resources that would enable them to do so. Second, a new generation of politicians, led by George Voinovich, were happy to acknowledge the authority of community organizations, eliminating the issue of recognition and begging the question of how to work together. Many responded to this question by becoming essential contributors to the institutionalization of a system for the large-scale redevelopment of

³¹ Cunningham interviews with Diane Yambor, Tom Gannon, John Calkins, Kathy Jaksic, and Mike O'Brien. Cunningham Collection.

³² Cunningham interview with Kathy Jaksic. Cunningham Collection.

the city's neighborhoods, what came to be known as the "community development industry system."³³

The organizing style of the Congresses would persist at a couple of the new CDCs and many initially viewed organizing and development as complimentary. But with staff turnover, little funding support for organizing, and the growing professional requirements of community development, the participatory practices of the Congresses fell by the wayside.³⁴ Instead, a very large population of CDCs emerged. With the elimination of the Congresses, CDCs became the authorized representatives of the city's neighborhoods, and they were expected to take on a broad range of governance functions as well as responsibility for neighborhood well-being and physical redevelopment. Despite the demise of the neighborhood counterpublic, the struggle over what participation was to mean was not over. Instead, the conflict shifted to the field of community development itself.

Community Development and the Rise and Fall of Professional Closure

In 1980 there were three types of organizations that claimed to represent Cleveland's communities; CDCs, the Community Congresses, and the ward operations of City Councilors. The trajectory of these organizations makes clear that the organizational form of the CDC came to be broadly useful, a utility that is evident in the very rapid increase in the number of CDCs from ten to fifty-five between 1975 and 1996. CDCs were useful to community residents because they served as brokers of resources coming from government and private philanthropy to rebuild the city's neighborhoods, one of the central planks in the platform of the Congresses. They were useful to City Councilors because they could serve as vehicles for spending funds in ways that tied neighborhood residents to their electoral operations. Finally, they were useful to growth-oriented elites because physical redevelopment served the purpose of maximizing the exchange value of the city's real estate in an apparently civic rather than self-interested manner.

Community development is frequently presented as a unified movement that works to rebuild urban neighborhoods.³⁵ There is indeed much that unifies CDCs, characteristics that were defined in the struggle with community organizing over the authoritative organizational form for the representation of neighborhood interests. CDCs in Cleveland represent a defined geographical area at the sub-urban scale, such as a ward, a neighborhood, or a statistical planning area. They realize their goals through the use of collaborative public-private partnerships rather than confrontational protest. Finally, they measure community well-being using real estate values and engage in physical development to increase those values. These organizations were producing several hundred houses per year before the foreclosure crisis, though this volume did not come close to outstripping the foreclosure rate in Cleveland even before the crisis that began in

³³ Jordan Yin, "The Community Development Industry System: A Case Study of Politics and Institutions in Cleveland, 1967-1997" *Journal of Urban Affairs* 20, no. 2 (1998): 137-157.

³⁴ For a discussion of this dynamic see Randy Stoecker, "The Community Development Corporation Model of Community Development: A Critique and an Alternative," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 19 (1997): 1-23.

³⁵ Herbert Rubin, *Renewing Hope within Neighborhoods of Despair* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000); Alexander Von Hoffman, *House by House, Block by Block: The Rebirth of America's Urban Neighborhoods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

2007. Nonetheless, many neighborhoods did experience a visible improvement in their well-being and, according to some benefitted in other ways as well.³⁶

These ideas about development were part of a philanthropic project to develop tools and metrics of successful community development. The Ford Foundation in particular was instrumental in developing program-related investments to facilitate philanthropic support of development projects and a new emphasis on the importance of real estate values as the primary measurement of community well-being. This approach is encapsulated in Grogan and Proscio's book, *Comeback Cities*, which is probably better understood as a manifesto. Situating themselves in a long tradition of thinking on community development, Grogan and Proscio argue that attempting to eliminate poverty is a bad way to improve neighborhoods. What is needed is "a careful restoration of order—in the built environment, in public spaces, and in people's lives."³⁷ For Grogan and Proscio, the role of the CDC is not so much to represent the community, they note that CDCs have "learned to steer clear of the... us-versus-them ideology that mired grassroots groups for decades," but to prime the pump of real estate markets through supply-side intervention. Blight that could discourage investment is assaulted using a combination of tools. CDCs deal with the particular problems of different parcels using a variety of development tools, such as LIHTC-funded housing or market-rate developments. The strategic deployment of development tools is enabled by an objectifying gaze that is manifested in land use maps and strategic plans. Often, CDCs have design review powers that enable them to block development that cannot be integrated into the plan. Housing development is the most powerful tool CDCs have available for reviving local markets because of the combination of its desirability from the point of view of the CDC, the availability of a well-funded and diverse set of tools, and the availability of the relevant skill-sets among the CDCs.

Driving around a neighborhood with a CDC director one can immediately see how this process works. After showing off a number of shiny new developments, including commercial, market-rate, low-income, rentals, and homes for ownership, the director comments on the lots as they roll by: "We'll probably put some LIHTC housing there (pointing to a few bombed-out storefronts). The lots won't support market-rate housing, so we can use LIHTC units to put some new units in an undesirable location." Other locations are deemed more appropriate for market-rate housing and even high-end townhouses ("they are in walking distance of University Circle."). My guide had a vision that is organized by matching policy tools with the needs of individual lots in order to maximize the potential revalorization of real estate values, a vision which was defined by the logic of professional community development practice in the 1990s. Much of her day-to-day work involved putting together financing deals, seeking tenants, and shepherding projects through various approvals.

The differences with the Congresses are stark. The primary artifacts of those organizations are protest banners, publications that aimed to be the voice of a movement, phone lists and sign in sheets—archival remnants of a many-headed hydra of community

³⁶ Cunningham, *Democratizing Cleveland*; Norman Krumholz, W. Dennis Keating, Philip D. Star, and Mark C. Chupp, "The Long-Term Impact of CDCs on Urban Neighborhoods: Case Studies of Cleveland's Broadway-Slavic Village and Tremont Neighborhoods" *Community Development* 37, no. 4 (2006).

³⁷ Paul S. Grogan and Tony Proscio, *Comeback Cities: A Blueprint for Urban Neighborhood Revival* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000): 3-4, 13.

deliberation and activism. In contrast, CDCs work out of offices that have walls lined with planning maps of their “service areas” and certificates acknowledging the completion of courses on a wide variety of topics including financial management, real estate development and marketing, and organizational leadership. Contemporary CDCs have generally empowered technocrats, expert in physical redevelopment and urban planning, as the representatives of community interests.³⁸ It has also empowered funders and lenders in defining the appropriate interventions in the city’s neighborhoods.

The empowerment of expert managers at the community scale had serious consequences for participation in CBOs. The authority of the CDCs within the city’s neighborhoods hinged upon the ability of community development experts to define needs and apply the appropriate solutions. However, community developers trained to see the world through the prism of real estate values, and to intervene in communities using capital-intensive physical redevelopment, naturally define problems and solutions in particular ways that do not necessarily correspond with the priorities of community residents. Indeed, once real estate values become the measure of community well-being, physical redevelopment in poorer neighborhoods began to target suburban professionals rather than existing residents, transforming the representative logic of community organizations. As for existing residents, they become a nuisance “indigenous population” that stands in the way of development.³⁹ CBOs were disconnected from the communities they represented and were creating a setting to attract an “imagined community” of affluent future residents.

Because of its emphasis on the revalorization of real estate, the technocratic approach to community development has been broadly supported by the municipal bureaucracy, private philanthropies, and local growth-oriented elites. Nonetheless, even though community organizing was marginalized, the consensus that emerged around the technocratic model of community development by 2000 was not unchallenged. CDCs were also a useful organizational form for ward-based politicians. Politicians who take a clientelist approach to representing their wards use CDCs to engage in what Marwell calls “triadic exchange.”⁴⁰ Effectively, CDCs enable politicians to link the programmatic activities of CDCs to electoral politics. Programs are used to create “organizational adherents” that are then assumed to be loyal to the Councilor on Election Day. For many in the field of community development, this sort of relationship is a modern-day form of “legitimate graft.” It siphons resources from appropriate community development activities and, moreover, it enables corrupt Councilors to maintain their grip on their wards. Community development is subordinated to the logic of electoral politics.⁴¹

³⁸ On technocracy see: Miguel Centeno, “The New Leviathan: The Dynamics and Limits of Technocracy.” *Theory and Society* 22, no. 3 (1993): 307-335.

³⁹ A CDC director characterized the efforts of neighborhood residents to retain control of their CDC this way. He, on the other hand, felt that his job was to “throw the door open to investment” because “private capital has an ego too.”

⁴⁰ Nicole Marwell, “Privatizing the Welfare State: Nonprofit Community-Based Organizations as Political Actors,” *American Sociological Review*, 69, no. 2 (2004): 265-291; Nicole Marwell, *Bargaining for Brooklyn: Community Organizations in the Entrepreneurial City* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Looking at maps in the City Department of Community Development does not suggest any difference in the ability of technocratic or clientelist CDCs to affect real estate values.

However, it should be noted that among clientelist CDCs the view is quite different and the participatory practices of these organizations are worth considering. One CDC executive director presented her organization as representatives of the people of the ward, not “interests” or “corporations.” She claimed they are distinguished by a desire to build amenities for existing residents rather than “golf clubs” for suburbanites. Their authority as representatives of the community is not derived from a broad-base of leadership or the demonstration of community solidarity through mobilization and protest. There is little in the way of democratic deliberation. She claimed it, naturally enough, based on electoral authority—the Councilor was elected by the residents of the ward. But alone this is not enough. Clientelist ward politicians have dense networks of relations with people throughout their wards and they organize them into ward clubs. These are participatory venues, though participants tend to be highly deferential to the status and authority of the Councilor. Despite how they are presented by their technocratic opponents in the field, these politicians are not simply venal. Indeed, many of them live in nondescript houses and use their relative poverty as a marker of authenticity, something which is often augmented by invocations of religious faith.⁴² They pursue equity in the distribution of resources and sometimes pursue redistributive policy.⁴³ The status of the politicians is instead expressed in the ability to call upon numerous people to do favors of various kinds, from fixing a house, to driving them on errands, to getting free meals.

The mode of participation in these organizations does little to develop the autonomous power of civil society organizations or the leadership skills or political sophistication of anyone other than the Councilor. Nor is the point to constitute an autonomous neighborhood voice or the civil society organizations that might underpin one. The effective clientelist Councilor is the central node in a dense network of relations that ensures accountability to neighborhood residents that extends well beyond the voting booth. In contrast with technocratic community developers, clientelist CDCs rely on the charisma of the Councilor and their ability to use their position to secure goods and services for their constituents, even by shaking down technocratic CDCs for a share of developers’ fees. This is justified in the name of acting on behalf of “the people” against the needs of other CDCs that are obsessed with development. The Councilor knows what these needs are because she has personal relationships with community members, something which the technocratic CDCs cannot claim: “I have yet to see any other ward where the councilperson can walk down the street and everybody is going to stop and talk... and a lot of it is based on the fact that our Councilperson... answers her own phone.” The respondent is incorrect on one point, many Councilors do this. One exasperated CDC director responded to a question on this point by noting that he has seen the Councilor “mow someone’s lawn in the middle of the day!” while a CDC trade association director can cite numerous organizations on her member list that are organized similarly, much to her chagrin.

⁴² Such invocations are increasingly prominent among representatives of the African-American East Side. On the West Side religion also plays a role in the authority of the Councilor, they are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic and many derive some authority from church attendance, but it is less prominent on Councilor websites.

⁴³ At a City Council meeting I saw a clientelist Councilor insist that a pilot recycling program be conducted in all wards equally, indicating a misunderstanding of the phrase “pilot project.” The same Councilor sponsored legislation requiring all construction managers to hire neighborhood residents on their projects.

Clientelist CDCs have difficulty reproducing themselves due to their close ties with individual politicians and the relative absence of formal organization. Moreover, status in the field of community organizations as a whole has increasingly privileged professional community development and urban planning skills. As a consequence, these organizations have trouble securing funds without their patrons. The death rate of these organizations is far higher than other types of CDC, and the clientelist position is slowly being eliminated from the field. In terms of the ability of CBOs to effectively represent neighborhood residents, the elimination of the clientelist position has the effect of eliminating an organizational type that relies upon participation for its ability to represent the community.

Rather than securing the uncontested authority of community development experts, the eventual dominance of technocratic CDCs threatened the very purpose of community organizations. Professionalizing CDCs made sense in the context of the struggle with clientelist CDCs and their political patrons, but this also undermined their utility as a foundation for elite authority. Once we recognize this function it is not surprising that renewed calls for neighborhood participation in CBOs did not come from politicians or the residents themselves, it came from private-sector funders of CDCs. By 2000 it had become apparent to funders that the meaning of community had been reduced to a synonym for organizational territory. The term was being drained of its association with authentic and unmediated social relations, self-governance, and democratic deliberation. Organizational boards were increasingly populated by local bankers, funders, and other community development professionals. To the extent that residents were still involved, they were mere tokens. Participation was necessary to buttress the claim of CDCs to represent their neighborhoods on development issues. An intermediary organization vice president explained the dilemma that led to this renewal simply: “funders were coming to annual meetings [of CDCs] and there was nobody there.” Technocratic CBOs are unable to effectively consecrate the priorities of urban elites because they no longer plausibly represent the city’s neighborhoods.

Making Participation Safe for Use: Consensus Organizing

The return to community organizing among Cleveland’s CBOs began in 2002 with a new round of philanthropic funding and a commitment by support organizations to train new organizers. Organizing has since come to be considered a core component of professional community development practice and many CDCs have hired full-time staff organizers. These organizers mostly organize and service street clubs in CDC service areas. Notably, this participation was not being demanded, it was being given by private-sector philanthropies. This effort would solve a problem that had emerged with the rationalization of technocratic CDCs around the goal of physical redevelopment: how to support the claim that CDCs were legitimate representatives of the city’s neighborhoods? Because resources were being given in exchange for the symbolic capital necessary to legitimate the rule of political and growth-oriented elites, it became necessary to recreate participatory practices in the city’s CBOs. But while organizing street clubs can help solve that problem, it creates a new one: what is to prevent newly organized community residents from recreating the contentious Congresses that has helped precipitate the crisis of growth politics?

The key puzzle that CDCs had to resolve was how to be legitimate representatives of the community when they were organized to respond to the imagined community of future residents. Why would people participate? What would happen when they pursued their interests? New technologies of participation made this possible, the most important of these for CDCs is *consensus organizing*. Consensus organizing enables CDCs to offer neighborhood stakeholders voice and venues to construct community solidarity. But this comes with costs. As with all extra-governmental participatory *fora*, one cost is the marginalization of formal mechanisms of representation that can hold decision makers accountable. Moreover, the privileging of markets as the primary metric of well-being and the determinant of appropriate organizational action eliminated the organization as a buffer between community residents and the effects of markets. Finally, this mode of participation requires accepting normative standards of civility that trump the use of power or contention to secure goals. Compared to the unaccountable and generally unconnected nature of technocratic CDCs, this is an attractive way to have one's voice heard. However, it is probably also the case that such a tradeoff looks more attractive only after other modes of participating and developing community solidarity, such as those in the Congresses and clientelist CDCs, have been marginalized. This type of citizen participation leaves no room for the recreation of a neighborhood counterpublic.

Consensus organizing was developed by Michael Eichler as a direct competitor of Alinskyite community organizing.⁴⁴ Despite being eliminated in Cleveland, community organizing groups have grown nationally. Alinskyite community organizations are often recognized as legitimate voices of the community in many cities. Without having to demand recognition the need to protest outdoors has declined, but contention over issues has often simply moved indoors.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Eichler argues that "conflict organizing" worked in an era when there was a single, politically unsophisticated enemy that was easy to identify. Of course, many community organizers would argue that conflict is often still necessary because of power inequalities. For Eichler inequalities do not prevent finding the common ground necessary for consensus. The implication is that there are no Bull Connors or Richard Daleys anymore. Authority rests on different practices and logics that are not as exclusive. Because of this, technologies designed to disrupt older forms of authority are rendered impotent. Community organizing has not adapted to new modes of authority built on participation and, therefore, it is "tired" and "ineffective."

None of this is really true in the details. Community organizing has changed quite a bit and it is often criticized by scholars for being devoid of ideology, not overly ideological as Eichler portrays it.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, while missing the target, Eichler is on to something. Namely, the nature of urban authority has indeed changed. Alinsky's community organizing was a technology that was designed to deal with the authority of growth politics, premised as it was on political closure and economic mobility. In the

⁴⁴ Michael Eichler, "Organizing's Past, Present and Future," *Shelterforce*, 101 (1998).

⁴⁵ For an important analysis of the relationship between outdoor protest and indoor contention in contemporary U.S. cities, see Robert J. Sampson, Doug McAdam, Heather MacIndoe, and Simon Weffer-Elizondo, "Civil Society Reconsidered: The Durable Nature and Community Structure of Collective Action," *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 3 (2005): 673-714.

⁴⁶ While there are numerous analyses of the contemporary IAF, the best is still Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). For a critical perspective see Robert Fisher, *Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America* (New York: Twayne, 1994).

neoliberal era this mode of authority is inverted. Access and participation are expansive and relativized in a context of downward mobility and increasing socio-economic inequality, short-circuiting institutional critiques that emphasized inadequate democracy rather than socio-economic inequality. Consensus organizers, on the other hand, use “tactics of partnership and understanding” to build trust and arrive at mutually beneficial results. Rather than a tool for making decisions, consensus is sacralized while conflict is rendered profane.

Eichler’s technology has been attractive to community developers since the mid-1990s. The reason is clear: consensus organizing enables community developers to effectively challenge the claims of community organizers to be the authorized representatives of neighborhoods. While this was unnecessary in Cleveland where community organizing had been marginalized before consensus organizing emerged, it was an issue elsewhere. The Ford Foundation initially funded consensus organizing demonstration projects in support of community development efforts in Little Rock and Baton Rouge, strongholds of ACORN.⁴⁷ LISC, the Ford-funded community development financing organization, also funded Eichler’s consensus organizing center in San Diego and disseminated the technology around the country. In cities with a significant community organizing presence, consensus organizing serves as an alternative technology of participation that relativizes and competes with Alinskyite organizing.

The model is entirely appropriate in a field of CBOs that relies heavily on connections with banks, developers, the City, and the City Council to be effective. Technocratic community development in Cleveland has always distinguished itself from organizing by emphasizing the efficacy of partnerships rather than conflict. However, for a decade technocratic CDCs had ignored community residents; now they energetically organize them into street clubs. Organizing is now considered an essential component of CDC activity and an essential component of physical redevelopment. Funding in the field has been shifting away from the most efficient developers and to organizations that have thicker connections with neighborhoods.

The street clubs built by consensus organizers have limited authority in CDCs. They have little to do with land use decisions, the allocation of capital, or developing neighborhood plans. These essential questions continue to be the realm of the professional community developer. In fact, when CDC directors are asked about street clubs and what they do, they generally cite their effectiveness on quality of life issues (policing) and their input on design. When architectural plans are developed, street clubs are often asked for comment. Of course, community residents are not architects, so they are unlikely to produce an alternative. However, examples of residents making decisions about the height of yard fences, parking arrangements, and the depth of porch overhangs are not uncommon. The most widely celebrated success of consensus organizing is a case where organizing reduced racial tensions prompted by a large housing development designed to attract suburban buyers. This organizing relied on the old encounter group model of easing racial tensions rather than working together to address problems that affect everyone in the neighborhood. In this case, the organizing paved the way for physical redevelopment that was not popular among existing residents by subordinating

⁴⁷ Ross Gittell and Avis Vidal, *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998)

the interests and aspirations of neighborhood stakeholders to the normative expectation of civility.

These characteristics are reflected in the self-understanding of contemporary community organizers in Cleveland. They claim to be “consensus builders” who build “positive relationships” even though this means “not encouraging residents” who presumably might be more combative. When issues are difficult civility is deployed to avoid contention. One organizer encourages residents to “be mindful of who you’re addressing and how you address them because there are ways to get what you want without causing a fight.” After all, “we’re all partners.” It is now possible for residents to “be more inclusive” and have “residents sit down with businesses.” Among the accomplishments of consensus organizing celebrated in one CDC are “community building walks,” a “welcome wagon” program (that welcomes new residents to the neighborhood), and ideas for neighborhood improvements such as the installation of yard lights.

When asked why CDCs should be doing organizing at all, a CDC organizer says stakeholders are essential “for legitimacy.” “If you just plopped something in the middle of a neighborhood and nobody knows about it, it may be accepted, but it might not be.” This goes to the heart of the purpose of consensus organizing in Cleveland. If interests were grounded in social position and aligned with the CDC, the issue of “acceptance” would not come up. Either something would be opposed or accepted depending on how the project aligned with the interests of existing residents. The question arises when physical redevelopment is disconnected from community needs. How then can CDCs claim to be authoritative representatives of neighborhoods? “Welcome wagons” street clubs serve that purpose admirably. “Generally, when people are informed of situations they are able to discuss it more rationally and not be so tuned up and acting on their emotions.”

Consensus organizing is a technology of participation that enables CDCs to claim popular authority for the actions of expert developers even when developers fail to act in the interest of existing residents.⁴⁸ As such, they are also able to consecrate the activities of their funders, politicians and growth-oriented elites, as legitimately civic. In the absence of this participatory technology CDCs would be able to engage in physical redevelopment, but they would not be able to serve their primary role which is to underpin the legitimacy of the city’s governors.

As a participatory technology, consensus organizing is not intended to develop a common identity and interest among neighborhood residents, which might be the basis for making claims in public. Indeed, deliberation, contention, and accountability are rarely found in contemporary CDCs, even though the number of street clubs organized by them is growing and participation is increasingly important to funders. Rather, organizers manage street clubs to avoid contentious claims and to focus people on resources that are available in existing partnerships. Given the nature of CDC connections, this practically guarantees that the technocratic approach to neighborhood improvement gets reproduced in street clubs as a democratic choice rather than an imposition by experts.

In other words, consensus organizing relies on the expert management of participation itself. This is a significant shift. While once participation was opposed to technocracy, in consensus organizing and other new technologies of participation they

⁴⁸ Mary Pattillo observes a similar dynamic in Chicago, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

have been fused. This does not mean that all organizing is a mere charade. CDCs pay very close attention to street clubs and not merely for the purpose of keeping a lid on them. Instead, they are useful forums for venting concerns and gleaning insights that can enhance the management of development. In other words, this type of participation is not merely about securing authority, but also about capturing the benefits of local knowledge and further socializing citizens into collaborative practices—even when the issues are not being addressed in ways that benefit the participants.

Not surprisingly, these positive effects of participation are among the most widely celebrated in contemporary policy, though some urban scholars have observed similar technologies and recognize that the effect is to render a politics of community interest normatively out of bounds.⁴⁹ When situated against the overall history and trajectory of conflict over the meaning and practice of participation in Cleveland, this arrangement is less an achievement to be celebrated than the product of the imperatives of contemporary urban governance and the narrowing of organizational diversity among CBOs. Participation is now an input in technocratic decision making and a foundation for the authority of elites that are unresponsive to pressing issues like unemployment and foreclosure.

Conclusion

Confronted with a crisis in the 1970s, Cleveland's growth-oriented elites formed an organization, Cleveland Tomorrow, that would enable them to fund and implement their own agenda and social policy without the burden of democratic accountability. They created organizations, raised money, and set priorities for the city—among them, funding for neighborhood-based community development which helped establish the legitimacy of their claim to be acting in the civic interest. Thirty years later, the city was confronted with another crisis. Despite many policy interventions, funding initiatives, and premature celebrations of recovery, Cleveland was continuing to decline. In response, Cleveland's growth-oriented elites wanted to re-scale governance to the regional scale. Rather than work out of smoke-filled rooms, they funded a massive public deliberation effort on the question of regional strategy called "Voices for Choices." They hired a private contractor to provide "deliberation services" and held meetings across the region that had tens of thousands of participants. This did not resolve the question of rescaling, and that would not be its significance even if it did. What matters is the assumption, even by the city's most exclusive and insulated leaders, that public participation is a necessary component of establishing the legitimacy of the effort.

Cleveland's crisis of political authority in the 1970s changed the way the city's political and economic leaders viewed participation. Once something to be limited as much as possible, the Community Congresses and Dennis Kucinich altered the way political closure was understood in the city. The costs of closure to the legitimacy of public action had become too high. The issue was no longer to figure out whether or not participation should be tolerated, it was what type of participation would be most useful.

⁴⁹ For analyses that see a similar growth in the authority of consensus and civil deliberation, see Pattillo, *Black on the Block*; and Steven Gregory, *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place In an Urban Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). For celebratory views see Briggs, *Democracy as Problem Solving*; Gittell and Vidal, *Community Organizing*; Grogan and Proscio, *Comeback Cities*; Von Hoffman, *House by House*.

The Congresses had a very sophisticated technology of neighborhood participation, but it underpinned a neighborhood counterpublic and undermined elite authority. It was not usable as a foundation for elite authority. Nonetheless, the experimentation with participatory technologies began migrating out of protest movements and into elite foundations, bureaucratic agencies, strategic business organizations, and the ward operations of local politicians.

Events in Cleveland were merely one manifestation of a much broader institutional revalorization of participation and experimentation with participatory technologies. Nonetheless, it is not simply a representative case. Cleveland's crisis of political authority throws the issue into sharp relief. In Cleveland, growth, the basis of urban authority through much of the postwar period, could no longer legitimate the rule of political and economic elites. Of course, growth, or at least preventing decline, remained a key goal of policy that was widely shared, but it no longer functioned as a justification for exclusionary decision-making. Likewise with political authority. Simply being elected was no longer an adequate basis for representative authority, as Kucinich learned. The people would have to be heard before decisions could be made. The question was: how should they be heard. The potential of a counterpublic to disrupt elite authority was on display for everyone to see in Cleveland. Unlike in most American cities, institutional leaders across the city made the choice to crush rather than tolerate a neighborhood counterpublic. But this merely put the question in stark terms: what sort of participatory technology can elites use to ground their authority? Part of the answer was to rescale governance functions to the neighborhood, but this was inadequate when there was no community participating in them. Consensus organizing solves many of the dilemmas of participation as a tool for authority and, not surprisingly, it was not communities that renewed the push for participatory venues in CBOs, it was philanthropic funders.

Our understanding of participation does not come from the observation of its practical uses or the battles to define its meaning. We lament the decline of civic participation and assume that expanding participation can be a source of democratic renewal, social solidarity, and better decisions. Of course, some kinds of participation can do this, but other types do not do anything of the sort and, in fact, participation can simply reinforce hierarchies, discipline public behavior into non-controversial dialogue, and undermine social solidarity. Simply put, participation has no inherent content. Different participatory technologies produce different effects and our conceptual and analytical efforts should be directed at the question of what types of participation are desirable and what effects do we value? Of course, this point is not original. However, it becomes much more significant when we appreciate that the meaning and practice of participation are objects of active intervention not simply by movement activists and democrats but corporate managers, growth-oriented elites, bureaucrats, and politicians. Participation is no longer a threat to elites, it is a resource. To talk intelligently about participation today requires a confrontation with this fact.

Institutions are no longer based on limiting the public role in decision-making in exchange for the promise of affluence and economic mobility. This was the principle of growth politics in cities and it was also the exchange entailed in the creation of a bureaucratic welfare state. Economic openness and political closure. It is increasingly apparent that one of the most important changes in this neoliberal era is an inversion of

this dynamic. The popular voice is now broadly accepted as legitimate and valuable. At the same time, we have increasingly abandoned socio-economic equity and a politics of income as goals. Labor unions have been crushed, the social safety net has been dismantled, and the logic of the remuneration of labor is no longer based on income security. The question is: how is this possible alongside increased participation? In Cleveland it is apparent that part of gambit is that people will accept economic sacrifices when they are heard in the process of decision-making. But this is too simple. The other component is that participation is not organized to produce a collective position. Today's participatory technologies do not formulate a collective position that can enable "the people," or neighborhoods, or African-Americans to act as a political subject in the public sphere. Rather, participation works to fragment discussions into a plethora of distinct institutional settings and topically-focused *fora*. In those *fora*, responses are heard, they are often measured, and the variety of opinions demonstrates, above all else, that there is variety. This diffusion and proliferation of participatory practice relativizes the significance of all of it for decision making and no single perspective has the authority of "the people" behind it. The authority of "the people" has been acknowledged in institutional practice, but when combined with contemporary participatory technologies, the effect is to relativize and reduce the significance of that authority such that participation is little more than a step in the successful management of an issue, a box to check on the "To do" list of campaign managers and institutional leaders.

My goal in this paper has been to make this process visible in order to further the discussion of participation in contemporary politics and institutions. By treating participatory practices as technologies designed to produce particular effects rather than as a "thing" with predictable effects it is possible to see how participation has been transformed. Once essential for challenging urban political authority and constructing vibrant counterpublics, participation is now a foundation for that authority and a tool for fragmenting and relativizing oppositional views. This process was not automatic. It is the outcome of decades of struggle over the meaning, content, and practice of participation. Participation is not the only concept to have this trajectory. A similar analysis could be made of "community" and its role in urban political authority and, no doubt, there are others. Collectively, the practical fate of these concepts reveals the danger of treating them as stable and relatively transparent signifiers that can be unproblematically manipulated in theory and discourse. Instead, we must treat them as objects and stakes of political struggles before we can hope to stabilize their content for theoretical discussion.

Author Biography

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