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Workshop Theme 9: Community Activism and Civic Innovation

Marginalised or Enabled Voices? 'User Participation' in Policy and Practice

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen widespread debate around issues of participation. This has been the case at all tiers of government, within a wide range of user communities and organisations and within the academic world. Yet there remains a lack of clarity about many aspects of participation, including the ways in which it is conceptualised and operationalised. This includes key questions such as the purposes of participation – is it to improve governance, to improve service delivery or to improve social and human capital (National Community Forum, 2006) – as well as who is participation for, who participates, and what are the limits of participation?

This paper will explore these debates through a discussion of the theoretical literature and by examining several distinct examples of participation across social policy. It will thus set the current concern with user participation in the context of wider debates around democracy, governance and representation, as well as participation *per se*.

Reference
National Community Forum (2006) 'Removing the Barriers to Community Participation', NCF

Key Words: governance, participation, representation

Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Residents' Response to Neighbourhood Decline

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ABSTRACT

Within urban studies there are many articles on participation, and many articles on residential mobility. However, both options have not been combined, whereas policies clearly aim to influence both residential mobility and participation, especially in deprived neighbourhoods.

The governments pursue both a social mixing policy and a participation policy. This article uses Hirschman's construct of 'exit, voice and loyalty' to explain the reaction of residents to neighbourhood decline.

Will they leave, take action, or wait and do nothing? The primary aim is to generate insight into the conditions for voice (both individual and collective participation), as opposed to exit, as a response to perceived declining neighbourhood quality. Second, we want to gain insight into the impact of neighbourhood characteristics on the expressed behaviour. The answers to our questions are based on data from the Dutch city of Utrecht sample Nieuw Utrechts Peil 2004 [Utrecht Residents Monitor], with N=8,770 among over 270,000 residents. These data enable us to analyse the opinion of residents within different types of neighbourhoods.

Key Words: participation, residential mobility, 'Exit, voice and loyalty'

Participation in Community Development – a Challenge for Both Politicians and Inhabitants

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

A Healthy City focusing sustainable welfare development including social inclusion and urban governance has a potential for urban planning and public health work as well as for multidisciplinary research. Prerequisites for citizens to lead a healthy life in a healthy city are a multiple challenge that has to be tackled with a broad set of policy measures. The local government is an important agent for implementing healthy cities. Alliances with both private and voluntary actors are necessary. The civil society plays a key role for the community participation.

In the Partnership for Sustainable Welfare development four Swedish cities aims to increase the level of community participation in four selected neighbourhoods. Thus the local government ambition is in one way clear it is of great interest to investigate the prerequisites for local community participation.

The aim is to analyse different aspects of citizen participation such as possibilities and limitations, political responsiveness to citizen initiative and strategies used in the local arena to strengthen participation.

Methods

A qualitative study of policies and perspectives in local government and neighbourhoods in the four partnership cities has been undertaken. During 2005 twenty nine semi-structured interviews with politicians, civil-servants and local key persons were conducted.

Results

Increased participation in political issues is most likely to occur when it concerns the daily life of the individuals. Participation is also dependent on an improved dialogue between politicians and citizens during the pre-decision planning. It is of great importance to discuss democracy and rights and obligations for both politicians and inhabitants. Even tough the need for participation is evident the results shows a clear distinction between direct and representative democracy. A limitation for participation is the long distance between initiative and implementation.

Conclusions

An increased level of participation is a great methodological challenge where it might take some time for politicians and inhabitants to meet in a creative dialogue.

Key Words: community participation, local government, sustainable welfare development

Soft-Selling Gentrification?

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines what happens when many of the fine-sounding concepts and phrases used to promote regeneration are applied on the ground. Through the example of housing regeneration in Dundee, it looks at what concepts such as 'low demand' and 'mixed tenure' can really mean for those living in the target areas, and especially at the reality of 'community consultation'.

The empirical core of the paper will be based on participant-action-research carried out with tenants in two areas of Dundee where multi-storey housing is scheduled for demolition. As part of the demolition process the city council carried out rapid consultative ballots in the buildings concerned. Subsequently, housing activists and tenants carried out their own much more detailed survey, which demonstrated fundamental flaws in the official consultation - and has been almost totally ignored. This empirical work is combined with a critical analysis of council processes and documents (including a crucial housing finance report that was only released to us after appeal under the Freedom of Information legislation), and reports in the local media.

The paper will attempt to look not only at who really benefits from this type of development, but also at the reasons for and impact of the rhetoric that surrounds it. How has this affected public debate, including within the academy, and what are the implications for the democratic process?

This ongoing research is part of a wider comparative study of housing and neo-liberalism that grew out of the sessions on Housing in Crisis that I co-convened at last year's Institute of British Geographers' Conference.

Key Words: regeneration, housing, community consultation

Communities and Regeneration

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ABSTRACT

Many current Scottish Executive regeneration structures are not effective for social regeneration. SIMD 2006 shows continuing problems. A combination of local communities and different structures such as housing associations are more effective for social regeneration delivery. There is a need for a wider variety of regeneration delivery structures, including housing associations and local community development trusts.

2006 SIMD shows domains of Social Exclusion, Poor Health and Inequality hardly changing, especially in regeneration areas – evidence that current regeneration structures are not delivering improvements. Many indicators are the worst in UK and Europe.

The Executive has focused on Urban Regeneration Companies, many of whose Business Plan outputs are not very relevant for social deprivation. Reductions in EU, Big Lottery and other funding mean that levels of Pathfinder URC funding are not sustainable.

URC areas face some of worst deprivation problems in Scotland. URCs are costly and not good at involving communities. Many Executive initiatives, including "People and Place", do not take adequate account of growing community pressures. A new Communities Alliance - Local People Leading - seeks to extend community ownership of assets, giving communities more control and responsibility. Housing associations and community development trusts form part of a wider range of organisations as alternative delivery platforms for regeneration programmes.

Examples of current capacity of housing associations and of the scale of current URC programmes show that housing associations and similar organisations are as well placed to become URC or regeneration structures which the Executive might support.

Scotland is developing localised structures for greater community involvement. The Land Reform movement is creating Community Interest Companies and Development Trusts.

Housing associations have a better track record in involving local communities, ethnic minorities, funding with better gearing, using their own money and delivery of wider range of more relevant social outputs including the "ladder" to owner occupation. There is also doubt whether URC structures have a capacity to meet affordable housing needs. Housing associations' have a potential to meet full range of housing needs and aspirations and to provide ladder from social rent through shared equity to ownership.

Councils like Falkirk have a precedent with SIRRS (Special Initiatives for Residential Led Regeneration) for some villages, enabling genuine Community Led Regeneration.

Key Words: communities, regeneration, development

Public Deliberation, Community Capacity and Neighbourhood Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to explore how formal institutional settings for public deliberation affect the character and the quality of participation and the type of participants that actually join up. The central question examined in this paper is how the local community and its balance of power is affected when citizens are involved in public urban policy programmes, particularly area-based initiatives such as the New Deal for Communities in the UK, the German Soziale Stadt, and the Danish Kvarterloeft. The efficacy of area-based programmes addressing poverty alleviation, employment generation and social inclusion has been subject to some debate, but it is inevitable that there will be consequences with respect to participation, democracy and community politics, be it intended or unintended consequences.

The paper examines different models of formal institutional settings for public deliberations that were used in an area-based programme, which builds on the active participation of local actors. And it explores what types of citizens that actively join the work. What interests do they represent? What are the consequences of increased community participation? What becomes the role of the externally induced programme with respect to involvement, community networks and influence?

The analysis is based on data concerning the Danish area-based programme Kvarterloeft collected through qualitative interviews over a period of three years. Interviewees include residents, community-based activists, neighbourhood politicians, project managers and representatives of local government. A number of respondents were interviewed more than once in order to uncover shifts in their views as the programme progressed.

Results of the research show that the insertion of an area-based project affects the power balance of the local community in a variety of ways.

  Some of these appear to be highly intentional on the part of the local government administration, for example deliberately to weaken the power of strong, local opposition groups and alliances. Not surprisingly the socially excluded participate less than other groups, but other effects are much more difficult to predict. What works well in one context seems to trigger conflict and strife in other neighbourhoods. The attitude of the local public policy makers and the size of the financial support seem to be decisive in this respect.

Key Words: public deliberation, community capacity; urban politics

We Never said it was Easy….Lessons Learnt from Collaborative Research

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an on-going research project in the South of England that seeks to explore the nature of community involvement from the perspective of local residents. The research is the product of a partnership between local residents, a capacity building charity, a regeneration programme and two universities and the paper has been co-written by two of the partners, one from a university, the other a manager within the regeneration programme. It provides an innovative approach to the analysis of findings from a defined 'deprived' neighbourhood, located on the fringe of the "chic, cool city" of Brighton and Hove. Local people form the majority of the steering group which guides the research.

The aims of the work are:
- to provide a voice for residents involved in participating in different ways in their local community;
- to give students (UK and international) the opportunity for practical experience in their course; and
- to draw some lessons of relevance to future policy making.

We will argue that the issues faced in developing and implementing this research mirror, to a great extent, many of the challenges and opportunities related to community participation in local governance. We will use the story of this project, thus far, to reflect on this experience, the related theoretical frameworks and potential practical lessons for both local and national policy.

Themes emerging include: the recognised and sub-conscious influence of neighbourhood and organisational cultures; the conflict of externally set time-frames and financial accountability with citizens' capacity to participate at a pace suitable to them; the strengths and weaknesses inherent in personal relationships as they develop in partnerships; what can realistically be achieved, and what can potentially be challenged – and by whom? Cutting across all these themes are profound questions around diversity, inclusiveness and equality which call into question who participates, and how 'representative' individuals can be of their wider community – and indeed whether there is a responsibility to be 'representative' at all.

Coupled with the emerging evidence from the research itself, we will explore the above themes and unpick how such evidence and experience can be meaningfully used to engage with local policy makers and inform future ways of working, especially in the light of the recent Local Government White Paper. It will be argued that the project highlights opportunities to make better

use of existing structures (in organisations and communities) and to challenge assumptions, bureaucracy and traditional approaches.

Key Words: citizen involvement, participation, governance

Re-Territorializing Housing Governance: Transforming Scotland's Public Sector Housing Through 'Community Ownership'

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, UK public sector housing has increasingly been problematised, culminating in its perception as the 'tenure-of-last-resort' (Marsh 2004). To date, government solutions across the UK have centred on modernisation by transferring ownership of the housing from the public to the 'private' sector through housing stock transfer (DETR 2000; Scottish Office 1999). This not only enables the levering in of private investment to address a legacy of chronic under-investment, but more fundamentally has the potential to devolve ownership and management of the housing from local government to housing organisations located within, and governed by, the communities in which they are based. The Scottish Executive's national housing policy of 'community ownership' is the epitome of this governmental rationale par excellence (Scottish Office 1999; Audit Scotland 2006). Somewhat of a nebulous term, community ownership emphasises the 'people' dimensions of stock transfer by drawing attention to how housing governance is to be transformed through enhancing local autonomy and control, thereby allowing residents to have a real say in issues relating to their housing (Kintrea 2006).

Drawing upon doctoral research on the 2003 housing stock transfer in Glasgow, evidence suggests that whilst 'community ownership' is underpinned by discourses of tenant empowerment which seek to mobilise residents' local knowledge and latent citizenship and thereby establish community as the new territory of social housing governance, the realisation of these governmental ambitions have nonetheless been undermined by tensions and conflict. This manifests itself primarily in the disjuncture between aspirations for community empowerment and the reality on the ground, for somewhat paradoxically the fragmentation of social housing- through the break-up of large-scale municipal provision co-exists with continued political centralisation, both at the citywide and national level. As such, community ownership may enhance as opposed to reduce government control.

Key Words: social housing, governance, community empowerment

Changing Attitudes of Community Through the Design Charrette Process

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ABSTRACT

The traditional planning process in the UK and elsewhere takes too long to develop, are demanding on resources that are scarce and most times tend to be unrelated to the needs and demands of society. It segregates the plan making from the decision making process with the consultants planning, the politicians deciding and the community receiving without being integrated into the planning and decision making process.

The Scottish Planning system is undergoing radical changes as evidenced by the publication of the Planning Advice Note, PAN by the Scottish Executive in July 2006 with the aim of enabling Community Engagement that allow for openness and accountability in the decision making process. The Public Engagement is a process that is driven by the physical, social and economic systems research aimed at improving the process at the level of community through problem solving and of the city region through strategic planning.

There are several methods available to engage the community in large scale projects. The two well known ones are the Enquiry be Design and the Charrette approaches used in the UK and US respectively. This paper is an independent and rigorous analysis of the Charrette process as observed in the proposed Tornagrain Settlement in the Highlands area of Scotland. It attempts to gauge and analyse the attitudes, perceptions of the participants the Charrette as well as the mechanics and structure of the Charrette. The study analyzes the Charrette approach as a method future public engagement in and its effectiveness within the Scottish Planning System in view of PAN 2005. The analysis revealed that the Charrette as a method of engagement could be effective in changing attitudes of the community to the design process under certain conditions as discussed in the paper.

Key Words: inclusiveness, process, sustainability, community

Local Groups: Voice, Conflict, Knowledge Forms

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ABSTRACT

European cities are traditionally characterised by multi-faceted forms of community activism; among those, one widely diffused example are local groups and other organisations voicing their points of view about a number of urban issues, like the quality of local services, the quality of public spaces and the environment, urban safety or protesting against urban renewal and transformation projects. Of course the situation is highly differentiated across Europe, due to the different local democracy traditions, to the features of urban governance and the system of relationships between local institutions and civil society *vis à vis* planning issues. Nevertheless, such protests, as a rule, are considered an obstacle by policy makers and planners, because they tend to make local decision making processes more complex, and to extend them in terms of time, while literature in general tends to underline the positive effects of community activism in terms of the possibility to enhance local democracy and public debate and, accordingly, the overall quality of the decisions that are taken. While certainly being an important dimension of local public debate, local groups are normally poorly organised, they tend to be created ad hoc for single issues and to disperse again when the local struggle is ended. Their internal weakness is frequently an obstacle in making their voice heard and taken into account.

The paper aims at identifying possible ways in which such voices can become a resource for policy making and planning. There are a number of aspects that seem to play an important role in ensuring the possibility to use community activism as a resource for planning: the type of knowledge used by local groups, their capacity to go beyond Nimby approaches, their capacity of a strategic vision for the future of the city, even starting from very local issues. In particular, the combination of different knowledge forms in the strategies of local groups is a crucial resource, because it enables these actors to actively question the quality of existing projects in favour of more comprehensive approaches. At the same time, knowledge can legitimise the position and role of such groups in the face of the larger urban arena (local administration, private developers, etc.). The paper will thus examine different aspects impinging on empirical analysis in the Milan urban region in Northern Italy.

Key Words: community activism, urban governance, local conflicts

Misnomer or MacGuffin – Does Community Development Develop Community?

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ABSTRACT

Community development is a label that can be applied to an eclectic range of projects. Often it is described as uncritically positive, due in part to a romanticisation of the term. This is highlighted by the associated key terms such as capacity building and empowerment that are frequently used. Not all outcomes of community development are positive, however. In addition, some people get involved in projects simply to accumulate social capital rather than achieve a specific outcome.

By its nature community development is a process that involves a variety of stakeholders who may participate for a variety of reasons and, therefore, it could be argued that the term is on occasion actually a misnomer. Community development is not necessarily facilitated by an altruistic belief in the common good; it can also be shaped by self-interest, insularity or prejudice. Consequently, community development can sometimes in practice contribute to the fragmentation of communities. Conversely, a somewhat bittersweet alternative effect is that the specific purpose of projects can in reality become secondary to participation itself.

This paper examines the positive and negative impacts of the community development process and considers whether or not purpose can become secondary to participation, with reference to case studies.

Key Words: community development, social capital, participation

Community Activism or Policy Implementation? Resident to Resident Learning in Neighbourhood Governance

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ABSTRACT

Community activists accumulate a lot of knowledge of regeneration programmes and governance structures. While some have found a career path as paid workers in community or voluntary organizations, consultancy offers an innovative way of converting their cultural capital into wages by providing services rather than importing professional skills from outside of the neighbourhood.

This paper is based the evaluation of the Home Office / DCLG Guide Neighbourhood (GN) Programme, through which neighbourhood organizations in cities as diverse as London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leicester, Hull and Plymouth, that have been successful in engaging with regeneration were encouraged to become consultants on the basis of their experiential knowledge of how regeneration works in deprived neighbourhoods and to mentor residents in other neighbourhoods, which were less established in neighbourhood governance. This process was called 'resident to resident learning'.

The Guide Neighbourhood Programme was developed in a policy context in which various government departments have recognized the importance and efficacy of action taken by local residents in regenerating their own neighbourhoods. In particular, the GN Programme built on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Residents' Consultancy Pilots Initiative, which explored the extent to which residents' knowledge of their locality can be valuable and marketable to regeneration organizations, and their knowledge of regeneration valuable to residents in other neighbourhoods. The Treasury's Cross Cutting Review argued for an increased role for the Voluntary and Community Sector in delivering services, using their specialist knowledge of local clients to deliver holistic services, with a shift from grant funding towards service contracts. The Home Office also aimed to make sure that in each deprived neighbourhood there was a 'community anchor organization' to support and facilitate a wide range of (unfunded) community groups, which promote community cohesion and renewal of civil society.

In the paper, ideas drawn from policy implementation studies are used in the evaluation of the Guide Neighbourhood Programme and the role and sustainability of the resident to resident learning model. The evaluation, undertaken by a consortium of Birmingham University, the University of the West of England and a consultancy, COGS, followed an action research model, which means that the evaluation team plays a developmental role as well as a research role, including running workshops at networking meetings as well as assessing the impact of the Guide Neighbourhoods on their clients through a survey and interviews. This type of co-production of knowledge and skills requires a delicate balance of capacity building and analysis.

Key Words: implementation, learning, neighbourhood

New Participative Trends in Spanish Cities: Reality and Fashion

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ABSTRACT

Spanish Cities have implemented new participative tools during the last years, or strengthened the existing ones. The starting point of this process has been the important Law 57/2003, which has introduced new compulsory mechanisms in the main cities (social councils, neighbourhoods administrations, complaints and suggestions commissions), as well as general duties in this arena for all municipalities (duty of passing new regulation establishing mechanisms and procedures favouring citizens' participation, use of ICT to stimulate participation).

As a result of that, the citizens' participation has become a crucial part of the local policies and of the political marketing at the local level in Spain, independently of the political trend of every Local Government. Even in some important cities, the Citizens' Participation Department is directly depending of the Mayor's Cabinet and is a key part of the Mayor's policy.

Even the pluralist Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) has designed a strategy in order to strength the citizens' participation, implemented by more than 250 municipalities, and included the more important cities of the country. There is also an important effect of some mechanisms born in the context of the Portoalegre Forum, such as the participative budgeting at the neighbourhood level.

Citizens' participation has reached and important place in the local political discourse and in most of cases is a reality, but also there are cases of mere fashion and cleavages between words and reality.

This paper will expose the main aspects and real results of this Policy in the Spanish cities.

Key Words: citizens' participation, local democracy, governance

Engaged Communities: Creating Social Capital at Neighbourhood Level

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ABSTRACT

Active citizenship is seen as an antidote to the decline of community, an indication that despite some evidence to the contrary, people still engage with others in their neighbourhoods, providing friendship and social support, and when necessary acting collectively on behalf of the neighbourhood as a whole. The research which is documented in this paper, explores the nature of residents' and community associations as examples of the way in which groups of individuals organize at a local level, interact collectively with the State on environmental and planning issues, while also providing a forum for community development and neighbourhood identification. This research has been carried out on a sample of residents' associations and community groups in the Greater Dublin area. The paper situates this research within the wider academic debate regarding social capital in neighbourhoods, by exploring the nature of the social capital that residents' associations help to create in their neighbourhoods, both positive and negative.

The research documented in the paper demonstrates that residents' groups can often utilize social capital in exclusionary ways. In order to understand the manner in which these more negative elements of social capital are utilised, the paper argues that it is not enough to focus on residents' associations and their actions alone. What is required is an exploration of the manner in which social capital is shaped by the socio-economic context of the neighbourhood and by the wider political context. This wider context includes Government policy which espouses the development of greater active citizenship and the development of civil society, yet stymies this in other ways.

The paper highlights the lack of congruence between attempts at national level to foster active citizenship and the reality at neighbourhood level, where the most active citizens often feel that much of their activity is prompted by failures in the actions of State institutions and local authorities.

Key Words: social capital, active citizenship

Real-Life Expressions of Vital Citizenship: a Typology Informed by Present-Day Community Participation in Dutch City Neighbourhoods

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ABSTRACT

Recently, in the public debate city neighbourhoods are often referred to as highly 'uncivic' places; places that lack a fundament of social capital (Putnam, 2000) and are trapped in 'vicious circles' leading to neighbours not knowing each other, people feeling unsafe and uncomfortable in their homes, and expecting a quick fix from local government to solve their neighbourhood problems. In our paper we try to look past this somewhat gloomy image of city neighbourhoods and their residents. We focus on, and try to understand, new initiatives of (apparently) vital citizenship and community participation that emerge in Dutch city neighbourhoods. Initiatives that – in various ways – try to tackle neighbourhood problems; carried by active citizens who are able to balance between self-organisation and coproduction with other local (municipality) actors.

Vital citizenship is often considered a key element for a strong (local) democracy and for quality of life in urban societies (see Putnam, 1993; Van Gunsteren, 1998; Van den Brink, 2002; Hendriks & Musso, 2004). But still little is known about the expressions and drivers of vital citizenship in practice (Van Gunsteren, 1998; Denters & Van Heffen-Oude Vrielink, 2004). This calls for bottom-up empirical research, taking as its starting-point cases where vital citizenship appears to be developing, connecting them to case studies that have already been done. On the basis of more than one and a half year of empirical research in Dutch city neighbourhoods, we try to present a typology of present-day community participation in Dutch city neighbourhoods: "What forms of community participation can be distinguished?". We will go into essential characteristics of different expressions of vital citizenship, and their strengths and weaknesses in relation to local governance/democracy on the one hand and urban renewal on the other. In line with the notion of grounded-theory building, the line of reasoning in the paper will be case-driven, empirically-inductive and naturalistic: as close as possible to lived experience (Hendriks, 2003).

Research on citizenship is often quite abstract in a political-theory type of way – one would almost forget that citizenship is connected to people of flesh and blood. A notable exception is case-study research done in Denmark, by Bang and Sørensen (1998; 2001). They present the 'Everyday Maker' as a particular expression of active citizenship: an expression distilled from Danish practices; but relevant to other contexts as well, the authors suggest (Bang and Sørensen, 2001). In this paper, we will mirror the Everyday Maker as typified by Bang and Sørensen to observations of vital citizenship in a Dutch context. Is the notion of Everyday Makership adequate and precise enough to describe and understand cases of (apparently) vital citizenship in the Dutch cities? What does this all mean for the conceptualisation of 'vital citizenship'? The 'Everyday Maker Danish-

Style' is used as a sensitizing concept (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), a conceptual stepping-stone, for the exploration of concepts of vital citizenship 'Dutch style'.

Key Words: community participation, vital citizenship, urban renewal