

Chapter 6

Community Empowerment Processes in the Context of Community Planning

Introduction

Community planning has problematic scientific, social, and political contexts. Firstly, the scientific knowledge about social problems often lacks relevance to planning; secondly, society allocates less and less resources to social objectives; thirdly, the connection between the decision to allocate and its execution is most shaky. The planner is given a broad mandate, a budget and regulations, in the framework of which he activates a delicate, diversified, and complex process which involves personal skill, judgment, and discretion, communication and interpersonal commitment. Between these two levels of activity, one general and contextual and the other specific and detailed there is almost no connection, and thus community planning lacks a sufficiently stable legitimation. The community planner's employers can always claim (as has happened not infrequently) that they actually do not know what his real actions are. When the situation in the field becomes politically or economically awkward or difficult, the financing institution can renounce the solution which has been developed, and claim that the original intention was completely different (Elmore, 1983).

Even when community planning operates from below, with local people participating in all the decisions, in most of the cases the decision on the planning itself is still not a local one. Only a powerful community can make decisions on the allocation of professional community planning. In most cases the decision on the allocation of community planning to a particular locality is made outside the local context, and does not necessarily stem from considerations of local needs.

When the residents themselves are interested in community planning, there is no guarantee that they will be able to benefit from it. For example, the residents of a neighborhood listed for renewal wanted to employ an independent community planner because of their mistrust of the local planning process. This initiative was frustrated by means of organizational outflanking: the planner who had been chosen by the residents was asked by the local authority not to respond to the invitation. Since he was a free-lance professional, whose livelihood depended on local authorities, he acceded to the authority's request, and did not counsel the residents.

This example can help us understand that the connection between the theoretical basis of planning and the professional activity in the field is quite shaky. The field requires very different interventions to those learned about in the formal professional training frameworks. A consequence of this is a lack of professional self-confidence among some of the community planners, who instead of relying on their personal experience and on local knowledge as their principal sources of action, may in fact cling to routine and to common solutions that have already been tried in the past, generally without discernible success. Lack of professional confidence together with lack of social legitimation are not a suitable climate for originality and innovation. A community planner also cannot rely on the allocation of resources for his project, because the decisions that are made on the policy level, including the budget level, are not sensitive to their impact on the creation of social problems in the field.

In a situation of uncertainty – of uncertain values as well as economic and professional uncertainty – the planner's outcomes depend on his skills and on the product he creates in the planning arena. He himself depends on the local people for the latter. He expects them to devote time, to participate, to display commitment to the planning process, and solidarity among themselves. However, solidarity among people, which is the basis for building a community, is also influenced by the broader social context. Although the origin of racial, ethnic,

gender and class relations is general-social, not local, they find expression in the places where people live—in the residential neighborhoods themselves (Davis, 1991). Nonetheless, even people who are divided among themselves are in need of community, and at times the very existence of weak people depends on their ability to organize and rise above what divides them. Life demands organization for the purpose of improving personal security, assuring a roof over one's head, obtaining additional social services.

Inactivity may result in physical destruction of the environment and the people (Heskin, 1991, Erikson, 1993). In other words, survival is a strong motivation for creation of solidarity among people. In less acute situations, community planning assists in the creation of a community, a micro-society which is an alternative to the separating, isolating social context which emphasizes the supremacy of self-interest and competition as opposed to group solidarity and the sense of togetherness. Community planners and community leaders frequently find themselves proudly reminding people that their community is a source of different norms and a different morality than those of society at large.

Community planning may become an experiment in *decolonization*, in distancing people from the disempowering social influences in the context of which the empowerment process is taking place (Boyte, 1984; Friedmann, 1987).

Since society still disempowers people and reinforces powerlessness and marginality on a sweeping scale, it is important to foster local processes of social change. Such change has at least a theoretical chance of being realized due to the interrelations that exist between phenomenon and context. Although the phenomenon (community empowerment) is influenced by the context (a disempowering society), the context too is influenced by the phenomenon and consequently might change as well. The human activity and the social structure, as we remember, are parts of a single duality.

Stages in the Community Empowerment Process

The Discovery Stage

People discover that they are not alone in their situation and their needs. They discover the critical characteristic as a source of connection with others and not only as a source of suffering and isolation. The discovery stage has individual-personal aspects, but since it takes place in a group, it has a significance beyond the personal.

In the group, a consciousness of abilities and potentials that exist among people with a common critical characteristic awakens. The potential for everything that is yet to occur is already present in the discovery that *other people feel as I do and suffer as I do and I am not alone*. The discovery of the critical characteristic as a source of individual empowerment also operates as a catalyst of community empowerment.

Parents in a group for children with developmental disabilities described this discovery as a great sense of relief. Mothers who before joining the effort to set up an organization had been completely alone in their struggle to cope with the diagnosis and treatment of their child, with their feelings about themselves and the inadequate standard of services, discovered that there are other parents who think and feel as they do. This discovery strengthened them personally and at the same time increased their will to work together.

The Partnership-Creating Stage

People begin relating to the critical characteristic as a source of partnership between themselves and others. This is a new way of relating to people in a similar situation to your own: instead of feeling contempt for them and blaming them (and yourself) for the situation, you start seeing the other people who suffer from the same problems as partners.

Residents in the same street in a poor neighborhood used to feel contempt for one another and for the neighborhood.

People testified that when they were asked about where they lived they did not mention the name of the neighborhood, but only the name of the city, and hoped that their acquaintances at work, or in the army, would think that they lived in the more affluent nearby neighborhood. Their common approach to themselves and their neighbors was that nothing good could be expected to happen in their neighborhood. The participation of these people in the community planning program changed their attitude to the neighborhood and to themselves. When they began acting together, they also understood the damage done to them and to the neighborhood by their mutual isolation and alienation.

In the case above the partnership stage developed gradually, in the course of progress in the community empowerment and planning processes. The new consciousness is formed gradually too, and in the first stage it is very fragile, and not without regressions. Proofs of progress in the process, and real outcomes, reinforce this consciousness. People need proofs and reinforcements in order to feel and think differently about themselves. At the start of the process any difficulty can arouse a wave of mutual recriminations, despair and regression among the participants (Freire, 1970).

The Self-Definition Stage

People seek an authentic definition of their situation. This too is a stage of discovery. After the discovery of other people as partners in distress and as potential partners for change comes the stage of the discovery of the right rhetoric to describe the group and its situation. At the start of the process people use vague terms to describe their situation. They live with a disparity between their own feelings and the definitions that others give them. When people are called *underachievers* they cannot identify with this term, which does not express them as people, but it still exists in the background of their self-identity and casts its shadow upon it. The lack of ability to oppose negative social diagnoses is a symptom of inability to

cope socially with the stigma, and the result is a quiescence in the domain of the self that increasingly dims self-perception and social consciousness (Deegan, 1995).

People's new ability to express themselves and to define themselves decreases their dependence on experts on their situation. When we are less dependent on other people's definitions, we cease being dependent on them for other needs as well. This stage demonstrates the extent to which independence of consciousness is important for the creation of practical independence. For example, when people define their high blood pressure as a life-style problem and not as a disease, they still need a doctor for specific aspects of observation and medication, but they learn to control their blood pressure by means of group support, mutual learning of control methods and changes in life-style. Or, for example, when people perceive a school as an educational, social, and community service, they depend less on education experts for the solution of all of the problems at the school. Then the social knowledge of the students and their parents receives greater weight in the search for organizational solutions. Where a community perception of the place of the school in local life is lacking, many of the parents, students and residents in the area live with the sense that the school is not what it should be, but appeals for improvement of the situation are addressed only to education experts.

The Self-Representation Stage

People discover that they can represent themselves instead of being dependent on professionals and experts. The ability to represent yourself becomes reinforced as you acquire practical skills in this domain. The more the empowerment process unifies people, increases their self-confidence and sharpens their understanding of their situation, the more confident they feel about representing themselves.

The advantages of self-representation point to the need to transfer as many issues as possible in the community

planning process to the shared control of the planner and the local people. Advocacy is suitable only as preparation towards empowerment, when it is necessary to mobilize a minimum of resources to enable weak people to begin the process, because it contradicts one of the most basic rules of empowerment: never do for others what they are capable of doing for themselves. Hence, in every case it is important to make sure that people will learn to become their own advocates in a reasonable span of time (Zirpoli et al., 1989).

In the self-representation stage people discover their political ability, and develop self-management skills. A person who can speak for herself before others knows that with the help of appropriate skills, which can be acquired, she will be able to manage her affairs herself.

The *Urban Renewal Project* carried out in Israel in the eighties is an example of a community planning project with a centralized style. The form and style of self-representation were directed from above, and in most cases were not an outcome of local considerations. It is possible that for this reason representation was defined as a democratic right and not as a community task. Both the style and the manner of representation were included in directives that came from outside the neighborhoods. During the evaluation of the project it was found that only a few residents had participated actively in the self-representation frameworks. In most of the neighborhoods most of the residents felt that they were not represented on the neighborhood steering committees; likewise, many of the government representatives who sat on these committees did not see the residents who participated in the committees as representatives of the other residents (Churchman, 1990a). Self-representation, then, like the other stages before it, is realized essentially by means of local praxis processes: integrated learning and action. Policy from above, even when it is aimed at this goal, does not provide the appropriate tools for its realization, and does not enhance empowerment processes.

The Stage of Resistance to Existing Policy

The previous stages in the empowerment process, too, are accompanied by a certain level of resistance. As already mentioned in the discussion of individual empowerment, without a degree of resistance to an existing situation there is no leverage for a beginning of the empowerment process. People resist other people's definitions and learn to define themselves. They resist being represented by others and start representing themselves. At this stage the resistance is already based on experience, progress in achieving goals, and knowledge: the activists have learned what the existing policy is on their concerns, and what plans have been derived from this policy, and they reject these and in effect engage in planning by themselves. People either reject the existing policy as a whole if it does not suit them, or plan changes in particular programs only.

The struggle over the school was conducted around a rejection of a plan to close the school. The struggle was intense because of the pressure of time, and the threat to close the school that very year, and escalated because the students and the parents threatened to strike and shut down the school until an alternative solution was found. The struggle of the residents in Los Angeles against the plan to evict them from their homes (Heskin, 1991), and the struggle of the women in the Wentworth neighborhood in Chicago against the building of a sports stadium in the neighborhood (Feldman & Stall, 1994), also involved resistance to an external plan and a public struggle against it.

When community planning is involved in a process, there is a chance (which is not always actualized) that the resistance will be more organized and orderly in character and less chaotic and violent. This resistance does not begin with a traumatic discovery but with a methodical learning of policy. At times the undesirable policy is covert, and a

certain sophistication is required in order to learn it and to find ways to resist it effectively. For example, members of a community who discovered that the solutions of experts were not effective, and were liable to cause further environmental disasters (Couto, 1989). The rejection of the proposed solution in this case⁵ was accompanied by the astounding discovery that through their terrible experience, the residents of this small community had become national experts on technical solutions for the removal of coal waste tips.

In Chicago, the community coalition for public housing discovered that the city's policy of encouraging investors was being carried out at the expense of development budgets for their neighborhoods. They organized public resistance to the policy of unbalanced city planning that neglects the poor communities (CAHC—Chicago Affordable Housing Coalition, 1993).

The Stage of Presenting an Independent Alternative

At this stage, people who can represent themselves, and can resist a policy they don't agree with, present an alternative of their own to the existing proposals affecting their community. In this situation, people reach the conclusion that "Either you plan or they plan for you" (Boyte, 1984, p. 97).

Most communities do not reach the point of presenting a proposal of their own. In the Urban Renewal Project, for example, this stage was in effect blocked by the central authorities. Residents' representatives sat on the project's steering committee and participated in meetings of forums that

5 Aberfan is a mining town in Wales where a mound of coal waste crushed a school. 166 children and 40 adults were killed in the disaster. The story of the disaster and of the recovery that followed, including the struggle against the unsuitable solutions to ensure the safety of coal *tips* in the future, is a story of community empowerment (Couto, 1989).

were supposed to make decisions, but in fact they responded to plans which in most cases were presented to the activists for the first time at that meeting. They engaged in discussions and did not make decisions. As I see it, self-representation in most of the neighborhoods degenerated as a consequence of participation in these ineffective forums. Only in one neighborhood did the residents plan an alternative proposal of their own, but there too the local proposal was outflanked and frustrated by the project's central authorities. This struggle for the realization of an independent alternative was so exceptional that the evaluators of the project called this neighborhood the *shrew* (As in the Shakespearian *Taming the shrew*) (Alterman & Churchman, 1991).

In the struggle over the school, the group of students and parents did not propose an alternative of their own for how to run the school. The parents' committee continued responding as well as it could to existing proposals. This situation designates the limits of empowerment of this group. The level of organization and self-management necessary to design an alternative proposal was not achieved by the parents and students at the school and did not receive encouragement from outside agencies.

The creation of the community service of parents of children with disabilities is an example of a local alternative. The parents organized in order to provide for a need of their own which was receiving no public recognition or response. Their proposal met with some resistance, but since their initiative was the only one available at this time and place, and since the group organized for self-management of the plan, it succeeded in implementing it.

The Affordable Housing Coalition in Chicago prepared a proposal of its own for a balanced urban development that would also allocate money for development of housing in the neighborhoods. The organization lobbied among members of the city council in order to ensure that its proposal would obtain the necessary majority in the council. The organization's proposal was not the most desirable proposal

for the residents, but a compromise that was achieved in the course of negotiations with some of the councilors in order to gain their support. The preparation of the proposal required considerable organizational effort: legal assistance, academic assistance, planning of a lobbying campaign and monitoring of municipal legislation in order to promote the proposal and bring it to the voting stage (CAHC, 1993).

The Evaluation Stage

In this stage the people evaluate their achievements and rediscover the limits of their empowerment (Couto, 1989). The evaluation stage involves the community's thinking about its ability to achieve social change. The rediscovery of powerlessness now stems from a position of active consciousness and empowerment. In my view this is the climax of the empowerment process, and the most important sign of its success. When this stage of the empowerment process is not achieved, there is a danger that the process will deteriorate into a distorted consciousness. A community which is not conscious of the limits of its power and of its powerlessness in certain areas will have difficulties continuing to produce empowerment for its members. Experience teaches that an unrealistic perception of power endangers continued development of the process, while the community's consciousness of its own limits is a constructive factor for such development. People understand that there are goals they will not be able to achieve by themselves. These realizations lead to the setting up of roof-organizations, coalitions between communities, and contractual employment of experts to obtain assistance with technical matters.

In the cases that I investigated the groups did not arrive at this stage. The parents shifted back to the form of representation customary for school parents' committees. The students' council, too, operated in the usual school framework and separately from the parents' committee. The two groups ceased cooperating with one another, and ceased participating

in the management of the school. The parents' committee was still a very involved body committed to the school's continued existence, but it operated without any organized community basis. In my estimation, the sense of community that was created around the school could have mobilized activists to confront a crisis again. For example, the struggle over the school was renewed several years later, when a teacher was dismissed because of his different approach to the students and his criticism of the school's educational policy. Students struggled against his dismissal, and he himself exploited the dismissal to express his opinion on education and on social discrimination. In this case the specific struggle was of no avail. The teacher was dismissed, and became part of a group which founded a school in the spirit of alternative educational values.

The evaluation stage is the last, but not final stage in the circular process of social change that is characterized by rises and falls. We must distinguish between this stage, which may indicate the success of the empowerment process, and the completion of the community project itself, which was the program that the community planning produced, one of the outcomes of which was community empowerment. At times the processes are parallel, but it is possible that from this point on community planning and empowerment go different ways.

Some writers believe that success or failure of the plan itself are not critical to the success of empowerment. Experience in community work shows that successful outcomes are very important. Participation in community activity is a way of acquiring ability within a framework that can and does succeed. Success is an important dimension of learning, especially for people for whom failure has been a constant life experience. Participation in a project that has failed is like repeating a prior history of powerlessness and self-fulfilling prophecy. Hence, an important goal of empowering community planning has to be the development of a feasible plan with reasonable chances of success, in order to provide

the participants with a positive initial experience. Later on, after one success, people acquire organizational experience and self-confidence, and can also learn from failures, especially because of the sense of control of the situation and the confidence in their ability that they have already gained through the process.

Organizing and Organization: The Basis for the Community Empowerment Process

Community empowerment is a process of creating a community and of much greater control over its environment. The process demands organizational means in order to develop. The organization enables the people in the community to manage their lives by themselves (Simon, 1990). The effectiveness of this process is expressed in its ability to produce empowerment: on one level, to produce individual empowerment for the people active in it; on another level, to find social solutions for the community. A particularly strong and efficient community organization, such as COPS (Communities for Organized Public Services) in San Antonio, for example, can achieve a social change and also create a real cultural alternative. COPS provided community – including civic values and norms of behavior; constituted a source of identification and of social criticism and thinking; enabled community members to control their rage and direct it to a constructive route; and symbolized sustainability – hope for a better future for the next generation (Boyte, 1984).

While the traditional communities – the village, the tribe – have almost completely vanished, their place is being taken by a new unit of social integration—the organization. Whereas belonging to the traditional community was fate, membership in an organization is a free choice. The traditional community demanded the entire person, while the organization is a means for achieving personal goals (Drucker, 1995). Community empowerment is realized by means of organizations, and it may be identified and evaluated through them. The evaluation

of the extent to which the community planning process is actually succeeding to enhance empowerment processes is based on the level of independent organization the community planning enables in the course of its activity, and on the community organization's efficacy and degree of sophistication.

The importance of organizing, as a principal means of community empowerment, is made perceptible in the mechanism of organizational outflanking. The organization is a strategic creation. A community can struggle for control of its environment and its future only by the organizational means that it develops. A community organization can serve as an alternative to external bases of decision-making and of expertise, because it can involve community members in processes which develop the skills and knowledge necessary for self-management. Lessons learned from practice and theory indicate that community development and planning processes which also build a community organization achieve more stable solutions to social problems. The Urban Renewal Project did not set goals in the domain of organizing and organization. On the contrary, its centralized structure prevented the establishment of community organizations in the various neighborhoods, sabotaged independent decision making on the neighborhood level, and in a considerable number of the neighborhoods actually even prevented the creation of a community.

As already mentioned, the struggle to keep the school open was characterized by organizing, but what was set up was a weak organizational basis. The parent's committee did set up a non-profit association of its own, which enabled it to mobilize resources and produce plans independently, but this was an administrative arrangement more than a community organization. Because of its organizational weakness, the parents' committee actually had to wage repeated struggles to maintain its achievements. The struggle for the school's survival therefore continued from one year to the next. When the parents' committee and the students found out that the

new director who had been appointed had no intentions of allowing them to continue participating on the level they had become accustomed to, they had to initiate a public struggle to have her replaced. It is possible that a better based organization could have participated more actively in the management of the school, and would have prevented the appointment of an uncooperative headmistress.

An example of a different process is the way parents organized around the establishment of services for children with disabilities. At first they organized together in order to find a local solution for the families involved. The organization they set up engaged in mobilizing resources from the entire town in order to provide several missing services. This goal shaped the organizational form. This group attached special importance to the organizational structure, because it was conscious of the need to ensure the survival of the new services. Hence a lot of work was devoted to networking the new organization within the local and the national organizational system in order to ensure its future survival. A community planner accompanied the process of setting up the organization, but at the stage when the various services that the organization provided became established, she was already much less involved.

Because of the great differences in civic culture, governmental structure and the organization of the public services, it is almost impossible to make comparisons between the Israeli and the American societies. In the United States, due to a strong democratic tradition of participatory community, there exists a legitimation for creating community and for communitarian initiatives of various ideological persuasions (Delgado, 1986; Boyte, 1986; Simon, 1994; Walzer, 1995). In Israel, in the fifty years since the establishment of the State, the authorities and large public institutions have concentrated organizational and community functions of mutual help and social services in their own hands, though with ever decreasing success. This centralism is one of the reasons (though not the only one) for the fact that local organizing,

self-management and participation of residents have not yet taken their rightful place in public consciousness and in the social discourse in Israel.

Community Planning as Context for Empowerment of Populations with Special Needs

The aim of this discussion of issues connected with community planning and empowerment of two groups – minorities and women – is to stress once again the importance of the community in the lives of special population groups. I am not claiming that minorities and women are groups that are more deserving of community empowerment than any other population groups. The idea I am interested in reinforcing is that every population group experiences its empowerment process in a different and unique way, and requires a community definition of its own. Likewise, I wish to emphasize once more that community planning is a practice which requires a critical consciousness—in every planning of a social solution it is necessary to re-examine professional concepts and how well they fit the groups at the focus of the planning process.

Empowerment of Minorities

A minority is a group of people whose existence in the midst of other people is marked by being different and conspicuous. The definition of a minority on a basis of ethnic origin, race, or religious belief, is, for the purposes of the present discussion, not different in principle from the definition of a minority on the basis of physical or mental disability. Any given minority, because of its distinctive characteristics, faces dangers of stigma, prejudice, and marginality. At times minorities need assistance in order to survive in a hostile environment. Hence, everything that has been said so far about community empowerment and the need for organization is equally true for

minorities, but their distinctive needs must be acknowledged as well.

The community framework of a minority group has a special significance, for the more successful the minority is in its efforts to survive, the more distinctive in its character it becomes. Unlike the image of an open, partial and unstable community I adopted for the purpose of developing the concept of community in this book, a community created by a minority group tends to be relatively closed and permanent. This tendency stems from a combination of internal needs and external conditions: as a consequence of living in a deterministic reality of racism, rejection and economic exploitation, the minority community creates an alternative system of values that enables people to preserve a sense of self-worth and self-respect that are not possible outside the community (Liebow, 1967).

Minority communities tend to be relatively closed because the points of entry and exit into and out of them are rigidly defined, at times beyond any possibility of change: only someone who bears the minority's common critical characteristic may belong to the community. The community empowerment of minorities therefore creates a community within a community, in which community planning can operate on two levels, the macro and the micro. On the macro level, the community planning has to relate to the environment that surrounds the minority. A change is required in this environment in order to change discrimination, rejection, isolation, prejudice, and economic exploitation of the minority concerned. The planning approach to such environmental change is generally dubbed a radical approach (Friedmann, 1987; Rose & Black, 1985). On the micro level, the community planning has to encourage individual and community empowerment among the minority people, with the aim of creating solidarity and mutual help, to halt powerlessness and to encourage the creation of a community (Gutierrez et al., 1990, DeLois, 1998; Okazawa-Rey, 1998).

The planning runs into the tension that exists between, on the one hand, the minority's aspiration to preserve its own authenticity and distinctiveness, and to be in a supportive environment with people like themselves, and, on the other hand, the will of this minority to emerge from the isolation and separation imposed upon it because of its difference, and to become integrated with the majority it lives among.

The key to community empowerment of minorities lies in raising their consciousness of these legitimate and contradictory needs: on the one hand, support and acknowledgment of the group's difference and hence of its distinctive social and existential needs; on the other hand, support of the group's need to become integrated into the surrounding community. The individual empowerment of as many of the minority people as possible brings confidence and hope to the entire group, and also enriches its leadership potential and its capacities for self-management. An example of this is the development of organizations of disabled people, from being organizations *for* these people, that were administered by people who were not disabled, into organizations *of* these people, which provide mutual self-help. It is important to note that this change may give confidence and a sense of control to all those belonging to the minority, and not only to members of the organization or its activists (Renz-Beaulaurier, 1988; Hasler, 1993).

Empowering community planning broadens the minority's possibilities of choice, and adapts existing social solutions to its needs and its life-style. As I have said, the key to empowerment is acknowledgment of the group's difference and distinctiveness. What this acknowledgment calls for is community planning of diversified and non-stereotyped solutions for minorities. Here in particular, a policy of avoiding arrogance and patronizing – a characteristic of all empowering community planning – is imperative.

I make no pretension to claim that empowering community planning provides a perfect social solution for the empowerment of minorities. The disempowering processes

directed at minorities are massive. They can involve fear, hatred, prejudice and social exclusion that have been going on for generations, enclosing the minority within discriminatory laws, procedures, and policies. A minor local tool such as community planning may have a most limited effect from the outset when the powerlessness is an outcome of systematic discrimination and is anchored in laws which support the existing local social relations and culture. However, every empowerment process is a change in the status quo, and is thus important in itself.

Empowerment of Women

Community empowerment in community planning processes takes on a special meaning among women, because of the paradoxical manner of their participation in community activity. According to reports from all over the world, women constitute a majority among the activists in any community, and a minority among the leadership in the community (Reinharz, 1984; Andersen & Larsen, 1998)

We have to discuss the special way in which women are involved in the community, and the difference in the empowerment process of women, in contrast to men in the same social situation. Likewise, it is important to try to understand why women are active in all aspects of setting up a community, but tend to retreat and vacate the arena when there is a need for leadership and formal representation of the community.

Some writers claim that women who are active in a community do so out of their traditional roles: they

maintain structure and activity, obtain resources, and in general function in the community as an extension of their activities in the home and the family. For example, women were the majority in the process of setting up a community service for children with disabilities. Women were a majority among the tenants in the effort to cope with landlord abandonment of a low income neighborhood in New York (Leavitt & Saegert, 1988), and women were the activists in Wentworth, Chicago and struggled for the community's existence (Feldman & Stall, 1994). Some writers explain that activity in the community is indeed a process that empowers and advances women, but in part it represents a perpetuation of the traditional feminine roles. The women open community laundromats, day-care centers for children, playgrounds, babysitting services and the like, all of which are only an extension of their activities inside the home. The criticism implied here is that women are exploited in the community as well, and not only in the home, and do not progress in an equitable way while realizing their potential.

I would like to illuminate this subject in a different way. I claim that women⁶ experience individual and community empowerment from a better starting position than men in the same community, because they sense their social situation in a different, less destructive way than men do. Because of their gender, they have had to reconcile themselves with powerlessness and marginality since childhood, and for this reason they develop an alternative culture out of which they draw power (Liebow, 1967).

Because of their social roles, which are limited to the bounds of the home, women are not perceived, and do not perceive

6 The reference to *women* is a sweeping generalization. I am referring principally to the phenomenon of women who are active in a community, and the explanation therefore relates to these women. Of course, there are women in the same social situation and class who experience all these things differently.

themselves, as responsible for the social situation of the group to which they belong. Hence, they do not bear the same amount of guilt and do not experience personal and social failure in the paralyzing way that men with the same critical characteristic experience it. A woman who succeeds in filling her traditional roles is likely to draw self-confidence and a sense of self-efficacy from this. In this way an alternative feminine culture is created, which includes values of mature femininity, responsibility for the home and the family, and a sense of mastery. From this compensating starting point, women can identify with the social powerlessness of their group, and at the same time can be less harmed on the personal level (Andersen & Larsen, 1998). Hence, it is easier for them (than for the men in their environment) to overcome inner barriers, to make a commitment to community social action, and to fill socially valuable roles in this domain. Women who since their youth have held on to values of maturity, responsibility and independence, begin the community empowerment process from a higher point of individual empowerment relative to men. They derive pride and a sense of self-worth from the very fact of their skills and mastery in filling feminine roles, which is not dependent on economic success, on a level of formal education, or on social class. This protects them from the despair and marginality that men in the same situation feel, and makes them a catalyzing force and a stabilizing factor at the beginning of community empowerment processes.

Another important aspect of the difference presented here is who the women who turn to community social action are. My impression is that women do not *escape* to valuable roles in the community due to unwillingness or inability to fill their traditional roles in the home. On the contrary, the women active in community building are generally successful housewives and mothers. Poor women who do not successfully fill their traditional roles in the home belong to a very weak and deprived group which also lacks the strength to contribute to the community. It is important to understand

that in very poor families, a woman who does not function at a very high level is often the cause for a diagnosis of the entire family as a *multi-problem* one. In order to survive in conditions of poverty and deprivation a woman has to have organizational and economic talents, excellent physical fitness, and needs to excel in human relations in the exercise of influence, and in negotiating.

The modest status of the role of wife and mother is entirely disproportionate to the standard of personal skills that are required in order to function properly in this framework. For this reason, indeed, analogously to their status in the home, when the community process develops, most women abstain from overt leadership roles, especially when their organization enters the stage where more public representation and political visibility are required. At the beginning of the struggle against the closing of the school, the parents' committee was headed by a woman. When the parents' committee actively joined the struggle she was replaced by a man, and from that time on the leadership roles in the school parents' committee were taken by men. Among the students, there was a majority of girls, and after the struggle the students' council was headed by a girl (although during the struggle itself the leader was a boy). A similar phenomenon may be found in neighborhood committees and community organizations: many women generally participate in neighborhood activities itself, yet it is rare to find a woman at the head of a neighborhood committee (Churchman, 1985).

When leadership in an organization is evaluated not only for charisma or other superfluous reasons, but is rewarded for results, women can fill formal leadership roles more securely. A woman activist in San Antonio explained that in the COPS organization this is what made the difference: "Women have community ties. We knew that to make things happen in the community, you have to talk to people. It was a matter of tapping our networks" (Boyte, 1984).

Community planning frequently relies on the activity of women in networking and maintenance roles, and it turns out that when leadership roles are developed on the basis of tasks and not of representation, equal opportunity is given to development of leadership among both women and men.

Conflict and Community Appropriation

Are resistance and conflict an inseparable part of the empowerment process? As I see it, conflict, like all expressions of anger and resistance, is a sign of emergence from a state of powerlessness. It is important to remember that social powerlessness is characterized by social quiescence, and not by overt resistance and conflict.

Resistance to an existing situation is in many cases expressed in claims for space appropriation (Feldman & Stall, 1994). In the course of the struggle against the evacuation of a poor neighborhood in Los Angeles, people obtained ownership of their homes, either as individuals or through shares in cooperatives. Since the housing authorities in Los Angeles prevented the residents from managing the cooperatives by themselves, they were not given the opportunity to appropriate their community. This is an example of organizational outflanking that had a disempowering influence on the development of community among the members of the cooperatives. Heskin has described these processes of disempowerment and destruction of community as cycles of gaining and losing community (Heskin, 1991).

In the struggle against the closing of the school, teachers and other school employees noted that members of the school's parents' committee were "behaving as if they owned the school". They said this in a critical tone, which cast doubt on the parents' right to behave in this way. During the struggle, students and parents took control of the school's daily schedule: they determined a time-table for demonstrations and meetings outside the school during school hours. After

the struggle they felt as if they owned the school because it was they who had ensured its continued existence.

The issue of space appropriation not infrequently arose in the Urban Renewal Project. In one neighborhood the neighborhood committee decided to dismiss the project director, after the authorities had refused to dismiss him despite the residents' dissatisfaction with how he was doing his job. The dismissal notice drew harsh criticism from the project and town authorities, who saw it as a radical declaration of appropriation of the project by the neighborhood activists. Despite the criticism and the formal resistance of the authorities to this move, it was impossible to ignore the dismissal, and the project director was forced to resign. Apart from this step, which was in essence a political declaration, this neighborhood failed to create an organization efficient enough to realize the claim for space appropriation. The neighborhood committee absorbed the harsh criticism of their step, and did not make any more claims of executive responsibility in this project. The appropriation of space, then, is a conflict. It cannot be expected that such a powerful claim will not run into opposition on the part of authorities and institutions which perceive themselves as owners of the space or as rulers of the process.

Community appropriation is a process which originates in people's inner needs. The struggle for a community proves how artificial the separation between individual and community empowerment is. A successful outcome of such a claim is a commitment to take care of the environment. On the individual level, the struggle answers the need to feel at home in the world (Howard, 1993), a deep need that is repressed by processes of disempowerment and powerlessness. In the empowerment process it surfaces and demands realization. The sense of being betrayed by society and the man-made environment in disasters such as the coal slide in Aberfan, or the chemical pollution of an entire town in Love Canal (Couto, 1989; Levine, 1982), leaves the people dispossessed of any control in their world. The residents of Aberfan set

up group processes of empowerment in order to express and give meaning to their loss. The residents of Love Canal remained injured and uprooted. They had lost their homes and their basic sense of security at home, with no possibility of erecting a memorial for their loss. After the process, Lois Gibbs, the woman who headed the Love Canal residents organization, became chairperson of a federal organization of citizens against chemical pollution. Creating this organization was her way of structuring a social meaning from the disaster that had occurred in her life.

It is worth noticing that the struggle for ownership does not always involve the appropriation of a physical space. It may also be a claim of proprietorship of the definition of a problem. For example, in the town of Love Canal, people struggled for years to have their definition of the disaster that had occurred in their life accepted. The neighborhood had been built beside a chemical plant, which employed many of the town's residents, and caused the pollution of the entire town. During the years when chemicals seeped through the ground into the residents' homes they caused chronic and malignant diseases, children born with deformities, and miscarriages. The conflict between the state and federal health authorities and the residents of Love Canal arose on the background of the authorities' unwillingness to recognize a definition that would expose them to long-term responsibility and to immense damages suits, including precedents throughout the entire country. At its height, the struggle between the residents and the authorities and their experts centered on the definition of the problem and on knowledge about the problem (Levine, 1982).

When the conflict subsided, it turned out that in this case, as in other cases too, it was the residents, and not the experts appointed by the authorities, who possessed the most relevant and most precise knowledge about their problem. It is interesting that in the examples above, and in others as well, apart from the experts appointed by the authorities, yet another professional agency appeared, of great importance

to processes of community planning: external professional experts whose services are recruited by the community, at times on a voluntary basis. These experts may be, as the case may call for, community planners, psychologists, chemists, educators. These experts provide the community with knowledge about the problem, and reinforce the people's ability to deal with expert claims that are directed against them in the course of the conflict. These external consultants are important for giving the community confidence in their knowledge as opposed to the "authorized" knowledge they are struggling against. Their involvement in the process is sometimes subversive and may endanger their professional career in the future (Levine, 1982). In Chicago, the CAHC organization set up a formal partnership with the city's universities, which research disputed issues for them. In this way the organization strengthened its claim to appropriate the problem definition, and its ability to fight for its solution, and also neutralized the system of pressure and sanctions almost always activated against experts who participate in public struggles on the side of community organizations.

Conflict is an aspect of the empowerment process. The struggle for the community and the struggle for self-definition express a blocked need to act in the world. Conflict is not only an expression of anger but also a proof of a will to act and to create something new even in the face of opposition. The great danger lies not in conflict, but, on the contrary, in quiescence and indifference, which enable planners to create an environment that is foreign to and alienated from the people who live in it

Outcomes of Community Empowerment

Is it possible to define community empowerment outcomes that community planning is interested in? In general terms, a social change involving community activity and community organization and action that continue encouraging

empowerment even after the conclusion of the planning task is an important outcome of the planning.

The need to achieve a concrete outcome stems from the instability of community achievements that are based mainly on good will and activism. It not infrequently happens that an especially empowering leadership contents itself with widespread community activity and deliberately avoids investing in organization building. When such a leadership is replaced, an organizational vacuum may come about, where leadership that will *lose the community* may position itself (Heskin, 1991).

A community organization has to be stable, and needs to produce efficient empowerment. Efficiency is the ability to mobilize resources, to set up a structure suitable to the community's purposes, to achieve goals even in difficult conditions of organizational outflanking (Mann, 1986).

Another important outcome is the creation of a community culture. Distinctive values and rules of behavior are a basis for the community's existence. The community that was formed around COPS in San Antonio based itself on a set of values and norms that not only obligate the organization's leadership and major activists, but also reinforce the pride, the mutual responsibility, and the self-respect of the local residents. People in this community are conscious of the fact that the community norms they have adopted are an alternative to the discrimination and the injustice that characterize the society outside their community. They are aware of this contradiction and of the vulnerability of their situation, and hence see themselves as responsible, both personally and collectively, for safeguarding the organization's existence and values (Boyte, 1984; COPS., 1994).

In especially successful cases, the outcomes of the empowerment process also have an influence beyond the community itself. For example, over the years the town of Aberfan developed knowledge of its own on a national problem – safety treatment of coal waste *tips* – and in this way contributed to the quality of life in the entire region.

Likewise, this community decided to devote compensation money they had received from the government after the catastrophe to setting up a joint community center with a neighboring village that had been not been harmed, and in this way the compensation money was used to foster an additional community (Couto, 1989). In Israel, the successful struggle of several poor neighborhoods to be treated as partners in the decision making processes affecting their renewal led to the creation of rules for the participation of residents in the Urban Renewal Project throughout the country.

Senior functionaries in the local education authority testified that as a result of the struggle against closing the high school, they had changed their attitude towards the participation of parents and students in educational decision making, and had enlarged the resources for fostering participation of parents and students in the schools. After the struggle the education authorities also understood the importance of community planning as a suitable approach in their domain.

It is important to highlight the Foucaultian aspect of these achievements, one expression of which is greater attention on the part of the authorities. Constitutions allowing residents to participate in the renewal of their neighborhood, or parents and students to participate in the life of their school, also represent an attempt by the authorities to take control of a local field of resistance; institutionalization of the relations makes possible closer surveillance of phenomena which were relatively free of *the supervisory gaze* of the authorities. Since we are speaking about a successful organized struggle of ordinary citizens (some of them children, poor citizens, residents of low income neighborhood) against governmental authorities, it is worth taking into account the following interpretation as well. The institutionalization of local processes by the authorities always entails a potential for cooptation and domination. Beside the official recognition of an additional active factor in the power relations arena, there exists the desire to position it in such a way that it will not threaten the status quo.

Empowerment processes always involve a process and an outcome—a process of organizing and outcomes of organization. The organization is the main means of encouraging community empowerment, and also the major outcome of the process and the proof of its realization. However, the processes of organizing have to continue even after the setting up of one organization, efficient as it may be, because encouraging empowerment by means of the organization is a no less important outcome than the organization itself.

We may therefore identify several integrated outcomes of community planning and community empowerment: 1. The establishment of an empowering community organization; 2. Widespread community activity; 3. Active community consciousness; 4. The appropriation of space and responsibility for it 5. Improvement of the quality of life and the attitude to citizens in the society. These are different levels of outcomes, which indicate once more that empowerment is a process that occurs simultaneously on the levels of human agency and social structure. For community empowerment to become stable, it has to be preserved on the level of the individual consciousness of many members of the community, as well as to be enabled by the norms and values of the social structure. A social change is established by means of actions of individuals who produce new values through their everyday behavior and their discourse. The new social process becomes meaningful through the new community frameworks that enable people to make a difference and to reinforce social change.

Empowerment and Community Planning