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Framing Civic Engagement:
Citizen Groups in Toledo 1980s
And Non-Profits Hartford in 2004

SI 645

WK 6 OCT 26, 2009

Study of Citizen Group Initiated Activities

- Preliminary studies conducted in Madison, WI and Ann Arbor, MI. Final study: Toledo
Method: Interviews of citizen activists representing 50 organizations who attempted to influence community decisions in Toledo, Ohio.
Approach: Focus on problems that citizen groups are attempting to solve (what they are trying to do)—rather than information per se.
- Durrance, Joan C. *Armed for Action: Library Response to Citizen Information Needs*. New York: Neal-Schuman, 1984.

Citizen Group Activity Study

- Multiple approaches to citizen group identification:
 - Library community information file
 - Local government agency contacts
 - Local media contacts (however, denied access to Toledo Blade files)
 - Snow ball sample of citizen groups
- Eligibility for interviews depended on actual activity within the past year
- 50 actively engaged citizen groups were studied

Number of Groups By Type of Neighborhood

	Gentrifying Neighborhood Old West End	Ethnic Neighb East Toledo	Minority/ Low Income Neigh Dorr-SS	Lower density neighborhoods W.Tol;Heather- downs/Bev
Number of Citizen groups in study	7	11	10	11
Citizen group rate/100,000 population	24	12	11	9

How I Found Groups in Various Neighborhoods

	Gentrifying Neighborhood:	Ethnic Neigh	Low income Minority	Lower density Neighbs;
PL Comm Info File	45%	10%	0	35%
Local govt Agency	0	25%	15%	10%
Media	15%	45%	10%	0
Another Grp (Snow- ball sample)	40%	20%	75%	55%

Differences in Scope of Activity by Neighborhood Type

Focus	Gentrifying Neighborhood:	Ethnic blue CollarNeigh	Low income Minority	Lower density Neighbs;
Neighborhood	28%	80%	60%	9%
City-Wide	28%	10%	30%	55%
Larger than city	44%	10%	10%	36%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 6-1 Typical Issues/Problems & Policy Decisions c 1984

- Planning & Community Development
- Delivery of Government Services
- Education and Schools
- Environment and Pollution
- Crime & law enforcement
- Homes, buildings, neighborhoods
- Civil rights, conditions of citizens

See handout from: Armed for Action

Table 4-1 Conditions Precipitating Toledo Citizen Group Action

- Pending or recent governmental action
- Pending or recent business/industry Action
- Conditions in the community or a neighborhood
- Societal conditions

Proposed or Recent Governmental Action

- New bridge; freeway routing; arterial through quiet neighborhood
- Location of a proposed city service building
- City low-income housing plan
- Tax abatement action re major local corporation
- Tax law change affecting suburbs
- Down-zoning of a neighborhood

An Interview at Tony Packo's

- <http://www.tonypackos.com/history.php>

Proposed or Recent Business/Industry Action

- Redlining by banks
- Racial steering by realtors
- Proposed nuclear power plant
- Location of a proposed massage parlor
- Location of a major industrial facility
- Farm worker working conditions in area fields

Conditions in the community or a neighborhood

- Abandoned housing
- Crime in neighborhood
- Deteriorating neighborhood
- Serious truck/train congestion in neighborhood
- Misuse of open space in a neighborhood

Where Did Citizen Groups Turn for Info/Help

- Citizen and non-profit groups at the local, state and national level
- People affected by the problem; citizens
- Elected officials and local governing boards
- Governmental agencies
- Neighbors, friends, family
- Professionals (a variety, depending in part on problem)

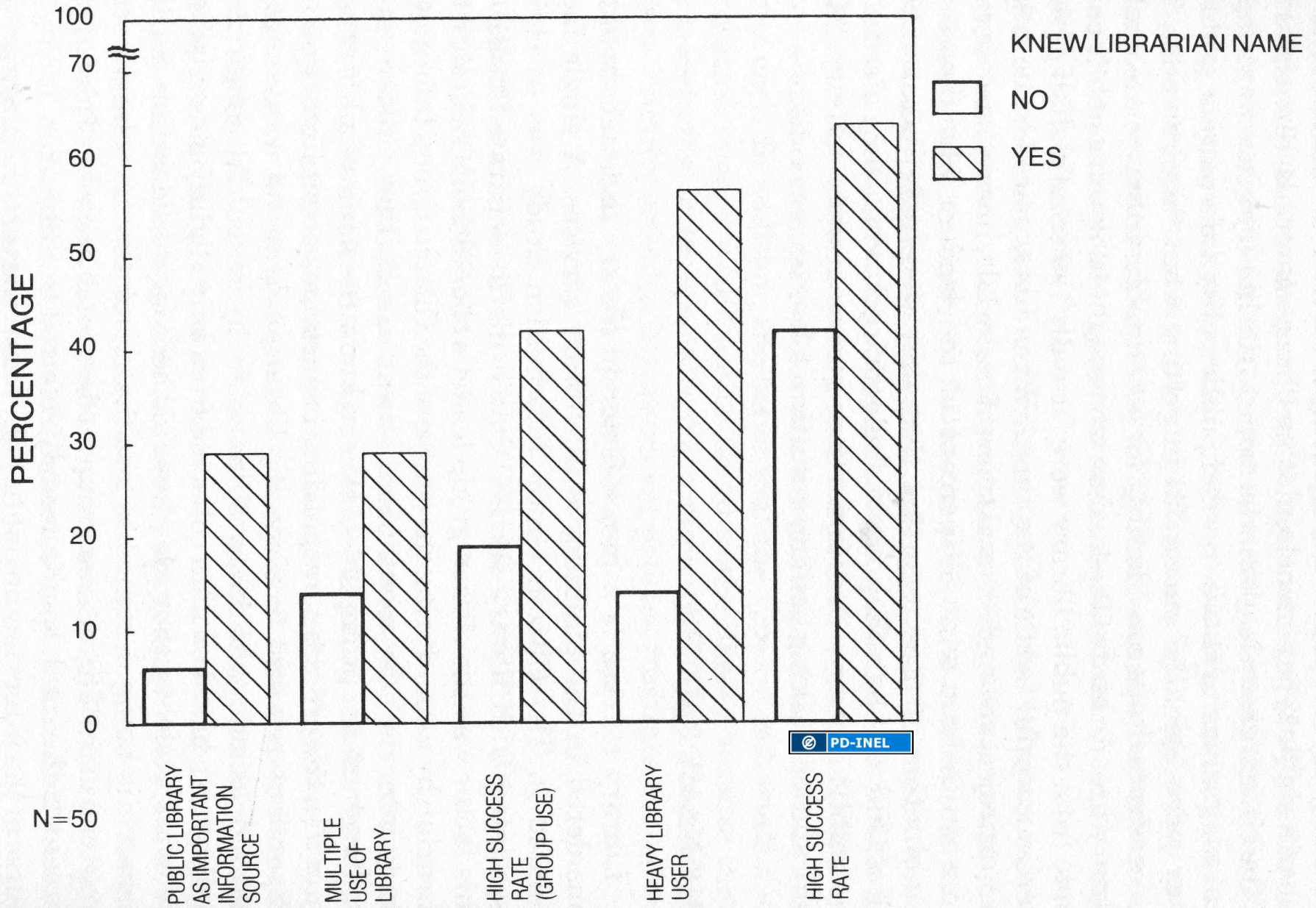
Table 6-2 Types of Information Needed by Citizen Groups

- Background knowledge/information
- Problem-solving information
- Knowledge of current conditions, government programs, legislation, proposals by bsns, etc
- Data for decision making including projections
- Comparative/evaluative data/information
- Political information based on experience of other groups/individuals—e.g., political savvy

Information Related Problems Encountered By Citizen Leaders

- Information scatter (82%)
- Not enough time to get what they needed (68%)
- Information needed not released by the agency (67%)
- Glut--too much stuff (can't use) (67%)
- Lack of access to needed information (66%)
- Unreliable information (60%)
- Availability of information uncertain (65%)
- Out of date information (58%)
- Not enough people power in organization (55%)
- Not sure where to go to get information (52%)
- Information we need doesn't seem to exist (35%)

Library Use Variables Compared by Name Factor



Role of Citizen Groups in Info Transfer

- See Fig 4-1 Armed for Action

Impact of This Study at the Time

- Interest outside of libraries (e.g., Harry Boyte)
- Interest within LIS researcher community—looking at the information needs (and actions) of real people—citizen leaders.
- Most librarians didn't understand the purpose of this study

Non-Profit Organizations
In Hartford
2004

Study Background

Funding

- One of eight field studies conducted as part of IMLS grant between 2002-2005. This study was practice-based.

Focus of IMLS grant

- Develop approaches for librarians to use in anticipating the information behavior of people in community settings

Goal of this particular study

- Determine how information professionals can better anticipate the needs of local citizen groups and non-profit organizations

Challenge for researchers: gaining entry

Study setting

Hartford, Connecticut

- Community faced with a range of challenges
 - Poverty, crime, blight, etc.
 - <http://www.hartfordinfo.org/>
- Strong infrastructure of resident-led community groups and nonprofits addressing city's most pressing issues
- Public library recognized for its community focused work <http://www.hplct.org/>

Methodology

Qualitative methods

- Interviews, focus groups, observations, document analysis

Data collection—two foci

- Examination of library's approaches to interacting with the community and anticipating and responding to its needs
- Examination of problem solving activities & information behavior of Hartford's local civic organizations
 - Organizations active in community problem-solving
 - Identified by library staff PLUS snowball sampling

Community Groups in Study

Neighborhood organizations (PSCs & NRZs)

- Problem-solving & neighborhood revitalization zone groups (17 officially designated neighborhoods)
- <http://www.hartfordinfo.org/>
- Primarily citizens, business owners
- Issues related to quality of life, economic development

Problem or issue-based organizations

- Focused a particular issue rather than a geographically defined neighborhood

Meta-organizing groups

- Organize other groups
- Convene groups and community activists
- Disseminate community information and liaison with community agencies



What we found...

PROBLEMS Faced by Hartford Groups

- **Similar to Problems** faced by Jane Jacobs and her neighbors and by groups in Toledo
- **Problems in response to actions or proposed actions** (or lack of action) by governmental agencies, by business or industry, and/or conditions within the community.

Problem-centered information intermediaries

- Organizations have *constructed* an important information role
- **Primary function** and mission emanates from problem focus—engage citizens; solve or reduce the problem
- **Secondary function** is to provide and facilitate the use of relevant information

Information-focused strategies

- Identified a number of strategies used by these problem-centered information intermediaries
 - Collecting
 - Sharing and referring
 - Distilling
 - Tailoring
 - Interpreting
 - Preparing for a specific use
 - Disseminating

Collecting & share information

- Formally and informally collect and share information
 - within their own groups
 - across network of community organizations
- Groups seek information from others

“One of the things I have found in Hartford is that people are very likely to call someone else to get information...”

“You call an information guru, someone you know personally. Information gathering is based on personal relationships.”

Distilling, tailoring, interpreting

- Tailoring to constituents' needs
- Distilling
- Interpreting
- Vetting

*“People we deal with are not especially literate...
And it [information] has to come in a way that's
translated into a usable system or format.”*

*“We have to take very complicated issues like healthcare and
translate it into ways people can understand. Not
more info or data, but a way people can understand it.
It's very challenging...”*

*“You can't show people charts and diagrams. It's not usable.
You don't want to, in a meeting, overwhelm people with
something that will make them feel stupid and not want to
come back.”*

Preparing for use and disseminating

- Prepare information for targeted use
 - e.g., meeting preparation packets including community reports and background information on discussion topics; handbook on how to do property research
- Disseminate information
 - meetings, workshops and seminars
 - mail out relevant, timely information on a regular basis

“We give NRZs information. We look for information that would affect NRZs. We have liaisons and partnerships with different organizations in the city-tourism bureau, Christmas in April committee, and [we serve as] liaisons to those other groups.

We have monthly meetings to report on programs, projects of interest, and things happening.”

A shared problem-centered approach

- Local organizations play a crucial part of community's information environment
- However, they may not recognize this as an information function
- We will discuss in a couple of weeks HPL model; librarians work side by side with these orgs & within the framework of these nonprofits;
- HPL librarians
 - Collect community information;
 - Interact with community groups
 - Attend meetings; Often host meetings
 - Help frame the problem and possible solutions
 - Identify problem-based needs at the point of need;
 - Serve as information intermediaries

Final Paper/Project/Case Studies