

Neighborhood Planning Organizations: Perspectives and Choices

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Reductions in government expenditures for human services have worsened conditions in low-income urban neighborhoods at a time when needs are increasing. Despite these conditions, some neighborhood planning organizations have increased in scope and capacity. This article discusses the development, activities, and accomplishments of such organizations and raises questions and choices for practice. The author concludes that, despite accomplishments of neighborhood planning organizations, they alone cannot be expected to save urban areas from decline, for this requires national policy and intervention in the larger context in which planning operates.

Many large cities and urban neighborhoods have declined in population and urban activity in recent years. From 1970 to 1980, for example, all but one of the larger cities of the Midwest lost population, including St. Louis (down 27.2%), Cleveland (down 23.6%), Detroit (down 20.5%), Dayton (down 16.2%), Cincinnati (down 15%), Minneapolis-St. Paul (down 13.9%), Kansas City (down 11.7%), Milwaukee (down 11.3%), and Chicago (down 10.8%). Economic recession, changes in industry and em-

ployment, and reductions in federal and state expenditures have contributed to this decline and have caused problems related to housing, health care, and other human services (Checkoway & Patton, 1985).

Low-income neighborhoods face particular problems. Studies document the pattern of private institutions disinvesting from poor neighborhoods in favor of other locations and public agencies disinvesting by reducing the levels of services provided. This often results in a downgrading cycle of deteriorating infrastructure, inadequate services, and withdrawal of people and institutions. Those who remain may

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face worsening conditions, feel alienated from decisions affecting their neighborhoods, or retreat from participation in the community.

Reductions in federal and state expenditures have exacerbated conditions in low-income neighborhoods, affecting many people who had depended on service programs because they perceived few other possibilities (Palmer & Sawhill, 1982; Perlmutter, 1984). State budget deficits and tax revenue shortages have caused cuts in services for the poor, members of minority groups, and other disadvantaged people at a time when their needs are increasing. Soup kitchens, housing shelters, and health clinics report increased requests for emergency services.

Despite these conditions, residents of some low-income neighborhoods have organized to overcome decline. Their organizations have built infrastructure, delivered services, and contributed to development, showing that citizens can take initiative and marshal resources to help themselves. Such organizations may not be typical in the human services field, but they provide important lessons nonetheless.

PERSPECTIVES ON PRACTICE

Neighborhood planning is a process through which people develop plans, programs, or services at the neighborhood level. Practitioners work in either public or private settings and in several substantive service or functional fields. They mix and phase methods and skills to develop community-based resources and to activate citizens to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Neighborhood planning is not a form of mandated participation in plans originated elsewhere or of outside advocacy for local groups, but a process

through which people strengthen themselves as they strengthen their communities.¹

Early history

Neighborhood planning has increased in scope and quality over time. Early twentieth century practitioners applied its rudiments to progressive movements intended to improve neighborhoods and promote reform. For example, city planners collaborated with health and housing reformers to work against overcrowded tenements and unsanitary conditions in industrial centers. Settlement workers studied social conditions and established service centers in poor neighborhoods. They lobbied for legislation, advised public officials, and participated in politics from neighborhood to nation. They advocated voluntary action and community self-help in addition to public responsibility and government programs (Davis, 1967; Krueckeberg, 1983; Scott, 1971).

Social movements and political turbulence contributed to subsequent practice. In the 1950s and 1960s, low-income blacks in urban ghetto areas protested against the bulldozers of urban renewal, the routes of proposed expressways, and the intrusion of large institutions into nearby areas. City residents sought participation in agency decisions or control over services at the community level. Congress responded with legislation emphasizing economic opportunity, community action, urban development, and neighborhood services. For example, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 authorized community-action agencies to develop antipoverty programs in concert with neighborhood health centers, community development corporations, and others providing services so as to concentrate resources on persons in need. These

protests and programs produced uneven results, but gave some residents a start at organizing (Altshuler, 1970; Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Hartman, 1975; Fellman, 1973; Katznelson, 1981; Lamb, 1975; Mollenkopf, 1975; Piven & Cloward, 1977).

In the 1970s, working-class whites in older urban neighborhoods took lessons from their black counterparts and organized to deal with private and public institutions whose practices contributed to decline. In Illinois, for example, neighborhood groups pressured legislators to enact an antiredlining law to prohibit institutions from denying property loans to those in particular geographic locations; this stimulated similar actions in other states (Boyte, 1981; Goering, 1980; Naparstek & Cincotta, 1976; Perlman, 1978; Rosenbloom, 1979). Other groups employed innovative methods to bring Community Development Block Grants into their neighborhoods: In Flint a group received staff support to organize in target areas, in Des Moines a group developed community centers to meet and formulate plans, and in Buffalo a group gained control of the allocation of federal funds (Dommell & Associates, 1982; Johnson, 1978).

Neighborhood groups increased in number and capacity. By 1980, the National Commission on Neighborhoods had identified more than 8,000 neighborhood organizations in the United States; the federal Office of Neighborhoods, Voluntary Associations, and Consumer Affairs had identified nearly 15,000 citizen groups concerned with rural and urban problems; and the Office of Consumer Affairs had presented case accounts of approximately 100 leading local groups working to activate citizens and meet local needs. The Urban Institute has documented an increase in nonprofit organiza-

tions, many of which operate at the neighborhood level (Palmer & Sawhill, 1984; Salamon, 1984). Pollsters find that a significant number of people either belong to a neighborhood group or claim they would join in defense of their community (Aramony, 1982; Kramer, 1981; O'Connell, 1983).

Impetus for organization

Some neighborhood organizations originate in reaction to crises. For example, the Shadyside Action Coalition of Pittsburgh was formed to respond to slum landlords and threats to public open space, the Birmingham Coalition of Toledo to oppose a planned highway that would have cut through the neighborhood, and the Downtown Neighborhoods Association of Toledo to protest commercial, apartment, and institutional encroachment on residential areas.

Other organizations originate when residents decide to develop their neighborhood. For example, the Upper Albany Community Organization of Hartford formed to improve housing and social services, the Union Sarah Economic Development Corporation of St. Louis sought to expand employment and revitalize commercial areas, and the Northside Community Council of Cincinnati worked to reallocate resources through participation in city planning. Initial goals vary from one area to another, and may include aims "to develop an active, integrated, desirable neighborhood where residents live in harmony and with pride," or "to assure that the community has the capacity to initiate development on as independent a basis as possible," or "to strive for justice and accountability in all areas pertaining to a healthy wholesome environment" (National Commission on Neighborhoods, 1979).

Organization activities

Neighborhood planning organizations encompass a wide range of activities. Some groups specialize in performing substantive services or functions. In California, for example, the Chinese Community Housing Corporation rehabilitates residential hotels into affordable housing for low-income families, the Savo Island Cooperative Homes group provides limited equity housing for moderate income people, the Peralta Service Corporation creates businesses that employ welfare recipients, the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union includes a member-owned financial cooperative that invests local funds in local development, a Cabrillo Village group develops small business for farm workers and teaches them employment skills, On Lok Senior Health Services offers food and medical care to elderly people in low-income neighborhoods, and the Toyabe Indian Health Project teaches health care to Native Americans (Office of Appropriate Technology, 1981).

Many neighborhood planning organizations reach a stage at which they operate several services. In Baltimore, for example, residents organized to stop the building of an expressway, block a library closing, and save a residential area from outside encroachment. They formed the Southeast Community Organization (SECO), a coalition of block clubs, civic associations, and senior citizen and church groups. SECO originated in social action, but it later created a community development corporation, a commercial revitalization program, a land bank, clothing design and metal craft companies, a neighborhood supermarket, and primary health care services. A human services task force established neighborhood family services, youth counseling programs, baby-sitting cooperatives, health educa-

tion workshops, information and referral directories, a community provider council, and a natural helper network (Cunningham & Kotler, 1983; Naparstek, Biegel, & Spiro, 1982).

In Chicago, residents formed a temporary organization to protest university expansion, slum landlords and merchants, and segregated schools. They convened a congress of more than 1200 people representing 97 community groups to form The Woodlawn Organization (TWO). TWO formulated plans in reaction to official city plans for the area, proposed an educational park of four schools on a common campus, worked to eliminate a skid row on a main local thoroughfare, and developed an experimental school project, using the neighborhood as an educational research center. Since then, TWO has produced low-income housing developments, a comprehensive mental health care facility, a supermarket, security patrols, a theatre, a management corporation, and a community development corporation to coordinate overall strategy for the neighborhood (Brazier, 1969; Fish, 1973; Lancourt, 1979).

In St. Louis, residents responded to a federal antipoverty program that misrepresented the community and to a proposed urban renewal project that threatened massive neighborhood deterioration. They formed Jeff-Vander-Lou (JVL), an independent organization emphasizing housing, community development, education, social services, and other objectives. JVL adopted bylaws that provided for community representation, drafted proposals, enlisted support, and began work on its first project. Since then, JVL has built and rehabilitated housing; delivered social services; attracted new industry and jobs; and formulated plans to boost the local economy. They have operated a senior citizens program providing meals, transportation,

and recreation for elderly residents; run a child-care food and nutrition program; sponsored youth training and summer vocational activities; and disseminated human-services information through neighborhood newspapers and radio stations. They have increased residents' awareness of neighborhood issues, developed leadership, and produced results (Checkoway, 1985).

In San Antonio, residents organized to improve services in ethnic minority neighborhoods. A Mexican-American practitioner met with parish priests and lay leaders, conducted training sessions for residents, and organized housewives and homeowners to improve streets for children and property. Today, Communities Organized for Public Services (COPS) represents thirty parishes and works to demolish substandard housing, construct new housing, and manage growth and development. COPS has also registered voters, elected representatives, and become a political force in city and state politics (National Commission on Neighborhoods, 1979; Skerry, 1984).

These are exceptional organizations, but they are not alone in the field. For example, Inguilinos Boricuas en Action in Boston has rehabilitated houses formerly slated for demolition, developed housing for elderly residents, and completed a community cultural plaza. The Tri City Citizens Union for Progress of Newark has rehabilitated housing, operated adult employment training services, established day care and community health programs, and provided outreach counseling and referral services. Co-op Services of Detroit operates optical and dental facilities, a construction company, and a credit union for members in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. In Chicago, Voice of the People has bought apartments from absentee landlords, renovated them, and rented

them to low-income residents, and has helped tenants organize and manage buildings. The Chinatown Neighborhood Improvement group of San Francisco has converted a YMCA residence to housing for the aged, established a nonprofit housing corporation, and made improvements in the business district. From these examples, one can see that no single substantive service or functional field typifies all approaches to practice.

Benefits to residents

Neighborhood planning can provide therapeutic benefits for individuals. Studies suggest that many residents of low-income neighborhoods show symptoms of alienation and frustration, which affect their ability or willingness to participate in institutions and decisions that affect them. Evidence indicates, however, that participation in neighborhood organizations can increase the participants' feelings of confidence, efficacy, and power; increase identification with community, social interaction among residents, and motivation for mutual aid and helping behavior; and contribute to organizational growth, leadership development, and capacity for solving problems. This is not to suggest that such benefits are evenly shared by individuals in neighborhoods, or that participation in neighborhood organizations is more therapeutic than increased income, education, and occupational status. But participation can enlarge residents' opportunities and expand their skills (Ahlbrant & Cunningham, 1979; Berger & Newhaus, 1980; Cole, 1981; Hallman, 1984; Schoenburg & Rosenbaum, 1980; Warren, 1981).

Neighborhood planning can also contribute to community development. It may involve residents in identifying problems and issues, formulating goals and objec-

tives, collecting and analyzing data, and developing written plans in the words of those who live in a neighborhood and know it best. It may initiate informal discussions and personal contact among key actors able to move from strategy to action and to generate one project from another. It also may require efforts to sweep the streets, knock on doors, pack a public hearing, and confront the powerholders. Neighborhood planning is not a one-time process to produce a singular plan, but a continuous and multifaceted process to develop capacity (Cassidy, 1980; Henderson & Thomas, 1980).

Neighborhood planning can also contribute to political development. Cohen (1979) describes a five-stage model in which neighborhood planning develops countervailing power. At first the neighborhood is unorganized and fragmented; primary institutions then bring individuals together to share common concerns and accomplish limited objectives. Following this, citizens organize to deal with housing and other issues. Next, the organization recruits members, builds support, and becomes a political entity of substance and power. Finally, the organization comes to represent the entire neighborhood and delivers programs affecting all aspects of social and political life.

Politicization through planning can take various forms. In St. Louis, residents incorporated as an independent organization, determined their boundaries, and gave themselves a name. They adopted bylaws that provided for participation, representation, and leadership in the new organization. All residents could participate in meetings and elect representatives to a governing body that set policy and elected officers. In adopting articles of incorporation, residents recognized their rights to form an organization, develop a governing structure and representative

council, and make decisions in their own behalf (Checkoway, 1985).

In Chicago, residents created a ward assembly to involve delegates from precincts and organizations in governing the neighborhood and directing their alderman in his votes. Delegates represented neighborhood and directing their alderman in voting. Delegates represented neighborhood interests, drafted a constitution, and established governmental institutions. They established a community zoning board, traffic review commission, and ward office to provide constituent services and hold city officials accountable. In doing this, the assembly operated from a tradition of neighborhoods as local foundations of politics and governance (Committee for Economic Development, 1966, 1970; Kotler, 1969; Morris & Hess, 1975; Simpson, Stevens, & Kohnen, 1979).

Neighborhood planning also can improve the delivery of human services by making them more responsive to community needs. Studies suggest that neighborhood organizations can increase the accessibility, acceptability, and availability of selected services, although quality and cost can vary from one situation to another (Hirshhorn, 1979; Yin et al., 1973). For example, evaluations indicate that neighborhood health centers have increased residents' access to quality care at an affordable cost, improved health status, reduced infant mortality, and provided primary care to medically underserved populations while involving the poor in both the planning and administration of their own services (Davis & Schoen, 1978; Geiger, 1984). Other evaluations indicate that neighborhood development organizations have rehabilitated or constructed housing units, promoted economic enterprise, built commercial facilities, and expanded employment. They

have helped reduce construction costs through "sweat equity," converted voluntary action into neighborhood capital and ownership, and provided a community alternative to government programs (Heumann, 1983; Mayer, 1984).

Barriers and paths to success

Serious obstacles confront planning in neighborhoods. It is difficult to make plans involving neighborhood issues when residents are unaware of inequities or discrepancies in services, approach the neighborhood as isolated individuals, or know little about the neighborhood as a planning unit. Planning is also difficult when it operates in an imbalanced political arena. Outside economic interests—such as developers, bankers, and speculators—are more likely to mobilize resources for planning than are unorganized neighborhood residents. Individual residents often accept the notion of outside control over local development, or hesitate to "intrude" in areas that involve concentrated power. In the absence of special circumstances, key decisions affecting local communities are often made by those outside them (Ahlbrandt & Brophy, 1975; Boyer, 1973; Clay, 1979; Downie, 1974; Feagin, 1983; Gans, 1962; Hartman, 1975; Marciniak, 1977; National Training and Information Center, 1976; O'Brien, 1975; Stone, 1976).

Despite these obstacles, some neighborhood planning organizations have proven successful. Mayer (1984) analyzes such organizations and finds that they share common "stages of development." Each has formally incorporated itself, developed competence in specific projects, and expanded activity into other areas; each has developed leadership and staff, attracted support from community groups and outside actors, and dealt with

the economic, social, and political environment; and each has involved low- and moderate-income residents and made tangible improvements. Mayer concludes that these organizations offer lessons for revitalizing neighborhoods and redeveloping cities.

Some organizations have received assistance from established institutions that provide resources to facilitate local activity. Foundations, churches, and governments are among the private and public institutions that have supported neighborhood initiatives. Several foundations have increased their funding for neighborhood groups as neighborhood leaders and staff have developed skills to write proposals, while churches provide a major private source of funding for activities that target the poor. Federal programs support state and local governments and nonprofit neighborhood groups, although the future of federal funding is uncertain. City governments have developed subarea planning programs in municipal agencies across the nation, but, although these programs can involve citizens in planning, they tend not to build local organizations or to transfer power to neighborhood residents. Subarea planning is not neighborhood planning in which community residents plan for themselves, but an approach in which central planning agencies seek to deconcentrate facilities or functions to subareas. It is not decentralization, but a new form of centralization (Checkoway, 1984).

Other organizations have benefitted from national coalitions and support networks that help formulate strategies and provide assistance. For example, the Center for Community Change assists poor people and members of minority groups involved in housing rehabilitation and neighborhood reinvestment; the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs helps

members of urban ethnic groups involved in community development and commercial revitalization; the National Training and Information Center trains neighborhood workers to enforce compliance with federal housing programs; and the National Association of Neighborhoods lobbies for legislation and promotes decentralization. Several groups facilitate the exchange of information and mutual support through newsletters and publications, or emphasize education to increase residents' knowledge and skills (Perlman, 1978; Rosenbloom, 1979). A need exists for systematic study of support network practice and impacts, although existing work describes their influence in selected cases and how they differ from the Industrial Areas Foundation, Midwest Academy, and other organized training schools that emphasize social action (Midwest Academy, n.d.; Staples, 1984).

Even exceptional organizations have difficulties influencing the larger context in which they operate. Citizens can take hold of their surroundings without outside officials telling them what they need, handle local problems without suffering the harmful effects of federal intervention, and improve their communities as they determine plans and programs for themselves. But even the most accomplished organizations cannot reverse citywide decline. Neighborhood problems result from decisions and institutions that operate largely outside the neighborhood, and the consequences flow from that process. To alter the consequences, it would be necessary to alter the process.

WHAT ARE THE CHOICES?

Neighborhood planning organizations have increased in number, but problems and choices remain. It is important to recognize the scope of practice while also

raising questions posing continuing choices in the field.

Local or cosmopolitan?

Neighborhood planning is a process through which people develop plans, programs, or services at the local level. Practice varies from one place to another, but practitioners generally hold that problems in neighborhoods have local solutions and that neighborhoods should plan for themselves (Berkowitz, 1982; Hallman, 1984; Morris & Hess, 1975; Stokes, 1981).

But the neighborhood also has limitations as a unit of practice. For example, some residents participate with fervor, while others find frustration or withdraw from the community. Some exceptional organizations take initiative and produce results, but many lack resources to make planning work. Some problems in neighborhoods have local solutions, but other problems originate outside the area. Often, outside economic interests are narrow and concentrated enough to facilitate intervention or influence planning, and these powerful interests are more likely to mobilize resources for planning than are individual residents. Even when residents organize, the causes of problems may not be accessible to organizations that lack authority over solutions (Fusfeld & Bates, 1984; McKnight & Kretzman, 1984; Smith, 1984). Localism can be useful and organizations can build coalitions and influence aspects of the larger context in which they operate (Castells, 1983; Harris, 1984), but what is the appropriate role of local practice in the face of cosmopolitan power?

Action or development?

Some organizations originate in reaction to crises that produce protests and confrontations. Residents may apply strat-

egy to build powerful organizations by direct action and conflict tactics against targets. Over time, however, leaders may decide that it is a strategic mistake to react to crises without independent plans and programs of their own. This decision can help broaden the issues and develop new programs. But the shift to development can also divert residents from direct action, focus their attention on services rather than on the whole social picture, and absorb them in plans when other actions might be more appropriate. Plan preparation can serve functions, but it can also create delays and frustrate supporters accustomed to "harder" tactics. Action and development can be used together in mutually reinforcing ways, but few practitioners have effectively mixed or phased the two (Giloith, 1985; Lancourt, 1979; Lauria, 1982; Mott, 1984; Ross, 1979). Neighborhood planners must ask: Which practice model best fits the situation? What are the ways to manage the transition from one model to another?

Rich or poor?

Neighborhood planning is not universal. Some neighborhoods plan while others do not. Some people participate actively while others engage in little or no activity. Moreover, those who actively participate are not necessarily representative of their area's population. Studies show that income, education, and occupational status all positively correlate with participation and contribute to the personal characteristics and social attitudes that support further activity. Higher-status people participate out of proportion to their numbers and apply resources and skills that make them especially effective (Checkoway & Van Til, 1978; Milbrath, 1972; Ragab, Blum, & Sprio, 1981; Rainwater, 1968; Verba & Nie, 1972).

Low-income people participate in neighborhood planning less actively than do higher-status groups, whether one uses income, education, or occupation as a measure of status. Low-income people are also less likely to form organizations, attend meetings, or participate in public programs, including community poverty boards presumably designed to elicit their participation (Kramer, 1969; London, 1975; Peterson, 1970; Van Til, 1973). The explanation for this is in dispute: Some analysts attribute the activity levels to institutional bias and discriminatory practices, others to political ethos, sub-cultural pathology, and the people themselves (Liebow, 1967; Wilson, 1963). Whatever the explanation, the fact of differential participation remains. This is not to suggest that poor people do not participate at all, however. On the contrary, evidence indicates long-term increases in the involvement of low-income people in neighborhood planning, although this is relatively less than the involvement of others. Poor people participate yet still face the effects of poverty and racism in the larger society.

Forward or backward?

Some people view neighborhood planning as part of a larger movement for radical reform, associating neighborhood planning with community control and other initiatives that could create change and transfer power if embraced across the nation. Boyte (1980) describes a "backyard revolution" through which individuals and groups create change through community-based programs and services. Analysts have traced the roots of neighborhood practice to urban social reform movements of the 1880s and 1890s, trade union movements of the 1930s, civil rights and welfare rights of the 1960s, and other

movements for social change (Fisher, 1984).

Others, however, view neighborhood planning as broadly conservative. Pines (1982) documents "the traditionalist movement that is sweeping grass-roots America," pointing to business groups that develop media campaigns against taxes and spending, promote economic education in the work place or classroom, and oppose social programs at the community level. Others describe federal officials who relax regulations affecting economic entrepreneurs in neighborhoods, encourage private corporations to form partnerships with local organizations, and advocate self-help as a substitute for government programs (Friedman, 1981; Savas, 1982). Others describe efforts by neighborhood organizations to protect turf, exclude outsiders, and resist racial and ethnic change (Dear & Taylor, 1982; Seley, 1983; Wolpert, Mumphrey, & Seley, 1972). Studies have found whites who exclude minority groups, minority groups who fight displacement and gentrification by whites, and practitioners who try to build multiracial organizations (Gale, 1984; Hartman, LeGates, Keating, & Turner, 1982; Philpott, 1978; Rosenbloom, 1981). Neighborhood planning is brilliant politics, seemingly shared by both ends of the ideological horseshoe, by anti-government conservatives and decentralist progressives, by corporate giants and grassroots community groups. Who could criticize such a broadly attractive notion?

Citizens or professionals?

Early studies of neighborhood practice assigned primary importance to what Leites and Wolf (1970) call the "hearts and minds of the people." According to this approach, individual grievances and group consciousness give rise to organi-

zations that select spontaneous leaders or hire staff to carry out ameliorative actions. Later studies, however, have assigned primary importance to resource mobilization and professionalization (McCarthy & Zald, 1973; Zald & Berger, 1978). In this view, institutional resources help create career opportunities and support networks among activists and professionals, who identify issues and build organizations in areas where individuals may lack awareness of grievances. This does not mean that grievances do not exist, but such a view emphasizes the importance of other factors that facilitate the growth of neighborhood organizations.

Early neighborhood leaders were generally characterized as citizen volunteers who emerged spontaneously and learned by trial and error (Philpott, 1978). They were later joined by advocates who represented neighborhood interests traditionally excluded from policy formation and planning, or by organizers who helped formulate strategy and apply tactics (Heskin, 1980; Lancourt, 1979). Now they are joined by practitioners akin to expert professionals who apply objective fact-finding and technical procedures in accordance with standards (Mayer & Blake, 1980). Some practitioners combine diverse roles, but the shift from voluntary action to professional expertise causes one to ask: What is the place of professionalism in a context of voluntary action?

Better or worse?

Analysts argue that neighborhood planning can make services more responsive to local needs. They argue that centralization can cause inequities; that central service agencies often emphasize values that conflict with local participation; and that

service providers often perceive consumers as uninformed and plan programs without consulting them. Such analysts hold that neighborhood planning can improve services and involve citizens in decisions that affect them (Cole, 1981; Yin, 1973).

Others, too, recognize the shortcomings of centralization and have responded with programs to expand participation in local subareas. American city governments have developed a wide range of subarea planning programs to complement traditional public hearings and citizen advisory boards (Werth & Bryant, 1979). These programs, however, tend to involve citizens in plan development and program management, but not to build a strong local organization or to transfer power to neighborhoods. They represent reforms calling for central agencies to deconcentrate functions to subareas, but not for initiatives allowing neighborhood residents to develop plans and programs for themselves (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1972, 1979; Needleman & Needleman, 1974; Yates, 1973). Indeed, some reformers argue that neighborhood planning is inimicable to professionalism, that residents lack the knowledge conducive to practice, and that marginal gains in responsiveness may sacrifice quality and cost of service.

Rich (1979) argues that the debate over neighborhood organizations in service delivery may pose a false dichotomy. He contends that the question is not whether central agencies or neighborhood organizations best serve residents, but which services are best delivered by which organizations at which levels. Rich finds no optimal organization or level for all services, but views individual services as belonging to larger systems that should share responsibilities according to function. For example, transportation, solid

waste disposal, water, and sewage services may be best delivered at one level, and health, education, and fire and police protection at another. Such systems presumably would include both central agencies and neighborhood organizations, in addition to new, multilevel service units, public-private partnerships, coproduction agreements, and other approaches. It would be ironic if increases in neighborhood planning gave rise to new forms of centralization and coordination, although analysts have recognized such cycles for years (Kaufman, 1969).

CONCLUSIONS

Neighborhood planning organizations have increased in number and capacity. Despite the obstacles confronting them, exceptional organizations have taken initiative and produced results. They have built housing, operated services, generated production, and contributed to individual, community, and political development. Such organizations are not necessarily typical of those in the field, however, and their actions raise questions related to continuing choices, but they provide lessons nonetheless.

Despite the accomplishments of neighborhood planning, many cities and neighborhoods continue to decline. Neighborhoods, particularly the poorest and neediest, still suffer from private and public disinvestment, which contributes to their decline and causes problems for those who remain. Economic changes and government program cuts continue to exacerbate conditions. Neighborhoods developed by exceptional organizations contrast sharply with surrounding areas. This contrast amplifies the accomplishments of organizations and the problems of cities and society.

Self-help is receiving a big boost from

national policy. President Reagan seeks to "restore confidence by returning power to the people." He and his advisers advocate self-help as an alternative to "government intervention" as they work to reduce resources for programs that affect cities and neighborhoods and describe policies that emphasize local enterprise, neighborhood investment, and private development (Ahlbrandt, Friedman, & Shabecoff, 1982; Ahlbrandt & Sumka, 1983; Butler, 1981; Friedman, 1981; Savas, 1982; Verity, 1982).

But dangers arise when neighborhood planning is translated into national policy. First, self-help may worsen problems in neighborhoods that require more, not fewer, resources. Many—perhaps most—low-income neighborhoods require resources from external public and private programs, and government has a special responsibility to help neighborhoods that cannot help themselves. Those in office should not be permitted to retreat from this responsibility by promoting self-help.

Second, an emphasis on self-help should not be used to divert attention from the context in which neighborhood planning operates. The shift to local initiative often places the burden on the neighborhood to modify its response rather than on society to modify the conditions that create the problems. This is bad social science and inept social policy: The major forces affecting individual neighborhoods are not individual but largely social, political, and economic. Local problems result from decisions and institutions that operate outside the neighborhood. It would be a mistake to blame neighborhoods for the process that victimizes them.

These comments are not intended to deny the importance of neighborhood planning as a means to improve conditions, nor are they intended to discourage neighborhood groups from forming, help-

ing themselves, and working to change the whole social picture. Exceptional neighborhood organizations can formulate strategies and build coalitions to expand enterprise and pressure institutions to reinvest in local communities (Crowfoot, Chesler, & Boulet, 1983). But self-help, when tied to national policy, may serve as a means to retreat from public responsibility. And even exceptional neighborhood organizations cannot be expected to save urban areas, for this requires intervention in the larger context in which planning operates.

NOTE

1. No single notion of neighborhood planning embraces all forms of practice. See also Cassidy (1980), Clay and Hollister (1983), and Rohe (1981). This section also builds on Checkoway (1984).

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