Igniting citizen participation in creating healthy built environments: the role of community organizations

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Abstract   This article examines the function of community-based organizations in engaging citizens in planning healthy built environments in urban neighbourhoods. Research on the 3-year Green, Active, Healthy Neighbourhoods (GAHN) initiative, spearheaded by a city-wide umbrella group and local organizations in four boroughs of Montreal found that in activating citizen participation, the role of organizations was significant in four dimensions: (i) mobilizing to generate awareness and interest; (ii) giving voice to problems and solutions; (iii) pooling citizens' and professionals' knowledge; and (iv) maintaining participation in implementation. Organizations involved in GAHN provided creative tools and processes for citizens' participation, which were valued by planners and local authorities, but collaborative participation was difficult beyond the exploratory and diagnostic dimensions. This study points to the challenges in sustaining collaboration and having influence. Organizations need to maintain pressure, conserve independence and renew linkages with citizens to shift urban planning practices from car-dominated to people-centred development.

'Daily when I take my kids to school or walk, I see how the facilities for pedestrians and cyclists are lacking. I think it is absolutely necessary to improve if we want to continue to live in the city, to be healthy and alive'. Jeanne is a concerned citizen of Montreal, Canada, who realizes that the planning of her neighbourhood affects the quality of her everyday life. The challenge is

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how to involve Jeanne and other citizens in building the kind of community they want.

With increasing urban growth across the globe, transforming built environments to provide for healthy livelihoods needs to become a key concern (World Health Organization, 2006). Cities have been created for cars not people; the lack of green spaces and safe places to walk or bike is resulting in a range of socio-ecological problems that can no longer be ignored, including obesity, depression, isolation and urban heat islands (Dannenberg, Frumkin, and Jackson, 2011). To design cities that are lively, sustainable, safe and healthy, the participation of local citizens is essential; urban planners and local authorities cannot succeed in silo. Participation of citizens is necessary not only because they intimately know their neighbourhoods but also because they can actively support the shift in transforming urban planning practices (Gehl, 2010). As Jane Jacobs wrote over half a century ago, 'Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because and only when, they are created by everybody' (1993, p. 312).

State-driven public participation planning processes are unable to provide the scope of influence required to make the shift (Innes and Booher, 2004; Shipley and Utz, 2012). This article examines the increasingly pivotal role of organizations in community development (Sorensen and Sagaris, 2010). Non-governmental, non-profit and community groups which are officially registered can become civil society's conduit for promoting social change.

To examine the role of organizations in the largely uncharted territory of citizen participation in creating healthy urban built environments, this paper draws on an evaluation research study of the 3-year Green, Active, Healthy Neighbourhoods (GAHN) initiative. GAHN was spearheaded by a city-wide non-governmental organization called the Montréal Urban Ecology Centre (MUEC) along with local organizations in four boroughs in Montréal. The study identifies four dimensions of organizations' role in activating citizen participation: (i) mobilizing to create awareness and interest; (ii) giving voice to problems and solutions; (iii) pooling citizens' and professionals' knowledge and (iv) maintaining participation and influence in implementation. According to the research, organizations were apparently successful in the first three dimensions, but their role dwindled in the final dimension, pointing to opportunities and challenges in maintaining collaborative participation.

Changing to healthy urban planning practice: citizens' and organizations' roles

At the core of this paper is an assumption that the manner in which our cities are built impacts our physical health and psychological well-being (Wells,

Evans, and Yang, 2010); and, a belief that community participation is beneficial to designing local environments that promote well-being. Encompassing physical, mental and social well-being, healthy places include built environments that support active transportation, green spaces and spaces for social interaction (Dannenberg, Frumkin, and Jackson, 2011). Increasing the size and number of bike lanes, enlarging sidewalks, improving public transit and placing people and businesses closer together will reduce car dependence and ecological footprints, as well as strengthen social capital.

Residents need to be involved in shaping their neighbourhoods because they hold knowledge that is qualitatively and quantitatively different from that of urban planners. Planning decisions are more likely to reflect community realities when citizens have been involved in the process (Eversole, 2010). Also one can assume that if consulted, citizens will more likely accept and support the unexpected negative outcomes of planning changes (Beyazli and Aydemir, 2011). This active involvement where citizens are both informed and committed is consistent with community development (Ife and Tesoriero, 2006). In such cases, citizens are not merely reactive to state proposals but contributors, who identify, create and implement.

But what is the impetus for citizen participation, and how does it unfold given divergent values and a diversity of actors involved? Ideally, in community development, issues and solutions arise from the grassroots (Ife and Tesoriero, 2006), but in practice, citizen's participation is far more complex and needs unpacking (Rowe and Frewer, 2005). The question of who facilitates public participation as well as among whom, when and to what degree remains highly problematic. Several authors contend that state-mandated public consultations that have become part of planning regimes in North America are mostly ineffective; these consultations have been critiqued as being 'nothing more than rituals designed to satisfy legal requirements' (Innes and Booher, 2004, p. 419). Bond and Thompson-Fawcett (2007) qualify local government's actualization of participatory planning in New Urbanism to be limited to a tool, namely charrettes, which is not inclusive and is overdependent on a facilitator. Shipley and Utz (2012) in a review of public consultation techniques concluded that there is a lack of formal training for planners and administrators, as well as a need for more knowledge about the interest, and priorities of residents with respect to planning issues.

In this context, I focus on the role of organizations in activating citizens' participation in planning for healthy built environments. From a rational perspective, as demonstrated by Voogd (2001), the costs of individual involvement in areas of collective interest exceed the benefits. He refers to this as the *communicative planning paradox.* Protecting collective interests requires therefore the involvement of an overarching entity, particularly for

sustainability and environmental issues which rank lowest among citizens' urban renewal concerns (Bus, 2004). Voogd concludes that government leadership is necessary to safeguard collective interests, but I explore community-based organizations' (henceforth organizations) role in building interest and creating an environment for action among citizens, as well as authorities and urban planners. Given a historical bias of governments and planners towards technical and scientific knowledge, organizations can perhaps provide a key channel to ignite residents and facilitate a shift in planning practices (Beyazli and Aydemir, 2011).

In focusing on organizations, there remains the question of the significance of citizen participation. Arnstein's (1969) well-known typology of participation which identified eight levels of participation in terms of differential empowerment is a necessary starting place. It identifies participation beginning at level 3 with informing and ending with community control at level 8, the highest form of participation. While most useful in providing a grid to assess public participation, Bailey and Grossardt (2010) have shown, based on a large US data set, that partnership, level 6, was the ideal level for transportation planning, although the current level of involvement lay somewhere between information and consultation, or levels 3 and 4. The study demonstrated that the public did not seek complete control, and furthermore, that reducing the Arnstein gap required increasing professionals' expertise in engaging citizens.

With a level six partnership being the aim, this paper explores organizations' role in igniting citizen participation and facilitating collaboration between state and non-state actors. This focus is in line with Innes and Booher's (2004) idea of collaborative participation in which citizens, state, organizations and planners come together to dialogue and jointly identify innovative solutions to complex problems. Instead of seeing citizens in opposition to the state, collaborative participation considers co-evolution whereby all actors possess information that can contribute to influencing action; engaging in dialogue helps strengthen the network and social capital. Similarly, Moulaert *et al.* (2010) argue that communities have become breeding grounds for social innovation. By seeking arrangements with other institutions, becoming involved with their processes and leveraging these relationships, citizens can influence state and market actors for greater impact.

Is there a risk in blurring the lines of demarcation between state, citizens, organizations and professionals? According to Defilippis, Fisher, and Shragge (2010) inherent power differentials distinguish community organizations and those in power; contesting the structural roots of contemporary problems requires being conflictual and radical. Community organizations' tendency to 'deresponsibilize' (p. 177) the state precludes bringing about profound social change that would challenge the status quo. Indeed, there

is risk of co-option, given the predominance of a neoliberal agenda that uses community-based agencies as puppets for state policies and directives. Settling for a defensive position that works within existing power structures can result in modest outcomes (Kenny, 2011).

Literature points to the need to be wary of masking the question of power. Sandercock (2004) refers to a planning imagination that involves audacity and creativity, with planners relinquishing some control to citizens and developing a new sensibility that embraces the multicultural and multi-functional identities of cities. While this may stand as an ideal, the shift would be more chequered; pressure needs to be maintained for the long-term in order to bring about the fundamental changes needed to shift to healthy planning practices. Indeed, enlarging sidewalks for pedestrians, closing down streets for social activities, and replacing car parking spaces with bike lanes entail a shift in mindset and practice by all stakeholders, including citizens, urban planners and engineers, and local elected officials (Gehl, 2010).

This article examines organizations' role in activating citizen involvement. Identifying the dimensions that could facilitate a reorientation of urban development from car-dominated to people-focused is part of gaining a greater understanding of the intentionality and exploration that comprise novel practices.

GAHN context

This article draws on a 3-year evaluation research study of the GAHN initiative which was spearheaded by a medium-sized non-governmental organization, the MUEC. The initiative's broad aim was 'to rethink street and public space design to favour active transportation such as walking or cycling and to increase the quality of neighbourhood life'. A central aspect of GAHN was to demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of democratic approaches to creating green and healthy neighbourhoods through citizen engagement. The initiative was funded by a quasi-governmental foundation, Québec en Forme, which aims to adopt new practices to address the province-wide concern with healthy and active living using methods which are innovative and collaborative.

Given the complexity of the project, the funders supported a developmental evaluation with emphasis placed on documenting learnings to provide feedback on ways of better reaching the aims of the initiative. This study draws on the information collected in my role as developmental evaluator with MUEC, where I observed activities with citizens and carried out bi-yearly interviews and focus groups with staff in organizations and municipalities on impacts and learnings.

While MUEC has a city-wide mandate, the GAHN initiative centred on four boroughs that varied in urban density, modal share and citizen mobilization

history: Parc-Extension, Southeastern Notre-Dame-de-Grace (NDG), Mercier-Est and Plateau-Est. Given the divided jurisdiction over planning areas among Montréal's nineteen boroughs, this focus offered opportunities to plan in a local context. In each case, a local community-based organization took the lead; their profiles indicated varying levels of expertise in citizen participation and urban planning, with none having expertise in both.

Activities were undertaken intensively in each borough by local organizations with the support of MUEC to engage citizens over a 1-year period, which culminated with the release of tailored plans with recommendations that reflected citizens' engagement and professionals' expertise (see Montreal Urban Ecology Centre, 2012).

Dimensions of activating citizen engagement
Analysis of the GAHN experience suggests that organizations activated citizens' participation in creating healthy built environments in multiple ways. Organizations engaged in a dynamic process that I present as containing four dimensions (see Figure 1). Below, I discuss emerging features and challenges related to each one.
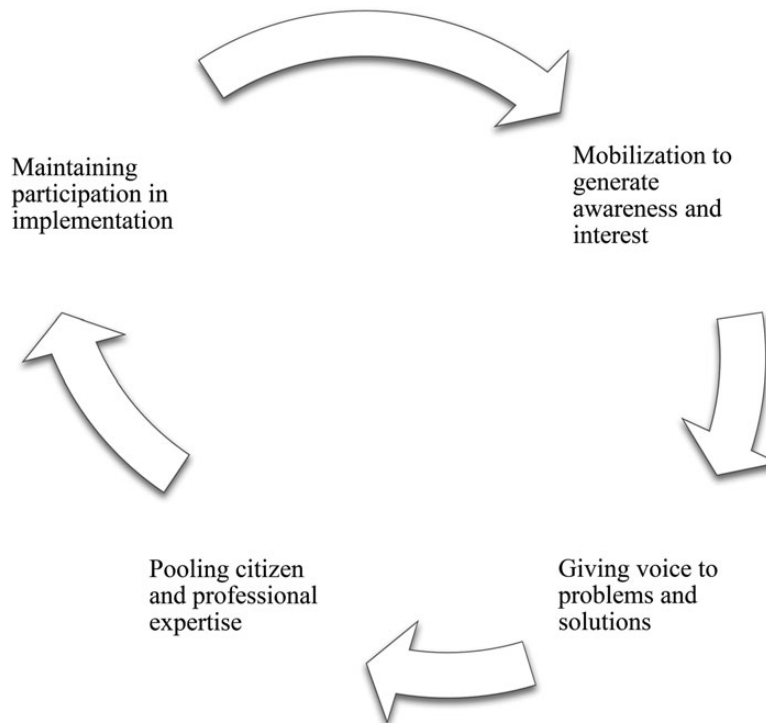

Figure 1 Dimensions of organizations' role in activating citizen participation.

Mobilization to generate awareness and interest

The first dimension of mobilization focuses on creating citizens' awareness about healthy planning in their neighbourhoods, as well as generating interest among the citizens who may feel that there is no individual benefit in becoming engaged, reflective of Voogd's (2001) point on the lack of individual incentive to participate. An organization staff member said there was no mobilization around environmental issues in her borough: 'There are no organized groups of citizens. . . . We are very focused on car transportation'. In another borough with a high percentage of immigrants, an organization reported that residents perceived no difficulties; residents were often unable to make a connection between urban planning and their lived experience. In the absence of local citizens or groups already active, organizations had to develop a mobilization strategy.

To reach out to citizens, organization staff had to begin by helping people to understand the benefits of becoming involved: 'There is work in framing [the issues]: how do you convince people to participate if they believe the issue does not concern them? The project must make the link between what is discussed about your street corner and the broader collective interests'. Reflecting on how best to convince citizens of the need for and value of their contributions proved essential, given the long-term nature of developing and implementing a GAHN plan.

To identify potential allies across the system and to strategize on how to move forward, local and internal dynamics of actors had to be mapped out. Actors who could perhaps become interested in the issue of built environments included neighbourhood associations, business associations, community health groups, parent committees, schools and youth centres. Efforts were made to also reach out to those more likely to resist change, such as businesses that feared the impact of GAHN on their operations.

Since creating human built environments required the involvement of multiple actors, emphasis was placed on building interest around an issue, and avoiding alignment with a political position. An organization staff member explained, 'We needed to . . . find ways of building on the strengths of our partners and especially ways in which we could avoid the political game'. Avoiding risks of partisanship was not always easy because GAHN issues were in at least two cases part of the opposition's political platform; perceived alignments resulted in local authorities' disapproval and dissociation. To reflect the collaborative approach, GAHN public events often included representation from the local authorities, opposition, community organizations and citizens.

At the municipal level, state actors expressed appreciation for organizations' contribution in 'motivating more people'. A comment by a municipal

staff member illustrated their importance: '[We] cannot transform a neigh-bourhood without involving the citizens. Organizations have an ability to be able to work with various stakeholders; it takes a lot of energy'. Municipal staff described MUEC and local organizations' role in mobilization as unique, and not something that government could achieve on its own. The statement reflects the limitations of municipal entities, and their dependence on local actors for mobilization, given the need to answer to elected officials and their lack of staff expertise in citizen engagement.

Community organizers were however more reserved in their assessment. Some expressed disappointment in how few citizens were reached. Although one remarked that it was 'utopian to presume that they would reach every-one', despite efforts, they mostly dealt with the 'keeners already engaged'. Others queried the scope of participation required, seeing greater benefit in working with a small group of well-informed citizens. These would be 'highly motivated citizens . . . who are involved, who know well the local dy-namics of their intersections, of their zone. [Their involvement] is fundamen-tal to the success and acuteness of the design plans', said one organization's staff member. This begs the question of the role of citizen mobilization: '[The] impact of activities can be to correct content, but it may be just to mobilize people', said a staff member of one organization. The gap between organiza-tions' and governments' viewpoints parallels questions raised in the litera-ture concerning how many citizens should participate, who they should be and how they should participate (Cornwall, 2008). These dilemmas are fun-damental to democratic societies that seek to involve citizens in decision-making aimed at collective interests.

Giving voice to citizens' problems and solutions

Aside from creating awareness and interest among citizens, organizations focused on giving voice to citizens' problems and solutions. A community or-ganizer summarized this dimension: 'We create public spaces within existing cultures to talk about issues about which citizens are often not consulted. They have been delighted to take part in a process that is not happening else-where'. This is consistent with the notions of 'structuring' public involvement (Bailey and Grossardt, 2010) and 'creating spaces' (Diamond, 2004; Innes and Booher, 2004) for public perspectives to take shape.

Depending on the phase for which they were seeking input to the GAHN plan, organizations offered methods for participation. In the beginning, the focus was on mapping the territory from citizens' perspectives to identify problem areas. Consultation activities included (i) setting up booths with interactive maps at community events in parks or street fairs, (ii) exploratory

neighbourhood walks, (iii) animated citizen forums and (iv) door-to-door or web-based surveys. Each of the activities served different purposes.

In the subsequent phase, exploring solutions, organizations welcomed ideas to solve the problems that were identified. Citizens were invited to participate in forums that focused on envisioning the future: on flower-shaped post-it notes, citizens identified their dreams and on root-shaped post-it notes, their values. Welcoming all ideas was part of the process, according to one organization's staff member: 'You must do these activities even if they are far-fetched. . . . You need crazy ideas . . . and you must become less critical'. Once again, municipal staff felt organizations were uniquely placed to encourage such lateral thinking because they did not have to 'fear creating expectations among the population.' Concern with managing citizens' demands was a prominent concern for municipalities; one staff member said, 'We are not comfortable to make mobilization with promises, creating expectations that cannot be met. Not that we should not consult but this can only happen at a certain time in the evolution of a project'. Underpinning this comment is municipal staff's fear of participation, lest citizens' inputs become overwhelming.

Organizations realized that citizens needed help to be critical of their environment as well as to make suggestions for improvement. For example, a citizen stated during a workshop: 'I have no idea how we would solve the problem'. An organization's staff member explained the necessary response: 'You must equip citizens otherwise they do not know. [You could] give suggestions, ideas, pictures, [and] models, not just to the youth but to all citizens'. Organizations had also to be well informed. Initially MUEC researched models from elsewhere to share ideas of what was possible. Local organizations soon identified the need to balance cases from elsewhere with more local examples.

Another way of engaging citizens was involving them in field studies, observing problematic areas to provide informed views on challenges and solutions. Inspired by a case in Denmark (Gehl, 2010), MUEC trained local volunteers on simple tools to count cyclist and pedestrian usage resulting in data that could inform action to make busy intersections safer. Citizens felt involved. One said, '[It was important] to count cyclists and involve citizens in the process. Residents felt really consulted. . . . I felt that I was really heard'.

In this second dimension, municipal staff valued organizations' role in scoping out and generating potential support for future changes. Local authorities saw organizations' leadership as having preventive benefits: keeping people informed and consulting them on different options early in the process would help bring residents alongside. A local authority stated: 'What I have always appreciated is the MUEC role in being the ears and

eyes for identifying the problems'. This could reduce the possibility of people feeling that local authorities were presenting citizens with plans that had been made without resident input, and local authorities then having to deal with frustrated citizens. One organization staff explained the long-term benefit for authorities in embracing participation early on: 'Rather than deal with controversies with citizens, why not prevent problems from arising?' Organizations contributed to establishing a fertile ground for sustainable planning changes. Interestingly, even if only a handful of citizens had been consulted and the participation levels were spotty, in focus groups and interviews, participants expressed satisfaction; the fact that there were multiple and open invitations was commended. This finding is similar to Sagaris' research (2010) in which she identifies the value of a community-based organization facilitating small groups hammering though issues because such efforts have aided in shifting towards more sustainable modes of transportation in Chile.

Pooling citizen and professional expertise

A third role played by organizations was pooling citizens' knowledge with professionals'; citizens' lived experiences needed to be combined with professionals' technical knowledge. This dimension involved integrating citizens' voices into the planning. For instance, a cyclist in a consultation activity shared his concerns around dangerous intersections. Urban planners' scientific know-how and broader knowledge of mobility patterns were necessary to address citizen's concerns in ways that reflected the GAHN principles and was implementable. A municipal staff member explained the importance of this step: 'People live these problems every day so they have knowledge, but it must be combined with highly technical things such as the flow of traffic throughout the day'. Another commented, 'I think the GAHN project connects the right people: citizens with the production teams. . . . It helps us see that the population supports the plan. A plan that involves these levels of consultation is more likely to succeed'. To what extent citizens influenced the planners is difficult to determine, but awareness became a key focus.

Part of pooling knowledge involved creating awareness among planners of the value and feasibility of engaging citizens in planning processes. Conferences, workshops and training on aspects of GAHN city planning in which international experts were invited to share examples of what they were doing in their own cities were held. After hearing about experiences with citizen participation in urban planning in Denmark, for instance, professionals started to refer to the idea of 'Copenhaguiser Montréal'. MUEC also facilitated workshops in which professionals and citizens worked on city-wide problematic issues, including one on security along bike paths on

arteries. Professionals realized in these formats that citizens had an 'ability to understand and offer intelligent solutions' and provided 'good ideas that we needed to reflect on'. Others though critiqued the simplification of plans and the lack of methodological rigour; one said, 'Too much time was wasted on unrealistic ideas'. It is clear that workshops would not translate automatically to transforming practice, as planners are not necessarily open to equating the value of citizens' expertise with their own. But they were a valuable component in arousing interest and reflection among professionals.

Convincing professionals also included introducing and supporting the use of appropriate tools for consulting citizens. Organizations helped in 'simplification, and making questions accessible', for professionals involved in municipal planning to become aware of the importance of paying attention to 'how we consult them'. In one case, instead of a request for more services, the survey revealed citizens' interest in making improvements to existing services, such as enlarging bike lanes and securing intersections. A municipal staff member asserted: 'This is the power of MUEC: to have used valuable knowledge-transfer strategies (training sessions, bringing in international experts)...to train 50–60 professionals who contribute to bringing about changes'.

In providing these spaces, organizations helped package citizens' requests in a way that may have been more amenable to feeding into municipal planning. Organizations acted in some ways as brokers, actively promoting a healthy built environments agenda that reflected citizens' perspectives. Being linked to citizens increased their credibility with municipalities.

Maintaining participation and influence in implementation

A persistent concern for organizations remains the question of maintaining citizen participation and influence in the implementation of GAHN development plans. While this stage will continue to unfold over the long-term, this last dimension remains the most difficult to achieve. One reason is that the resources entailed in realizing the plans depend on multiple factors that extend beyond local authorities. There is also the fact that planning changes requires dealing with citizens who do not share the interests of pedestrians and cyclists. As shown in several boroughs, citizens previously uninvolved in the first three dimensions become vocal when their parking spaces were in jeopardy. An organization staff member commented: 'We are faced with changing a culture and daily habits. . . . We are after all in North America where the car culture dominates'.

At this stage it seems that local authorities became less interested in collaborative participation; organizations felt their role diminished. As one explained: 'We feel a lot of pressure. We have to deal with big players. We

have the short end of the stick. Once the plans had been presented, local organizations often found themselves in a position of 'begging' to be involved, rather than as experts naturally invited to contribute. Organizations expressed concern that many planning decisions were determined in silo, and that they were asked for input haphazardly, not systematically. When changes were made that reflected the GAHN plan and coincidentally benefitted municipalities' political agenda, organizations' contributions were not acknowledged. An organization staff member reflected on their work being ignored by the municipality: 'No mention was made of organizations' contribution to mobilization. Only the borough received acknowledgement, making it appear that everything goes through them'. Organizations felt that municipalities should consider them more as partners in this phase, and expressed a desire to 'have a relationship of collaboration and form an alliance, and to not be seen merely as lobbyists'. They also wanted municipalities to embrace 'organizations' role in questioning'.

For local organizations to continue being a voice for the GAHN plan, organizations identified concrete ways they could support implementation, including in keeping citizens abreast of new developments. An organization's staff member remarked on this opportunity: 'We also can promote positive stories. The municipalities are only starting to catch on that we can help'. Organizations identified a need to report back to citizens in order to reignite interest in the issues, and perceived this role as having the added benefit of supporting municipalities' accountability to citizens.

The state's discomfort around maintaining citizen participation was evident from the unfolding of residents' involvement in follow-up committees in three boroughs. While initially citizens' representation on committees was welcomed—particularly when announced by the borough—local authorities later questioned the significance and contribution of residents. They claimed that their presence made confidentiality difficult for decision-makers who were wary of openly discussing issues. One year after these structures were officially set up, most had been hardly functional, focusing on merely sharing information, and all were certainly ineffective in maintaining citizens' voice in plan implementation.

Given the scope of change involved as well as the two levels of jurisdiction concerned with planning, local organizations continued to value the role played by MUEC at a city-wide level. A high-ranking municipal staff member commented: 'They have managed to involve the city (which is not always easy) and place positive pressure at the level of the boroughs'. Local organizations welcomed the credibility of MUEC, 'to be able to put us in contact with the right people', in order to help 'assert the role we played in the development of the plan'. At a local level, organizations lacked the human resources to take on this role in addition to their community work.

A municipal staff member explained: 'They have a role in agenda-setting. . . . It is important to make healthy built environments an issue not only during elections . . . but also at all times. Their objective of improving the quality of life remains ongoing'. It became clear that organizations' role in maintaining citizen participation would require alternative approaches and tools that would significantly differ from those needed in the earlier dimensions.

Implications

This inquiry suggests that organizations play an important role in igniting citizens' participation and generating awareness among planners and local authorities of the value of engaging residents in planning for healthy built environments. Organizations are uniquely placed to build both 'community social capital and planning capacity' (p. 311) as pointed out by Sorensen and Sagaris (2010); and to represent the collective interests, addressing the *communicative planning paradox* (Voogd, 2001). Community-based groups can act as catalysts in urban planning helping to shift practices so that development becomes less car-dominated and more people-centred. This catalytic ability is unavailable to the state because planners and local authorities do not have the skills to carry out 'good consultation' as concluded by Shipley and Utz (2012), nor do they have expertise in the emergent area of people-centred urban planning. This study shows that if indeed social innovation emerges at the local level (Moulaert *et al.*, 2010), organizations need to manage as well as evolve their approach to change.

The strategic process facilitated by GAHN organizations paralleled *Living City*'s work in activating citizenship in sustainable development in Chile (Sagaris, 2010). Organizations similarly mobilized actors and created deliberative spaces for exchanges, actions which planners and local authorities valued for their ability to develop awareness and knowledge, moving towards people-centred development. In GAHN, the dual focus on local community-based organizations and the city-wide MUEC served to build relationships at the community level and at the city-wide level to promote and activate the agenda of a lively, sustainable, safe, and healthy city. This parallel focus may hold merit as a good practice in other cities where urban planning matters are under divided jurisdiction.

This study illustrates the multiple dimensions of citizen participation (see Figure 1). The model elaborates on and extends our understanding of citizen participation in public planning issues beyond the short-term consultation activities that have been the focus of much literature (Connelly, 2006), providing for a process of community development (Ife and Tesoriero, 2006). In the exploratory and diagnostic phase of mobilizing, giving voice and pooling knowledge, various actors engaged in ways that exemplified collaborative participation (Innes and Booher, 2004); the spaces created for citizens to

identify interests and dialogue were seemingly valued by planners, local authorities and citizens. In the implementation dimension, a gap emerged however between organizations, citizens, as well as planners and local authorities. Organizations felt state actors' recognition and support for their role dwindled; additionally, citizens' desire for, and the form of meaningful involvement became unclear.

The faltering in state's valuing of collaboration raises questions about the possibilities of closing the Arnstein gap (Bailey and Grossardt, 2010) and achieving the goal of partnership. Further research is required around understanding how best to manage and what to aim for in sustaining citizens' participation in the area of planning for healthy built environment. Prevalence of concurrent understandings of participation (Fraser, 2005; Cornwall, 2008), the view that rationally citizens may have no interest nor reason to sustain participation in environmental planning issues (Voogd, 2001), and the continual emphasis on immediate results are critical areas that require further investigation.

The drop in a state's interests and commitment to collaborate with organizations in managing public participation in decision-making does point to the enduring power differentials between state and non-state actors (Shaw, 2008; Defilippis, Fisher, and Shragge, 2010), requiring that organizations remain vigilant. If organizations are going to help in achieving social change, our study suggests that retaining independence from state-driven planning processes is essential, and that maintaining agency as argued by Ostrander (2012) is critical to effectively play a bridging role between citizens and state. Thus, while capacity building of planners and local authorities may be a priority for organizations such as GAHN, a focus such as this must not be at the expense of maintaining pressure on the state. Organizations must conserve a position of externality to avoid the state co-opting them for political or administrative reasons, and having, as a result, citizen's participation falling short. Collaborative positioning may remain the goal, but when necessary, organizations must be able to take an oppositional position, effectively negotiating, leveraging, and managing alliances and networks among formal and informal actors (Sagaris, 2010).

Throughout this study, one is reminded that transforming the development of a city from being car-dominated to being people-centred is not just a technical issue; it requires change in a way of life. As encapsulated by one staff member of an organization, 'We will not just be drawing yellow lines, but ensuring the safety of our citizens and a place for humans to grow'. In bringing about this profound shift, organizations have multiple roles to play in giving voice to citizens such as Jeanne, activating interest among other citizens, illustrating the value and possibilities for planners and local authorities and advocacy. In taking on these various roles, organizations need to be continually

creative, strategically seeking collaborations while maintaining focus on deeper social change.

Funding

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