

Cross Cultural Community Participation in Planning: The Case of Grand Rapids Housing Pilot Project

Allahyar Raza;
Dwayne Rewniak, MCIP.

Abstract



BridgmanCollaborative Arch. Grand Rapids.

Unique community needs specific to the socio-economic composition of each individual community could be better addressed locally. There is no standard community participation model that fits all that addresses the local and the regional community issues in concert. In the case of Grand Rapids, it is an area situated in a critical geo-political and cross-cultural location that reveals new planning challenges. It also creates an opportunity for a new planning imagination and community participation model to emerge that responds to the specific needs of the region.

The Grand Rapids Housing Pilot Project is an innovative initiative that was announced jointly by the federal and provincial governments and the Grand Rapids' communities, in November 2005. In response, two public participation models were developed to assess the housing needs in each respective community. This case study explores the two participatory needs assessment processes that took place in the greater Grand Rapids area: one in each respective community (on- and off-Reserve). This paper examines how the experiences of these two examples can inform new planning sensibilities and imaginations that facilitate and embrace alternative knowledge within the processes of cross-cultural knowledge production. What can we learn from them, and how is it related to planning?

Background and Context

The focus of public participation in needs assessments is to assess and create knowledge that is relevant to planning and development: knowledge that is locally specific and shapes policies for the present and future development of places. The need for greater inclusion of alternative and indigenous knowledge in planning and design has also been a central focus within critiques of development and planning theory (Sandercock, 1998 & 2003; Schrivers, 1993). This focus has led to an attempt to re-theorize planning and development practice as a means of countering its Eurocentric tendencies (Sandercock, 1998; Tucker, 1999); despite the fact that participatory methods have been subject to significant critical analysis (e.g., Mosse, 1994; Lennie, 1999). These methods have been criticized for their

Table of Content:

Abstract -	1
Background and context -	1-2
Facts of the case -	2-4
Outcome and discussion -	4-5
Lessons Learned -	5-6
Relevance to Planning -	6
Conclusion -	7
Reference -	7



Map of Grand Rapids Area
Source: Local Planning District, Thompson

systemic inability to embrace alternative world-views and knowledges (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). However, these methods have also been seen as a means by which the inclusion of differences and re-theorization can be achieved (Chambers, 1997; Sandercock, 1998 & 2003). With the industrial revolution and urbanization, public participation methods in planning and development have steadily declined (Ruggeri). In the 50s and 60s, public participation methodologies were rediscovered by the advocacy planning movement and were to create plans that responded to the needs of users and empowered them to take the future into their own hands (Sandercock, 1998; Hester 1975). In particular, these methods have been largely popularized through the efforts of John F.C. Turner in North America and the United Kingdom (Nascimento). Today, public participation is often required by federal, provincial, and local government agencies for almost any development: it is widely believed that the knowledge created brings legitimacy and authority (Rios, 2005a).

Regional, Local and Cross-Cultural Knowledge

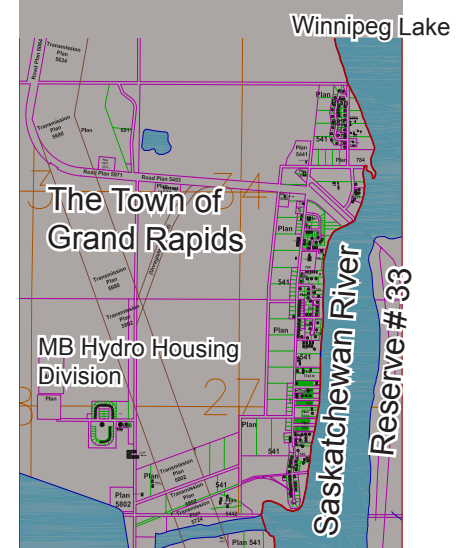
To make a plan or design more effective, public participation must address the local and the regional issues concurrently. Furthermore, planning cities and neighbourhoods in the context of a global society requires much more than good physical design and/or traditional planning knowledge. Traditional planning tools have led to the creation of places where one design fits all. They were envisioned, Deni Ruggeri argues, to level all specificity in favour of universal or regional consensus; however, current studies show that there is no standard planning tool (i.e. community participation model) that fits all. One of the many important aspects of community planning and design consists of its incremental approach to problem solving – each place, culture, and planning issue is unique and has to be addressed locally and regionally in concert.

Also, because of its attention to the specificities of each community, a participatory needs assessment should address identity as well as cultural and political differences. The voices of ‘difference’ often resonate from multicultural and cross-cultural settings, and there are lessons for the future of the planning profession and practice in listening to them (Sandercock, 1998). These lessons have to do with new ways of knowing and doing. It seems so obvious today that we need to draw on local ways of knowing and doing in the planning process to address local issues (Sandercock, 1998 & 2003; Schrijvers, 1993).

In the case of Grand Rapids, planning for housing generally needs to involve the local communities, to achieve shared housing objectives, address common and potential issues, increase the credibility of the project and raise the opportunities to learn from each other.

Facts of the Case

Grand Rapids was once a self sustaining community and a natural gateway to Manitoba’s north. It is situated approximately 435 kilo-



Map of Grand Rapids Area
Source: Local Planning District, Thompson

meters (km) north of Winnipeg city; along the Saskatchewan River where it pours into Lake Winnipeg at its northwest border. It is a relatively diverse and complex community. The complexity especially started at the beginning of the 1960s, when Manitoba Hydro built a dam to harness the hydro potential of Grand Rapids, which subsequently has had some major consequences – flooding of the area and creating a divide between the local communities. The relocation of the First Nations community by Manitoba Hydro divided families and created substantial socio-economic disruption that critically affected the local way of life. Virtually, there currently are three communities in the greater Grand Rapids area: the Town, the First Nation, and Manitoba Hydro's subdivision.

Residents from all three communities share most of the town's services and facilities such as schools, grocery stores, commercial centers, and health facilities. Based on site observations and demographic information, the residents of both the town and the First Nation, compared to the Manitoba Hydro subdivision, are less educated and relatively unskilled; the present quality of housing provision and services is even poorer. In addition, almost all of the employment opportunities revolve around Manitoba Hydro, fishing industry, tourism, and forestry. Many community members rely on temporary and seasonal employment opportunities.

The communities are distinguished by their varying jurisdictional treatment and benefits. Although internal migration has been consistent between the town and the reserve in search of better resources and housing opportunities, they have remained separated for many years. As a result, symptoms of difference – political, social, cultural, and economic inequalities – are apparent (Damas and Smith, 1976). Although these symptoms have raised more mistrust and alienation, they also beg for a new planning imagination and system that effectively deals with the differences.

Grand Rapids Housing Pilot Project: The Two Participatory Needs Assessments

To mitigate those differences and to address the housing needs, the Grand Rapids Housing Pilot Project was announced in November 2005. It is a partnership between the Governments of Canada and Manitoba and the communities of Grand Rapids (on and off-reserve) to help meet current and future housing needs. The pilot itself is innovative because its goal is to bridge jurisdictions to address housing needs both on and off-reserve, and it is emphasized to be community led and sustainable.

In response, two needs assessments models were developed and performed to assess the housing needs in each respective community. Each model included a public participation strategy in their processes. However, the pilot seems to be in a state of flux with these participatory models being questioned. Are the two community participation models creative, inclusive, and equitable? Are there new challenges opened up during their processes? How are the cross-

The Town has a population of around 336 persons (Census 2006). The majority of the population has aboriginal background. The municipal administration takes responsibility for the town site and the Manitoba Hydro subdivision, and a Resident Administrator leads an elected local committee.

Manitoba Hydro's residential subdivision is a relatively isolated, but well designed and maintained community within the Town and accommodates employees of Manitoba Hydro. It has a relatively higher standard of housing and infrastructure, and the residents are employed and economically well-off comparatively (Sumner, 2005).

The First Nations Reserve is connected to the town via a bridge on PTH 6 that spans over the Saskatchewan River. The Reserve is mainly a Cree community of around 651 members (Census 2006). The tribal council affiliated with this First Nation is Swampy Tribal Council Incorporated.

cultural needs or differences addressed?

Both reports focused on an intensive community participation process, and they both attempted to respond to the goals of the housing pilot project endorsed by Canada Mortgage and Housing Co. (CMHC), Manitoba Housing and Renewal Co. (MHRC), the Town of Grand Rapids, and Grand Rapids First Nations community.

Outcomes and Discussion

Both communities and their leadership recognized housing as one of their top priorities, and they desire to work in harmony and unison towards a united and dynamic community with better housing opportunities. They both have the same sets of needs, values, and a similar community vision: healthy housing and economy, better/higher employment rate, better services and amenities, and a supportive community. In response to the participatory housing needs assessment, both communities recognized common themes around housing such as: sustainability, durability, flexibility, adaptability, inclusivity, safety, security, healthy, entitlement, affordability, adequacy, and enhanced local economic development.

On the other hand, there were some differences in their approach. Bridgmancollaborative's report (for the First Nations) primarily focuses on community and housing design issues, while Angela Enright's report (for the Town) focuses more on jurisdictional issues, equity, and partnership needs and opportunities as a holistic approach towards a healthy community. Enright attempts to address more of the challenges and differences that hinder the process of developing and realizing an effective housing pilot project. The following themes, which have barely been touched in the First Nations' report, are discussed in the report prepared by Enright:

- Inequitable ability to engage consultants – one community has more financial resources, adequate clout, and ability over the other ones to engage their own consultant who might be partial.
- Jurisdictional restriction/benefits – the Town and the First Nation leaderships have independent directions to preferably leverage resources and prioritize project activities. Jurisdictional inadequacies and inequities keep the communities divided and devoid of many opportunities and resources.
- Insufficient shared activity/vision at the onset – independent directions lead to insufficient shared activities or to lack of a common vision, which could potentially become a “deal breaker” to any future projects including this housing pilot project.

In short, the Town's report talks about planning and political issues, which is a wider angle but consistent and related to housing issues in Grand Rapids. On the other hand, the First Nation's report brings together architectural and design issues, and using design tools to address the nature of housing needs. Both processes and reports are relevant, community driven, and rigorous. Not only do they both recognize the basic housing needs and opportunities in Grand Rap-

The Two Participatory Needs Assessments

- The Reserve:
Bridgmancollaborative Architecture LTD. (29 August, 2006). Sustainable Housing Pilot Project: Phase 1 Summary + Report. Winnipeg.
- The Town:
Enright, Angela from Norman Regional Development. (Aug. 2006). Grand Rapids Housing Initiative 2006: Federal, Provincial, First Nation, and Community Pilot Project.

ids, but they also attempt to reach outside of the box. However, their approaches are not as comprehensive in nature as they should be. They have not developed enough knowledge to address the housing issues in Grand Rapids in a sustainable and holistic manner.

Lessons Learned

Through the experiences of the two participatory needs assessments and working in partnership in the context of a new program, the MHRC has learned many lessons. Most challenges come from difficulties due to the cross-cultural and –jurisdictional differences as well as maintaining partnerships. The lessons include:

- These two experiences show that there is no standard planning tool (i.e. community participation model) or knowledge that fits all places and situations. Each place, community, and time is unique, and it has to be addressed locally yet keeping the regional challenges in mind. The information generated illustrates how different frameworks and methodologies of participation enable and constrain the inclusion of culturally different expressions and constructions of knowledge. A critical analysis of the two needs assessment reports indicate that knowledge, for example, created through design was lacking in one report and ‘indigenous’ knowledge was lacking in the other report. These experiences confirm the importance of understanding, getting prepared, and planning for the cross-cultural differences well in advance.
- Bring First Nations and municipalities closer: Traditionally, First Nations and municipalities have not had to deal with each other through any kind of formal, legal process. The Town and the First Nation leaders have independent directions to preferably leverage resources and prioritize project activities. Jurisdictional inadequacies and inequities keep the communities divided and devoid of many opportunities and resources. The advent of this Housing Pilot Project has brought local governments and First Nations relationships to the forefront, stressing the need for cross-cultural awareness to better address the housing needs of both communities in the greater Grand Rapids area. The two needs assessments confirmed that in order to address the housing needs in the region in a sustainable way, both communities should be brought closer and share a common vision and process in order to move forward.
- “Community is built through inclusion rather than through drawing boundaries.” (Sandercock, 2003, P144). Unless the two reports are put together, or the process includes both design and planning as well as both the Town and the First Nations community, it is not holistic in nature and sustainable over the long run. The MHRC has learned that differences between the Town and the First Nation community should be put aside. Establishing a good relationship between the different jurisdictions to have a common community vision at the onset would allow the process of development to be smoother and more effective. Since both parties continue to express a desire to work together, this partnership would also be an excellent oppor-



The diagram shows how community participation joins all issues together.

Source: www.regionalplanning.ca

“For pilot projects such as this one to be successful, all parties involved must work together and learn from one another at the onset in order to ensure that common issues are identified and shared objectives are achieved”.

(Dwayne Rawniak)

tunity for both communities to reaffirm and build upon the current, productive climate. The pilot should include ideas and contributions from both communities equitably and without any boundary.

- The challenge is also to ensure that continuing support to First Nations and municipalities negotiating under this Pilot Project is equitable. Both experiences illustrate that one community has more financial resources, adequate clout, and ability over the other one to engage their own power, resources and ability. This inequity and inequality will influence the decisions making process. The partners now see the need to ensure their continuing supports to importance of understanding, getting prepared, and planning for the cross-cultural differences at all stages.
- All partners learn that public education about the process and specifics of this Housing Pilot Project and its varying cultural perspectives are an integral part in achieving success. Also, by encouraging the dwellers to control the major decisions and to freely contribute to the design, construction, or/and management of their housing, this planning prospect should ensure that the process and environment produced stimulate individual and social well-being in the greater Grand Rapids (Turner, 1998).

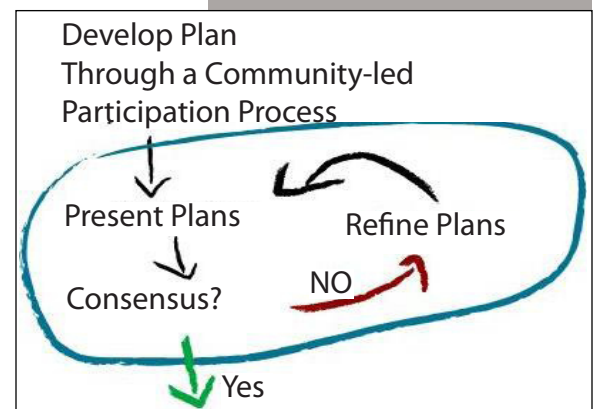
The lessons learned by the MHRC and all the partnerships involved in the Pilot Project will help to improve the process of partnership-building and knowledge-creation that each of the partners may encounter down the road. These experiences will better prepare them to smooth similar processes next time.

Relevance to Planning

This government funding partnership helped to facilitate an ideal planning environment through communication, long-term stable funding that is centered where it is needed, policy priorities that are locally determined and the opportunity for innovative local approaches. Planning in this context contributes different prospects to the local challenges and towards “collective action in pursuit of collaboratively-developed visions” (Brown, 1999).

In particular, cross-cultural perspectives on this Pilot Project demand that planners push the boundaries of assumed planning knowledge, empowering the planning professional to discover ‘new’ ways of knowing and practicing their chosen profession: a profession that reflects upon the dialogues and negotiations between the different jurisdictions. For proactive planners, this Pilot Project offers an exciting and challenging opportunity to play a part in redefining the ‘traditional’ relationship between First Nation communities and the adjacent municipality.

The bigger vision should be: a greater Grand Rapids devoid of inequity, physical, political, and/or social division, as well as favouritism; towards healthy housing opportunities, self entitlement, exciting economic opportunities, community and environmental responsibility.



Planning through a community-led participation process.
Source: www.regionalplanning.ca

Conclusion

This pilot project is innovative in its approach to bridge different jurisdictions and create a process that can be applied to similar situations in the future. Planners are usually faced with deeply entrenched, opposing sides. One of the challenges planners face is to assess and create knowledge related to planning or development projects. This knowledge has to be legitimized through the inclusion of local, non-verbal, regional, academic, and professional wisdom and expertise. This process is often accomplished through public and stakeholders participation; however, the increasing multicultural nature of Canadian society will likely increase the number of conflicts based on cultural differences. This process seeks to legitimize the views of the stakeholders and acknowledge their individuality while searching for areas of concession and solution that are acceptable for all. This way, the solution to the planning problem is found by accepting and awarding all interested parties, as well as those who are affected by this planning process, for their contribution.

Allahyar Raza (BED with City Planning Option) is currently working at completing a masters of City Planning at the University of Manitoba.

Dwayne Rewniak (MCP, MCIP) is a graduate of the University of Manitoba's City Planning program as well as an active member of MPPI and CIP. He is the Coordinator of Strategic Initiative at the Housing Services of Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation.

Reference:

- Brown, D. (1999). "Beware of Monstrous Hybrids! A Professional Planning Perspective of Jane Jacobs' Systems of Survival." Bood Review. Plan Canada.
- Chambers, R. (1997). *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the Last First*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Damas and Smith Limited. *Unincorporated village of Grand Rapids : Community Infrastructure Analysis*. 1976. Winnipeg: Manitoba Dept. of Municipal Affairs.
- Friedmann, J. (1987). *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kothari, U. (2001). "Power, Knowledge and Social Control in Participatory Development". In Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. *Participation: the New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books, 139-52.
- Lennie, J. (1999). *Deconstructing Gendered Power Relations in Participatory Planning: Towards an Empowering Feminist Framework of Participation and Action*. *Women's Studies International Forum* 22(1), 97-112.
- Mosse, D. (1994). *Authority, Gender and Knowledge: Theoretical Reflections on the Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal*. *Development and Change*, 25, 497-527.
- Nascimento, DM. "Low-Income Housing and Community Participation". *Cultures and Settlements*, edited by Miles, M & Kirkham, N. Portland: intellect.
- Regional Planning: An Integrated Development Plan for Niverville*. Masters of City Planning Studio Project. <http://www.regionalplanning.ca>
- Ruggeri, D. *Learning From a Small Town: Community Participation As the Foundation for a 21st Century Design Process*. Last retrieved from internet <http://www.dis.uia.mx/conference/htmls/pdfs/21stCenturyDesignprocess.pdf>, May 15, 2007.
- Schrijvers, J. (1993). *The Violence of 'Development'*. Amsterdam: International Books.
- Stats Canada. *Community of Grand Rapids: Census 2006*. Last retrieved from World Wide Web, <http://www.statscan.ca>, May 15, 2007.
- Sumner, W. K., 2005. *Designing a Needs Assessment Tool: Determining Housing Need in Rural Manitoba*. Vol (2), Practicum, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Tucker, V. (1999). "The Myth of Development: a Critique of a Eurocentric Discourse". In Munck, R. and O'Hearn, D., Editors, *Critical Development Theory: contributions to a New Paradigm*. London: Zed Books, 1-27.
- MHRC Facts Sheets on the Grand Rapids Housing Pilot Project.