Engaging Communities: Participatory planning in Los Angeles neighborhoods

By

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Abstract

As the planning paradigm in Los Angeles shifts away from sprawled development and towards smart growth and transit-oriented development, low-income communities are weary of the changes future investment and development will bring. Several studies have shown that the introduction of rail stations accelerates neighborhood change and in many cases gentrification. While transit expansion and worries about gentrification are not unique to Los Angeles, the number of transit stations is planned to double, meaning that the redevelopment decisions and outcomes will have a widespread impact on the L.A. landscape. The way in which communities plan for and advocate for the neighborhood changes they want to see is extremely timely considering the forthcoming changes. Taking the afore-mentioned factors into account, what does the future look like for low-income Angelenos in the pathway of new transit stations? What lessons can be learned from communities that have recently dealt with arrival of light rail to their neighborhoods and what can we learn about how participatory planning processes can be used to engage local stakeholders to address redevelopment concerns? This thesis uses the case study method to explore the work of three Los Angeles community-based organizations and their experience implementing participatory planning processes.

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather.
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As the planning paradigm in Los Angeles shifts away from sprawled development and towards smart growth and transit-oriented development, low-income communities are weary of the changes future investment and development will bring. With the passage of Measure R in 2008, a voter-approved sales tax to finance transit, the county will generate $14 billion to invest in new rail and bus rapid transit capital projects in the upcoming decades (Metro, 2014). The county transportation agency, Metro, has also received millions of dollars from state and federal grants to support new projects (Metro, 2014). This unprecedented expansion of the transit system will have numerous effects on the

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1 The widely cited figure of $40 billion is for all Metro projects, both new and current. Approximately $14 billion (35%) will be spent solely on new capital projects.
Los Angeles urban landscape. This region, synonymous with car culture, is shifting gears and creating a vision for more sustainable living. Policy at the city level has followed this trend, with the creation of the Transit Corridors Cabinet, an executive directive on livable streets (“Great Streets” Executive Directive No. 1), and a TOD consolidated plan, among other initiatives. The City Planning Department, in the process of updating neighborhood plans, has planners working on TOD specific plans for existing and future stations. With all of this momentum towards altering the way Angelenos live and move around the city, many are asking how this work can be framed in a just growth perspective, where equity is a pillar of the movement for a more sustainable Los Angeles.

This shift in development principles promises benefits for the environment and Angelenos, and especially for communities that have disproportionately lived with environmental burdens. However, there is also an underlying sentiment that when the sustainability rhetoric is put into action, it does not always account for equity issues. In a recent series of articles on transportation, development and equity by KCET, a local public media outlet, authors have written on the effects of transportation expansion on local communities and the need for attention to equity. As Manuel Pastor (2014) framed it, equity and social inclusion are the key to strong and resilient economies. Another article in the series presents three questions for practitioners as they develop concepts of sustainable communities:

- How do we achieve “just growth,” and grow in a sustainable, equitable and inclusive manner as we as a region target development around transit stations and transit corridors?
- Can historic and cultural neighborhoods remain true to their roots, or are we on a destructive path to water down these places into trendy interchangeable hotspots?
Don't real people matter in this quest for reductions in vehicle-miles-traveled and greenhouse gases? (Yee, 2014)

These questions bring up an underlying concept, which is a development model that does not displace low-income and people of color communities while also ensuring a more sustainable lifestyle. The desire to redevelop communities into pockets of urban sustainability, with light rail and mixed-use building, must be tempered with a conscious effort to make these communities inclusive. Equity and inclusion can't just be an afterthought, but should be included from the beginning of the planning process.

Background

Several studies have shown that the introduction of rail stations accelerates neighborhood change and in many cases gentrification. The widely referenced report, Maintaining Diversity in America’s Transit-rich Neighborhoods (Pollack, Bluestone, & Billingham, 2010), asserts that there is a strong connection between new rail stations and the acceleration of gentrification, however this is not always the case. Additionally, the authors concluded that in many cases as the are income increased, the rate of car ownership grew, thereby nulling the major benefit of TOD, which is to create developments that increase transit access and use (Pollack et al., 2010). In a Los Angeles specific study using similar methodology, the results showed that station areas received a disproportionate increase of residents with higher incomes and higher rates of car ownership when compared to the county overall (Dominie, 2012). Another Los Angeles-focused study examined the factors that make TOD successful and points to the combination of design and policy as heavily influencing the success or failure of
surrounding development (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2010). There is no guarantee that
the introduction of a new rail station will result in increases in investment and
redevelopment, but based on the literature, there is definitely a strong
connection between the two. While transit expansion and worries about
gentrification are not unique to Los Angeles, the scale of the system expansion,
with the construction of almost 100 new stations, means that the redevelopment
decisions and outcomes will have a widespread impact (Move LA, 2014). The way
in which communities plan for and advocate for the neighborhood changes they
want to see is extremely timely considering the number of projects in the
pipeline.

In addition to the expansion of the public transportation network, there
are several other factors driving the acceleration of neighborhood change. The
flow of new capital into pockets of the inner city has been met with concerns of
gentrification and displacement. The resurgence of investment in urban
downtowns has not been experienced since World War II and many of the new
real estate developments popping up are geared to specific demographics, such
as young professionals and baby boomers, and more specifically leave out low-
income populations (Dittmar & Ohland, 2004). In an effort to secure and develop
affordable housing, cities have implemented value capture mechanisms like
density bonuses and linkage fees, and created affordable housing trusts.
However, these efforts are a drop in the bucket when compared to the amount
of luxury housing coming on the market, especially when accounting for the
spillover effects of new market-rate and luxury units on surrounding housing
prices. On top of this, smart growth and new urbanist trends focusing on the
livability of compact urban neighborhoods, has contributed to an increased
demand to live in the redeveloping urban core. As redevelopment expands the amenities and housing options for middle and higher-income people, low-income communities are getting squeezed out of these inner city neighborhoods.

Beyond these larger trends, the City of Los Angeles is orienting itself to take advantage of the influx of investments in transit infrastructure. The previous mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa, created the Transit Corridors Committee to study how the City can develop policies to encourage TOD. Within these discussions there is a great amount of excitement over the potential for transit to serve as a catalyst for economic development, but there appears to be less focus on how the City can encourage (or mandate) more affordable housing so that the folks that actually depend upon and use transit can stay in these neighborhoods. Within the City Planning Department, the update of the City of Los Angeles General Plan, which is composed of 35 community plans, is currently in process. This update offers a chance for local stakeholders to voice their opinion on future development, but also provides an opportunity for developers to advocate for zoning amendments that might not serve local stakeholders' interests. In addition to the community plan updates, a handful of station TOD plans are being created in several neighborhoods (City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 2014).

Considering all of the above-mentioned factors, what does the future look like for low-income Angelenos in the pathway of new transit stations? The current system is composed of several rail lines, including the Gold Line (entered service in 2003-2009) and the Expo Line (entered service in 2012). What lessons can be learned from communities that have recently dealt with arrival of light rail
to their neighborhoods and how will their experiences translate to other L.A. neighborhoods?

**Research Question and Methods**

Considering these larger trends and pressures, the process of neighborhood change does not happen overnight and is a process that can be directed through strategies that involve policy, planning and community engagement. Community-based non-profits have been implementing community-lead planning strategies to address redevelopment and gentrification. In light of this, this thesis uses three case studies to explore participatory planning as a means for engaging diverse groups. These cases include a neighborhood plan in Boyle Heights, a station-area plan in Little Tokyo, and the redevelopment of a large-scale housing development in South L.A. These three projects have all completed community visioning and planning processes, and through interviews I documented the successes and challenges in developing engagement processes in these transit-oriented districts. By looking at how engagement is structured and the role of the community in "community-lead" planning, I hope to examine the effectiveness of participatory planning in getting broad-based engagement. From a higher-level viewpoint, I wanted to use this thesis to explore how participatory planning can be used to bring voices to the table to advocate for equitable development in a time where mixed-use TOD is often used as a façade for luxury housing and gentrification. How can TOD-related planning present an opportunity for low-income communities to plan for desired improvements, instead of signaling forthcoming gentrification?
I chose the case study method of research, focusing on three community-based organizations, each of which is located in a different neighborhood in Los Angeles. I selected the cases based on several factors. First, I wanted to look at communities where a light rail station had recently opened, that were in or near downtown Los Angeles, and that were made up of a high percentage of renters. In 2008 I worked at East LA Community Corporation on a neighborhood oral history project, and had focused my undergraduate thesis on the participatory planning work they had started a few years before. Because of my familiarity with the organization I knew that their work on the Plan del Pueblo would make for an interesting case within the context of this study. The other two cases I learned about through colleagues who connected me to staff at the community-based organizations. Through semi-structured interviews, generally lasting about 60-90 minutes, I spoke with the individuals who worked on the creation and implementation of the planning processes.

These cases are intended to provide a snapshot of the planning work these local groups have done. I have tried to paint a complete picture of their work, but there are most likely some details I have missed. Some of the limitations in my methodology include: all three cases focus on processes that have already occurred, so I was not able to conduct first-hand observations; the people I interviewed were reporting on and assessing their own work; all of the organizations have received financial support in some capacity from funders, and thus there may be some funder/grantee dynamics in play that affect how the experiences were presented in the interviews. Bearing in mind these limitations, I hope to present a relevant and revelatory synopsis and examination of participatory planning in Los Angeles.
This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 surveys the literature on participation in planning from the middle of the 20th century up until present day. The focus of the literature review is to gain a better understanding of the need for and benefits of including robust participatory processes in planning, as well as to explore how collaborative planning processes can alleviate some of the downfalls of existing institutionalized planning processes. Chapter 3 presents three cases in Los Angeles where community-based groups have chosen to develop participatory planning processes with local stakeholders to address planning spurred by the arrival of light rail. The content of this chapter is primarily based upon interviews with organization staff. Chapter 4 examines the three cases, looking at the chosen approaches and salient themes that emerged through the processes. Chapter 5 summarizes the main takeaways of this thesis and provides some directions for future research.
Participation, community involvement, engagement. These terms have nuances between them, but share a root desire, which is to develop paths of exchange between parties, usually with the hope of creating a better outcome. The methods for this exchange have evolved over the years, but even with these shifts in methodology and advances in technology, the challenge of getting a broad base of voices to the table remains. Even once people are at the table, how do we collaborate and make decisions, and how are these decisions then implemented? City planners and community-based practitioners have grappled with these questions for decades. A key issue within this discussion is the disconnect between those that have power, make agendas and make decisions, and those that live with the implications of these decisions. This recognition that people who live with the effects of decisions should have a voice at the table, and according to some, hold the power, is a core principle of those who believe in the value of participation. Planners in the 1960s and 70s recognized this imbalance of power and studied ways to address it through planning. After
decades of work, planners are still committed to using public participation as means for making more just decisions, although there is much room for improvement. This thesis looks at how community-based organizations are addressing transit-oriented development through participatory planning. Through a survey of the literature on participation in planning, this chapter provides a foundation for the cases by looking at the historical context of participation and planning, contemporary perspectives on participatory methods, and the importance of participatory planning for communities historically disenfranchised from planning processes.

**Planning and Participation in the 1960s/70s**

The 1960s marked a shift in urban planning. The citizens’ movements on civil rights, women’s liberation, anti-war and calls for social reform all provided the background for criticisms of urban planning and its blatant lack of concern for people. Critics reflected on the role of planners and the amount of power planners should have. The focus on planning for people looked to citizen participation as an avenue through which power would be shifted from planners to the people. Proposed changes ranged along a spectrum of giving citizens total power to creating multiple plans to engaging stakeholders in a consensus building process. All of these proposals analyzed power in planning and rejected the approach of top-down planning that was so prevalent.

One of the most widely cited authors of the time, Sherry Arnstein, argued that public participation ranges from manipulation to citizen control, where the latter eliminates the need for decision-makers (Arnstein, 1969). She argued that this radical change of the decision-making structure would better address
inequalities. By giving control to citizens, Arnstein recognized the value of all people’s ideas and democratized the decision-making process. This idea marked a significant shift from the model of planner as expert and recognized that the public has valuable ideas and understands their needs better than the planner does.

Another take on public participation came from Davidoff who advocated for pluralist planning as a means to include various points of view in the planning process. The author suggested shifting from the unitary plan model, which he believed incomplete and lacking in depth, to a model where planners work for different clients to produce different plans for a single place (Davidoff, 1965). Davidoff saw the planner as an advocate and educator, thereby expanding the role of the traditional planner. Advocacy planning, or planning work undertaken for specific interest groups by sympathetic consultants, had the goal of creating positive social change.

Both Arnstein and Davidoff, early critics of modernist planning, proposed significant changes in the role of the planner and the public. While Arnstein elevated citizens to the level of planners (in the sense of being the decision-maker), Davidoff validated the need for various ideas in planning, but maintained the need for planners. Both models proposed departures from the commonly accepted way of (not) including the public’s ideas, but their approaches have also received criticism for their proposals’ lack of practicality and limited view of the power structures controlling decision-making. Despite these limitations, both of these authors have had a powerful influence on planning in the U.S. and provided a foundation for contemporary planning literature.
Contemporary Literature

The contemporary literature on participation is expansive, showing that the interest in exploring participation only grows with each year. Despite this interest, there is no consensus on what is meant by participation and what is meant by good participation. As Sanoff recognizes, “community participation has a different meaning for different people and even a different meaning for the same people according to the situation” (Sanoff, 2000). This malleability is highlighted in another point Sanoff makes: “participation is contextual, so participation varies in type, level of intensity, extent and frequency” (Sanoff 2000). As Crawford et al (2008) acknowledge, “while the definitions of citizen participation are many, the general consensus among researchers is that such participation should be sought. At the very least, its effects are nominal, at best, participatory action helps empower citizens and create a more sensitive and inclusive planning end product.” The general consensus in the literature is that participation, in principal, is good, but in practice, and as we’ll see in the section on institutionalized participation, it can have a wide range of effects, including negative ones.

Participation in decision-making processes is one of the fundamental aspects of democracy. A great deal of literature focuses on how deliberative and collaborative processes strengthen democracy. In assessing processes that have the potential to strengthen democracy, Fung (2006) delineates several questions one should ask, including: who participates, how do they communicate and make decisions, what is the connection between their conclusions and opinions on one hand and public policy and action on the other? The answers to these questions help us understand the limitations and potential of the participatory process. In
designing participatory processes, it is also critical to think about the type or level of participation one is trying to establish. There is a distinction in the literature between the gradations of community involvement, from community participation to community driven to community controlled. Fundamental in these distinctions is the common importance of choice and voice, which is an integral part of the principles of democracy.

The frustration with top-down planning and interest in participatory models has lead to an exploration of the benefits of participation on concepts like community capacity and local knowledge. Community capacity is “the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community” (Chaskin, 2001). Through participatory processes, community capacity can expand and subsequently help communities increase their ability to affect change. The process of collaborative work “builds up social, intellectual, and political capital which becomes a new institutional resource” (Healey, 2006). Community capacity is also referred to as civic capacity, and Innes and Booher (1999) write that civic capacity doesn’t just stay with the participants, but overflows into their circles of associates and “this capacity in turn has the potential to create a more intelligent society, better able to adapt quickly to changes in the conditions and more competent to address controversial, difficult issues.” Overall, the literature lauds the potential for the expansion of community capacity through collaboration and participatory processes.

Participatory processes also have the potential to incorporate local knowledge, which is sometimes an undervalued source of information. Local
knowledge is especially important for place-based work that attempts to solve problems affecting residents and local stakeholders. A lot of the principles and methods used in participatory planning build off of the popular education movement. The separation between so-called experts and laymen is actively addressed, seeking to build dialogues where all participants feel comfortable sharing their insights. Many organizations have developed curriculums on policy and planning that pulls from the body of literature on popular education, from authors such as Paulo Freire, who advocate for a teaching style that emphasizes equality among all participants and embraces the value of all types of knowledge. By developing processes based on dialogue, where participants can discuss their lived experiences, it can lead to learning that builds confidence and skills.

**Failures of Institutionalized Participation Methods**

The most recognized form of institutionalized participation is the public meeting. One of the highly criticized aspects of this format is that the issues presented are chosen through a non-participatory process and the framing of the issue already has a predetermined problem and solution. The participation process is a legal step that agencies need to comply with, so usually the intention of the process is not to collaboratively develop ideas. The comments that are given have no type of assurance that they will be included into the existing plans. Often it is too late in the process to even realistically incorporate comments. Additionally, it is expected that participants should know about the issue presented and if they don't, and subsequently don't know how to engage in the topic, then it is just too bad. As Innes and Booher (2004) summarize, “ultimately
the differences between the methods legally required in the US and collaborative approaches include: one-way talk vs. dialogue; elite or self-selected vs. diverse participants; reactive vs. involved at the outset; top-down education vs. mutually shared knowledge; one-shot activities vs. continuous engagement; and use for routine activities vs. for controversial choices.” Some public agencies have made more of an effort to alter meeting formats, although they have not relinquished their power to select and frame the issue. And, there are a few examples of public agencies engaging in collaborative processes. One example is the frequently cited process of participatory budgeting, with the most well known case in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Traditional public engagement methods do not achieve genuine participation and in many cases do not improve the outcome or decision, while also leaving out large sections of the public (Innes and Booher, 2004). The authors argue that part of the problem with these traditional methods is the dualistic frame in which the process is based, with government on one side and citizens on the other. By creating a collaborative process and breaking this dual framing to include other actors (non-profit and for-profit organizations, planners and public administrators), a fluid framework can achieve dialogue, interaction and co-evolution (Innes and Booher, 2004). This alternative framework moves beyond the traditional process to achieve genuine engagement. The actual purposes of public participation in a democracy according to Innes and Booher (2004) are:

“(1) for decision makers to find out what the public’s preferences are so these can play a part in their decisions; (2) to improve decisions by incorporating citizens’ local knowledge into the calculus; (3) advancing fairness and justice; (4) getting legitimacy
for public decisions; (5) because the law requires it; (6) to build
civil society; (7) to create an adaptive, self-organizing polity
capable of addressing wicked problems in an informed and
effective way."

In practice, the fifth reason, and sometimes the fourth, are the reasons why we
even have the existing participatory processes. While the engagement methods
used in institutionalized participatory processes are far from ideal, there is hope
for other processes that incorporate collaboration and deliberation.

**Participatory Planning**

Participatory planning is a collaborative planning process. Participatory
planning has developed as an alternative to institutionalized forms of planning
that rely on public agencies to develop the framing of problems and solutions. It
is a more time intensive process that focuses on educating participants in the
vocabulary at hand, and then works with participants to develop visions or ideas
for the changes they want to see. This approach is rooted in the idea that local
knowledge is valuable and participatory processes have the potential to address
issues like exclusion and discrimination. It is also more focused on the process
than on the product, although in some cases the product is an important aspect
of the project. There is room for creativity and the process is iterative. Fung
(2006) writes about this process of moving from consultation to deliberation in
decision-making processes, which is an important aspect of participatory
planning. The deliberative process can lead to consensus, increased capacity and
other benefits for participants. The shift from consultative to deliberative also
signals a shift in power dynamics although the decision-making and
implementation still depend on deeper shifts in power structures. Participatory planning values participants’ knowledge and supports participants’ decision-making capacities by including them in the deliberative process.

This pattern break in engagement style uncovers interdependencies between participants. Instead of giving singular comments pertaining to one’s individual interest, participants have to interact and produce a collective interest, vision or plan (Innes and Booher 2004). Dialogue and collective work moves beyond the dichotomy of win-lose or win-win, but re-frames the way in which people think about winning and losing (Healey, 2006). By framing issues together, it validates people’s perspectives and creates a sense of ownership among participants. These processes enable participants to get to know each other and develop relationships (Forester, 1999). This leads to the creation of authentic dialogue, which is essential for effective collaboration (Innes & Booher, 2010).

There is a lot of potential for participatory planning to fill gaps in traditional planning processes. However, Crawford (2008) writes, “while the concept of citizen participation and participatory planning are generally perceived as positive efforts, there is still little consensus as to what exactly such participation should entail and how to determine if it is successful in achieving equally ambiguous goals.” Forester (1999) discusses the flexibility of participatory processes and notes that what is relevant can become irrelevant and vice versa, conveying the fluidity of the process. This flexibility can make it hard to assess or determine if a process is successful. Additionally, the effects of these processes are not immediately seen and are seen in ways that are hard to measure. Despite this, it is still an approach that many community-based groups choose because of
its focus on cultivating peoples' knowledge of planning, leading them to be more likely to participate in future planning opportunities, institutionalized or otherwise.

**Participatory Planning Methods**

Within the participatory planning approach there are various techniques, some of which, like charrettes, visioning and community mapping, are commonly used by community groups trying to engage stakeholders. A charrette is a collaborative design event that fosters community ownership of a project by including stakeholders before the start of design and maintaining inclusion in the process throughout the evolution of the plan or design (Lennertz, Lutzenhiser, Cox Blair, Wood, & Wilbur, 2013). Generally, charrettes are intended to be intense processes, lasting only a couple days, where ideas are taken from scratch and built out into drawings and plans. The charrette is held up a valuable participatory design process because its very nature as community-based process should translate into popular support of the resulting plans (Fagence, 1977). Visioning is a process where participants are asked to think about how they would like their community to be, identify ways to work toward the vision, and turn the vision into images and words. Community mapping is when participants observe and collect neighborhood information through fieldwork. They can then use this information to identify assets and gaps within a geographic area, and use this data to strategize next steps. Storytelling and theater/role playing are also under the participatory planning umbrella. The first allows participants to share their history and identity, while the latter allows participants to imagine new points of view and reflect on their own (Innes &
Booher, 2010). All of these techniques, including others not explained here, build on the principle of collaborative learning that is central to participatory planning. Many times organizations engaging participants in participatory processes will use a combination of techniques, whereas others will focus solely on one technique. In the upcoming cases we will get a better sense of how these techniques are used.

**Participatory Planning in Low-income Communities and Communities of Color**

Participatory planning can have beneficial effects for all people, but there are aspects of participatory planning that are especially important for communities who have traditionally been left out of planning. As explained in the Vital Difference report by the Center for Reflective Community Practice,

"the knowledge of individuals and organizations working to build healthy communities is essential for framing problems in their true complexity. This knowledge is unique because it integrates context, personality, history, politics, culture and action, while presenting a complex understanding of how disenfranchised communities work. Despite the importance of this knowledge, practitioners from these communities have endured a long history of seeing their words, knowledge and insight extracted and reinterpreted to misrepresent them and the people they represent" (Amulya, O’campbell, & McDowell, 2004).

The lack of trust between low-income communities and communities of color, and public agencies and politicians, means that more than an occasional community forum or public meeting is needed to start a dialogue that builds towards collective planning. Participatory planning provides a method by which
planners and community members can come to understand each other better over multiple gatherings, and incorporating participants’ ideas and validating people’s experiences encourage participation beyond a superficial level. By working collaboratively to create visions and plans, the misrepresentation that occurred in the past can be avoided.

The misrepresentation and lack of concern for low-income communities and communities of color has affected trust and belief in public agencies to do the right thing. In her writing on planning with multicultural communities, Umemoto (2009) writes, “deliberative planning is particularly relevant in multicultural milieus where historically marginalized groups could clearly benefit from attempts to promote a fair and equal hearing for diverse voices in public affairs.” This deeper engagement translates into an increased sense of trust and efficacy, as well as greater levels of future engagement. And, without trust you have no basis upon which to plan, “building trust between a planner and a constituent along with trust between participants is oftentimes not a well-defined step in the planning process. However, the establishment of trust and a safe environment can make or break a culture-based planning process” (Umemoto, 2001). Many times public officials are baffled by the lack of attendance at public meetings, lamenting that those most affected by the topics of discussion are not present. By understanding how communities have often been mislead or hurt by the decisions public decision-makers have made over the years, there is an opportunity to use alternative methods of engagement to rebuild trust. Participatory planning aims to foster communication and develop relationships between participants by designing a process that can lead towards beneficial changes in relationships between communities and decision-makers.
Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on the trajectory of participation in planning from the middle of the 20th century when rational models of planning and decision-making dominated, up until the current trends of expanding the meaning of participation from a legal requirement to a tool for more equitable planning. Participatory planning, in theory, addresses many of the deficits of institutionalized participation. In practice, the challenges to creating and implementing a collaborative planning process are numerous. In examining the cases that are presented in the following chapter, I am looking at how each of these groups approached participatory planning in the context of transit-oriented development. While much of what was outlined in this literature review, from the emphasis on local knowledge and collective decision-making to relationship building provides a framework for evaluation, how does the environment on the ground complicate these elements? Moving from theory to practice, the following chapter includes three Los Angeles case studies of participatory planning in action. We will see how these cases fit into what the literature describes as participatory planning, and the challenges and successes they experienced.
CHAPTER 3 - CASE STUDIES

The following case studies illustrate the work of Los Angeles community-based organizations that have incorporated participatory planning into their work on neighborhood planning and development. All three places, Boyle Heights, Little Tokyo and the section of South Los Angeles near University of Southern California, are low-income communities dealing with the implications of new light rail stations, real estate speculation and rising rents. These three communities have addressed transit-oriented planning on different scales: neighborhood plan, station-area plan and large-scale housing complex. As these communities think about the preservation of affordable housing and well being of community members, how can they bring unheard voices into planning discussions in these newly branded transit-oriented neighborhoods? Many of the residents living in these neighborhoods have been transit-dependent for years and have a desire for the light rail lines to provide greater access to the city and not just serve as a way to bring in new people to the neighborhood. By engaging stakeholders in
conversations about development spurred by the introduction of new rail stations, these groups are trying to increase their involvement in directing the change that is happening in these neighborhoods.

The cases below are based on interviews with staff members from the community-based organizations highlighted in each of the cases. Each of the organizations has a history of working on neighborhood planning and has spent many years using different methods for engaging their members and the community at-large. The selected examples of participatory planning should be understood as part of these organizations' larger efforts to affect neighborhood planning and development decisions. The cases are meant to serve as examples of how specific approaches, within the participatory planning framework, have been used to address transit-oriented development. All of the groups define the work that is outlined in this chapter as participatory planning.
Boyle Heights

Neighborhood Background:

Just across the Los Angeles River, east of downtown Los Angeles, is the neighborhood of Boyle Heights. Boyle Heights was a mostly rural section of Los Angeles until after World War I (Sánchez, 2004). In the 1930s, Los Angeles' population increased by 600,000 with nearly 90% of this growth the result of net migration (Marshall, 2013). Restrictive residential covenants on the Westside of the city meant that non-Anglo groups were limited to living in East and South Los Angeles. As such, the East and Southside developed with multiracial and ethnic neighborhoods with working class migrants from around the world and throughout the U.S. Boyle Heights was a mix of Jewish, Japanese, African American and Mexican (Sides, 2003). Local housing covenants that prohibited "non Caucasians" gave activists a shared interest and a tangible reason to form political coalitions. The policy of segregation that mandated separation created politically active multicultural communities that resulted in numerous lawsuits against housing discrimination (Marshall, 2013). The multiracial coalitions played a critical role in cracking the all white façade of the L.A. city council with the 1949 election of Mexican American Boyle Heights resident Edward R. Roybal (Marshall, 2013).

As the Jewish community began to gain acceptance into the mainstream as whites, they moved out of the Eastside. By the 1950s, about half of Boyle Heights’ population was Mexican, while the Jewish population that was once over 70% of the population had decreased to about 17% (Sánchez, 2004). Boyle Heights was severely affected by the regional effort to build up the network of highways during the 1950s. As a result the neighborhood of less than six square
miles has five freeways cutting through it (the 5, 10, 60, 101 and 110). In the 1960s and 1970s Boyle Heights' residents were part of larger civil rights movements. The history of struggle in this neighborhood continues into today, as Boyle Heights residents organize around environmental justice, economic justice, affordable housing, and immigration reform, among other pressing issues.

Today, Boyle Heights is still home to a large immigrant population (48%), and is mostly Latino (94%) (US Census Bureau, 2013). The neighborhood is mostly made up of renters, with 76% of the housing units renter occupied, and the household median income is $33,150 (US Census Bureau, 2013). It is one of the densest neighborhoods in Los Angeles, with 84,290 people over 5.83 square miles (US Census Bureau, 2013). In 2004, Metro began construction of the eastside extension of the Gold Line light rail line from downtown to East Los Angeles. The extension included four stations in Boyle Heights: Pico/Aliso, Mariachi Plaza, Soto and Indiana (on the border with unincorporated East Los Angeles), which all opened in 2009. During the construction period, the Los Angeles City Planning Department initiated the update of the City's community plans. The neighborhood planning process began in 2006, but due to the economic recession the process was put on hold in 2008. In 2012, after advocacy by East LA Community Corporation and other neighborhood institutions, funding was allocated to the project so that the plan could be completed. It is currently in process.

There are several major development projects that, in addition to the expansion of the light rail, have the potential to significantly change the make-up of Boyle Heights. One of these projects is the redevelopment of Wyvernwood, a

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2 Census Tracts: 2032, 2035, 2036, 2037.10, 2037.20, 2038, 2039, 2041.10, 2041.20, 2042, 2043, 2044.10, 2044.20, 2046, 2047, 2048.10, 2048.20, 2049.10, 2049.20, 2051.10, 2051.20, 2060.32, 2060.50
large garden style housing development built in the 1940s that currently has over 1,000 rent controlled units. The developers of this hotly contested redevelopment have promised to make sure that all current residents can stay once it is redeveloped, yet they have not provided any details on how that would actually happen. Nearby Wyvernwood is the historic Sears building. Boasting historic art deco architecture, the Sears building has gone through several failed redevelopment attempts. However, a new group of real estate developers has recently purchased the building and plans to build a mixed-use development with approximately 1,000 residential units, none of which are planned to be affordable units (Barragan, 2014). In addition to these two major projects, there are numerous other smaller-scale redevelopments happening in the neighborhood.

Organization Background:

East LA Community Corporation (ELACC) has been working in Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles since 1995. Its mission is to advocate for economic and social justice in Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles by building grassroots leadership, developing affordable housing, building neighborhood assets and providing economic development opportunities for low- and moderate-income families (East LA Community Corporation, 2014). The community organizing department currently has campaigns focusing on the legalization of street vending, redevelopment of Metro-owned parcels and community planning. In 2006, realizing that the neighborhood was at a crossroads with the construction of the Gold Line, the update of the community plan and pressures from
downtown redevelopment, the community organizing department developed a community planning campaign.

**Participatory Planning - Objective:**

In 2006, ELACC’s community organizing department had three active committees: education, jobs and housing. As the organizers were planning out the strategies for these campaigns with the members, they had conversations about what members wanted to change in Boyle Heights. Members replied with similar responses about trash, gangs and violence, and graffiti. After realizing that looking at the deficits of the neighborhood elicited responses that focused on symptoms of the larger problems, they decided to take a different approach. As one organizer put it, “people weren’t going deep, so at some point we flipped the script, instead of asking what changes do you want to see or what don’t you like, we asked people to identify the assets in the community,” and by reframing the questions they were asking, the dialogue changed to strong social networks and thriving cultural elements of the neighborhood. As an organizer explained, “the initial organizing was about building a sense of pride and ownership.” As the discussions proceeded, they began to uncover the root causes of the social and economic conditions of the neighborhood and analyze why in a community that is mostly renters, the homeowners and business owners were the ones with a voice.

During this time, organizers implemented activities and events that spanned a broad range of community-relevant issues. Initial events focused on knowing your rights with police, work, and housing, learning about healthy food and teaching political education, among other topics. They tried to “peel back
the layers for the community to see that this is not how people in other communities live and it’s a problem, but not because of you as an individual, but because it’s an institutional, systemic problem.” After going through this process, they laid out all the campaigns that they could focus on and the members got to choose the campaign they wanted to focus on. They all kept choosing the community plan. With the new light rail line in construction and the Boyle Heights community plan in progress, ELACC and its members decided that the best way to tackle some of the root issues they had discussed was to organize around Metro and community planning. They saw an opportunity, because as the organizer explained, “a lot of public dollars were going to be invested in the neighborhood, but they weren’t being planned to match the needs of the community...there’s money, there’s projects, there’s people in power, there are all these plans, but they don’t match with what’s going to get people out of poverty and increase the quality of life.” The organizing department decided that they needed to focus on the planning and redevelopment that was coming with the construction of the new light rail line, and thus created the community plan/Metro campaign.

*Participatory Planning - Process:*

Once the team had decided to focus on community planning, the organizers conducted research to develop a curriculum. As one organizer recalled, “we were learning about planning on the day to day as organizers in order to translate that into popular education curriculum for our members to understand these concepts in their everyday lives, which are not difficult concepts, they just use fancy words.” One set of activities they developed was a
recurring event called Policy con Pan Dulce. During these events an invited guest would present on a planning or policy related topic and then have a discussion with members. An example of one of the events was when they invited an urban planner to discuss what a community plan is. They also invited representatives from public agencies, like City Planning, the Housing Department and the City Council member’s office, to come speak. In addition to the Policy con Pan Dulce series, they had workshops where members mapped community assets, took pictures of the neighborhood, measured the width of sidewalks and streets, and carried out a community survey. They also used teatro/role playing, field trips and games. All of these activities were meant to build members interest in land use, while also showing them that they already knew a lot about these issues.

In addition to internal events and activities, members also attended city sponsored planning events and city council meetings, while also organizing actions. When attending public meetings, the meetings were set-up such that it was difficult for any dialogue to occur and there was no mechanism to ensure that public feedback was integrated into future iterations. Because of this frustrating experience, ELACC decided to create their own plan, while also trying to engage in the formal process. Through the activities they held and with the research organizers conducted, they began to compile the information into the Plan del Pueblo.

One of the principal concerns of residents throughout the many discussions was the evictions and displacement that was starting to happen. With redevelopment booming in downtown LA and the light rail line in construction, people were worried that evictions and rents would only rise. How could they use community planning to control development and secure a place for low-income
people in Boyle Heights? What were the mechanisms for preventing or lessening the impacts of gentrification? Through this Plan del Pueblo process, members and the organizers were able to explore these questions and analyze the power structures that were behind the neighborhood changes they were experiencing.

The planning process was in part about visioning the Boyle Heights they wanted to see, but more importantly about discussing power, equity and justice, through the lens of people who were living through these issues. The Plan de Pueblo that started to form as a result of the planning discussions is a policy document with recommendations on the changes residents want to see. The goal was to craft points that would be implementable and that matched the language that city planners use so that it would be as easy as a cut and paste.

Participatory Planning – After Thoughts:

The Plan del Pueblo process, which is still in progress, has worked through challenges in maintaining engagement throughout the past eight years. As anyone might imagine, keeping members part of this long-term process is not easy. One organizer mentioned, “we go over the information with the members that are participating and sometimes it feels like its not going anywhere. For some people, they have been participating since 2006, which is a really long time. It’s been a challenge to maintain momentum.” This extended timeline has also had some benefits, as well. The organizers have had time to reflect on the work they’ve done and think about how they could have done things differently. As one organizer explained their process, “all this was new, and now in retrospect, there’s a lot of organizations that learned lessons from us, and from other people across the country, and at some points I’m sure we recreated the
wheel a thousand times." By having a more lengthy process, there was time to think about how they could make incremental improvements or even bigger structural improvements to the process. This opportunity meant that there was a lot of learning that has happened for the organizers and the members that have been a part of the process since 2006.
Little Tokyo

Neighborhood Background:

On the eastern end of downtown Los Angeles is the geographically small, but culturally rich neighborhood of Little Tokyo. As its name implies, it is one of Southern California’s centers of Japanese culture, and one of California’s three officially designated Japanese cultural districts (the others are in San Francisco and San Jose). Japanese immigrants began moving to the area at the end of the 19th century, and at the beginning of the 20th century many Japanese immigrants worked at the Santa Fe Railroads, adjacent to the area where Little Tokyo began to grow. By 1908 Little Tokyo had over 50 Japanese restaurants and was considered by outsiders to be self-contained community where residents could take care all of their needs without leaving (“Departures Series: Little Tokyo,” 2014). The enclave expanded to thousands of residents and covered an area with a radius of three miles (Yee, 2014). However, the effects of Japanese internment severely debilitated the neighborhood and during the period of internment, Little Tokyo became known as Bronzeville, a bustling hub of African American culture. Little Tokyo, which once housed 30,000 residents, grew to over 80,000 residents (Kitazawa, 2012). Overcrowding and absentee landlords lead to the condemnation of many structures and the displacement of many of Bronzeville’s African American residents. Around 1945, Japanese started returning to Little Tokyo and black business owners hired Japanese and Japanese who were able to buy their businesses back hired blacks. Over time many of the area’s African Americans moved to other parts of the city, and waves of urban renewal and in adjacent civic center ate away at the neighborhood, leaving Little Tokyo with less than one square mile.
Despite its small size, the area is a hub for small businesses and cultural and religious institutions that serve the Japanese-American population throughout Los Angeles County. The Civic Center, Skid Row and the Arts District border the area, which are three very distinct areas that have become attractive to investors looking to develop luxury real estate in downtown. One of the major cultural institutions in the neighborhood is the Japanese American National Museum, which is located across from the Little Tokyo rail station. There are also various other institutions, restaurants and public spaces within this small neighborhood. Demographically, the neighborhood has a strong presence of elderly people, with about a quarter of the population over the age of 65 and 5% of the neighborhood population under the age of 18 (US Census Bureau, 2013). The neighborhood is ethnically diverse, with 40% Asian, 12% African American, 14% Latino, 30% White and 4% other races (US Census Bureau, 2013). The housing units are mostly renter occupied (72%) and the median income is $24,411 (US Census Bureau, 2013). The opening of the Gold Line Little Tokyo station in 2009 and subsequent planning for the Regional Connector, a new station expected to be the system’s busiest station when complete in 2020, coupled by other development pressures, meant that Little Tokyo’s future depended on the community’s involvement in planning decisions.

Organization Background:

The Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC) is a community-based nonprofit serving the neighborhood through the development of affordable housing, provision of social services, and promotion of cultural and historic preservation.

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3 Census Tracts: 2060.31 (Block Group 1), 2062 (Block Group 1 and 2), 2073.02 (Block Group 2)
(Little Tokyo Service Center, 2014). Created in 1979, LTSC has been working with local residents for many years on planning and preservation issues. During the 1980s and 1990s they organized around displacement when an influx of developers from Japan and Korea began investing in the area (“Departures Series: Little Tokyo,” 2014). LTSC has advocated for affordable housing and cultural preservation in the institutionalized Los Angeles Planning Department initiatives, Metro station planning and civic center redevelopment. With the transformation of the Little Tokyo/Arts District light rail station into the Regional Connector, LTSC has been collaborating with the Little Tokyo Community Council on engagement in decision-making processes. While LTSC aims to involve local residents in these processes, they also represent stakeholders from throughout Los Angeles County who have a connection to the neighborhood.

**Participatory Planning – Objective:**

Over the years Little Tokyo has maintained the same geographic epicenter, but as downtown and civic center redevelopment has encroached around the edges over the decades, Little Tokyo has had to engage in planning to secure its existence. The announcement of the Regional Connector, a new multi-line station in the geographic heart of Little Tokyo, as an above ground station meant that an important piece of Little Tokyo would cease to exist. After negotiations with Metro, the station will now be built underground, but as this station is projected to be the busiest rail station in the network, LTSC knew they

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4 Established in 1999, the Little Tokyo Community Council (LTCC) is a non-profit coalition whose mission is to ensure that Little Tokyo remains a viable center for both the Japanese American and Downtown Los Angeles communities.
had to proactively address planning and engage stakeholders before too many development decisions were made without consulting the existing community.

Additionally, through the construction process there were going to be several large lots available for development once the current above ground Little Tokyo Station was incorporated into the underground Regional Connector and construction/staging was complete. The opportunity to have input on how these parcels should be developed presented the question of what could be the most effective way to present their ideas. Having engaged members in visioning processes previously, the team was eager to try a different approach that would have takeaways that move beyond big, overarching ideas to concept sketches and other visual representations of their ideas. With the future availability of large lots of land ready for development, LTSC wanted to have a blueprint to show the City what they wanted to be developed in these areas. Because of the transit accessibility, location in downtown and mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented style of Little Tokyo, LTSC knew that they needed to come up with proposals that expressed their members’ visions and a participatory design process seemed like a perfect path to get to this outcome. So, in 2012 LTSC partnered with the Natural Resource Defense Council, Enterprise Community Partners and LISC, to implement a community planning process that would address new neighborhood development and include sustainable development principles. Over a two-year period, this collaboration developed the Sustainable Little Tokyo plan.
Participatory Planning – Process:

LTSC worked with leaders from their base and partner organizations to develop the participatory design process. The first year of the two-year planning process was preparation and shaping the project scope with the partner organizations. Since LTSC had already engaged their membership in planning and visioning exercises throughout their years of planning work, LTSC compiled information from all of these events to give to the consultants. They envisioned their previous work as setting the stage for this design process so that they wouldn't need to start from scratch. After a year of doing this preparation and logistical work, they opened the process to community members. Several community members, who were leaders within LTCC, were an important part of this phase, as an LTSC staff member explained, “they helped establish goals, objectives, select the architects by reviewing the proposals with us and sat in on interviews with us, and we made the decision together.” During the second year of the process, the meetings focused on planning the design process, which would take the shape of a weekend-long charrette. During these meetings the group looked for ways that they could make the design process, which would have a strong environmental and sustainability component, relevant to participants. They chose culturally relevant ways to express concepts, like using the word mottainai, which means what a shame to waste, and kodomo tameni, which means for future generations, to express themes that were important to incorporate into the design plan.

During the last weekend in September 2013, LTSC held a charrette workshop lead by consultants. This charrette process was open to all LTSC members and community stakeholders. Beginning on a Friday afternoon and
culminating on Sunday with presentations on the designs developed over the weekend, the charrette process included workshops and focus groups, and advertised that all feedback was welcome, regardless of the ability to spend an hour or a whole day working at the charrette. There were focus groups for business leaders, youth, and elders, and interactive workshops with multimedia features and educational exhibits. In total, LTSC estimated that about 200 participants came during the weekend. After the charrette process, the consultants created a planning document called A Sustainable Little Tokyo, which includes an economic analysis and a community vision illustrated in sections, plans and renderings.

*Participatory Planning – After Thoughts:*

The charrette process was well attended, but there was some uncertainty as to the effectiveness of the process in engaging the participants. During this design process, some participants felt that they didn’t know how to engage. One staff member explained, “people thought it was hard to understand what was going on during that weekend and people didn’t feel that comfortable providing input because they didn’t really know how to, and people felt like they weren’t being listened to because the designs weren’t reflecting their input.” The weekend timeline was a very intense and did not allow much time for back and forth between the designers and participants. Overall, the way in which the engagement aspect was structured resulted in surface level participation and some LTSC staff felt like the participatory design was not as participatory as they had hoped for. As one staff member explained, “[the architect/consultant] said that they had a lot of experience doing community participation, but what we
found was that their version of community participation is totally different from what we were expecting. We thought it would be an extension of the work we’d done on community planning, like sticker dot voting, brainstorming exercises, but the architect didn’t really provide a methodology for us.” This meant that LTSC ended up jumping in to provide ideas for how to get people involved in the design process, even though the design process is not what LTSC specializes in. As a staff member explained, “our takeaway was that these guys are the best in this area [design], but they didn’t really know how to engage our community in the process. We had to push to get people mechanisms for engaging.” Some other feedback post-process was the following: “we were conscious that there was a certain degree of planning fatigue in the community because we’ve gone through different processes so many different times, so we made a big point of reviewing and refreshing the work, affirming where we were, and trying to transfer that to the consulting team.” In summary, the engagement process they had hoped for really didn’t match up to what they had experienced when they’d done visioning and other planning-related work.
Exposition Park, South L.A.

Neighborhood Background:

The northern section of South Los Angeles, considered the Exposition Park area, began as an agricultural area. Exposition Park, which today houses several museums and the Los Angeles Coliseum, was created as Agricultural Park in 1872 (Masters, 2011). In the early 20th century, as the Los Angeles population grew, this area became more urbanized, and like the other two neighborhoods from the previous case studies, the area was multicultural due to the housing covenants that limited where non-white people could live. Historian Josh Sides (2012) described the effects of these covenants on the spatial demographics of the area, “one black Los Angeles resident in 1917 described [the racially restrictive covenants] as ‘invisible walls of steel.’” While these invisible walls kept nonwhites restricted to specific parts of the city, it also provided the backdrop for multicultural coalitions (Sides, 2012). However, after World War II and the passage of Shelley v. Kraemer (1948) and Barrows v. Jackson (1953), the ethnic diversity of residents in the neighborhood decreased as people began to move around more, and the area eventually became primarily African American. Many middle class blacks lived in the Exposition Park area and adjacent West Adams (Sides, 2003). But, after the civil unrests of the 1960s in South L.A., most notably in Watts, many of the black middle class residents moved further west into Baldwin Hills and nearby areas.

South L.A. has suffered through decades of disinvestment, but the Exposition Park section of South Los Angeles is currently going through several big changes, mostly caused by the arrival of light rail and the expansion of USC. The Expo light rail line opened in 2012, connecting downtown Los Angeles to
Culver City and the second segment under construction will extend the line to Santa Monica. A recent Los Angeles Times article, “Soaring home prices spur a resurgence near USC,” details the rapid rise of real estate prices as the real estate market heats up again, and explains that many of the young professionals moving to the area have been enticed with the Expo light rail line (Khourii, 2014). The area has a household median income of $27,084 and 81.5% of the housing units are renter occupied (US Census Bureau, 2013). While once a primarily black neighborhood, today’s residents are 71% Latino and 23% black (US Census Bureau, 2013). The stark contrast of wealthy USC and the surrounding neighborhood has resulted in an often strained relationship, as symbolized in the literal a figurative wall that separates the neighborhood and the university (Dreier, 2013). As USC and private investors inject capital into the surrounding neighborhood, tenants are leaving the area because of soaring rents and students are replacing them just as fast as they are leaving.

Organization Background:

T.R.U.S.T. South LA (TSLA), established in 2005 under the name Figueroa Corridor Community Land Trust, is a community-based organization committed to improving quality of life in South Los Angeles. The membership base has control over TSLA’s assets, which is ensured by the legal structure of the organization, elects 80% of the board, and controls major decisions in the organization. TSLA has been active in land stewardship through the community land trust, as well as mobility, recreation and planning initiatives through,

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5 Census Tracts: 2226, 2312.10, 2312.20, 2313, 2316, 2317.10
6 The members that have these benefits are called Regular Members and they must be low-income people who live or work in the land trust area (T.R.U.S.T. South LA, 2014).
leadership development and advocacy work (T.R.U.S.T. South LA, 2014). They have a new initiative, Community Mosaic, where TSLA plans to purchase single-family homes and build housing in the backyard behind the existing single-family homes. By using this strategy they can double the density in neighborhoods while also fighting against speculation and maintaining property within community control. They also work on redeveloping large multi-family developments into community-owned mixed-use projects. One of the current projects includes the large-scale housing complex called Rolland Curtis Gardens.

**Participatory Planning – Objective:**

In 2010, TSLA found out that the affordability covenants for Rolland Curtis Gardens were going to expire (the project was built in 1981 with Community Redevelopment Agency and HUD funds, so it had a 20 year affordable housing covenant). TSLA asked Abode Communities, an affordable housing developer, to try to acquire the property, but when Abode approached the owner it was difficult to get an agreement on the sale price. In early 2011, the covenants expired and tenants got 30-day notices. During this period, tenants and TSLA met two times a month, sometimes every week, to develop a campaign. Many tenants left, some because they weren’t willing to risk staying, and others because they were forced to leave by the housing authority because their Section 8 vouchers were going to be cut off if they didn’t leave. The owner was willing to take a loss in rent in order to get people to leave so that he could get USC students to move in (and quadruple or quintuple the rent). Some of the tenants said they weren’t going to leave and after costing the owner a year and half from the time he sent out the first 30-day notices, they were able to ask
Abode to try to buy the building again. A deal was reached and TSLA and Abode became joint owners of the complex. They decided to use a participatory planning process to redevelop the site, and thought it would also be a chance to discuss neighborhood development issues.

Participatory Planning – Process:
TSLA launched outreach for the planning process to get Rolland Curtis Gardens residents and surrounding community members involved in the project. They wanted to get local residents excited and involved, but also recognized that they were going to need the community to support this redevelopment project. As a staff member explained, “when we launched the outreach for the planning process we were still resolving things in the building and we knew that we wanted the tenants involved, but we also really wanted to engage the surrounding community.” They knew that they would be increasing the density of the development, so it was important to have community input and support from the beginning. The opportunity to focus on a specific site would also serve as a chance to engage participants in discussions about neighborhood changes related to the Expo Line and USC development pressures. TSLA did extensive outreach, knocking on 550 doors in the surrounding neighborhood, making about 200 contacts, and getting about 100 people to participate in the planning process. They had seven different sessions in the planning process, four of them at a nearby church doing the visioning and planning. The other sessions included a day of site visits to local TODs, an open house showcasing designs, and a parking working group to get consensus on a 20% parking reduction (below 1:1).
During the beginning of each session, the group did a recap of the previous meeting and in some cases the videographer (who they hired to film the sessions) put together a short film on the previous session. They started the sessions by opening with a more general perspective of the neighborhood and talked a lot about mobility issues in the first session, which included community safety. They talked about transit access and how people get around, to and from jobs and services, thereby setting the frame. Then in the conversation about the definition of TOD, they turned that over to the architects from Abode. The group talked about TOD, but they had a limited amount of time due to the tight redevelopment timeline. The architects needed to get to a design, so they moved quickly into a conversation that focused on the site. Separate from this project, TSLA’s internal organizing schools use a TOD curriculum because as a staff member explained, “it’s important for our members, and particularly our leaders, to be conversant in TOD because this is where city policy is moving and we have to be able to engage.” This prior exposure meant that some of the participants already had a strong background in these issues.

From the beginning of the design process, there was a lot of exchange between the participants and the designers. A staff member explained, “the site planning started in the first session and we did it in every session except when we did the TOD tour. There were a lot of opportunities to go back and fourth.” The first site planning exercise was using aerial photos of the site and different colored blocks that represented the amount of housing, commercial, open space and parking they would need to put on the site to make it financially feasible. This activity was preceded by a discussion of what these types of developments look like and considerations to keep in mind. In between the sessions the
architects were able to incorporate the ideas and discuss with the participants some of the reasons for not including certain suggestions. Abode Communities used to be the LA Community Design Center and has over 40 years of experience in community design, which meant that the architects were used to engaging with community members and other non-designer participants. As an interviewee explained, "architects sometimes think they know how something should be and community meetings seem like an obligatory step in the process, but Abode really thinks different." The architects were committed to opening up the design process to different ideas and ready for the challenge of incorporating these new perspectives. At the end of the process, participants were really excited about what they had come up with.

Participatory Planning – After Thoughts:

At the end of the planning process, TSLA and Abode got the designs they needed to move forward with the redevelopment of Rolland Curtis Gardens. By working with residents and local community members on this project, TSLA was able to increase member’s awareness of the intersection of transportation and land use, as well as provide experience working a design project. Because of the scale of this project and the fact that they were designing something they owned, members got to feel a sense of accomplishment by participating in a process where they can see the results. The redevelopment of this large-scale project was a way to get the community talking about TOD and planning.


Chapter Summary

This chapter presented three cases of community-based organizations using participatory planning to engage members and community stakeholders. All of the inner city neighborhoods in the cases are predominantly low-income and renter populations, making them extremely vulnerable to the pressures of redevelopment spurred by the introduction of light rail stations. The cases conveyed the variety of approaches and outcomes that are possible, and have lessons to impart for those who are considering using participatory planning to engage stakeholders. The next chapter will look at the approaches more in depth and explore some of the themes that arose in the cases.
CHAPTER 4 - CASE ANALYSIS

The previous chapter laid out three cases of participatory planning in Los Angeles. The cases represented how community-based organizations are using participatory planning to engage stakeholders in urban planning and redevelopment spurred by the introduction of light rail stations to these communities. This chapter will explore the approaches that the organizations took, as well as themes that can impart lessons for future participatory planning processes.

Policy and Design Approaches in Participatory Planning

Planning in the U.S. has faced a tension between physical planning and policy planning since its beginnings (Schuman, 2006). These competing orientations continue today and the three cases of participatory planning fall along this design-policy spectrum. ELACC focused on a policy outcome and
LTSC and TSLA focused on a design outcome. By choosing these different end products, it guided the types of activities that were executed, and in turn these activities affected the way in which these groups were able to achieve engagement in these processes. This section will explore the different aspects of each approach as expressed in the cases and will present how these two approaches added or detracted from the engagement process. Interestingly, all of the cases, regardless of approach, had a focus on creating documents that could easily be incorporated into city plans and policies.

**Policy Approach:**

ELACC decided to take a policy approach to planning and through participatory planning activities, they educated members in urban planning issues and policy processes. Some of the activities they chose were the discussion series (Policy con Pan Dulce), community mapping activities and games. These activities were chosen because the format allowed participants to build their knowledge of planning and political processes. This process was primarily dialogue-based and lasted over an extended time period, which meant that the participants were able to build familiarity with each other and engage in authentic dialogue. The results of this process were then turned into the Plan del Pueblo (which is in its final stages), with the intention of creating a planning/policy document that could be implemented by decision-makers.

**Design Approach:**

On the other hand, LTSC and TSLA used a design approach to engage participants in planning. Both groups used a charrette process to come up with
designs for their planned areas, although TSLA used a mix of policy and design activities to achieve their design product. One of the main reasons LTSC decided to go with the design approach was that they wanted to make executable plans. TSLA had the goal of developing a design product for their development and used several types of activities in this design approach. In their process, there was a lot of back and forth between the architects/designers and the participants, and when participants’ suggestions weren’t incorporated, the architects would explain the reasoning behind the decision. In the LTSC case, many of the members weren’t clear on how to engage in the design/ charrette process because it wasn’t well-defined how they were supposed to contribute to the designs that were in front of them. The condensed timeline of the charrette meant that there wasn’t a lot of time to exchange and learning for participants, limiting the potential to build individuals’ capacity. In contrast, TSLA had charrette activities, but held them over several workshops and integrated other activities into the workshops. This process allowed time for the designers/architects to tailor the material in the workshops to the participants.

The following sections touch on some of the themes and commonalities that emerged in the cases. These themes include: strengthening the base and capacity building; creating spaces for dialogue; framing and reflection; and influencing change.

**Strengthening the Base and Building Capacity**

Part of my initial question sought to learn how participatory planning processes could get a broader section of the community involved in planning.
While all of the cases did outreach in their respective neighborhoods, the participatory planning processes focused mostly on engaging the organizations' memberships. ELACC worked with their base throughout the past eight years, although they continuously worked to expand their membership base. LTSC worked with their member leadership team to plan and develop the process and invited all Little Tokyo stakeholders to the charrette. TSLA worked with Rolland Curtis Gardens residents, their membership, and other local residents who weren't members of the organization. While there are advantages to broad-based engagement, building the base also has benefits. Working with the base gives more of an opportunity to build capacity, which is one of the main benefits of participatory processes that is underscored in the literature. In order for communities to participate well, they need capacity, which these processes are creating (Carter, Pastor, & Wander, 2013). In the case of TSLA, the participants learned about architecture and design and got to understand through an iterative process the types of constraints that architects deal with. The participants in ELACC's process learned about how decision-making is done at the city level, for example. The charrette process as a standalone participatory planning process was the least effective in building the capacity of participants because the accelerated timeline constrained the level of engagement.

Creating Spaces for Dialogue

One of the overarching goals amongst all these processes was to engage stakeholders in conversations about transit-oriented development and gentrification. All of these processes were successful in creating spaces for these dialogues to happen. The extent to which these dialogues happened varied on
the structure of the engagement processes. In the ELACC case, there were many opportunities for dialogue about these issues because the structure of the engagement was strongly based in a dialogical approach. The LTSC case, while opening up a space for conversations on development, was limited by the charrette structure. The time-restricted charrette structure limited the possibility for participants to engage in deeper discussions. TSLA used a mixed approach, engaging participants in charrettes and design activities while also creating a space for conversations. In the literature on collaborative processes, one of the main elements for effective collaboration is authentic dialogue (Innes & Booher, 2010). By creating participatory planning processes to develop visions for these communities, the cases were really creating spaces for participants to connect with the issues that affect their lives. The experience many participants had with friends, family members and acquaintances moving from the neighborhood because of the rising rents related to the light rail was a recurring theme in these conversations.

**Framing and Reflection**

An important characteristic of any planning process is framing, or the packaging and presenting of an idea or issue in accordance with a specific perspective. Framing enters the process at all levels, from choosing the problem to the analytical approach, to decision-making criteria, and evaluative approaches (Chakraborty, 2012). All of these elements are subjective to framing and while framing is not necessarily a good or bad thing, it does influence how people respond to and interact with what is being framed.
All three of the communities from the case studies are working through similar issues, and the way in which a sensitive issue like gentrification or redevelopment is framed can affect how people are able to engage in the planning process. By framing these problems as a threat instead of as an opportunity, it changes the way participants approach the issue and can put them on the defensive. By framing issues as a loss, people come at the issue from a deficit, which can make it difficult to be creative. ELACC experienced this first hand when they were developing the trajectory of their campaigns. Asking people about the deficits of Boyle Heights elicited a similar responses from the participants, however, when they flipped the conversation to talk about the assets of the neighborhood, the level of engagement changed. This shift also changed how people looked at their neighborhood and instilled a sense of pride in their community, making it more likely for people to participate and engage.

In the LTSC planning process, they made a concerted effort to integrate cultural aspects into the planning process. When discussing principles of sustainability, they integrated Japanese concepts to add cultural relevance for the participants. By adding this element to the planning, they were also ingraining this cultural element into the plan and into their desire for the future of Little Tokyo. ELACC also made a point of integrating cultural elements into their Plan del Pueblo process. By using vocabulary and concepts from the cultures represented in these communities, the groups were successful in encouraging engagement and making sure that the planning reflects cultural relevance.

Reflection can be a helpful step in the framing process. Schönh (1995) advocated for taking the time to reflect throughout the process, thereby allowing the opportunity to reframe the process. As mentioned above, the way in which
issues are framed affects who and how they participate and engage. By being aware of the framing that happens in these processes, we can be more careful about how we design participatory processes. Additionally, we can encourage the single and double learning loop processes that Argyris and Schön (1996) explain. The single (feedback) loop process involves an analysis of an outcome or situation where the individual changes the way they approach the problem but does not internalize these changes, thereby causing no shifts of values or norms. The double feedback loop connects the situation to the approach to the values that are behind that approach. In the cases, an example of a single loop learning process is the charrette approach by LTSC. The vacant parcels in the neighborhood provided an opportunity to create a vision for how to develop this area. They analyzed this situation and came up with a process for creating this plan. ELACC, on the other hand, went through the process of choosing a campaign to focus on, which was the first feedback loop, and then through the realization that they needed to reframe how they were approaching issues by looking at the root causes of their observations, they completed a second feedback loop.

**Influencing Change**

All of the organizations from the cases had a deep desire to influence the change happening in their neighborhoods and looked to participatory planning as a means to achieve (or at least in part) this goal. In the case of TSLA, they had ownership over the development, which meant that they were able to achieve this goal. The other groups were trying to affect places that were much larger in scale, but also where they did not have ownership over the decision-making. The
process for influencing change in this context is recognizably more challenging. In thinking about how the participatory planning work can meet this goal of influencing change, the role of collaboration, not just among participants, but also among communities affected by similar circumstances becomes even more critical.

The Los Angeles political system, similar to the region’s sprawled development patterns, is fragmented (Gottlieb, Vallianatos, Freer, & Dreier, 2005). In the effort to influence change, transit-oriented development strategies and gentrification must be addressed at the scale of the region. The approaches in the cases have had positive effects on the participants, bringing conversations on development and displacement to the forefront. At the same time, all of these processes had ambitions of creating end products that could influence planning. In order to address the wide-scale change that the construction of nearly 100 stations will bring, a larger platform is needed. These micro-approaches to influencing change would be more influential at a regional scale. Currently, there are some attempts to fill this gap. All of the organizations from the cases are part of the Alliance for Community Transit-LA (ACT-LA) coalition. The organizations come together to support each other’s work, and a possible next step for these organizations is to align their neighborhood participatory planning work. By developing a joint end product that stitches together their experiences, they can bring this collaborative planning process to a larger scale.

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7 The Alliance for Community Transit-Los Angeles strives to create community transit – just, equitable, sustainable transit systems and neighborhoods for ALL people in Los Angeles, placing the interests of low-income communities and communities of color first as we create a more sustainable city (Alliance for Community Transit-Los Angeles, 2014).
This can create more momentum and pressure, which will help in the effort to influence the change that is happening in Los Angeles neighborhoods.

**Chapter Summary**

The three case studies of participatory planning fell along the design-policy spectrum and brought up several themes for future consideration. In these cases the degree to which the groups took policy or design approaches, combined with other aspects like timelines and project ownership, had varying outcomes for community engagement. The themes that arose in these cases and that can serve as guideposts for future groups were strengthening the base and capacity building; creating spaces for dialogue; framing and reflection; and influencing change. The following chapter will offer some concluding thoughts and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

The shift in the Los Angeles landscape caused by the expansion of the transit system has the potential to increase access to reliable transportation options, improve the environment, and spur economic development. However, the construction of these new stations signals redevelopment and real estate speculation, which present a real threat to low-income communities particularly vulnerable to rising rents. This process of transit-induced gentrification is taking place from Boston to L.A., and community members, local organizations and public agencies are discussing ways to address this complex challenge. Many community-based organizations have taken the role of initiators and facilitators of these conversations. As numerous communities around Los Angeles face this dilemma of how to engage stakeholders, participatory planning is a way to engage people in these dialogues. Beyond conversations, these processes build
individual and community capacity. Participatory planning, through a combination of policy and design approaches, can help communities prepare themselves for the difficult challenges lie ahead.

**Main Takeaways From the Cases**

The three cases presented in this thesis offer several main takeaways for those studying or working with participatory planning. First, all of the cases were able to create spaces for dialogues about planning, gentrification, and TOD, to varying degrees. These conversations, especially in the cases where participants were able to spend time discussing these issues, are an important step in the path to devising solutions for how to manage the neighborhood change that is in the pipeline. Second, these participatory planning cases were able to develop the capacity of some or all of the participants. Through activities that familiarized participants with topics like how city policymaking works, how to read a site plan, or what considerations go into a design document, these groups were able to build the knowledge and capacity of the participants, which is consistent with the benefits listed in the literature. Third, there was a tension between the level engagement and the timeline groups were working with. The chances of achieving a level of engagement where participants are able to build a level of comfort and trust requires time that is not allowed by the more design-centered processes. Fourth, all of the groups had a strong desire to create an end product as part of their goal. While this end product is an important component, these cases reinforced for me that the process of arriving at these products is the most valuable aspect of participatory planning. Perhaps this is generalizable to planning on a whole, where the plan isn't the transformative piece, but the
process of getting there is really what is most valuable. There is some tension between this notion and the systems that are set-up to support the work of the community-based organizations. These groups have to share their work in tangible formats for funders to see, when the real accomplishments are made in hard to capture ways.

**Future Directions**

There are several lines of future research that I have identified through this process. In the case of TSLA where they had ownership over the future of the plans they created, it would be interesting to interview the participants on their reflections of the process and compare it to the responses from participants who worked on a planning project where the outcomes were not within their control. How does outcome ownership, or power over the outcomes, influence participant engagement? Another potential area for study is how the policy and design documents differ in how they are received by the city officials. Did the design document with its plans and sections provide a more convincing presentation or are both of the types of documents given equal consideration? This could help the organizations better understand what methods are most effective for conveying their ideas and visions.

**General Reflections**

Gentrification poses a threat to the social networks and livelihoods of residents, as well as poses a risk to the cultural heritage of these neighborhoods. These communities face the question of what does it mean to preserve a cultural community, and how do you hold on to cultural identity without it becoming a
relic. As many supporters of gentrification argue, neighborhood change is just part of the nature of urban areas. Opponents argue that on the basis of equity, neighborhood preservation and anti-gentrification and displacement measures are urgently needed. The neighborhoods in the case studies were all places considered undesirable to outsiders at some point in their history, and were created as spaces for those excluded from the right to choose where they wanted to live. Now that these places have shifted from spaces of exclusion to places desired by those with power, how can these groups harness this momentum to create benefits for the existing community?

When I started my research for this thesis, I was interested in looking at how participatory planning makes a difference in the engagement of communities with significant transit investment that have traditionally been excluded from planning processes. In light of the sheer quantity of funding dedicated to expanding the transit system in Los Angeles, how can participatory planning help communities voice their concerns about the future of their neighborhoods? Through these case studies, I have learned about the nuances between types of participatory planning and had time to reflect on the ways in which different aspects of these planning processes unfold in different contexts. The project timeline, degree of ownership over decision-making and extent to which design and policy are incorporated into the project are all elements to contemplate when designing a participatory planning process. While this thesis recognizes the limitations of participatory planning in creating the types of structural changes that are needed for more equitable development to take place, these organizations are doing valuable work that lifts up the knowledge and builds the capacity of local communities.


City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning. (2014). Department of City Planning.


