

# Part 5: Community Renewal Lessons from Australian Experience





# Community Engagement in Urban Regeneration: How it Differs from Other Processes

- More:
  - actors
  - complex networks
  - interests
  - complex outcomes
  - skilled lobbyists, including private sector
- Power structures
- Processes less transparent
- Longer timescale and slower processes (planning and construction)

# Australian Community Renewal Plans

## In all localities:

- Resident involvement in physical changes restricted to **consultation** exercises
- Limited evidence of involvement **before** first plans
- Subsequent stages: varied levels of engagement

## BUT

- levels of influence varied between states and across cases

# Barriers to Resident Participation 1

## 1. Poverty and social disadvantage:

- Residents felt stigmatised because they:

- live in denigrated areas

believe they were treated unfairly because of this

## 2. Serious social problems

(unemployment, drug usage, crime):

- reduced morale
- eroded self esteem

# Other Barriers to Resident Participation 2

3. Earlier failed programs or inadequate consultation: apathy, cynicism, scepticism
4. Formality discouraged local participation:
  - meetings
  - language
  - *daunting*
5. Meeting times and venues: restricted attendance of certain groups
6. Childcare **not mentioned**
7. Key cultural groups often excluded despite extensive use of interpreters and translators

# Other Barriers to Resident Participation 3

## 8. Lack of knowledge:

- participants knew very little about forums
- claimed community members did not represent their views

## 9. Professional domination:

- Residents often felt dominated, ignored or manipulated by renewal professionals
- felt constrained and limited in their role

## 10. Unfairness: many felt all the work was left to them

## 11. Capacity building: many doubted their ability to fulfil role they were given

# Barriers to Resident Participation 4

## 12. Representativeness:

- Do key community representatives speak for themselves?
- or the whole community?
- or just one section of community?

## 13. Conflict:

- some upset by conflict in meetings
- reluctant to stay involved

## 14. High levels of dependency on institutions (including government)

- disillusionment
- general apathy



# Primary tasks of community engagement

- Identify priorities
- Develop a community vision or plan
- Establish consultative and participatory structures
- Implement comprehensive program of support and resources for:
  - community-based activity
  - projects through a capacity-building plan

# A long-term process that requires...

- considerable experience facilitating group development
- strong commitment to equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice
- high levels of interpersonal skills
- ability to support and encourage learning
- good understanding of government policy and practice
- keen political awareness

# Most Crucial Task

*Giving residents skills  
to participate effectively  
in renewal programs*

- necessary for tackling barriers posed by previous life experiences
  - give individuals or groups:
    - confidence
    - skills
    - knowledge
- to have more control over their collective situation

# Good Practice

- **Renewal professionals:** sometimes saw main task as:
  - securing resources . . . or . . .
  - providing information
  - rather than giving residents skills to participate effectively
- **Community development role:** not always fully understood by those involved
- Need to articulate and document
  - processes
  - skills
  - personal qualities of facilitators

# Key Findings

## 1. START EARLY

- best results when community closely involved at start
- if communities excluded at beginning, serious danger that **wrong issues** will be prioritised and resources mis-directed or wasted

## 2. CAPACITY BUILDING

Considerable time and resources needed to allow participants to develop skills and gain confidence to participate

## 3. BUILD ON EARLIER LEARNING

Consider lessons learned by earlier community development

## 4. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**most significant factor** in ensuring genuine involvement of community in regeneration (Martin Wood)

# Key factors in promoting participation 1

- community development approaches that:
  - start with local people
  - identify local issues
  - give residents confidence and skills to influence their circumstances

# Representativeness

- Establish participation structures to permit wide range of representation
- closed forums (representatives chosen by bureaucrats rather than local community)
  - treat with caution
  - rapidly become exclusive

# Start with the views of local people

Before plans have been drawn up:

- strengthen and resource existing groups
- work for inclusion of excluded groups

Because previous renewal experiences may have alienated local people:

- target resources **swiftly** at issues prioritised by residents



# Advice and Warnings 1

1. Community participation **not an easy or cheap option**
2. **Takes time**: may take several years to develop structures and processes
3. Skilled and experienced **workers**
4. Local facilities available to community groups
5. Financial, training and community development **support**
6. Local people **employed** in community development roles. **This should be the aim at the outset.**
7. **Plain words**: plain English newsletters or letters and translations into key local languages

# Advice and Warnings 2

8. All processes adequately **resourced** for a sufficiently long period

9. **"Quick wins"** to combat disillusionment.

Disillusionment soon sets in if:

- local residents not given genuine power and
- cannot see effects of their participation

10. **Congenial processes:** participation structures and processes congenial to residents



# Quick Wins

## early visible success

- provides an important boost at start of a renewal program



# Training for local residents

- aim to provide necessary skills for participation
- build upon residents' local knowledge
- enable everyone involved to gain a better understanding of local issues

