

Radical Postmodern Planning Practice: Examining the Planner's Role in Housing and Inner City Revitalization

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[An MPPI - UMCP Collaborative Initiative]

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to look at the role of a planner when dealing with the community and non-profit organizations within the context of municipal government neighbourhood-based housing policy. The case study will look at the experience gained by

Jacquie East, a practicing planner, during her work with the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI) and her dealings with multiple publics. The theory component deals with the radical postmodern

planning model outlined by Leonie Sandercock, examining how this applies in the context of the Winnipeg policy environment. However, these issues are not exclusive to Winnipeg due to the current housing problems facing Canada and could be found to apply in other cities with similar circumstances.

It is hoped that this may be a resource to inspire and direct the future of planning for those who work directly with the community to renew declining neighbourhoods, deal with the complexity of the task at hand.

Key Issues

- What is the role of the public sector planner when dealing with nonprofit groups and the community?
- How do you provide the community with the tools to control, write and implement plans?
- Balancing community dynamics and government objectives can be a challenging task
- Communication is complex
- Community members have become planners



Renovated Home for Sale
(Spence Neighbourhood Association 2004)

Objective

It is the overall goal of this collaboration to bring to light some of the lessons learned when a planner seeks to address the needs of a community renewal effort within the context of a municipal policy agenda and partnership with two senior levels of government.

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Background & Context

Housing Conditions

Although Winnipeg has the most affordable housing in Canada, many residents spend more than 50% of their income on shelter, which leaves very little for other basic necessities.

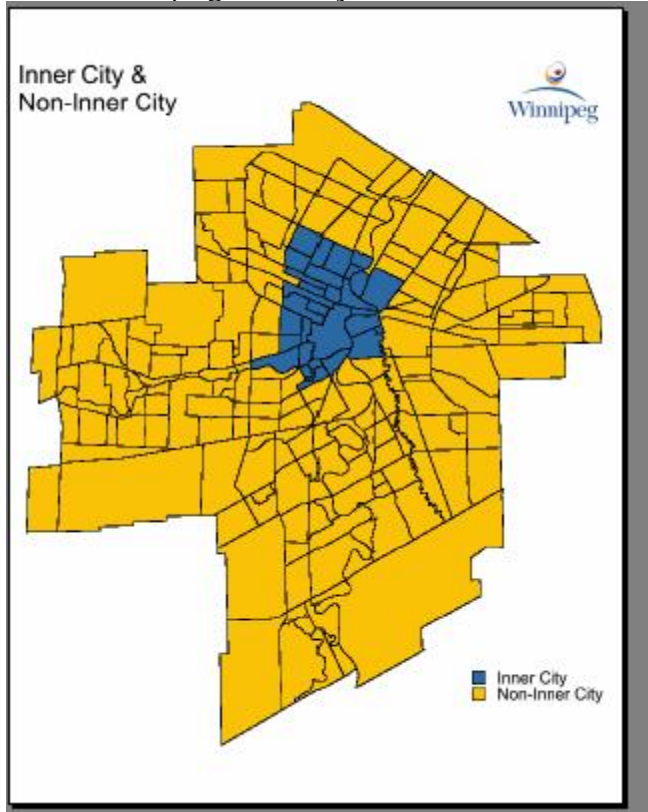
Compounding this problem is the fact that Winnipeg has the second largest stock of older poor quality housing in Canada, much of which is beyond rehabilitation.



(Deteriorating Young Street Housing WBDC 2004)

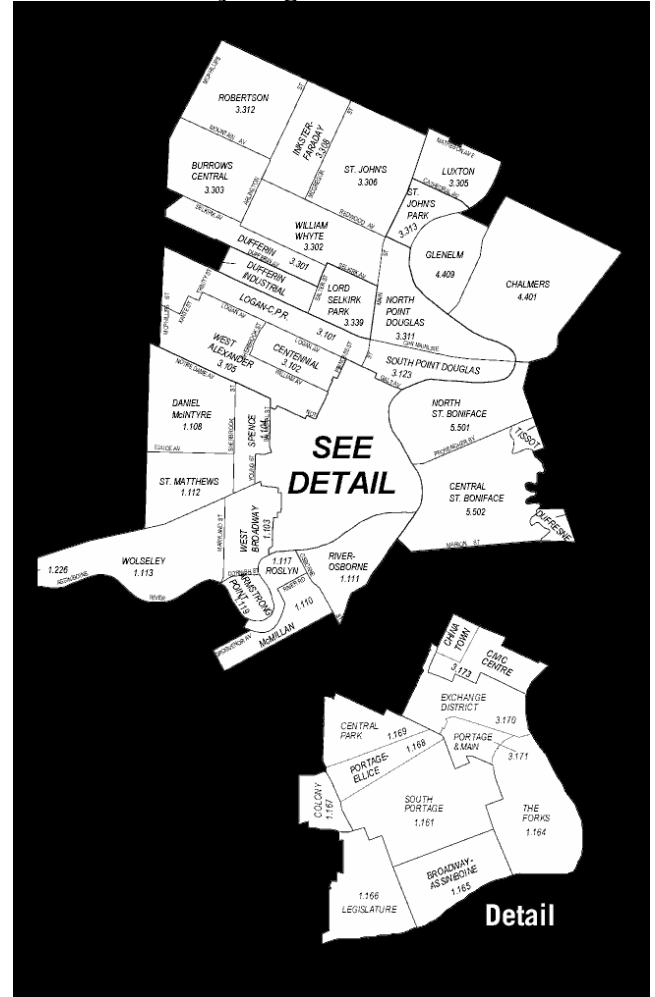
In particular, Winnipeg's inner city neighbourhoods are in serious distress and decline (Winnipeg Housing Policy 1999). Map 1, below outlines the areas considered as the inner-city. Please refer to Map 2 for individual inner-city neighbourhoods.

MAP 1: Winnipeg Inner-city



(City of Winnipeg 2000)

MAP 2: Inner-City Neighbourhoods



(WIRA 2000)

Facts of the Case

Policy Environment

It is no secret that Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods have experienced serious decline. The following section highlights the policies in place to address housing and neighbourhood decay.

The Winnipeg Housing Policy

This strategy seeks to renew declining neighbourhoods by providing the tools for communities to rehabilitate housing and improve the overall quality of life. It has been acknowledged that the community plays a vital role in the renewal of declining neighbourhoods; as such, it is the intention of the civic administration to ensure that solutions reflect the social, economic and the cultural realities of the local area. It has also been recognized that the community

possesses expertise, and that the role of the City is to facilitate and encourage broader community participation. Part of the execution of this policy requires that the City partner with other levels of government and community agencies to improve housing and opportunities for marginalized groups. This, in addition to other initiatives, resulted in the creation of the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative, which provides a central coordinated effort to address Winnipeg's housing crisis.

The Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative

The Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI) was designed to address declining housing in designated inner-city neighbourhoods. This three year multi-million dollar partnership was established with the governments of Canada, Manitoba and Winnipeg. Through the WHHI, the local community can gain access to a variety of federal, provincial and civic housing repair programs (Manitoba Family Services and Housing 2003). The WHHI acts as a one-stop shop for community groups and individuals seeking information and financial assistance for locally based initiatives addressing homelessness and substandard unaffordable housing, (although it has sometimes been described as a single window, triple pain!).

- **Federal Partnership**

The Government of Canada provides housing assistance through the National Homelessness Initiative, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), the Urban Aboriginal Homelessness Strategy, Youth-at-Risk Homelessness and the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP). The SCPI was based on a community plan that sought to apply local solution to address homelessness. The RRAP, a tri-level government and public community partnership, provides funding to low-income homeowners and landlords to make repairs, improving the adequacy of the dwelling units (WHHI 2002).

- **Provincial Partnership**

The Province of Manitoba contributes to the tri-level partnership through programs such as Neighbourhoods Alive! Neighbourhood Housing Assistance (NHA), and RRAP.

The objective of Neighbourhoods Alive! is to provide community groups with the resources they need to support housing, physical improvements, employment, education, recreation, crime prevention and safety. In addition, the program provides local neighbourhoods with funds to develop capacity, allowing them to implement

their plans. The NHA program provides specifically housing funds to renewal organizations and cooperative housing groups within designated major improvement neighbourhoods (WHHI 2002).

- **Civic Partnership**

Under the Winnipeg Housing Policy, the City of Winnipeg has allocated funding through several programs. The Winnipeg Municipal Cost Offsets Program provides financial assistance within targeted neighbourhoods through the reimbursement of Civic fees. The Winnipeg Housing Revitalization Program aids in financing predevelopment costs associated with renewal. Often community organizations lack the technical expertise to develop plans and may need to hire contract workers in the areas of construction, architecture or planning (Goetz 1993). Assistance is provided to community stakeholders to develop a Neighbourhood Housing Plan, through the Winnipeg Neighbourhood Housing Plans and Advocacy Program (WHHI 2002). The City is encouraging unique and innovative approaches to address declining neighbourhoods within the inner city with programs such as the Winnipeg Housing Demonstration Program, which helps in financing quality affordable housing. The Winnipeg Minimum Home Repair Program provides owner-occupants with the opportunity to undertake minor repairs to improve the safety of their homes (WHHI 2002). Lastly, the City is also responsible for the delivery of RRAP.

Plan Winnipeg

Plan Winnipeg: Vision 2020, the City's development plan, contains several policies, which directly support the approach taken by the Winnipeg Housing Policy and consequently the WHHI.

Section 1B-01 outlines support mechanisms for neighbourhood revitalization efforts. In relation to this report, the most significant aspects include;

coordinating the delivery of services and programs through community-based facilities, engaging the community in the identification

and management of neighbourhood issues and improvement strategies, and providing leadership in the development of multi-level government programs.



Residents making local improvements; (WBDC 2004)

Further to this, section 1C-01 outlines how the City shall facilitate the provision of safe affordable housing by supporting partnerships with nonprofit community housing groups.

Radical Postmodern Theory

The current policies, such as Plan Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Housing policy strongly focus on the need for the community to be directly involved with revitalization efforts in the inner city. Because the fundamentals of post-modern theory embrace the community driven focus, it is reasonable to suggest that it is most appropriate theory that would apply in the context of planning in Winnipeg's inner-city. However, this project asks how radical was the approach taken by the WHHI when dealing with the community. The follow section will outline the components of radical planning and determine what aspects apply to the approach taken within the Winnipeg context. This question could easily be transferred to other regions faced the same issues.

Planners must rely on practical wisdom within a postmodern and diverse city. In today's society planning needs to be more people-centred, keeping in mind there are multiple publics. There needs to be less emphasis on what has been done in the past and written in reports. Through this movement towards understanding the people, comes community planning and empowerment, which is essential to democratic planning. Top-down planning is an archaic practice. In the postmodern city there needs to be a shift towards greater participatory planning and an understanding of diverse populations (Sandercock, 2003).

"Planners must rely on practical wisdom...."
(Sandercock, 2003)

Outlined below are seven necessary policy directions for civic administrative structures, as developed by Leonie Sandercock in her article "Planning in an Ethno-Culturally Diverse City: A Comment" (2003). In a later section, these will be examined in the context of the WHHI.

Seven Necessary Policy Directions

1. Commitment by political parties at local level in developing integrated initiatives with organizations.
2. Multi-tiered political and policy support systems.

3. The culture and practices of municipal workers (transforming patterns of discrimination and domination).
4. Reform and innovation in social policy through language assistance and culturally sensitive social services.
5. A better understanding of how urban policies can and should address cultural differences.
6. Elaboration on the notion of citizenship.
7. Preparedness to work with emotions, dealing with issues of belonging and fear.

Further to this, Sandercock details the components of radical postmodern planning in her latest text "Cosmopolis II" (2003). The following provides a brief outline of her concept, which will also be used to evaluate the WHHI.

6 Key Components to Radical Postmodern Planning Practice:

1. Greater reliance on practical wisdom.
2. Planning is less document oriented and more people-centered, with more negotiated, political and focused plans.
3. Planners need to access other ways of knowing, examining experiential, intuitive and contextual knowledges articulated through stories and other media.
4. Greater community-based planning geared to empowerment and a movement away from top-down approaches.
5. Acknowledge that there are multiple publics. The idea of the "Public interest" is no longer applicable as there are now multiple publics
6. Planning needs to be more participatory (Sandercock 2003)

Lesson for the "modern" planner

In today's diverse society, there are many cultures present. Planners must turn to other ways of knowing to better understand and communicate with different populations. Through this movement towards understanding the people, comes community planning and empowerment, which is essential to democratic planning. In the Post-modern city there needs to be a shift towards greater participatory planning and an understanding of diverse populations.

There needs to be a shift to greater participatory planning...

Action & Interaction

Addressing Sandercock's Radical Postmodern Approach

After reviewing the current systems in place to address housing and inner city revitalization Winnipeg and the outline of radical postmodern planning theory, it is now time to see how the two integrate. This will be accomplished by looking at the role of Jacquie East, former Housing Policy Coordinator with the WHHI, and the approach taken to engage the community in participation.

In regard to the "Seven Necessary Policy Directions", the formation of the WHHI clearly had a multi-tiered support system, incorporating all three levels of government and the community. At the Civic level, the Mayor was committed to a local approach and actively engaged those within the inner city neighbourhoods. However, the senior levels of government were not as supportive. Initially, the provincial government supported the integration and a local approach, however, the intention was not followed through. Nonetheless, this can be seen as a first step towards giving the community a greater role in decision-making. The systems within the provincial government would not allow for more of a radical postmodern approach, such as allowing those within the provincial housing arena to explore more community minded solutions. This was especially true for the Federal government where the internal system was rigid and not open to change. This problem was exacerbated as the more senior levels of government had the most financial resources to provide, however they were the least committed to the community approach to housing renewal, which is fundamental for success.



Spence Neighbourhood Community Clean up
(SNA 2004)

The culture and practices of those at the municipal level were much more in accordance with the ideas Sandercock has outlined. Teams of municipal workers including the Mayor, inspectors, police and fire department officials would perform neighbourhood walk throughs with the residents. This allowed the residents to build a relationship with the politicians and civic workers, helping to address local neighbourhood issues. This allowed for a more direct approach, reducing the level of bureaucracy and transforming the pattern of decision-making within the local context.

Although the residents of the neighbourhood were empowered by direct contact with decision makers, not all within the community were represented. The Aboriginal community was not specifically engaged. While the local government took a step in the right direction, citizens were still required to function within the format and processes associated with leveraging funding.

Multiculturalism was celebrated and acknowledged within the communities, as events often incorporated Aboriginal traditions. This illustrates that some positive steps are being taken.

Multiculturalism was celebrated and acknowledged within the communities...

Unfortunately, culturally sensitive delivery systems have yet to be fully embraced within government.

For those working in the inner city communities, there was an understanding that there was some skepticism associated with the intentions of government. This is difficult to address and requires trust to be built with the planner and with the community. This often requires the planner to step away and allow the community to plan for themselves producing tangible results.

Taking into account the six elements outlined relating to radical postmodern planning, the WHHI did take an initial movement towards Sandercock's design. The local residents were to come up with their own neighbourhood plans. This allowed the community to directly address the issues within their area, recognizing the benefit of local expertise. Community plans tended to be more people-centred focusing on more than just housing, but also community building. For instance, incorporated within some plans, were litter clean-ups and

community carnivals. This ensured that the local residents came out to support and build a community spirit, something that may have not been identified by an outside party, particularly a government housing program.



Spence Neighbourhood Community Activities (SNA 2004)

At the local level, planning was much less document oriented and focused more on acting as a conduit for residents. On the other hand, more senior levels of government dealt with much more paperwork, perhaps increasing the stringency of the processes.

Minimal steps were taken by the three levels of government to try and pursue other ways of knowing, although the community was invited to share their personal stories with the media. Storytelling can be a powerful tool in the planning realm and can help leverage public support.

As has been stated, community-based approaches were strongly encouraged at the local level, as residents were given the opportunity to write their own plans. In addition, the traditional top-down method of interaction was reduced as residents were in direct contact with those in decision-making positions. However, the top-down method was still in full swing at the provincial and federal levels. Even if personal beliefs supported a more bottom-up approach, the systems within these levels of government did not allow for anything other than a modernist approach.

By its approach, the WHHI allowed for the needs of multiple publics to be articulated through the individual neighbourhood plans. Obviously, different areas of the city would have different needs, and the unique community plans allowed those with direct experience to address the needs within their neighbourhood. This reflects a movement towards becoming more sensitive to practical wisdom. Although the WHHI was able to address the needs

of multiple publics at a regional level, the different voices within each of the neighbourhoods may not have been adequately recognized. As is true with much of citizen organization, those with the loudest voice get heard. As a result, it is likely that the Aboriginal community, for example, may not have been fairly represented.

The small steps of local government through the WHHI indicate that there has been a shift in philosophy towards a more radical postmodern approach, as outlined by Leonie Sandercock. In the local context, residents were empowered as they were relied on for their practical wisdom and understanding of community issues, allowing for a more participatory approach. It was acknowledged that the needs of the inner city neighbourhoods would vary, and respect was given to the notion of multiple publics.

Residents were empowered and relied on for their practical wisdom...

Although the local government made steps in its approach, it is obviously not perfect, nor is it truly radical. It must be noted that these incremental changes may point the way for the other levels of government by setting a precedent in the area of housing and inner city revitalization.

Lessons Learned

Within the WHHI, the role of the Housing Policy Coordinator was to act as a starting place for the community; a conduit to the resources and services within. This networking strategy is fundamental to the capacity of nonprofits operating within the inner-city. This allowed relationships to be built with the community and the city, affording organizations access to systems created within the WHHI and the other levels of government.

The planner acted as a conduit to resources; stepping back allowing the community to plan for themselves

Organizational capacity was further encouraged as it was the role of the planner to support the organizations seeking funding by writing reports and endorsing the community plans and then stepping back and not being directly involved. Furthermore, community leaders were invited to City Hall to present the plans to the Housing Steering committee.

This contributed to capacity building, as residents dealt directly with decision makers, fostering cooperation. Despite these movements towards capacity building, funding through the WHHI tends to be a one-time deal. This greatly limits the ability of organizations to pursue their goals over the long-term and increases the likelihood of future dependency.

A postmodern approach to housing and inner-city revitalization depends on both personality and the system of government. There are those within the profession who still follow the modernist approach to planning, which greatly reduces the ability of those within the community. Individually there are also those who support bottom-up approaches to addressing decline; however, the stringencies within senior levels of government do not allow for this flexibility and funding is often subject to what has been outlined provincially or federally. The local setting allows for more freedoms. Residents have more direct access to politicians and tend to be treated differently with less bureaucracy involved. This allows for greater flexibility and increased resident control within the area of inner city renewal.

Communication between the three levels of government within the WHHI was highly complicated. It was extremely difficult to provide a unified message that clearly expressed that of the WHHI and the multiple partners involved. Instead, each level sought to convey their message.

Often the attitudes of those in senior government positions reflected a lack of respect for the local communities, perhaps due to issues of personality that have been outlined previously. There is strong reliance on people skills within the setting of the WHHI, perhaps reflecting the importance of personality within a setting that is dealing with the

A postmodern approach to housing and inner-city revitalization depends on both personality and the system of government

community and one that is highly emotional. There may be need for a person within this position to be passionate about inner-city revitalization, and a community-based approach. However, it must be noted that an advocate alone would not survive the 'systems'. There is some kind of delicate balance here that has to be in place to be most effective, as planners need to be respectful of partners, and even politics, that operate within different or more traditional systems. It's a fine line.

Countless volumes of literature have espoused the benefits of a local approach to renewal, and clearly, that is what is required in the Winnipeg context. Additionally, the government systems need to respect the direct knowledge of those within the community and create an environment that supports their efforts through bottom-up approaches.

Conclusion

It was the overall goal of this assignment to bring to light some of the lessons learned when a planner seeks to address the needs of a community renewal effort within the context of a municipal policy agenda and a partnership with two senior levels of government. It has become apparent through the policy documents and discussions with professionals that the City has taken some steps to engage the community. Furthermore, the local government has begun to take the initiative to practice planning according to the elements outlined in the radical postmodern approach. It must be acknowledged that this is a step in the right direction. Government change tends to occur incrementally and the City has taken steps in the right direction to encourage a system that values diverse communities and the expertise within. This is hopeful. On the other hand, the provincial and federal governments look as if they are trapped in the top-down modernist models that have dominated much of the last century. It is hoped that the city will act as a catalyst for incremental changes in the practices of the senior levels of government, providing a system that will allow community efforts to be recognized and supported.

The local government is beginning to take steps towards a more postmodern approach...

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Renovated Home
Spence Neighbourhood Association 2004

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