

Creating a liveable community?

Linking participatory planning with participatory outcomes

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Abstract

Liveability strategies, currently being adopted by local governments in New Zealand to accommodate growth, are being developed using participatory processes. Participatory processes are intended to build local partnerships between central government agencies, local institutions, and community organisations. Participatory processes of planning have the potential to build better plans and multi-layered relationships, and engage and inform residents during the process. This approach recognises that delivery of liveability strategies does not rest with Councils alone, delivery of outcomes is also reliant on collaborative partnerships at the local scale. Research in Glen Innes, a suburb in Auckland, New Zealand, illustrates that the focus needs to shift from participatory planning towards participatory implementation to achieve liveability outcomes. Lessons are drawn from three participatory planning processes in Glen Innes – two ‘top-down’, one ‘bottom-up’ – showing the need for consultation processes that foster dialogue and build relationships to support implementation. In the Glen Innes case, local government and other stakeholders retreated back to core business following participatory planning processes and no process was developed or resources made available to implement parts of the plan that were most important to residents (e.g. safety, social connectedness, and local economy). While lack of community capacity is often identified as the most important barrier to community participation in planning processes, this study suggests that lack of civic trust is also an important barrier in this marginalised community. The case also highlights the importance of institutional capacity to link across departmental silos and multiple scales of government for place-based planning and implementation. In conclusion, participatory processes are identified as a neutral technology, neither good nor bad; what matters is how the technology is applied, in what context, and the effectiveness in leading to implementation and outcomes. Experimentation is still needed to determine appropriate forms of governance to create more liveable communities.

Introduction

The concept of participation has for many years been key to community development discourse. More recently, the concept has been related to rights of citizenship and to democratic governance (Gaventa 2001). Participatory governance can be defined as formal involvement of citizens in and influence over policies that directly affect their lives.

Liveability strategies in New Zealand are closely linked to a political shift towards participatory governance aimed at enhancing responsibility and ability to respond to change at multiple scales, particularly at the ‘community’ scale. Place-based strategies prioritise the ‘local’ as a site of effective policy and programmes, based on a model of participatory governance. Third Way politics – that is, post-Keynesian welfarism, post-neoliberalism – have been labelled the ‘inclusive’ liberal turn towards social governance (Craig and Porter 2006).

The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) broadened the role of local authorities to include the promotion of social, cultural, economic, and environmental wellbeing of their communities. Councils are required to develop Long Term Council Community Plans (LTCCP) that cover a 10-year period and are based on the ‘four wellbeings’. The LTCCP identifies community outcomes in collaboration with the community sector. Central government, non-governmental organisations, the private sector,

community organisations, indigenous Māori, and other groups are all then involved in the promotion and delivery of community outcomes.

It is argued that plans will if citizens are provided with greater opportunities to contribute to local government planning, then plans will more closely reflect local conditions and the process will build capacity at a community scale for active citizenship (Cuthill 2004). Difficulties in engaging residents of marginalised areas in participatory planning processes are common and are attributed to inadequate levels of social capital (i.e. social networks, norms of trust and reciprocity). Poor communities are often identified as lacking the capacity to engage in participatory processes and build strategic networks that enable collective action (e.g., Evans 2002, Lane and McDonald 2005). Theories of concentration of poverty and social isolation point to social pathology rather than political actions, public policy, and larger structural forces in shaping the local context for residents (Bennett and Reed 1999). In contrast, some observers suggest that lack of civic engagement in local government processes is due to 'collaboration fatigue' (Craig and Porter 2006:220, Leonard and Memon 2008). Civic participation is often underestimated in disadvantaged communities because of preference for less formal types of participation (e.g. club sports) (Skidmore et al. 2006).

There are concerns about equity of outcomes of participatory processes, with significant imbalances of power between community and government sectors. Jane Kelsey (2002:84) observed that 'partnerships may be essentially a technique that aims to pacify, more than deliver...[but] partnerships create expectations and demands that may lead to backlash if people are engaged with no visible returns' (in Lerner and Craig 2002). The notable absence of business groups in LTCCP processes has also been observed as an issue that undermines the collective responsibility discourse (Leonard and Memon 2008).

Participatory processes also often fail to recognise competing 'communities of interest' within localities, through the overly generic use of concepts of 'community'. Diverse interest groups can subscribe to a shared set of symbols and imagine themselves as a community, yet attribute different meanings to these symbols (Hansen 1995). Differences are regularly suppressed to maintain community relations but surface in times of conflict between groups (Strathern 1982, Young 1990, Giddens 1994). Furthermore, participants in consultative or participatory processes are not necessarily on a level playing field (Fung and Wright 2001). Local interests frequently favour the local elite, preventing resources being allocated to benefit those most at need (e.g., Park 1984, Scott et al. 2000).

While community capacity is commonly identified as a barrier to good participatory processes, institutional capacity to work collaboratively, even internally, is often ignored. A study in Waitakere, Auckland, found that despite requirements for participatory processes, funding was still held by 'silo-sector budget holders' and there was little statutory requirement for funding to be allocated to aligning plans and strategy to LTCCP outcomes (Craig and Porter 2006).

In this context, participatory processes are best viewed as neutral technologies that can produce good or bad outcomes. Furthermore, it is noted that '[l]ocal agendas are not inherently more legitimate than state or environmentalist agendas, and that

centralized state resource management is not always a bad thing, for social or ecological goals' (McCarthy 2002:1298). A mix of approaches, including participatory, consultative and top-down processes, may therefore be useful. This paper examines participatory processes in Glen Innes and in particular reflects on participatory governance as a technology in liveability strategies.

New Zealand Participatory Planning Processes

In New Zealand, the concept of liveability is being incorporated into growth management strategies by local authorities based on 'compact city' planning approaches. A Regional Growth Strategy (1999) has been developed for the Auckland region, the city where approximately a third of the nation's population resides and which is identified as one of the top ten 'liveable' cities in the world but also where social disparities are most evident in the country (Craig and Porter 2006). A metropolitan urban limit has been applied in the Auckland region, and specific areas have been targeted to accommodate intensive growth. Liveable Community Plans are required for these targeted areas to provide the planning framework for managing growth, based on collaboratively identified community outcomes.

The issue that quickly emerges in relation to liveability processes is responsibility for delivery of community outcomes over multiple bottom-lines. Participatory planning processes are difficult enough; facilitating implementation is a much bigger challenge. In an era of increasing public demand for limits on council spending and trimming back on bureaucracy, local governments struggle to justify to property tax payers spending on anything other than core services. It is not clear what the legislative requirement to 'promote social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being' means, nor how it is to be achieved and resourced.

The Glen Innes liveability planning process is illustrative of this dilemma. Glen Innes is the first suburb in Auckland City to go through this process and therefore local government had to interpret and apply the many layers of legislative requirements and non-statutory guidelines to planning processes. The aim of this paper is not to critique the planning process as such; rather it is to shift the analytical focus from planning to implementation processes and the concept of participatory governance.

Research approach

A long-term programme of ethnographic research in Glen Innes, New Zealand informs this paperⁱ. Participant-observation, interviews and document reviews are the key research methods. The research began with a review of Council documentation and public submissions to the Glen Innes Liveable Community Plan and zone change plans to allow higher density housing in Glen Innes (Scott and Shaw 2005).

Subsequent ethnographic research, begun in February 2006, has to date included interviews with 20 residents, 2 focus groups (a group of 6 state tenants, and 10 Glen Innes residents and community development workers). A further 20 interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders in mid-2006 to investigate social networking processes in Glen Innes. Interviewees included social service providers, *iwi*ⁱⁱ, local government, government agencies, and non-governmental organisations (Bava and Scott 2006). Interviews and ongoing dialogue with numerous key government stakeholders involved in Glen Innes community renewal have also informed the research. Participant observation has involved attending community events, submission hearings, and

community meetings, and participating in several formal social networks that support social and environmental sustainability initiatives in Glen Innes.

Glen Innes Context

Glen Innes, established as a ‘state housing’ suburb in the 1950s and including Auckland’s first comprehensively planned town centre (Auckland City 2004), was created as a dormitory suburb to service nearby meat processing and manufacturing industries. Most houses are detached single dwellings. Of the total of 5367 households in Glen Innes as at the 2006 census, 56 percent of properties are owned by Housing New Zealand Corporation (HNZC), the central government social housing provider.

Glen Innes rates in the highest decile of deprivation in New Zealand (Salmond et al. 2007). Median household incomes of \$49,800 are low, much lower than that of Auckland City as a whole (\$66,100). Glen Innes has a youthful population and is ethnically diverse: Māori (14%) and Pacific (30%) populations being higher than elsewhere in the city (7% and 11%, respectively) (Auckland City 2008). The economic reforms that began in the 1980s had a profound impact on Glen Innes; rapid decline in meat processing and manufacturing particularly affected Māori and Pacific people, heavily represented in these industries. Although unemployment has dropped since 2001 (from 12.6 to 7.8%), economic deregulation has resulted in low wages and the displacement of many low and semi-skilled jobs.

Glen Innes is stigmatised as a ‘high need’ community with heavy reliance on social and welfare services. Policy requirements for HNZC to house first those assessed as ‘highest need’ contribute to ongoing marginalisation and an ever-changing ethnic and cultural mix. Residents reminisce about when Glen Innes was the home of ‘working families’ and people were proud to be from ‘GI’.



Fig. 1: Area of ethnographic study

Participatory planning in action

Three participatory planning processes have been undertaken in Glen Innes since 2000, all aimed at improving liveability in its various forms. Two of these processes could be called ‘top-down’ - Auckland City Council’s Liveable Community Plan

(LCP) and Housing New Zealand Corporation's Talbot Park Community Renewal Project. The third, described locally as a 'bottom-up' process, was a community-based visioning project undertaken by a local community development organization, Ka Mau Te Wero (KMTW). Each of these groups claimed to have adopted participatory processes. These processes, including approaches to planning and implementation, are examined here.

Liveable Community Plan

In 2000, Auckland City Council (ACC) selected Glen Innes as a 'priority one' area to accommodate future growth based on specific criteria (Auckland City 2004:7). ACC developed a LCP to provide the planning framework to accommodate growth in Glen Innes incorporating changes in urban form (increased housing densities and 'mixed use') with attention to design (controls on quality). ACC planning and consultation extended over four years. Taking note of previous consultation documentation and research, ACC were careful to make use of existing information to reduce consultation overload. As a highly marginalised community, Glen Innes has long been the recipient of research and renewal programmes aimed at (and largely failing to) improve socioeconomic outcomes or to enhance the built environment (Mathur 2008). Residents reported they were tired, and extremely cynical, of ongoing community renewal processes. Added to this was a new community concern – housing intensification.

Consultation involved some innovative participatory techniques, including a charette, a series of public meetings, 'drop in' days, visual displays, stakeholder and technical workshops, open planning days, consultation with local *iwi*, a 'box city' youth forum, and project newsletters (Auckland City 2004). ACC planners reported feeling dissatisfied with the low number of residents who took part in these processes and also commented that an extremely mobile population in Glen Innes meant those who were involved might well have moved on since then. Half of Glen Innes' residents have only lived in their current homes for less than five years, and two thirds for less than 10 years (Auckland City 2008).

ACC was surprised at the enormous backlash against housing intensification in Glen Innes (and elsewhere) at that time and saw it as a knee-jerk reaction. Strategising and planning at all levels of government had been taking place for more than 10 years to accommodate growth in sustainable ways. Urban sprawl, very poor air quality, heavy reliance on private vehicles and changing household dynamics were to be addressed by more compact urban development. Despite ACC attempts to engage residents in planning processes, interviews with residents showed there was little or no understanding amongst residents of negative impacts of urban sprawl as drivers for changing urban form. The LCP process elicited fears about gentrification from some residents while other residents expressed fears of 'slumification' from increased housing densities (Scott et al. submitted). Nevertheless, the LCP was signed off in 2004, and following a further round of consultation a zone change to allow higher density development was approved in 2006,.

The Glen Innes LCP included an eight outcomes vision:

- An attractive, safe and vibrant town centre
- Enhancement of local employment opportunities

- A variety of housing types to meet the needs of a diverse and growing community
- Improvement of public transport facilities and services to make it easier to get around
- Enhancement of pedestrian and traffic safety
- Easy and safe access to community facilities and open spaces, which meets local needs
- Strengthening of community identity and improvement of public safety
- Protection and enhancement of the natural environment

The plan stated that responsibility for delivery of these outcomes was to be collective; local and central government, residents, community organisations, and other agencies were expected to act collaboratively to improve liveability in all its forms. ACC responsibilities were carefully identified in the plan, with a focus on the local government 'core business' of the provision of infrastructure; other stakeholders who could be potential partners in the implementation of the plan were also identified (e.g. police, community-based organisations).

ACC developed an action plan and established an inter-department forum to facilitate implementation of priority infrastructure projects, with input from stakeholders. Several of these actions have been completed, including upgrades to the town centre (stage 1), train station, and parking facilities, and the development of a major recreational facility. ACC found that the LCP was a useful tool to attract ACC funding and for cross-department collaboration to implement these upgrades. Other collaborations to improve infrastructure, such as a traffic and pedestrian safety project, are in the planning stage.

On top of core business provision, ACC was identified in the LCP as 'advocates', 'working with', 'supporting', and 'facilitating opportunities' and 'forum' to meet vision outcomes. However, no process was developed (or funding allocated) for collaborative implementation of other parts of the plan, including enhancing local employment opportunities, public safety, strengthening community identity, and the natural environment. The LCP is on the ACC website but without any update of progress in implementation. With no links explicitly made between planning and implementation processes, the plan has 'dropped off the radar' for residents and residents do not connect the LCP with resultant infrastructural upgrades.

GI Visioning Project

Residents expressed concerns that they had had no meaningful input into the LCP (Scott and Shaw 2005). In response, KMTW, a local community development organization, initiated a community visioning process in 2004. An iterative process of participatory planning and implementation was developed. A design team was formed and consultants were employed to undertake a community-visioning project based on bottom-up participatory planning approaches; this included engaging key community advisors and facilitating public meetings, workshops, and formal and informal meetings with a wide range of community organisations (Hancock et al. 2005). Four priorities for Glen Innes were identified: enhancing community leadership; harnessing GI pride; strengthening well-being; and working together. The aim was to broker the best possible outcomes for the community based on identified priorities. ACC staff were excluded from the GI Visioning consultation process and this confused their

planners, particularly given their extensive community consultation in the shaping of the LCP.

Based on identified priorities, an action plan was developed and several formalised networks established to build relationships across agencies and community organizations and to develop collaborative initiatives to meet identified vision outcomes. Despite exclusion from the GI visioning process, ACC staff, particularly community partnership and parks staff, were actively engaged in these networks during our research. These ACC officers built links between community-based organizations and the ACC and helped identify appropriate departments and ACC officers for specific resources; however, achieving input from more highly-resourced departments continues to be a challenge.

Quarterly GI Visioning meetings for stakeholders have been held since the release of the visioning document in 2005; updates on project activities are given and stakeholders are able to meet and discuss progress and potential collaborations. The meetings were initially called 'External Stakeholders' meetings, but the word 'external' was dropped over time, recognising that organizations such as the local University Campus and local government were part of 'the community'. KMTW actively identifies the links between consultation with residents and resulting actions. For example, regular reminders are given that the new GI Community Market was established in response to residents' requests during the GI Visioning process. This branding of the GI Visioning project has helped build trust and participation in subsequent actions.

Local networks are gaining momentum over time and are increasingly attracting small amounts of short-term funding to undertake community development activities. Network members are also making collective representations to local government to influence infrastructural upgrades, citing back LCP participatory governance principles to justify their input. While providing an opportunity for community capacity building and collaborative action, the networks struggle to engage residents and 'talking chiefs', that is, management-scale decision-makers and resource allocators (Scott and Liew 2007). Small indications of capacity building amongst residents are evident, but often those residents actively engaged quickly become swamped with ever-increasing demands on their time. Personal, work, and ethnic and church networks are central to many residents' lives, and participation in broader community activities is limited (Mathur et al. 2004, Bava and Scott 2006). While there is a growing capacity and sense of connectedness between social service and community development workers, as well as an emergence of numerous 'network weavers', much work is still to be done to built connectedness, trust and capacity for engagement in suburban-scale initiatives.

Talbot Park Community Renewal Project

Talbot Park is a 5-hectare social housing development in central Glen Innes, owned by HNZC. A Community Renewal project was undertaken to improve living conditions for residents and to demonstrate sustainable urban design (including medium-density housing, energy efficiency, low-impact storm water management, and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design). Nine apartment blocks were

renovated and other homes were replaced with a mix of housing types, including single dwellings, townhouses, and apartments.

HNZC consulted with tenants and integrated their feedback during the planning stages. For example, residents' requests that the homes 'not look like state houses' were accommodated by using housing designs from six different architectural firms. HNZC was keen to demonstrate more compact forms of development that also met residents' needs. The renewal project was completed in 2007 and, counter to community expectations, residents are very happy in their new homes. People report feeling a greatly improved sense of safety, community connectedness and pride; tenancy turnover has dropped from 50 to 4 percent per annum and there is now a waiting list of keen prospective tenants.

What has made this development work? HNZC adopted an 'intensive tenancy management' approach in Talbot Park. Five HNZC staff work from an on-site office, including two project managers, an administrator, a tenancy manager and a community development worker. Tenants are able to raise concerns with HNZC and initiate collective action at regular residents meetings; however, tenancy and property management decisions are ultimately made by HNZC. Tenants are carefully screened, contracted to follow the rules, and 'bad' tenants are moved out. Displaying a mix of top-down and consultative approaches to tenancy management, HNZC and nearby Ruapotaka Marae reached an agreement that a certain percentage of Māori residents would be housed at Talbot Park, and Māori tenants were selected in consultation with the marae.

While HNZC's planning processes were participatory in terms of design approaches, implementation is not. The renewal project went ahead despite community concerns and HNZC took a strong management lead rather than devolving responsibility to a residents' or community organization. Arguably, this mix of governance styles has resulted in improved social outcomes. The sense of safety, amenity values, and a struggling local economy and job market in Glen Innes continue to affect residents' lives however.

While ACC planners were very supportive during planning, regulatory staff were less so, making consent processes time-consuming and costly with no financial benefits from including sustainable design features (Bracey et al. 2008).

Comparing participatory approaches

ACC facilitated a strongly participatory LCP planning process and have used this plan to facilitate cross-department collaboration in infrastructure upgrades. Participatory processes in implementation of non-infrastructure aspects of the plan are less evident, particularly those that link government and community sectors or more internal integration. While strategically ACC were supportive of more compact forms of development and more localised or low-impact environmental management, the Talbot Park project suggests that operationally they were not.

KMTW facilitated strong participatory planning and have carried this through to implementation. Branding of the visioning process and regular progress updates have helped build trust and community engagement. However, KMTW still face strong

institutional and community capacity barriers to facilitating community-based governance.

The parallel but disconnected visioning processes undertaken by ACC and KMTW represent a lost opportunity. The planning processes were not used to build relationships that intersect government and community sectors. Agencies continue to do what they have always done: ACC has reverted to the 'core business' of infrastructure upgrades, HNZA provides social housing, and community-based organizations undertake community development and social service provision. Lack of cross-sectoral links have prevented collaboration to implement strategies to achieve more holistic outcomes.

Competing community needs were recognised by local government in the LCP. Local government's need to accommodate growth overrode community concerns about increased housing density. However, the decision to proceed with housing intensification has the potential to favour those most in need of affordable housing. The participatory planning process was effective in alerting ACC and HNZA to priority issues for residents and these influenced subsequent renewal practices. For example, Talbot Park design was strongly influenced by Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles.

Changes to place are intended to lead to improved social outcomes. At a very local level, this has certainly been the case in Talbot Park. A mix of participatory planning and more conventional top-down implementation approaches have worked well in this context. The somewhat heavy-handed approach of HNZA is supported by residents, and is an example of the kinds of support people need to manage themselves well in this context. However, significant improvements are needed in the wider Glen Innes area to improve overall liveability for residents (particularly safety and the local economy), and these improvements are unlikely to result from improved partnership and collaboration alone.

Statements of willingness to work collaboratively were made by all stakeholders, but there was no process or funding to make that happen, suggesting a greater focus needs to go on participatory implementation rather than concentrating solely on planning. Participatory planning has so far placed a burden on community organizations and local residents, those with the least capacity to engage, with limited evidence of improved socio-economic outcomes. Lack of civic trust (rather than lack of civic responsibility) together with dire socio-economic circumstances of many residents have appeared to limit community engagement in liveability processes. As no one agency is resourced to lead such place-based initiatives which must include long-term implementation and participatory processes, vision outcomes are essentially left to chance.

Now what?

Recent changes in local government political representation have resulted in the withdrawal of funding for further infrastructural upgrades in Glen Innes, part of city-wide cuts to limit property tax rises. Stage 2 infrastructural upgrades to the town centre to improve links between retail outlets has been delayed until 2013, and a music and arts centre and streetscape upgrade have been cancelled (Glucina 2008). These cuts seriously undermine residents' trust in local government processes (and

LCP outcomes), and reflect an underlying tension between electoral and participatory democracy.

In the same month these cuts were announced, central government announced a Transformation Project for the Tamaki area, within which Glen Innes is situated. This project is an intensification plan to house an additional 30,000 people over the next 20 years. HNZA leads the project, in collaboration with local and central government, and the city public health authority. A participatory planning process has been initiated, and, based on lessons learned from the Glen Innes LCP process, two people with strong personal and professional networks in Glen Innes have been engaged to facilitate a more inclusive and participatory consultation process. Whether this participatory process survives potential political changes later in the year remains to be seen.

Conclusions

Participatory planning processes in Glen Innes resulted in a liveability plan that identified local concerns and outcomes visions that were generally supported. The plan also supported cross-department collaboration on infrastructural upgrades. However, implementation processes in Glen Innes have failed to bridge the silos within local government and between government and community sectors and to develop a whole-of-government approach to broader liveability strategies. Relationships built with community organisations during planning were not maintained in ways that supported community governance. Participatory processes are a tool to be used to support more broadly based governance. Our study suggests that what matters is how this tool is used and in what context, and experimentation is still needed to determine what forms of governance work best to create more liveable communities. Broader structural changes are also needed to address the most profound equity issues affecting residents – very low incomes and displacement of jobs (Scott et al n.d., Sywngedouw and Heynen 2003).

The difficulty of engaging residents in participatory planning has been previously identified and lack of community capacity is often blamed (Cuthill 2004). Collaboration fatigue has also been identified as an important barrier to participatory processes (Craig and Porter 2006:220, Leonard and Memon 2008). The Glen Innes study suggests that lack of civic trust and never-ending renewal processes have shaped this lack of civic engagement (together with historical material conditions). A mix of governance styles may therefore be necessary.

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ⁱⁱ Tribal and urban Māori groups