

Counteracting Ingrained Practices of Community Development in the American South. The Klondike/Smokey City Case in Memphis TN, USA

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Abstract

Negli Stati Uniti lo sviluppo di comunità è diventato, nel corso del tempo, un ambito di lavoro molto dibattuto all'interno del quale agenzie non governative intrecciano le loro iniziative volte al miglioramento dei quartieri con quelle proposte e attuate dalle autorità pubbliche. Questo paper analizza i principi e alcune delle questioni problematiche e irrisolte legate alla retorica dello sviluppo di comunità attraverso il caso di Klondike Smokey City, un quartiere Afro-Americano di Memphis (TN, US). Più specificatamente, il paper evidenzia alcune lezioni imparate durante un processo di ricerca orientato all'azione portato avanti durante le fasi iniziali di una partnership che ha coinvolto la *Klondike Smokey City Community Development Corporation* e il Dipartimento di *City and Regional Planning* presso l'*University of Memphis*. Il paper riflette su come approcci di ricerca in pianificazione ispirati alla ricerca-azione possono essere conducenti nell'affrontare alcune delle più importanti sfide fronteggiate dalle organizzazioni di comunità.

In the US, the field of community development has become an increasingly contested terrain where non-governmental entities routinely integrate their neighborhood improvement initiatives with those proposed and implemented by public authorities. This paper analyzes the assumptions and some of the problematic and unresolved issues tied to the rhetoric of community development by exploring the community-based development efforts of the Klondike Smokey City (KSC) community, a historic African American neighborhood in Memphis, TN. In particular, this paper highlights some of the lessons learned during an action-oriented research process carried out by a newly established partnership involving the KSC Community Development Corporation (CDC) and the City and Regional Planning (CRP) Department at the University of Memphis. This paper reflects on how alternative approaches to planning scholarship inspired by action-research might be conducive to revealing and addressing some of the most challenging issues faced by self-organization practices.

Parole chiave: Comunità, Sviluppo di Comunità, Ricerca-Azione, Auto-Organizzazione

Keywords: Community, Community Development, Action Research, Self-Organization

1. The “Community Alternative” in the US

Over time, the construction of enabling spaces – defined as those in which new forms of collaboration between subjects

of different institutions, agencies, and community groups are established to generate creative bridges for planning and management (cfr. Tracce Urbane, 2017 conference call, track n. 2) – has been interpreted in several ways and various forms in different contexts across the world. In the US, starting in the mid-60s, the community development movement generated very specific forms of enabling spaces aimed at encouraging collaboration between poor peoples' organizations and government structures. Since the Special Impact Amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act in 1966, there has been an increasing number of non-government agencies whose primary role has focused on rebuild declining neighborhoods from the inside (Bratt, 1989). Community-based organizations had initially been established to implement projects, especially those related to housing, by filling gaps in the housing market left by private and public organization's inability to provide affordable housing for the most disadvantaged. Over time, those organizations changed their areas of expertise and operation, embracing a more comprehensive approach to neighborhood development encompassing such activities as: job generation, neighborhood infrastructure, educational programming, and so on. Pursuing this broader mission, CDCs have been playing a fundamental role in addressing neighborhoods' concerns by supporting and enhancing people's self-organization practices, and challenging existing power structures, especially when these have prevented those in need to access the abovementioned resources.

In particular, CDCs have sought to act as a counterbalance to the power block by putting pressure on the establishment to achieve "equal partnerships" with economic elites (Shearer, 1989). Similar community-based institutions had been very active until the mid-70s when inner city communities across the US started to decline. At the national level, this period corresponds with the establishment of Community Development Corporations (CDCs), which were originally created to formalize the existence of community-based power blocks seen as the only "community option" (Clavel et al., 1997) to counteract the well known alliances between private and public elites well conceptualized by the concept of the "growth machine" (Molotch, 1976). The idea that local services and subsidies can be provided by community based organizations

(Clavel et al., 1997) has been very successful in those contexts where social conflicts on the ground were acknowledged, internalized, and pushed forward by local CDCs. Maintaining a strong connection to the larger public base, CDCs' work has been reflected, in a number of cases, in the agendas of local elected representatives, showing how the community alternative proposed by this model was able to influence municipal decision-making processes (Reardon, 1990; Clavel and Wiewel, 1991; Forester and Krumholz, 1990).

While examples of successful CDCs can be found across the US, the CDC model has been greeted with significant disbelief. Not only urban scholars, but also community activists have been concerned about the increasing distance between formalized community organizations (such as CDCs) and the broader people's base. This preoccupation has prompted many academic studies to look at the numerous tactics deployed by power structures to co-opt community based organizations (Marris and Rein, 1967; Piven and Cloward, 1979; Gittell 1980; Stoecker, 1997). Since the 90s, mechanisms for CDC co-optation have significantly undermined the transformative power of grassroots organizing and community-based development organizations working in many of America's inner city neighborhoods. The erosion over time of the "community alternative" has often compromised or derailed the initiatives once robustly carried out by CDCs and similar groups. In this scenario, enabling spaces lost their transformational power by being controlled by co-opted entities whose power and influence has been significantly diminished by existing power structures.

In this new scenario, while CDCs have become increasingly entangled with the power block through various forms of co-optation, they have been expected to serve as the 'watchdog' for more formal organizations carrying out localized self-organizing initiatives that could help restoring communities' agendas. This has prompted some to reflect upon the broad range of obstacles occurring in similar circumstances, concluding that self-organizing remains very limited because "there's only so much self-sacrificing you can do" (Herbert, 2005) to counteract existing power structures in order to achieve results that are sufficient to affect structural change. In these circumstances, what type of work is needed to fill the

gap caused by co-optation dynamics and the lack of resources and power among informal groups committed to work for the restoration of a community alternative in the public arena? In what follow, the case of the African American neighborhood of Klondike Smokey City (Memphis, TN) is presented as the epitome of a place where the initial existence of a strong “community alternative” has been slowly undermined by social dynamics that intertwined co-optation of local community groups with all of those initiatives carried out by local groups to restore the former glory of a tight-knit African American community in the face of significant disinvestment, outmigration and economic distress. After introducing the KSC Neighborhood and its phases of growth and decline, the paper shares an account of the work that has been carried out by the partnership established between the local KSC CDC and the CRP Department at the University of Memphis. Some hypothesis based upon this work are shared to encourage others to reflect upon the possibility that researchers-in-action might have in working within similar arenas where old models for establishing enabling space are becoming increasingly problematic. The paper concludes with a call for the importance of questioning taken-for-granted assumptions on existing enabling spaces and highlighting both the challenges and opportunities for approaching the activation of enabling spaces in severely distressed communities, such as Klondike Smokey City, in a new way.

2. The Klondike Smokey City Community

The Klondike and the Smokey City communities trace their roots back to the often-dual nature of American inner-city neighborhoods. On the western side of the community, the traditional mixed-race urban environment, where the sharing of the neighborhood space between blacks and whites reflecting the cultural and economic subjugation of people of color; on the eastern side, one of the first and most flourishing self-sufficient African American communities, where residential buildings and retail businesses were owned and managed by the new rising African American community. The western Smokey City neighborhood was settled, in fact, as a traditional neighborhood where African Americans worked as butlers, maids, and drivers for white families, however, it was fundamentally transformed during the 60s as a result of the construction of Interstate 240.



Fig. 1- The maps shows the boundaries of the entire KSC Neighborhood as it is today. In lighter gray, on the west side, the old footprint of Smokey City community; in darker gray, on the east side, the old footprint of the Klondike Community.

The Klondike neighborhood was one of the first and most flourishing self-sufficient African American communities in the South whose residents were making a good living in the first companies employing African Americans in semi-skilled and skilled manufacturing positions such as the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company and International Harvester.

After desegregation laws began to take effect during the late 60s and 70s, while white families were abandoning the Smokey City community ‘white flying’ to the numerous Memphis suburbs, the local demographic of the two former separated communities became quite homogeneous in terms of race and class (cfr. Connerly, 2002). These were years of great accomplishments for these two neighborhoods that generated some of the most successful business leaders, community activists, and elected officials contributing to the African American history of the entire Greater Memphis Region. In 1970, Jesse James, one of the most prominent African American leaders of the Klondike community and owner of one of the first black-operated grocery store in town, founded the Klondike Civic Club. The Club, whose leaders

and members were active in the Memphis Civil Right Movement, played a fundamental leadership role during the period immediately following desegregation, effectively advocating for legislation to advance African American rights and struggling for the implementation of these new laws.

The organization of the Civic Club in the 70s is the ultimate expression of a community with a strong community organizing and self-empowering drive. This was, in fact, the 'hotbed' of civic and cultural innovation where new accomplishments for the African American community were achieved for the very first time. The Klondike Elementary School was, for example, the first school in the south that implemented school integration policies. The local community center was built and named after the work of community activist Katie Sexton, a well-known and respected woman leader in the Memphis Civil Rights struggle and co-founder of the Kennedy Democratic Organization, the Black Memphis organization founded in 1969 where many of Klondike's leaders contributed progressive ideas to the broader civic debates on economic and community development. In 1973, some of the leaders and founding fathers of this grassroots movement became deacons of the newly built Vollintine Baptist Church, which became the cornerstone of the KSC community. It was established to create a faith-based institution with the explicit aim to preserve, support, and enhance the grassroots social justice work being done in the neighborhood.

2.1 The Resistance through the Decline

Since the 80s, a series of plant closings, ongoing public and private disinvestment, political negligence, and public indifference transformed the once-vibrant and proud Klondike Smokey City neighborhood into one of the most environmentally, economically, and socially distressed communities in The Bluff City. Uniform Crime Reports and Census data revealing high levels of crime, joblessness, poverty, and physical deterioration along with increasing number of stories of household despair, violence, gangs, and abandonment were regularly reported in the local press and in key-informant testimonies prompting many observers to abandon hope in the neighborhood. Unfortunately, these negative press stories tended to overshadow positive stories of neighborhood organizations carrying out activities promoting the well being of the KSC community. Neighborhood

schools, religious institutions, non-profits organizations, and local fraternal groups struggle every day to restore order and a positive sense of community in this once vibrant African American community.

At the beginning of the 90s, KSC was transformed from a community of proud long-term homeowners to an area of transient renters many of whom had little connection to the community. This transformation was caused in large part by endogenous factors such as the fact that many of the senior residents left and the majority of the young people attracted to the neighborhood lacked the resources to invest in the community. These internal factors were complemented by parallel exogenous occurrences such as the completion of public housing programs (HOPE VI for the most part), which forced poor people to relocate into subsidized private market-rate housing complexes. The declining KSC became a perfect relocation site for these former public housing tenants whose complexes were being demolished. In 1996, the Klondike Neighborhood Organization and the Klondike CDC were established with the aim of reclaiming the neighborhood by carrying out community development initiatives that could generate needed public and private investments in the neighborhood. The grassroots events and activities organized by these two organizations ranged from social events to various forms of community organizing and confrontational meetings with city officials aimed at pressing public officials to re-engage the local planning agenda of the Klondike Smokey City organization. Actions by these two main organizations that were coordinated by Alma Morris, President of the Klondike Neighborhood Association and former City Council candidate, have been complemented by continuous block-by-block organizing undertaken by very active block clubs – such as the Klondike Boosters and the Klondike Eastside Block Clubs whose members were committed to reclaiming the neighborhood and pushing the city to take responsibility for the evident physical decline of the neighborhood.

2.2 The Legacy of the “Club(s)” and the CDCs’ Cooptation

While these community organizations were committed to putting KSC back on the local political agenda, the main city development agency – the Memphis Housing and Community Development (HCD) Department responsible for addressing

major neighborhood challenges appeared unwilling to invest public resources in KSC. During the mid-90s and early 2000s, a large amount of public funds and resources were dedicated to the implementation of HOPE VI projects (carried out by HCD in collaboration with MHA) whose main goal was to rid inner-city Memphis from public housing. While this public housing-centered city revitalization effort was underway, the Memphis Housing and Community Development Department's leadership made several promises to the KSC community. While community efforts focused on encouraging the city to support initiatives aimed at revitalizing the neighborhood, the actual public involvement in these KSC initiatives remained very limited. The community's ongoing requests for assistance did not parallel city agencies' actions, whose responses were limited to scattered interventions: public expenditures for non public housing neighborhood development projects were maintained under the total control of HCD, whose contribution to KSC remained limited only to a modest amount of discretionary funds needed to support the day-to-day operations of the recently established Klondike CDC.

In the first years of the 2000s, the former director of HCD strongly suggested to the KSC leaders that they coordinate and pursue their redevelopment efforts through a single organizational entity that could better respond to community's needs while at the same time enhancing the neighborhood's capacity to collaborate with the city and its HCD agency. The idea of having a large CDC in charge of a target area with precise boundaries and a large service territory was a conventional practice followed by HCD during these years. This strategy served as a device to achieve tight control of the city through the creation of a system of control and co-optation of local CDCs. As a matter of fact, the city was divided up by HCD into districts whose designated CDC leaders maintained a strong connection and loyalty to the main HCD leader, who was expected to take care of the future of communities, such as KSC, through the provision of Community Development Block Grant and Tax Incremental Financing funding. Following the HCD director's suggestion that they bring their neighborhood improvement efforts together under one organizational structure, the Klondike Smokey City CDC replaced the former Klondike Neighborhood Association and the Klondike CDC, as the primary vehicle for community renewal in the area. In 2008 the KSC CDC was invited, along with many other CDCs

across the city, to join a new citywide venture called the Greater Memphis Partnership. This partnership featured a formal collaboration among various city agencies, representatives of the most well resourced Memphis philanthropic foundations, and a selected number of community-based organizations represented by strong and well-established CDCs. Representatives of the partnership led the Greater Memphis Partnership Steering Committee, which also included CDC leaders representing all of Memphis' neighborhoods. Using participatory techniques such as theme-focused meetings involving representative from the partnership and one-on-one interviews with 60 community stakeholders, the partnership drafted the Greater Memphis Neighborhood Plan in 2009. This plan identified three top-ranked neighborhoods whose needs did not outweigh opportunities, so that investments could still be seen as successful in these areas. Using the same rationales that underpinned often-criticized government planning practices from the 30s and 60s such as redlining and planning shrinkage (Aalbers, 2014), the 2009 Greater Memphis Neighborhood Plan established the conditions for a strategy in which a selected number of community leaders place the city's neighborhoods in one of three categories based upon the level of physical decline, economic distress, and social disorganization present. Their approach limited funding for the city's poorest neighborhoods while concentrating on those with moderate levels of distress.

Since the publication of this plan, the KSC CDC and its designated target area have experienced the negative consequences of this planned strategy. As repeatedly came up during key-informant interviews, lack of investment in affordable housing, streets, parks, infrastructures, and maintenance of public spaces brought the KSC community to be forgotten by the majority of recent public planning ventures. The KSC CDC, like many other CDCs in Memphis, remained trapped in the limbo created by the Blueprint's top-three neighborhoods selection process and the already existing wealthy areas that remained attractive for public and private capital flows. Moreover, in the specific case of KSC this condition was exacerbated by its geographical location wedged between the western Uptown Development where HOPE VI programs had already cleared the way for private housing development, and Crosstown Concord, the Mid-town megaproject focused on turning a former Sears Building into a mixed-use

facilities.

The type of planning generated by the Greater Memphis Partnership substantially set the conditions for KSC-like neighborhoods to remaining in undesirable limbo for any future investments. While this vicious mechanism remained in place, new promises from HCD's leadership kept feeding the populist hopes of a brighter future to come for neighborhoods such as KSC. In hoping to avoid the political challenges and financial costs of embarking on a comprehensive planning effort, HCD hired an urban design consulting firm in 2013 to generate a plan focusing on proto-typical housing development demonstration projects, and the generation of mixed-use urban nodes with economic activities right at the edge of the KSC thoroughfare. Once again, the main agency paying the cost of the planning process never followed up on the recommended implementation strategies. Today, after more than 10 years since the KSC CDC was created, the KSC neighborhood remains neglected while public investments and resources are spent in the immediate surroundings. Interviews with key-informants refer to this dynamic as a flip in the air, constantly prioritizing public expenses elsewhere and waiting for trickle-down effects generated by surrounding developments. A stalemate has taken place in the neighborhood – as in many others – for years now, following the departure of the very powerful former director of HCD.

2.3 Creating New Enabling Spaces in KSC?

In the fall of 2015, the executive director of the KSC CDC was looking for “technical assistance” to support and expand the various activities that the CDC was carrying out in the KSC neighborhood. The fact that for so many years the city had continued investing in the outskirts of the KSC neighborhood was the main factor that prompted the CDC to ask for technical support in identifying planning strategies that could fill the gap left by the city's failure to invest in the community. The CDC's main concern was to re-concentrate city attention (and investments) from the outskirts of the KSC neighborhood to its core, trying to re-establishing the once thriving urban environment that local residents once enjoyed.

During initial meetings and conversations with the CRP Department, CDC's preliminary ideas were mainly focused on two main elements: (1) to conduct a history project that could

unveil the historical legacy of the neighborhood, and (2) to further the urban design initiatives contained in the plan previously generated for KSC during one of the HCD planning processes. While these initiatives were initially seen as fundamental to building an economic development plan for KSC, the newly established partnership started to question the narrow focus of them and proposed to initiate a larger planning process that could reach out to the broader KSC community to explore possibilities for urban regeneration not contained in the recently completed HCD plan. As a matter of fact, if on one side the history project and the advancement of the urban design plan were seen as proactive initiatives proposed by the CDC, it also appeared that those very same initiatives were replicating rooted practices of community development from the late 90s. Acknowledging the problematic issues associated with those practices, the newly established collaboration launched a new course of action aimed at exploring what other alternative practices could complement the two previously proposed redevelopment strategies advocated by the CDC.

2.4 Enlarging the Margins of our Action

Following an approach to planning research inspired by action-research, in the fall of 2015, the CRP Department engaged two classes from the MS in City and Regional Planning Program (the Comprehensive Planning Studio and the Historic Preservation Planning Seminar) in a highly participatory planning process aimed at shaping the KSC Community Development Plan. Over the course of the semester, the partnership conducted door-to-door interviews, neighborhood history research, and historic and current socio-economic and physical conditions analyses. All of the results of this work were constantly shared with local stakeholders during various community meetings, allowing the definition of possible priority initiatives and a common vision for KSC to emerge. During these events, two major topics were brought to the attention of the partnership's leadership, and repeatedly came up when people were interacting on possible strategies to address community needs. The first topic confirmed the initial attention given by the KSC CDC to the community history. Combinations of interviews, archival research, and moments of shared findings revealed the reach history of the KSC African American community. In particular, the historical

research highlighted the existence of all of those elements of the urban fabric, the life of all of those individuals, and the memories of collective events and community stories that made KSC so unique and important to the African American legacy in Memphis. Beginning with the 1920's, the community shared the story of all of those who were born and grew up in one of the first black-owned neighborhoods in Memphis. Moreover, KSC emerged as the first African American neighborhood where busing policies were implemented successfully, where the "Memphis 13" (the first 13 children going to integrated schools) started their journey. It was also the place where blacks owned not only their houses but also local businesses that were thriving during the same years in which KSC was established. But most of all, it was one of the most important sources of inspired leadership for the Memphis and Southern Civic Rights Movements. The local Civic Club was the place where many of the most prominent leaders of the African American community started their careers in the emerging Memphis Freedom Struggle.

The rich history of the KSC community was recognized as an invaluable asset upon which to build a healthy, equitable, and sustainable future for the community. Participants in the newly established community/university partnership aimed at establishing a reclamation process that could help the black community regain its control of their neighborhood both in terms of ownership and stewardship. Interviews revealed that although a lot of properties appeared to be vacant, many former residents and their heirs currently maintain properties in the community despite the fact that they do not live in the neighborhood today. For these families, as well as for all of those blacks who used to have some connections to the KSC community (relatives, friends, places to go to, etc.), the neighborhood is still viewed today as the symbol of their community's self-determination legacy. They all maintain emotional connections to various places in the neighborhood: connections that are embodied in their vivid memories and in all of the old photographs, documents, and papers they have been scrupulously keeping. However, all of those memories come alive every Sunday when the members of this community – today scattered throughout the city – travel to KSC to go to their church on Vollintine Street, which is the only physical place where they still gather.

Individual interviews have consistently pictured a community that

was fragmented and dispersed all around the City of Memphis over time. However, the intangible connections to places in KSC, the community's Sunday ritual, and the more formal connection to the neighborhood in the form of ownership of parcels, an abandoned building, or part of a property represented the constellation of relationships that individuals maintain with KSC. During community meetings and public events participants shared their skepticism about the typical model of neighborhood re-development, where developers spend time and capital in assembling abandoned or rundown properties in order to finance, design, and build "from scratch" a new urban community. Instead, they were willing to find and embrace strategies of neighborhood development based on the vast system of community assets already present in the community.

2.5 Generating a Plan

Toward the end the fall semester of 2015 and throughout the spring semester of 2016, the partnership focused on the identification of planning strategies that could better address problematic issues that had emerged throughout the process.



Fig. 2 - Discussion during one of the KSC community meetings organized during the planning process.

While the planning process was underway, a major course of action that gained a lot of attention from participants in the process was the one (among the others identified in the plan) focused on the enhancement of the quality of the built environment. This strategy combined the rehabilitation of historic properties, the celebration of the black legacy, the infill development of vacant and abandoned properties, and the provision of new affordable housing units.

All of these elements were contained in a strategy that was viewed as the main mechanism aimed at re-enforcing and re-establishing lost and/or weak relations between the African American community and their old neighborhood. This strategy developed through the community process was framed within an asset-based community development paradigm (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1996), which although not new in literature, was very innovative for the KSC context. Asset-based community development is based on the idea that change can grow from the inside of the community through incremental steps that keep economic, human, and socio-cultural development strictly intertwined.

Following this approach, this strategy featured the undertaking of a community mapping and a direct organizing campaign for identifying and re-engaging former owners to promote the transformation of historic properties into high-quality affordable housing units, eliminate “slum-ownership”, and re-enter into the market all the rundown properties, maintaining community control of this process. It was designed to, firstly, mobilize the larger community around ideas prioritized during the partnership process and, secondly, to use a community land trust (CLT) model as the major technical planning tool to implement community control over the reclaimed land and properties. The first part of the strategy was seen as the major engine to launch a process aimed at enabling change into a distressed and forgotten place; the second part was seen as the potential solution to maintaining land in the hands of the former residents, landowners, and all of those KSC-connected individuals who still care about the future of KSC.

3. Reflecting on Enabling Spaces

Although the plan did not proceed with the implementation phase, a modest part of the community moved forward with

the implementation of a small CLT strategy, following guidance proposed within the planning process. Throughout the process, from the moment when the partnership opened up a dialogue on possible alternatives for collaboration to the moment of the proposed CLT for KSC, some turning points are important to reflect upon in order to generate relevant lessons contributing to the discussion on enabling spaces for community action in KSC and elsewhere. A more general reflection is related to the nature of the process that was established by the KSC-CRP collaboration. While there was a very precise scope of service used to reach out to the university by the CDC, the way in which this preliminary collaboration was handled had the high intentional purpose to unsettle taken for granted assumptions on procedures and methods of work. In other words, while it appeared that the CDC had a precise idea on what to do, an initial phase of dialogue between the two parties in this collaboration was necessary to reframe those ideas. This phase was designed to establish an exploratory process, in which – without having precise agendas and constraints – participants had the opportunity to figure out things about themselves, their community, and their relationship with the KSC neighborhood to nurture and craft future strategies built on those relationships.

Moreover, this process was aimed at strengthen the relations between the larger community and the organization that has been in charge of the community development initiatives in KSC. The proposed CLT was, in fact, a strategy that built upon the previous exploratory phase, encouraged the CDC to embark in a completely different direction from the ones presented in the past in KSC. Using endogenous resources and assets, instead of exogenous ones, the CLT became the tool purposely designed to create actions based on the agreement of a set of values and visions that emerged during the very uncertain preliminary phase of the planning process. In other words, the CLT was a highly intentional planning action designed to (1) encourage the implementation of a community-based value-centered project for the restoration of the urban fabric, (2) re-envision the role of the CDC while re-opening the process of understanding the future of the KSC with the larger public.

This particular project was designed to be a very intentional action to create an important new enabling space. As a matter of fact, the CLT implemented through an asset-based approach

has tried to re-orient some of the local, and more generally, practical problems associated with this technical planning tool. On the one side, while the city has been looking at strategies to assemble land in distressed communities to accelerate the process of reintroducing the very same land in the private market (through the local Land Bank and city-wide non-profits such as the Blight Authority of Memphis, BAM), the KSC community had not found a way to productively participate in these city processes. On the other side, while community actions have historically played an important role in the shaping and maintaining of the KSC neighborhood, they had recently exerted less influence in affecting the more structural neighborhood development procedures undertaken at the city level, and corroborating CDC's actions in advancing a strong community-based agenda for neighborhood redevelopment.

4. Concluding Reflections

While the KSC neighborhood is still struggling to secure a "fair share" of public investment for their inner-city community, some lessons from this partnership might be shared to contribute to the local planning efforts and to a more general conversation on the establishment of enabling spaces.

Firstly, although limited in time and achievements, the collaborative process between the KSC CDC and the CRP department was able to open up an important arena for generating collective knowledge to inform planning actions that can be considered new in the context of KSC. This has favored the creation of a public space to question the rooted dynamics of community development. The presence of community development structures in KSC (like the CDC) and a strong emphasis on community development by the city do not necessarily insure a value-centered and community-based process for local development. Exploratory processes led by third parties institutions might infuse the creation of innovative patterns created on the disruption of rooted existing procedure. Secondly, in exploring the KSC history, one of the main elements emerging from the research was the relevance of community development practices over the course of the last sixty years and the impact these have had on the neighborhood. However, part of the story revealed the top-down stories counterbalancing those successes. In particular, the KSC case shows how the structural

system has changed to counteract community-based practices, establishing structures and leaderships that have cannibalized all the potentials of “community alternatives”, leaving to the unpowered the heavy burden of initiating and maintaining community development through self-initiatives. While the more recent part of the KSC story confirms that for these initiatives, it is very difficult to re-balance power mechanisms and re-claim the transformative power of “community alternatives”, the CRP involvement reveals that these initiatives can be seen as seeds of change. These embryonic forms of change are effective only if they are supported and expanded through collective processes aimed at addressing more structural problems affecting the public decision-making process and the institutional management of community development practices. In the KSC case, the university played an important role, but other forms of third parties research initiatives might be relevant too. More generally, public academic institutions have the resources and capacities (and some level of obligation) to help in creating enabling spaces not only in support of self-organization initiatives, but to affect public decision making weather using corroboration, collaboration, or disruption when necessary. Finally, the most likely usable technical tool that seemed to be helpful in the creation of the strategy for KSC was the establishment of a community land trust. While this has been identified as the tool to implement a resident-sensitive planning strategy, in other communities’ settings other tools might emerge as more feasible and suitable for specific local problems. The underlining assumption, though, is that whichever tool is selected for use, it should be generated through an endogenous community process that creates a course of action designed throughout the exploratory phase of sharing collective values, principles, and visions. Regarding this last point, the difference between a planning “tool built for” a community as compared to a “tool built with” a community can’t be overemphasized. In the specific case of a CLT, this glitch has been highlighted by a last trend in community development research on the possibilities and missed opportunities of CLTs (Williams and Pierce, 2017). More specifically, this research-in-action embraced the idea that planning innovation is possible when projects stem off of highly uncertain collective processes: navigating the uncertainty of the first exploratory phase, the process led the group to build

the pattern for a CLT with an asset-based approach. Mirroring the missing link of the community in building CLTs across the US (DeFilippis et al., 2017), the KSC case is an example on how existing planning tools and procedures can be meaningfully applied only when their goals are clearly shared in a collective setting. Otherwise, there is a strong risk of confusing ends with means, contributing to the perpetration of existing systems of powers instead of advancing the goals for which those very same tools were created in the first place.

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