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The Participation Trap: The Limitations of Participation for Ethnic and Racial Groups

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ABSTRACT *This paper concentrates on the linkages between land-use planning and participation and raises questions regarding the limitations of ethnic or racial groups' participation in policy-making. Findings from empirical research conducted in both the UK and the US are presented. The paper suggests that uncritically involving groups defined by race or ethnicity is not coterminous with equality but may reinforce stereotypes in the policy making process.*

Introduction: Community Involvement as a Normative Action

Community empowerment has become a rallying cry for both UK and US policy-makers. As Goodlad and Meegan (2005) have noted, participation has been promoted as a solution to a number of perceived failings in local government decision-making. While many of the forums for public involvement have been created at the behest of current Governmental agendas, historically planning has been the only statutory function of local government required to carry out public consultation (Skeffington, 1969). Planners continue to engage in debates regarding the role of participation, effective processes and the outcomes of participation in empowering communities (Arnstein, 1968; Healey, 1990, 1997; Beauregard, 1996; Sandercock, 1998, 2001, 2003; Forester, 1999).

This paper reflects upon some of the strategies planners use to interact with ethnic minority groups and the assumptions about ethnicity and difference that may motivate such action. Ethnic minority groups are often perceived as difficult communities to engage with. Certainly, these groups deserve special attention as they have been marginalized and discriminated against within society (Rex & Moore, 1967; Pilkington, 2003). However, the difficulties refer to the challenges planners feel they face in engaging certain groups with planning rather than an inherent problem of the group (Higgins *et al*., 2005, Reeves, 2005). Ethnic minority groups as a whole often face economic and social problems, but these are a result of complex social phenomena rather than being inherent to the group per se (Gilroy, 1987; Miles, 1993). However, it is important in practice to be aware of the dangers of oversimplification leading to the assumption that there are homogeneous life experiences based upon presumed racial or ethnic similarities (Yuval-Davis, 1997; McDowell, 1999; Amin, 2002).

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This paper considers two cases of community participation, the first with African-American residents of Burch Village, a public housing development in Champaign, an Illinois city in the mid-west of the United States of America (US). The second is part of the statutory plan-making process and occurs with an Asian businessmen's group in the West Midlands of England. Efforts to be sensitive to the diversity of interests in society leads to the identification of communities who become the building-blocks of participation. At the same time as knowing that individuals have multiple identities, questions need to be asked of the identification of fixed community groups. The cases are framed by presumptions about equality and the role of participants signifying difference and diversity.

Community Engagement

While participation has lessened within the formal political realm, demonstrated most basically through the decline in voter turnout, it has spilled over into wider areas of public life to the arena commonly known as civil society (Goodlad & Meegan, 2005). Contemporary political rhetoric emphasizes the centrality of the 'active citizen' to a strengthened and accountable democracy (Levitas, 2000; Taylor, 2003). There are associated concerns with the need to reconnect individuals to community and thereby society (Putnam, 2000). However, the idea of community ties have tended to change in focus from more traditional ideas of geographic or class-based allegiances to cultural and identity-based ties (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Sayer & Storper, 1997). Yet this shift is value-laden and, as Miraftab (2004) has noted, '[S]ocial capital is theorized not as a homogenizing and shared asset of a community, but as a coercive and conflict-ridden set of relationships where in [*sic*] individuals are positioned.' (p. 241)

The civil rights movement of the 1960s acted as a catalyst in the recognition of important identities, deep differences and the necessity for this complexity to be recognized in the political realm. More recent shifts have seen these become grouped under the banner of 'identity politics' (Harvey, 1996; Kenny, 2004). While new and more diverse groups have sprung up and demanded a voice in the face of oppression, we are left to wonder about their claims for equality. Do all of these groups have equal claim to recognition in the public realm?

It is widely known that ethnic minority groups in the UK and African-Americans in the US are faring less well than the white majority population (Wilson, 1987, 2000; Pilkington, 2003). There is continuing evidence that mainstream organizations are consistently discriminating against ethnic minority people (Macpherson, 1999; Morris *et al.*, 2004). Civil society is promoted as a key arena of participation for 'ethnic' groups to have their interests met. The intention of such targeted consultation is a desire to incorporate marginalized viewpoints into shared public forums. However noble such intentions may be, they can act to focus attention upon ethnic interests as particularist and separated from the mainstream rather than integral to the good society. This has raised new problems as limited attention has been given to the underlying rationale in seeking to involve ethnic minority groups and the unintended outcomes it may have.

There is not space in this paper to discuss the value of the terms 'ethnicity' and 'race'. However, it is widely acknowledged that they are socially constructed phenomena which retain power through their relationship to visual difference (Gilroy, 1987, 2000; Hall, 1991; Jenkins, 1997). These constitutive identities gain meaning in relationship to other

presumed ethnic and racial groups, and these relationships are mediated by power. The process of 'othering', in which 'the other' is understood in opposition to the 'normal' member of the nation or community, has been explored in postcolonial perspectives (Young, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Benhabib, 1996) and by theorists engaging with the nation-state (Parekh, 1999). The nation necessitates a narrative to distinguish itself from others and this has often become tied to ideas of true ethnicities and races (Gilroy, 1987). It sets up a boundary between the presumed 'ethnic majority' and the 'ethnic minority'. This paper uses the terms 'ethnic minority', 'ethnicity' and 'race' to refer to groups in society, but this in no way assumes that these are 'real' categories. However, they are readily understood terms and used by the participants in the research.

While understanding ethnicity and communities to be fluid and contested concepts, the identification of an ethnic community in everyday life gains a solidity and realness. The idea of communities based on ethnic affiliations has undoubtedly become a strong force for mobilization and allowed for the voices of the formerly unheard to become more vocal. Still this prioritization of ethnic community membership is of concern. Firstly, the idea that community groups are a coherent whole is problematic (McDowell, 1999; Raco, 2000). Secondly, there is little research exploring how the act of identifying a community within policy-making creates such an object. Or in other words, forming a community group may be a pragmatic decision made by people looking for a channel by which to be heard or recognized (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Yuval-Davis, 1997). As Hoggett (1997, p. 14) notes, 'Community is a fundamentally political concept . . . the idea of community is saturated with power. As such community is a continually contested term.' It is of significant interest to understand how the process of participating in planning influences how these groups are understood and in fact contributes to the creation of an idea in which identities are important and thereby communities are identified.

An Idea of Representation

While the planning literature centred on participation has emphasized a need for greater cultural sensitivity and understanding (Sandercock, 1998; Umemoto, 2001), there has been a limited exploration of why this may be advantageous. The heterogeneity revealed within the public becomes obscured when the attributes of race and ethnicity are used as fixed identifiers. In the move from theorization to practices, racial and ethnic communities become solid and real categories for action (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Puwar, 2004). How does the planning process contribute to the creation of interests and set boundaries between people?

This raises some pertinent questions for participation strategies aiming to be 'representative' over some dimension. The act of prioritizing ethnicity in order to set boundaries to groups should be of greater concern. Ethnicity and race are socially constructed but they have real consequences given the ongoing discrimination in society on the basis of race and ethnicity. While the notion of community representatives is problematized to some extent (see Smith, 1998; Pearce & Mawson, 2003), the prioritization of category of ethnicity over any other allegiance in order to identify and understand communities continues (Amin, 2002).

There are dangers on reifying these identities per se in isolation from the power relations within society (Rose, 1999). Harvey (1996) has warned against uncritical acceptance of multiple identities in isolation from the processes creating them. This

can lead policy-makers to search for the authentic voice of a pure ethnic identity rather than situate it within broader societal processes. Thus there are limitations to understanding participation solely within the paradigm of identity politics. This is because although it may suggest what we may wish to represent within a more equitable society it gives limited answers to normative questions or a point beyond identity politics. It results in 'a radicalized relativism which celebrates difference for its own good, often assuming the naive form of left-wing populism. Many cultural radicals employ the anti-intellectual procedure of taking popular, and especially ethnic or sexual minority culture for granted.' (Storper, 2001, p. 166).

Theorizing the processes of identity creation needs to occur within the framework of normative thinking about equality. It becomes engaged with 'Why certain kinds of permanence get constructed in particular places and times to form dominant social values to which people willingly subscribe' (Harvey, 1996, p. 11). Moreover, it should ask difficult questions regarding which differences may be seen to be more important but within the context of change rather than establishing permanent categories (Young, 1990, 2000; Sayer & Storper, 1997). The desire to acknowledge solid and unchanging ethnic categories is worrying when discriminatory processes contribute to their creation.

In attempting to respect ethnic minority groups, essentialist boundaries become the focus of recognition rather than the aspiration for the good society. As O'Neill counters, there is little critique of what good representation may be. He uses Borges to illustrate his argument. In one story, the pinnacle of cartography is arrived at 'when the perfect map is identical to the area it maps. . . . Similarly the only adequate congress of the world is discovered to be the world itself.' (O'Neill, 2001, p. 485) Perfect representation is not achieved through ensuring that we represent everything or mirror society (Young, 2000). Rather there needs to be an understanding of the *important* differences. O'Neill continues: 'That men with red beards who sit in armchairs lack a spokesperson in the United Kingdom is not a problem. . . . There are problems when any large groups of the population lack any adequate representation in political life.' (O'Neill, 2001, p. 486).

The Contextualization of Race and Ethnicity in Planning

During the 1960s, American planning theorists including Arnstein (1969), and Davidoff (1965) argued that power relations between professionals and the public had to be altered in the field of planning. While the UK and the US have purported to treat all its citizens equally, the state and its agents have practised overt and covert discrimination against people on the basis of race and ethnicity. This has been demonstrated in the allocation of public housing (Rex & Moore, 1967; Thomas, 1997), police discrimination and institutional racism (Scarman, 1981; Macpherson, 1999,) and other state services (Penketh, 2000). In UK terms it has tended to be categorized as direct (victimization), indirect (conditions discriminating against one group) and more recently institutional (see Cohen and Bains, 1988; Anthias, 1999; Commission for Racial Equality, 2001). Within the US there is much more political emphasis and media attention given to race and racism. This reflects the more ethnically diverse nature of the US population and the differing histories of migration, in particular the history of African-American slavery and the ongoing existence of a large underclass (Wilson, 1987; Ritzdorf, 1997; Thomas, 1997). The realm of city politics with highly influential mayors and political leaders (Thomas, 1997; Venkatesh, 2000) and the principles of 'home rule', ceding

greater powers to the states, contribute to a fragmented US landscape. The disenfranchisement of this population is starkly evidenced through a history of segregationist housing policy and ghettoization motivated by white racism (Lemann, 1992).

Despite the heterogeneity of the population, planning has until very recently been resolute on the capacity of planning to mediate in the determination public interest (Taylor, 1998). This has been challenged by exploration of the dimensions of the public and how they are conceptualized (Lister, 1997; Sandercock, 1998; Hillier, 2002). Critiques based within gender and ethnicity have raised fundamental questions about equity of citizen involvement (Giligan, 1982; Sandercock, 1998) There are strong linkages between the UK and US literature which has problematized planning as technical practice and emphasized its political nature (see Reade, 1987; Krumholz and Clavel, 1994). Planning has been critiqued for failing to listen to the full range of public opinion and favouring vested interests (see Healey, 1990; Silver, 1997; Thomas, 1997; Thomas, 2000). The approaches to redressing the balance have varied, with the US tending to favour advocacy and deliberative modes of planning, with planners working openly with marginalized groups (Davidoff, 1965). Within the UK a more pragmatic approach has been taken and attempts made to open up participatory processes to a wider set of interest groups (Healey, 1990; Thomas, 1996). This is not surprising given the different thinking about race and ethnicity which has led to the synthesis of these concepts into professional practice taking markedly different directions.

Representing ethnic or racial groups needs to be linked back to power relations and political representation as a whole. This raises questions for participation strategies seeking to incorporate marginalized groups in general. In what sense are they nested within desires to make society more equitable or to promote planning processes as sensitive to issues of equality and discrimination? Is engagement with ethnic minority groups a discursive act supporting the creation of ethnic communities? The paper will now move on to consider these questions in the light of empirical evidence from the US and the UK.

Methodology

The research is based on fieldwork conducted in England and the US, with the assistance of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The fieldwork took the form of 48 and 15 semi-structured interviews respectively, participant observation of community consultation meetings and access to local government files. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted by the author with local government officers, local politicians and community activists in both locations. The paper will outline two 'moments' of engagement with 'racial' and 'ethnic' community groups. These moments are based around a particular planning issue, in the first the redevelopment of the Burch Village public housing complex and in the second part of the statutory public consultation for its unitary development plan (UDP).

Case One: Mid-West US

Burch Village is a public housing project on the east side of the city of Champaign, Illinois. There is a history of African-American immigration to the states and cities of the north-west in search of better conditions (Lemann, 1992), but persistent exclusion and segregation remains (Leachman *et al*., 1998). The 2000 US Census recorded a total population of just over 67,000 in the city of Champaign, with 15 per cent (10,543)

identifying themselves as being black or African-American and nearly 75 per cent (50,000) defined as white. (US Census Bureau, 2000).

Champaign City manages a total of 603 housing units (Monson, 2003) of which Burch Village comprises a modest 67 units. The area has multiple problems, ranging from the poor quality of these housing units, to socio-economic problems, conflicting neighbouring uses and stigmatization. The Burch Village complex was originally constructed in 1953 as housing units for a segregated African-American population. This case explores how race and ethnicity may dominate engagement in particular ways.

Perceptions of Burch Village

Champaign City Council's Existing Conditions Report describes the area as 'reflect[ing] a history with rich cultural and social significance for African-Americans' (Champaign City Council, 2002, p. 11). This statement partially alludes to the troubled racial history within the US and the far-reaching impacts upon patterns of settlement of African-Americans (Lemann, 1992). In the case of Champaign, this has led to the settlement of African-Americans within the city as they migrated from the South (Champaign City Council, 2002). Yet while this had been with the intention of escaping the worst excesses of racism and to seek employment, racism continued to be experienced through the segregationist housing policy of the city at that time. The area became the housing site specifically for the African-American population as a direct reaction to the 'poor housing conditions for many of the African-American families living in Champaign'. (Champaign City Council, 2002, p. 11). Prior to the creation of Burch Village, two adjacent areas of African-American home-ownership were developed by that community's endeavours to purchase their own land and finance house-building. Thus while the report continues by describing the residential development in the area as a positive result of the 'grass-roots collaboration' of African-Americans to improve their housing conditions (Champaign City Council, 2002, p. 11) such grass-roots action was a direct response to the lack of attention and investment given to African-Americans needs by the white state.

Older residents of Burch Village described the area as having once been a 'nice neighbourhood' to live in but which now came to have a mixture of physical and social problems. At the time of the interviews, the city was awaiting the outcome of their 2003 HUD Hope VI bid to fund the demolition of the area. HUD's Hope VI grants are part of a competitive process whereby housing authorities must bid for funding to demolish poor housing stock (Champaign City Council, 2003).

The population of Burch Village is 97 per cent African-American and Table 1 shows the population breakdown. Nearly half of the household heads were single parents and 40 per cent of the total households lived on less than $15,000 per annum (Champaign City Council, 2003, p. 23)

Seeking public involvement in the redevelopment plan has been a long-term process. The length of the process raises issues, as does the nature of the process in constructing ethnic and racial boundaries. As far back as the 1980s the homes were identified as unfit for habitation. Currently, housing units do not meet safe electrical standards; do not have sufficient access-egress; and damp and mildew are also commonplace. A senior planning officer speaking about public involvement stated: '[I]t's been long term. There's some people that really stuck through it. It did take a long time and some [time] embedded with details, [it] dragged out.'

Table 1. Breakdown of Burch Village (by ethnic category)

	1990	2000
White	9	3
Black	382	385
Asian	0	0
Native American	0	0
Hispanic (of all races)	0	7
Other	0	8

Source: Champaign City Council, 2003.

The planners involved discussed current consultation as strands of an overall coherent planning process. They spoke of initial meetings where the community were perhaps naïve and a junior planner spoke of the older residents asking '[W]hy can't it be just like the old times?' Moreover, they had initially made contact with a disparate group of people who the planners had presumed were one community. The long-time residents had been suspicious of the newer residents, describing them as 'trash' at the initial public meetings, and suggesting that they were drug dealers bringing problems from Chicago. However, tensions had arisen as some of the ex-Chicago residents were also in attendance and had refuted this accusation. The planners had approached this group with the conceptualization of them as one coherent community, perhaps with the expectation that as poorer African-Americans they could empathize with each others' situations. They expressed surprise at this situation occurring and struggled to place these comments within a framework of race and racism, which perhaps at its heart places an emphasis on visible presumed racial attributes as a source of allegiance to a community. One planner said: 'Burch Village is African-American and maybe some Latinos, not a lot, not a lot of white people, [it's] not that type of comment – racist but more classist.'

They framed these comments as different from those of a white community, which they suggested would be motivated by racism, but rather sought to place them as class-based – although this was also problematic, as all the tenants were on a low-income. However, it illustrated the sense of uncertainty in seeking to understand interactions primarily through race.

These tensions were also pertinent to the validity of the planning process, as the junior planner reflected there was a 'perception of distrust, what is the next fast thing that we [the planners] are going to pull on them. . . . Come and build apartments when [we] promised single family [dwellings]. It got tense . . . heated arguments. . . . People just think [we are] doing another experiment on black people.'

Overall, the city planners felt the process of involving the public had been successful. A junior planner said: 'We made progress because last night seven people showed up and they were the same [people] from first meeting [arguing] but now they sit together and were laughing . . . and it was a fun meeting and that was good. . . . [The meetings are] just not so rigid any more.' It was also portrayed that the process engaged and educated both the planners and the residents. A community facilitator revealed that

> my part was getting the residents to the table, because historically people make plans for people and they [the planners] were not getting participation. So what I had done

> was to go to the complex and meet residents. It is so easy to insult them [laughs] and I can show you some stuff [the planners] did initially which did not include the residents. So we redid them and [put in] the fact they [residents] had input.

However, the physical outcomes were more problematic as they are primarily reliant on HUD funding. The planners were concerned that they would be seen to be unresponsive to the community when the lack of progress was outside their control. The inability to address other wishes of the residents was presented as being outside the scope of planning. Tangible outputs such as the construction of single-family housing were possible but depended on HUD cooperation. The physical plan for improvement is the construction of five market-rate housing units, 30 for applicants with incomes of between 40 and 60 per cent of the average US household income and 13 to 15 for extremely low income families (Champaign City Council, 2003).

The issues of race and their spatial manifestations were not far from the minds of the planners who were able to frame the actions of the state within a framework of historic overt racist discrimination. They contextualized the current actions of the state with particular understandings of integration and segregation, stating that 'Although Champaign does have segregation, I think it does a really good job of integrating' (planning officer). Integration, particularly racial integration, was considered to be an indicator of a progressive or fairer set of social relations. However, white residents opposed to such integration were discussed in terms of being implicitly racist or NIMBYs ('not in my back yard'). In the case of Burch Village, as well as other public housing redevelopments, the planners broadly understood their actions as working to improve the living conditions for the poorer, generally African-American population and thereby aiming towards equality.

The planners had selected the lenses of race in order to try and understand this group as a coherent community. However, this was not the case, and before the participation process could begin the city officials had to try and build a sense of community. Subsequent progress has been slow in redeveloping Burch Village, as federal funds were only secured in 2004 in order to commence redevelopment. Further evaluation of the Burch Village case will be presented in the final three sections of the paper.

Case Two: English West Midlands

Smethwick is a densely populated residential suburb in the West Midlands of England. The area has a history of far-right politics and during the 1960s was infamous for National Front (far-right fascist) activity and local politics based on 'keeping Britain white'. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) has always been Labour-controlled and has a number of local councillors who identify themselves as Asian. South Asians had immigrated to the area for a mixture of reasons including contacts with white army colleagues during the Second World War and the availability of manufacturing jobs in the area. The area has been identified both nationally and locally as suffering deprivation.

Once a predominantly white area, it now has a large Asian population, particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi. Approximately one-fifth of the population is from an ethnic minority (20.3 per cent) with two-thirds of this subgroup identifying themselves as Asian or Asian-British. This is a high figure in UK terms and significantly above the national average of nine per cent (National Statistics Office, 2002). The area has a high street

with buildings on one side including shops targeting Asian groups, a largely vacant shopping precinct, a library and temple. The case study was conducted during a review of the unitary development plan which states that 'as the Area of Townscape Value along Smethwick High Street is of significantly high quality, the Council will undertake further investigations into its potential for designation as a Conservation Area'[1] (Sandwell MBC, 2000, p. 344).

Housing Conditions

There are a large number of terraced houses (pre-1919) in the area which are predominantly owner-occupied. However, they do not provide the living space necessary for many of the families occupying them. The local authority identifies 40 per cent of this housing as being in poor condition. A survey commissioned by the local authority found that there were noticeable variations between different ethnic groups. In particular, Table 2 indicates the disparities between the three Asian groups, indicative of their socio-economic conditions in the UK.

Sandwell MBC emphasized the importance of consulting with ethnic minority groups in the area. A formal 'umbrella' group, the Sandwell Ethnic Minority Umbrella Forum, representing the six main ethnic minority populations, had been established by the local authority. The local authority had decided there was a need to draw ethnic minority groups into all consultation processes formally. The planners had already included community organizations in the planning consultation through mailing lists and opportunities for a meeting with a planning officer. This forum was invited to respond to a number of consultations on the 'ethnic minority view'. One of the six groups was the 'Indian ethnic group' who were represented by an Asian businessmen's [*sic*] group, described by the chair: 'It is the umbrella group for Indian community ... we were formed to protect the rights of the Indian community who are the oldest and majority of the ethnic minority population, comprising between 60–70% of the ethnic minority population.' It is to this group that we will now turn.

'Protecting the rights of the Indian community' became a dominant theme. The umbrella forum was the primary channel used by the planners and was invited to comment on the unitary development plan (UDP). The Asian Businessmen's group was the only ethnic minority group from the six ethnic minority groups in the forum that objected to the UDP. It

Table 2. Three measures of housing quality in Sandwell

	% of households		
Ethnic Group	Overcrowded	Lacking or sharing basic amenities	With no central heating
Indian	15.9	1.0	25.3
Pakistani	34.5	1.8	59.2
Bangladeshi	45.8	1.3	65.2
White	2.0	1.4	35.0

Source: Ashram Agency, 1998.

engaged with the process on the planners' terms and wrote a lengthy representation to the head of planning along with giving evidence at the public inquiry.

Objecting to the Plan

The main body of the objection dealt with housing issues and a perceived need to secure larger housing units for Asian groups. Specifically the objection requested 25 per cent of affordable housing to be set aside for ethnic minority groups; the employment of builders of Asian ethnicity to build Asian homes; and to be consulted on any developer-led housing projects. These objections were heard during the planning inquiry, a legalistic hearing process required to adopt the UDP as policy. It revealed a process where the validity of the objections in planning terms was contested whereas the cultural validity of the objections and their relationship to equality were not contested.

Issues of cultural validity were not integrated into the UDP, either because it was felt that existing policies respected difference or because they were outside the realm of planning. However, they conceded the cultural validity of the objection with the planning department's counsel going so far as to say that all parties concerned 'respected your way of life and your customs', which suggested a consensus about what 'Asian-ness' might be.

The Asian Businessmen's group, a survey commissioned by the local authority and the planners did agree there was a need for larger housing. These were defined as homes with four or more bedrooms and two downstairs living rooms. It is of interest that this was rationalized in very different ways. The Asian Businessmen's group explained that the lack of larger housing units meant that their older children moved out of the local area. The chair of the group felt sure that if they had room to accommodate their children and spouses they would remain living in the family home. The group spoke to planners of the need to maintain strong families and the planners interviewed concurred with this as 'an admirable value'. The planners' understanding was that Asian groups led a very different way of life but could commend their strong family values.

Finally, the local authority survey, while concurring broadly, found mixed opinions. Larger downstairs rooms were needed to accommodate large family gatherings and new homes were often inappropriate as they had one downstairs living room. However Victorian houses were ideal as they generally have two downstairs rooms. The housing stock met cultural needs for some groups but was often in poor condition. More importantly the higher numbers, compared to other parts of the borough, of Asian people also made respondents feel safer.

> Although many lived in overcrowded conditions and would like to have bigger houses, they did not want to move away from the area. It was felt to be a tight knit community where everyone knew everyone else. They felt comfortable wearing Asian clothes – they would not feel comfortable about wearing them in a white area. (Ashram Agency, 1998: 5)

The report considered that respondents prioritized living in a predominantly Asian area to having higher-quality housing. This was partially due to proximity to local facilities but there was a fear that living in predominantly white areas would give rise to experiences of racism.

However, these factors were subsumed under a normative conceptualization of Asian people forming strong close communities and choosing to live near one another. Related to this, local facilities were a strong attraction of living in Smethwick, but fear of other areas should not be ignored. Thus a complex range of factors influenced choices to reside in Smethwick. However, the local authority's policies solely concentrated on providing appropriate facilities in the area. The UDP's future strategy was to create 'an Ethnic Bazaar' on an area of green space, along with constructing a 'Gulistan (orchard garden)' (Sandwell MBC, 2000, p. 345). While housing emerged as a key issue of concern, no specific policies or strategies were identified by the local authority. Although the local authority had given thought to providing space for the inclusion of ethnic minority groups within participation, there had been limited attention to potential change within the planning system itself.

Reflecting on Attempts to Engage with Ethnic or Racial Groups

The foregoing cases raise a wide-ranging set of issues. There has been recognition that certain groups, including those identified by ethnic and racial characteristics, have been excluded from participatory processes historically. Attempts to incorporate these groups into participation is a welcome and positive step. Both sets of planners articulated a commitment to integrating ethnic minority and racial groups into participation. They were well aware of discrimination but perhaps failed to recognize that this manifested itself in different ways. Certainly such attempts to involve these groups present new and more complex challenges. However, the two examples also illustrate that such initiatives can lack a nuanced understanding of the slipperiness of community. The final section of the paper will reflect on what these two moments of consultation have to say about assumptions based on ethnic or racial communities and their role in shaping participation in planning.

The two cases indicate that planning processes rely upon a narrative of community to operationalize ethnicity and race. The first important stage was the act of identifying communities, a process largely undertaken within the professional realm. The dialogue apparent within each case tells us about both planning and community strategies. It is assumed that such exercises take place based on a reality of groups out there waiting for the professional to classify them and bring them into the mainstream. But the case studies illustrate that the planners were also partially responsible for creating communities.

It can be argued that in the case of Burch Village, the identification of the individuals involved was unproblematic; they were simply the local residents. As well as this, the area had a history of community-based action centred around a racial identity. Race presented problems as it paid little attention to how this categorization has shifted over time. Two difficulties arose when the planners sought to identify them as a coherent community. The predominance of African-American tenants led planners to imagine the existence of an homogeneous African-American community. The cosy ideas of race as an overriding unifying factor were dispelled by the vocal distrust of the incomers from Chicago, demonstrating that race was not the only factor in creating community.

Burch Village residents presented no one 'community' voice and the divisions within the population became evident to the planners. The participatory processes were long-running and had led to some residents creating a community, happy to sit together in meetings. However, their racialized position and severe economic disadvantage was not radically altered within the process. While they were able to set out some common

values for their community strategy, housing conditions had not changed. One of the objectives was to 'Develop a strategy that eliminates the stigma of the northeast neighborhoods of Champaign' (Champaign City Council, 2003, p. 26) While seeking to celebrate the African-American heritage of the area, the planners found that some residents had wanted to encourage white people to move into the area as a way of making it more appealing. Race was not a basis for community empowerment for these people. The area suffered from physical and socio-economic decline, but this was etched onto race as the signifier of disadvantage. There was a hope that changing the racial mix of the area may change its fortunes.

However, more general development planning, as illustrated in the UK case affects a more diffuse group of people. One of the main challenges is the manner in which heterogeneous groups become transformed into 'community'. The Confederation of Indians in the UK were a business-interest group; however they had negotiated a wider role in participation. They presented their interests in terms of the 'Asian community', whereas this group varies markedly in socio-economic position and housing standards (see Table 2). As Yuval-Davis highlights, 'ethnic projects mobilize all available relevant resources for their promotion' (1997, p. 44). By the use of Asian-ness as a political resource they were able to get agreement that there were clear differences in their community. It was an intriguing example of using the assumptions of difference and 'othering' to gain agreement and potential advantage from the mainstream organizations (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992).

The insistence of formal mechanisms led to an Asian Businessmen's group representing the Indian community in the UK case. It demonstrates a group of people who had familiarized themselves with local government approaches to ethnic minority consultation over the decades and who were able to dominate the process. In this example, the community group was aware of the way planners engaged with ethnic minority groups. The group represented a business interest but packaged this as a concern with Asian values and ways of life to press for changes to housing policy. Although its gains may not have been significant, it continued to develop a body of policy underpinned by conservative notions of Asian-ness. While the identified issues (living with extended families, local places of worship) are of importance for some Asian families, it is not only true for the Asian ethnicity or indeed all people of Asian ethnicity. However, the success of the group's strategy was that its voice became the authentic voice and the sole voice. Women's voices and young people's voices, among others, were not heard in the formal consultation process. The local authority's reliance on its formal mechanism meant that it did not seek other voices but rather validated one group as the voice of the whole community.

Correlating Ethnicity with Values

The case studies illustrate the tensions involved in hoping the involvement of ethnic and racial groups in project- or policy-based planning will contribute to a diminishment of their marginalization and will challenge institutional prejudices. However, incorporating a diversity of groups within the planning process can also become muddled with promoting 'progressive views'. While the UK local authority pointed to their successes in engaging with ethnic minority groups, it did not always lead to a more enlightened and transformative policy-making process. The process in some ways reinforced gendered, class and age values that are already secure. The key difference was the ethnicity of the participants.

Burch Village is an example of a community in distress. There was no evidence that the residents were opposed to or championed equality. Yet there is often an expectation that ethnic and racial communities will prioritize racial equality. There was a strong emphasis on the progressive changes that previous generations had been able to implement, but now change was being led by the state. These people were suffering multiple deprivation and their immediate priority was to obtain decent living standards. However, something more was assumed about them, namely that experiencing discrimination would lead to the championing of equality within their regeneration plans.

The case studies did not show the ethnic and racial groups to be heroes of racial equality or villains. The UK case did illustrate that different standards of judgement were used in engaging with ethnic minority groups. It would be hard to imagine a white residents' group demanding only the employment of locally-born white people to build houses being recognized and not challenged. The achievement of some idea of representation led to the actual views expressed being unquestioned (Storper, 2001). The reasons for the Asian group requesting this are not clear, but these are a group of people who have been marginalized. They perhaps took the opportunity presented by the local authority to gain any power they could based on the notion of cultural difference (Yuval-Davis, 1997). In this case the local authority and its counsel assumed and tacitly agreed with regressive views.

The identification of distinctive ethnic communities created space to articulate cultural differences which had both positive and negative consequences. Evaluating participation became uncoupled from the democratic process imagined to benefit and change all actors, not just the relatively disempowered. Policy-makers need to be responsive to the multiple publics they are working for and question their assumptions, however well-meaning they may be.

Conclusions

Despite the cross-fertilization of literature in both contexts there are clear differences between the UK and the US. Particular histories lead to racialized societal relations and moments of consultation are embedded within them. Public engagement occurs at specific instances but the memories of how communities were dealt with in the past are not easily erasable. Greater sensitivity to this will guard against importing participation techniques divorced from the contexts in which they were created. Vitally, there needs to be a greater discussion of the nature of representation in democratic processes. At the heart of equality is fundamental debate between all sectors of society. The incorporation of the different and the marginalized is not a proxy for equality.

Planning has made important contributions in exposing power relationships in society and arguing for more inclusionary processes. However, questions still remain regarding the normative notions of 'good' participation. Encouraging greater participation by marginalized groups without consideration of power relations between and within groups does not safeguard values of equality, nor should it be presumed to do so. Participation does not offer a panacea for embedded racial and ethnic inequalities. These inequalities are interwoven into the fabric of our societies.

In both these instances there was potential for the groups involved to feel that they were listened to by the planners. The challenge is for policy-makers to be aware of the specific as well as the broader impacts of their actions. Policy-makers are not responsible for creating inequality, although they may challenge or reinforce it to some degree. There are major

differences between seeking equality in service provision and equality as a means to the 'good society'. While policy-makers may be able to improve conditions at the local level, their actions may have unintended opposite consequences for equity more generally.

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Note

1. 'Conservation Areas' in the UK are areas of architectural or historic interest which are subject to special planning measures to preserve or enhance their characteristics.

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