Organizational Capacity Building Through Empowerment Planning: Lessons from East St Louis, Memphis, and Sicily
Session Participants

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UMass Boston
East St. Louis, Illinois
From All-American City to Beirut by the River

• In 1959, ESL was designated an All-American City by NML and Look Magazine
• Between 1960 and 1980, the city’s lost 3/4s of its businesses – 12,000 well-paid industrial jobs
• By 1990, unemployment was 31%, poverty was 42%, and ESL had the highest violent crime rate in the US
• Prompting a HUD Official to refer to ESL as “America’s Soweto”
Just Another “Rust Belt City”

- Devastated by a combination of deindustrialization, suburbanization, and public and private disinvestment
- Whose residents suffered from what William J. Wilson called a new and more virulent form of American poverty
- Dominant urban policy approach towards severely distressed communities was Roger Starr’s “urban triage” or “planned shrinkage” – withdrawing resources from communities thought to represent “terminal cases” of urban decline (Necropolis)
“Wherever human beings are concerned, trend is not destiny.”

Rene Dubos
Birth of the East St Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP)

- Emerson Park women decided to transform the area surrounding their children’s child care center – Result: Shugue Park
- Undertook the development of a comprehensive plan that won an AICP National Award but generated no local investment
- Residents and students launch volunteer cleanup of illegal dump sites without funding
- Moved on to organize volunteer scrape-up, paint-up of elders’ homes
- Established a linked deposit program to support moderate rehab of “at risk” homes
Building Upon Initial Successes

- Formed a Habitat-like “infill housing” initiative
- Established the ESL Farmers Market
- Secured an extension of the Metrolink into East St. Louis
- Completed the Parsons Place Development Project
- Established Youth Build Charter School and Neighborhood College
- Re-opened the Katherine Dunham Centers for Arts and Humanities
Citizen Participation Techniques

- Formed a representative Steering Committee of local stakeholders
- Initiated an aggressive community media campaign
- Undertook several physical conditions surveys
- Conducted movers and shakers interviews
- Pursued door to door interviews with residents
- Organized monthly data analysis meetings
- Culminating in a well-attended Neighborhood Summit
Social Inventions for Citizen Participation/Empowerment

Adoption of “Ready, Fire, Aim” approach to community planning – undertaking meaningful action projects throughout the planning process to overcome residents’ skepticism regarding the possibilities of change

Paint-up, scrape-up work weekends
Construction of Illinois Avenue Playground
Development of the ESL Farmers Market
Establishment of the ESL Neighborhood College

- We are not even the flea on the tail of this dog – Richard Settle, EPDC
- We want similar training as your graduate students are receiving
- Decision to create the neighborhood college
- 200 ESL residents complete 8 non-credit courses on the fundamentals of bottom-up, bottom-sideways planning
- Classes cover community organizing, non-profit management, grantsmanship, resident-led crime prevention

First class on direct action organizing – 15 expected, 35 attend.
Key Outcomes of this Social Invention

- $40 million in improvements
- Ended population and income losses
- Encouraged organizing in other East St. Louis neighborhoods
- Popularized “empowerment approach” to resident-led revitalization planning
- Led to successful replication in other severely distressed urban communities
- Provided a transformative professional education for hundreds of planning and design students who have gone on to become key “opinion leaders” in the fields of affordable housing and community development
South Memphis, Tennessee
South Memphis: The South’s First Garden City?
What Happened to S. Memphis

• Slowly integrated in the Post-War Period
• A very desirable neighborhood through the early 1970s
• Rapidly destabilized by loss of manufacturing, shift in mode of transportation, accelerated suburbanization (Post-King assassination), loss of retail, and pervasive residential and commercial red-lining
The Community’s Future Further Complicated by Public Policies

• Failure to maintain the public infrastructure in older residential neighborhoods
• Focus on brick and mortar investment (Housing) with a lack of attention on economic development
• Economic development focused on mega-projects and “hoped for” trickle down
• Embrace of auto-oriented transportation (Ringing ourselves to death – I240 and I269)
South Memphis Circa 1990: A Perfect Example of Wilson’s Truly Disadvantaged

- Unemployment approaching 30%
- Poverty exceeding 60%
- Vacant (problem) properties at 30%
- Abandoned industrial, commercial, and residential buildings at 25%
- Highest school suspension and expulsion rate in the city (43% of high school students finish)
- Frighteningly high violent crime rate
What Observers Failed to Notice: Life Beneath the Surface!

- Extraordinary upswing in citizen organizing: open spaces, crime, youth, housing. etc.
- Increasingly engaged African American faith communities (Perkins’ CCDA)
- Growing connections between local community and nearby universities
- Rich cultural life: STAX – Otis, Isaac, Sam and Dave, Rufus, Karla, Mavis, Booker T.; and Hi-Records – Willie Mitchell and Reverend Al Green
Enter the Reverend Robinsons

- AME Bishop James Bryant assigns the Robinsons to St. Andrew in an attempt to save a former flagship church that was on life support.
- These two remarkable co-pastors rebuild the church by serving the physical, social, and spiritual needs of the community.
Saint Andrews’ Prescription

- Resurrected Ernestine Rivers Child Center
- Created a Family Life Center: health, wellness, education and jobs
- Established Circles of Success Learning Academy
- Organized The WORKS Inc. CDC – Counseling, Rehab, Construction, ED
Success, YES! Moving the Dial, No!

- Significant economic and community development successes
- Congregations grows from 150 to 1700
- National recognition
- Still, overall community conditions continued to deteriorate
- The pastors felt the need to increase the scale of the church’s efforts
The Birth of SoMeRAP

- Rev. Robinson calls the University of Memphis President
- Presents an ambitious goal for comprehensive community transformation
- Describe your team!
- Call back when you have 10 churches, call back when you have 20 churches
- Result: Formation of a broad-based Sponsoring Committee for Community Change called SoMeRAP
Determining the Need - Mixed Methods

Patrick Geddes (Father of Modern Town Planning)

“Survey Before Plan”

• Oral history
• Archival research
• Demographic analysis
• Community mapping
• Neighborhood documentation
• Physical conditions surveys
• Movers and shakers interviews
• Focus groups
• Resident interviews
• Listening posts
• Community visioning
• Neighborhood summit

All used to gather data and build the base
Overall Development Goal

Transforming South Memphis into the region’s premier neighborhood of choice by dramatically improving the overall quality of life through a resident-led and managed comprehensive community development strategy
Specific Development Objectives

• Improve access to primary health care services (No local providers, 60% uninsured)
• Insure access to high quality, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods (No full service market for 3 miles)
• Expand quality housing options, especially for low-income renters (Recent emphasis has been on home ownership)
Development Objectives II

• Expand living wage employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for local residents ($156 m in HOPE VI, < 20 jobs)

• Support resident efforts to reduce the incidence of violent street crime (Address lack of treatment, jobs, and re-entry programs)

• Enhance the beauty, safety, and functionality of the public realm to encourage investment

• Promote alternative transportation options for local residents
The Peoples’ Plan for Building a More Vibrant, Sustainable and Just South Memphis

• Involved nearly 1,000 residents
• Endorsed by more than two dozen local institutions
• Won State APA Award for Excellence
• Rejected by Housing and Community Development Commissioner – The City plans for its neighborhoods!
Organizing the Campaign

- Organizational endorsements
- Resident petitions
- Letters to the editor
- Press conference
- Individual Council Meetings
- Major City Hall Turnouts
- Result: 13 to 0 passage of the plan
- Adopted as city-wide best practice
Food Desert

An area with limited access to quality retail food stores offering a well-rounded selection of foods, including fresh fruit, vegetables, meat, and dairy products.
Addressing Food Insecurity in South Memphis

- Community Gardens
- Community Supported Agriculture
- Farmers Market
- Local Grocery Stores
- Transportation Program
- Food Policy Advocacy
Farmers Market Steering Committee

The People and Organizations that made the SoMe Market happen

Sponsoring Organization(s)

Representatives of an established Farmers Market

Residents

Representatives from local non-profits and churches

Representative of Food Policy Council

Representative of Healthy Memphis Common Table
Getting Started - Farmers Market Basics I

• Establish the need for improved food access (Plan and Retail Study)
• Form Farmers Market Steering Committee
• Determine Local/State Laws
• Pursue Market Design and Siting
Getting Started - Farmers Market Basics II

- Find a Location
- Develop Market Policies and Rules
- Undertake Vendor/Farmer Recruitment
- Prepare the Site/Secure Approvals
- Mobilize Volunteers to Staff
South Memphis Farmers Market Key Collaborators and Partners

Initial Consultations
- Ag Extension
- CY Farmers Market
- Downtown FM
- Grow Memphis
- MLGW
- MRDC
- St. Andrew AME
- The Works CDC
- U of Memphis

FM Advisory Bd.
- Residents
- The Works
- St. Andrew Enter.
- U of Memphis
- Grow Memphis
- HMCT
- CY Farmers Market
- MRDC
- Tate Seniors

Co-Conspirators
- M&SC Health Dept
- FM Vendors
- Food Policy Council
- OPD/LUCB
- Market Goers
- Knowledge Quest
# Market Site Considerations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location, Location, Location</th>
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## Site Design
- What is required (Stands, parking, info, signs, lavs)?
- What will go where?
- How will farmers and shoppers access the market site?

## Zoning and Special Permits
- Office of Planning/Develop.
- Land Use Control Board
- City Council
Market Management – Setting Policies and Rules

When will the Market open?
What will be sold at the market (Producers only, organic?)
What will it cost to rent space at the Market?
Who will be on site during Market hours?
Is security a consideration?
Farmer Recruitment

- Press Campaign
- Attractive Vendor Materials
- Tri-State Mailings by U of M via Cooperative Extension
- Technical Assistance Providers (Grow Memphis)
- Farmers Market Visits (Repeated)
- Farmer Friendly Policies
- Visible Commitment to the Enterprise
- Press Coverage for Businesses
Community Impact of the Farmers Market

- Improvement of a highly visible location
- Increased community pride
- Creation of a safe public space
- Increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables
- Enhanced awareness of the nutritional importance of fresh foods
- Demand for additional food-related resources (A grocery - now!)
- Greater recognition of SoMe RAP
Strengthening the Market

- Sustained Support for a Farmers Market
- Links to Local Community Gardens
- Volunteer Involvement
- Funding to Support a Market Building
- Food Policy Advocacy
- Additional Food Access Strategies
### Building Upon the Market!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Developments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Parkway East Improvement Project (Approved for Spring ‘11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban Art Commission - South Memphis Community-Builders Walk! ($85,000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>From Illegal Stripping to Legal Scavenging - Tire Reclamation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attracting a Local Primary Care Facility</td>
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<td>Grocery Store Development Initiative</td>
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## More Recent Developments!

### New Developments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Image</th>
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<tr>
<td>Funding for new building for Ernestine Rivers – 50 to 120 child.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freeing of space to allow Circles of Success Charter School to add 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, and 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grades</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adoption of South Memphis Park by Grizzlies and AutoZone</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grocery store development initiative, incubator space</td>
<td></td>
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<td>New rails to trails project connecting neighborhood to MRT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immediate Projects - Year 1 and 2</td>
<td>Intermediate Projects - Year 3 and 4</td>
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<td><strong>Summer Sports Leagues</strong></td>
<td><strong>Substance Abuse Treatment Initiative</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborate with Memphis City parks, commissions, youth recreation organizations, local schools, community churches and area corporate and community philanthropists to establish a major new summer basketball league for South Memphis boys, girls, men and women at Southside Park-Memphis' own Rucker League!</td>
<td>Develop a new substance abuse prevention, interventions, and treatment program in the community designed to address the most serious addiction problems confronting South Memphis residents. The Community’s extensive network of faith-based organizations will be used to educate local residents on the basics of addiction and treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Services Directory</strong></td>
<td><strong>Farmers Market Project</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a comprehensive directory of human service programs available to South Memphis children and families. This directory would be available online and in hard copy. The directory will be updated, on a regular basis, by graduate students from The University of Memphis' Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning.</td>
<td>Conspire with local farmers, public health officials, and economic development specialists to create a high-quality retail vendor food market to provide local residents and workers with access to high quality, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods. The farmers market would also be used as a venue for public health events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighborhood Wellness Campaign</strong></td>
<td><strong>Healthy South Memphis on the Move</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate a community-based health and wellness program in which peer health advisors instruct local residents on topics related to diet, exercise, family planning, parenting, conflict resolution, and other topics central to creating healthy children, families, and communities. Behavioral shifts towards healthy living will be supported by the organization of mutual support networks. Improvements in the health referral system will be carried out.</td>
<td>Recruit, schedule, and market the public health education, screening, and direct service activities of the city and region’s largest health care providers by bringing their mobile health clinics to the site of the soon-to-be-established farmers market site on a regular basis. Increase the number of local residents referred to and seen by local health providers on a regular basis as a cost effective alternative to the use of local emergency rooms.</td>
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# Health and Wellness Initiatives

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immediate Year 1 &amp; 2</th>
<th>Intermediate Year 3 &amp; 4</th>
<th>Long Term Years 4-7</th>
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<td>that provides a wide range of coverage for</td>
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<td>University of Memphis' Graduate Program in City and</td>
<td>also be used as a venue for public health events.</td>
<td>basic services for families at a cost of</td>
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<td>Regional Planning.</td>
<td></td>
<td>$165.</td>
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What's Next?
What's Next?
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What's Next?
The SMFM Green Grocer
Demonstration Kitchen
Ecological Cycles are today the consequence of 5-millenium-long complex interaction between humans and the powerful natural processes.
Ask “Regions” to change their waste management approach

Governor Salvatore Cuffaro
EU special commissioner for the “waste emergency”

2002 WASTE MANAGEMENT REGIONAL PLAN
Call for tender for 4 privately-owned waste-to-energy facilities
No! Let’s Stop Them!!
Informal Mobilization

Coalition for the Sustainable Development of the Simeto Valley

Formal Organizations

The March of 5000 in Adrano

Successful Anti-incinerator Campaign
Not just legal action but broader community organizing and political strategy
“The reason why somebody can decide to build an incinerator on our river is because there is not a better vision of the future.”
8-year-long Community-University Partnership
Collective Reflective Practices - Phase 2

The “Casa delle Acque” fall retreat
November 2010

Stakeholders
Support the local economy through policy design

Community members
Historic preservation
Environmental issues

Researchers
What strategy makes the most sense?

Grass-roots groups
Improving the area
Strengthen the sense of community
Community Mapping Initiative
The large collective maps
Mapping activities have been carried out:

- In 10 different locations, in the countryside and in 4 small towns along the river;
- improving the tools used each time;
- involving more than 500 individuals; among them: representatives of 22 community groups and non-profit associations and City Officials from three of the four small towns.
Community meetings

Individual Interviews

Progetto di Mappatura di Comunità

mental mapping
Community Mapping Initiative
**Community Mapping Initiative**

*HOW?*

- Produce "papers" more difficult for local politicians to ignore
- The follow-up projects are identified as part of something bigger
- Create a portfolio of community projects ready to be funded by EU (with and without institutional partnerships)
- Help the community know and then love their place
- Community mapping = educational campaign
- Enlarge the base supporting the partnership
- Networking and involving other association in the steering committee of the initiative
Mappa di Comunità della Valle del Simeto
The Design Contribution

- Implementing pilot projects included in the community map
- Expand possibilities for local firms and designers
- Make it “happen”!
The Community Design Experience in “contrada Nicoló”, Paternò
Co-creation of design proposal for a riparian garden
Final draft of the design
Inspired by a NEW model of “development”
Simeto River Agreement
Implementation Strategies

**MOBILITY**
- Accessibility / Security / Connection / Enhancement of existing structures / Sustainability

**CULTURE**
- Historic-Environmental Assets / Public Spaces / Historic Centers / Identity

**AGRICULTURE**
- Agro-District / CSA / Training and Education / Ethics

**WASTE**
- Zero-Waste Strategies / Growing Strategy for Municipal Management / Participant Observatory

**WATER**
- Participatory Observatory + Regional Management Authorities
PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

ASSEMBLY + EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
(majors + representatives of the presidium)

LABORATORY
(technical support)

PARTICIPATORY PRESIDIUM
(hundreds of association + businesses + individuals)
"THE SIMETO RIVER AGREEMENT"

General Legal Framework

Signed on May 18th, 2015

Revolutionary Governance Structure
Empowerment Approach to Community Planning/Design

- Participatory action research - produces better analysis and prescriptions (W.F. Whyte)
- Direct action organizing - builds political base of support for redistributive policies (S. Alinsky)
- Popular education - generates social capital through membership/leadership development (M. Horton/P. Freire)
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