

BUILDING DIALOGUES:
Tenant Participation in Toronto Community Housing Corporation
Community Governance

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Any inadvertent errors or omissions in this paper are those of the author alone.

Abstract

Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) is a non-profit housing provider responsible for the accommodations of over 58,500 low- and moderate-income households dispersed throughout the City of Toronto. They have developed a formal Tenant Participation System to engage tenants in the governance of their housing communities, based upon local councils of elected tenant representatives. This paper explores the possible benefits of incorporating deliberative practices within the Tenant Participation System. Through the combination of learning from interviews conducted with staff and tenants of TCHC, secondary research of organizational literature and writings on comparable models, and examination of theoretical discourses, a case is made for the relevance and merits of deliberative dialogue in the context of TCHC tenant communities. As an organization oriented towards strategic change, a corporate restructuring initiated in 2008 has provided the opportunity for TCHC to develop new tenant engagement practices. A discussion of deliberative democracy theory provides a foundation for understanding the principles and prospects of deliberative dialogue, and justifies its suitability for practice in tenant community governance. There is an organizational interest in broadening and deepening tenant participation beyond the development of representative leaders, and some of the TCHC staff are considering the potential of deliberative processes. However this will require a concerted and sustained effort by TCHC as an advocate and facilitator for deliberative dialogue. Findings support the argument that integration of deliberative dialogues into the Tenant Participation System can

advance organizational goals for community development, and generate outcomes that are mutually advantageous to tenants, their communities, and the housing provider. Plausible effects of tenant participation in deliberative dialogue processes include the empowerment and social learning of participants, community capacity-building, improved social cohesion, inclusion of marginalized individuals, tenant ownership over local decision-making, and greater cooperation between tenants and staff of TCHC, in addition to democratic and well-reasoned solutions to community concerns. There are wider implications of tenant involvement in deliberative community governance, such as greater engagement of economically marginalized individuals in civic activity, tenant integration in the social and political life of their larger neighbourhoods, and increased tenant political participation on municipal, provincial and national levels. These possibilities are meaningful both to TCHC and the City of Toronto in advancing their aspirations of creating healthy and resilient communities.

Foreword

This major research paper was undertaken in partial fulfillment of the degree of Master in Environmental Studies. The area of concentration for this degree, *Participation in the Improvement of Social Housing Communities*, has brought the primary subject of study, Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), under the consideration of three other components: tenant social organization, participatory democracy, and green politics. This major research paper has been scaled-down from that breadth of scope, omitting discussion of green political theory in order to sharpen the focus upon the current possibilities of the Tenant Participation System of TCHC. As the culmination of the iterative learning process documented through the plan of study, this research has directly contributed to fulfilling two key learning objectives. Firstly, a fully-realized comprehension of the major programs, partnerships, interactions and relationships in which TCHC, tenants and other community partners are actively pursuing community-building and tenant engagement goals. Secondly, an understanding of theoretical and operational models through which to consider the adaptability and suitability of deliberative dialogue approaches for tenant engagement in the diverse, lower-income urban communities of TCHC. Over two years of researching Toronto Community Housing Corporation, experiences such as a volunteer field experience placement in their Tenant and Community Services Unit, observation of Tenant Forums, Tenant Council meetings, Tenant Engagement Consultations, attending conference presentations by TCHC staff and tenants, and conversations with staff and tenants, have all contributed to an

understanding of TCHC that forms a background for the research specific to this paper. The unanticipated reorganization of TCHC in 2008 provided an opportunity to examine the impact of organizational change upon processes of tenant participation, and both document and analyze this development in the research paper.

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Section One: Toronto Community Housing Corporation

Introduction

In contemporary Toronto, there are many people who are economically excluded from the possibility of home ownership and need more affordable living options, including alternatives to the private housing market. Social housing is a form of affordable housing intended for low-income and moderate-income households and funded through government programs (Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, n.d.a). This includes private housing co-operatives, non-profit housing provided by municipal corporations, and non-profit housing operated by private community-based associations (ONPHA, n.d.a).¹ In non-profit housing, many of the low-income households pay a rent geared-to-income set at 30% of their monthly income, and government programs subsidize the remainder of the operating cost. Social housing exists in Toronto out of economic necessity, a result of government policies, programs and monies invested over the past half-century. During this time, changes in political regimes have created new financial pressures and management expectations upon non-profit housing providers. To adapt to social, economic and political circumstances, some housing organizations have chosen to increase the formal role of tenants in their operations. This paper will explore one particular Toronto non-profit housing

¹Non-profit housing is a legal distinction in Ontario, because it distinguishes the private and municipal affordable housing that is subject to the *Residential Tenancies Act* (2007), from housing co-operatives in which residents are not tenants but equal members of the co-operative, and governed by the *Co-Operative Corporations Act* (1990) (ONPHA, n.d.a).

provider, Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), as a case study in the complexities of actively developing democratic processes through which their tenants may have the opportunity to collaborate in decision-making procedures that govern the management of their residential properties and the services in their communities that impact their quality of life.

Non-profit housing can be discussed conceptually, but it is a material asset in the form of residential properties situated in a specific geographical and social space. For inhabitants of non-profit housing in Toronto, the experience of life occurs within a neighbourhood - a territory with some commonly understood identity and boundaries, within a larger urban area - but their lives also intersect through communities. There are many definitions of *community*, commonly revolving around the relationship bonds between community members, but these interactions may be based on common interests, identities, values, or geographic proximity (Banks, 2003, pp.14-15). Tenants in a non-profit housing building or complex might be considered members of a community of place if they share some communal space that allows for interaction and familiarity, and the development of some sense of common purpose (Kuyek, 1990, p. 10). Additionally, there is a latent potential for tenants to become an *active community*: a group or network of people taking action to embrace “communal values of solidarity, participation and coherence” in shared activities directed towards common goals (Banks, 2003, p. 15). As shall be discussed, a shared sense of community can be advantageous for non-profit housing residents, not

only for its intrinsic social benefits but also for the increased capacity of an organized community to identify and achieve mutually beneficial objectives.

This paper will examine the current and future roles of TCHC in the development of local governance in tenant communities. Both tenant and housing provider perspectives are considered, but the primary focus is upon TCHC organizational interests and a sympathetic analysis of their position. The research process has fostered an appreciation for the vital importance of TCHC resources and expertise within tenant communities, which affords the opportunity and has instilled an assumed responsibility for TCHC to become a positive force in generating social and political change in these neighbourhoods. Interest in this potential is bolstered by a respect for the organizational ethos, and the perceived sincerity and enthusiasm of TCHC staff members. This paper will consider the evolution of the TCHC tenant engagement structure as an organizational strategy responsive to the dynamics of tenant-landlord relationships and as part of the perpetual change process the organization has undergone through its brief history. The relations between these parties has advanced beyond a paternal housing provider and recipient dynamic towards a recognition of tenants as citizens, with the implication that this understanding has allowed TCHC to orient towards a project of conferring governance responsibilities to their tenant communities. It shall be argued that tenants have both a need and a right to participate in the decision-making that affects their living environment, in order to address the complex problems related to resident socio-economic marginalization and the

state of neighbourhood services and infrastructure. It will become apparent that it is beneficial for tenant engagement in TCHC community management to expand in breadth and depth, in order to realize desired outcomes in tenant communities, and improve cooperation and trust within neighbourhoods and between tenants and TCHC. A case will be made for a transition in the strategic focus of TCHC from processes predicated on developing representative tenant leadership in local management to the inclusion of tenants in deliberative dialogue as a methodology for increasing tenant participation in the governance of TCHC communities, and consequently enlarging tenant civic engagement.

Deliberative dialogue methodologies offer additional possibilities for tenant engagement, which can complement or reinforce current TCHC community development efforts. The general objective of this research is to determine whether deliberative dialogue methods might be feasible and mutually beneficial for tenants, their communities, and the housing provider, and how they may improve tenant participation in community-building, self-governance, and civic social networks. The overarching assertion is that deliberative dialogue processes can be established within TCHC structures, to engage tenants in addressing complex issues of concern to residents and the housing provider, in a spirit consistent with organizational strategic goals and values. Theoretical and experiential discourses deemed relevant to the engagement of tenants in community governance and local management decision-making will be discussed, and claims that concern the integration of deliberative processes into TCHC

structures will be considered. It will be asserted that deliberation can be an effective means of democratic decision-making in diverse marginalized communities. Dialogue is underlined as a key element in deliberative processes for maximizing the intrinsic benefits and the deliberative outcomes for participants. Deliberative dialogue facilitated and initiated by TCHC is presented as a legitimate and empowering experience for participants, which can in fact be strengthened by the existence of alternative options for civic expression such as social activism.

Through the combination of qualitative primary research in addition to research of organizational literature, writings on comparable models, and examination of theoretical discourses, a case will be made for the relevance and merits of deliberative dialogue in the context of TCHC tenant communities. The research has been enriched by semi-structured interviews conducted with TCHC head office staff and community-based frontline staff, as well as tenants. The intent was to consult with those who have experiential knowledge of tenant interactions with TCHC community development efforts. Interviews with professionals revolved around questions about organizational change, deliberative practices, tenant engagement, leadership development, and trust between staff and tenants, which were designed to capitalize upon the particular knowledge and experience of the interviewee. Because of the decision to direct the paper towards changes to tenant engagement structures that could result from the 2008 TCHC reorganization process, staff perspectives as process leaders, coordinators and

facilitators familiar with the history and internal dynamics of the organization were of greatest interest. It was not the goal of this investigation to gather a representative sample of tenant viewpoints, but to seek feedback from a small number of individuals who have been involved with TCHC community-building efforts, and were outspoken and active tenants who had likely considered the value and effectiveness of tenant engagement in local community development initiatives. These conversations with tenants concerned their perceptions of local interest in participatory budgeting and community governance, their assessment of opportunities for tenant dialogue about community concerns, and the level of tenant trust in the integrity of TCHC community management practices. One concession in the research was a reduction in the number of interviews that were conducted with tenants, in part due to changes in circumstance that compressed the available timeframe. The completion of a few tenant interviews was deemed to be sufficient, a reaffirmation of common tenant perspectives heard through attendance at 2008 TCHC Tenant Engagement Consultation forums, and previous conversations with tenants about their own community volunteerism and views on tenant civic participation, during a summer internship with TCHC in 2007. While it was not feasible to ascertain the full spectrum of tenant views, those who were heard from provided an indication of some perspectives that served the requirements for this research.

Ultimately the opportunity of the major research paper was utilized to explore deliberative democracy as manifest in TCHC, balancing and integrating

theory with the case study of the TPS, rather than undertaking a major project that would be focused upon more intensive primary research. Several academic studies and scholarly articles have been written on the participatory budget and tenant community governance in TCHC, involving considerable observation and interviews with tenants about their participation. This work takes a different approach, one that reflects on the possible connections between organizational change and deliberative dialogue. The intention is that through a pursuit of these personal academic interests, some valuable ideas and perspectives will emerge that are of use by TCHC for the improvement of their community-building practices. An additional executive summary of the major research paper will be completed to provide to interview subjects in addition to this final paper, so that they have a more compact document to read that will hopefully benefit TCHC as an organization, and stimulate the discourse surrounding processes of tenant engagement in their communities.

Historical Overview

The Federal and Provincial Governments began constructing and funding social housing in Ontario after the Second World War. Much of the current social housing in Toronto was built in the period between the mid-1960s and the mid-1990s by both levels of government (ONPHA, n.d.b; Shapcott, 2006). The Federal Government role in funding social housing declined between 1984 and the mid-1990s, and they then offloaded the administration of their social housing in Ontario to the Provincial Government in the late 1990s (Shapcott, 2006, p. 6).

This occurred during the Harris Conservative government in Ontario, which had already cancelled plans for new provincial social housing following its election in 1995 (Shapcott, 2006, p. 30). This administration furthered the devolution of social housing funding and management by beginning the process of offloading all of its social housing stock, including the formerly Federally administered properties, to Ontario municipalities in 1998 (Shapcott, 2006, p. 30). The Ontario *Social Housing Reform Act* 2000 formalized this process, legislating that municipalities would become Service Managers, responsible for housing programs and properties formerly run by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (Brown, 2006, pp. 3-4). This devolution of social housing responsibility from senior levels of government to Ontario municipalities was not a seamless transition, but one marked by government funding cuts and the transfer of much of the financial burden for maintaining this housing onto municipal budgets. This was just one component of a greater Ontario Conservative government ideological strategy for dismantling the welfare state apparatus, downloading the responsibility for maintaining and delivering various Provincial services onto the municipalities; what has been characterized as part of a neoliberal urban agenda (Albo, 2006) or a neo-conservative approach to welfare (Burman, 1996, pp. 42-45). With the provincially mandated amalgamation of the City of Toronto in 1998, the peripheral suburbs of the city became incorporated into a single municipality. This enlarged the geographic infrastructure over which the City was responsible,

including regions that did not have the concentration of services found in the downtown core.

In Toronto, the transfer of non-profit housing commenced in 2001, as the provincially run Metro Toronto Housing Corporation became the responsibility of the municipal government, which was already the shareholder for the Toronto Housing Company. Toronto City Council merged these two organizations into a single municipal non-profit housing provider, Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), which commenced operations on January 1, 2002. As the Service Manager for all social housing in the municipality, the City of Toronto is responsible for administration of funding and overseeing over 240 non-profit housing providers and housing co-operatives (Brown, 2006), but the City became the sole shareholder of TCHC, and established a 13-member Board of Directors to govern and a Chief Executive Officer to run its operations. Upon commencement of its operations TCHC was responsible for the management of 1,440 buildings of varying age and size spread across the City of Toronto, and their portfolio currently includes 58,500 housing units, 93% of which are subsidized rent geared-to-income (RGI) units (www.torontohousing.ca/rent). As seen in Figure 1, almost half of the annual TCHC operating budget is derived from subsidy funds, intended to supplement the difference between the total cost of operating a unit and the geared-to-income rent paid by a tenant (TCHC, 2006b, p. 59).² The

² The subsidy funding originates from three sources: the City of Toronto contributes 47% of the total, the Federal government portion is 37%, and other GTA municipalities share the cost of the remaining 16% (TCHC, 2006b, p. 59).

TCHC housing operations revenue that is collected from tenant RGI rents (Figure 1) is a source with no likelihood of increasing from year to year, much less keeping pace with inflation and rising operating expenses. As the landlord to a large, predominantly low-income population dispersed through many property developments, TCHC is vulnerable to increases in property taxes, utility costs, mortgage fees and building maintenance costs, that cannot be managed without increased funding from governments, reducing operating expenses or generating additional sources of revenue.

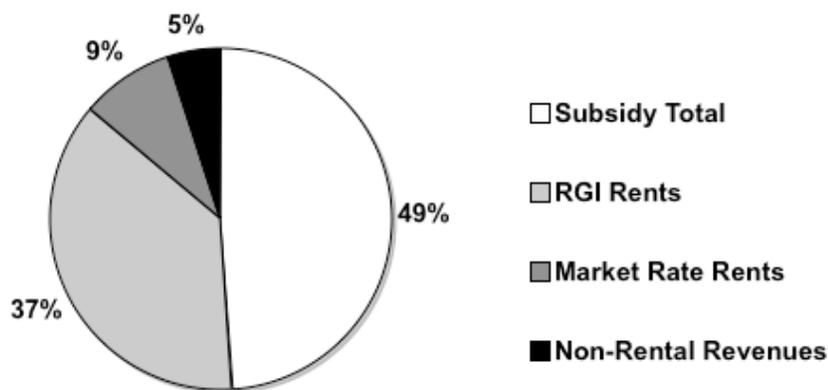


Figure 1: Sources of TCHC housing operations revenue, 2007. From *Community Management Plan 2007-2009 (Draft)* (p. 59), by Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006.

Current Municipal Realities

One prominent concern of the municipality since amalgamation has been the increase in poverty within the City; a trend only compounded by funding cuts to various social support services by senior levels of government, and the

declining investment in infrastructure such as public facilities and affordable housing. A key factor in the prosperity of citizens of the City of Toronto is the state of its social infrastructure - the services, programs and facilities that support community activities and improve the quality of life in neighbourhoods (Family Service Association of Toronto, 2005). Social infrastructure is so vital to the functioning of neighbourhoods because it includes not only the physical sites and spaces such as public libraries, non-profit housing and community centres, but also consists of the programs and services that improve the lives of individuals and foster a sense of community belonging as well as social networks among neighbours. In the past several years there has been significant attention to the issue of community investment, in part through the negative media spotlight on gang activities and neighbourhood crime, but also through increasing research and activism around the nature and persistence of concentrated regions of poverty in the municipality. The United Way of Greater Toronto (UWGT) and Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) report *Poverty by Postal Code* analyzed rates of poverty in areas of Toronto using census data of 1981, 1991 and 2001, and discovered “a dramatic intensification of neighbourhood poverty in the inner suburbs, in the former municipalities of Scarborough, North York, Etobicoke, East York and York” (UWGT & CCSD, 2004, p. 54). The report found that higher poverty neighbourhoods dispersed both downtown and in the inner suburbs, share common features such as a lack of social infrastructure services and facilities for their residents. A Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force (SNTF) was established by the City of Toronto in partnership with the United Way of

Greater Toronto in 2004 (Corke, 2005), with the goal of developing a strategy for revitalizing neighbourhoods impacted by growing poverty and inadequate social infrastructure (City of Toronto & UWGT, 2005). TCHC CEO Derek Ballantyne was one of the members of this task force, which published a report, *Strong Neighbourhoods: A Call to Action* (City of Toronto & UWGT, 2005) that recommended the establishment of *priority neighbourhoods* for infrastructure investment. There are currently thirteen priority neighbourhoods in Toronto, most of which coincide with the higher poverty areas in the inner suburbs as described in the aforementioned reports. There is a significant presence of TCHC housing properties within these neighbourhoods, and the organization has become involved with the municipal government, community agencies and residents in efforts to improve local social conditions.

TCHC is also occupied with the ongoing challenge of maintaining an adequate state-of-repair in its existing social housing properties. Operating costs increase as housing stock ages, and without investment in repairs and replacement of major building systems the quality of the housing deteriorates (Brown, 2006). According to former Metro Toronto Housing Corporation (MTHC) chief executive Peter Schafft, the provincially-run MTHC was falling short in its capital repair budget by \$15 million to \$20 million annually from the inception of the Harris government in 1995 until its incorporation into TCHC (Gillespie, 2001). Because the total bill for capital repairs of these properties were estimated at \$100 million, former City Councillor Brad Duguid, a member of the original TCHC

Board of Directors, characterized the MTHA properties downloaded by the Province in January 2001 as a “ticking time bomb” (Gillespie, 2001, p. A01). TCHC inherited deteriorating housing stock, without adequate resources or funding to address the immediate or long-term maintenance needs. The provincial government refused to commit additional monies for downloaded social housing, asserting that they had provided sufficient funds to the municipality for operating and repairing the former MTHC buildings (Gillespie, 2001). The Executive Director of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association asserted that the provincial devolution had “pushed an already under-funded social housing environment on to Ontario’s cash-strapped municipalities,” and “without adequate ongoing funding to perform capital repairs to their buildings, housing providers, including TCHC, are just barely hanging on” (Kerur, 2004, p. A19). Despite the efforts of the City of Toronto and TCHC to seek additional funds from the current Ontario government, the total capital repair deficit for TCHC properties has grown to \$300 million in 2008. This has affected the ability of the organization to ensure acceptable living conditions for all of its tenants, and is a primary consideration when weighing options for managing the future of its housing stock.

The decline in government support has coincided with an increasing need for additional non-profit housing. There is a centralized waiting list tracking applications for the RGI units operated by TCHC and all other social housing providers in Toronto, a process managed by TCHC subsidiary Housing

Connections. Because of the low turnover rate of RGI units, a household will likely be on the waiting list for years before they are offered an available rental unit. This depends upon the size of unit the household requires and the number of different building locations an applicant wishes to live at, each of which has a separate waiting list.³ One indication of the demand for RGI units is the number of applicants on the Housing Connections waiting list: in their *Monthly Statistical Report* for July 2008 there are a total of 66,826 households (Housing Connections, 2008). The average annual income of a RGI tenant household in TCHC is \$14,600 (TCHC, 2006b, p. 41), which is well below the ‘Low Income Cut-Off’ threshold used as a measure of household poverty by Statistics Canada (UWGT & CCSD, 2004, p. 10). Although TCHC has some mixed-income buildings with a combination of RGI units and market rate rental units, the majority of its housing stock is exclusively RGI units, and available only to tenants who have been processed through the Housing Connections waiting list.

While most TCHC tenants are in low-income households, there is a great diversity within this large population of 164,000 residents. This includes single individuals, families with children, and seniors. Some tenants are long-time residents of the legacy corporations that amalgamated into TCHC, but there is also a significant population of newcomer immigrant families. The tenant population of TCHC housing does reflect the demographic trends identified in

³ For example, the Housing Connections website suggests there could be a one to five year wait for a bachelor unit, and up to ten years wait for a home with multiple bedrooms (<http://www.housingconnections.ca/Applicants/FAQs.asp#Q2>).

research on higher poverty neighbourhoods of Toronto, within which TCHC social housing has a significant presence (UWGT & CCSD, 2004). For example, in high poverty neighbourhoods there is a disproportionate number of lone parent families and a high percentage of newcomer and immigrant families, relative to the municipality as a whole (UWGT & CCSD, 2004). As previously mentioned, higher poverty neighbourhoods in Toronto may suffer from inadequate social infrastructure, and the result is that the local services and supports necessary for high concentrations of low-income families with particular needs, such as community programs for youth or settlement assistance for new Canadians, are not available. TCHC is in a position to assess the needs of their tenants, and actively seek opportunities to bring resources into their housing communities.

Where tenants are concentrated in distinct TCHC developments, such as high-rise apartments or townhouse complexes, or within higher poverty neighbourhoods, they may perceive a social stigmatization of their geographic community. Thus, the challenges experienced in some TCHC communities are not limited to the condition of local resources, and their identity can be threatened by aspersions from within and from outside. In the consultations that preceded the *Poverty by Postal Code* study, residents of disadvantaged communities reportedly expressed concerns their neighbourhood was increasingly stigmatized and they feared the population of the City at large might consider them a “write-off” (UWGT & CCD, 2004, p. 55). Additionally, social housing in general and the TCHC brand might face the stigma of association with negative publicity

generated by media coverage of violent crime, poor living conditions (related to property maintenance), and disasters (such as building floods or fires), and this reflects back upon residents of TCHC regardless of their neighbourhood. One potential effect of this on low-income residents might be internalized stigma, and decreased group self-respect (Burman, 1996, pp. 22-23). Another reaction might be a sense of solidarity with other residents, and common cause for action to dispel prejudice and misrepresentation. As Meikle (2002) notes, these are two contradictory characterizations of urban poverty that are in debate, a question of “whether the urban poor suffer from conditions of social disintegration and community breakdown or whether they rely on strong networks of solidarity between groups and individuals” (p. 41). Whether a community is assessed by its perceived deficits or by tallying its assets will have significant bearing upon not only the morale of its members but on how problems are conceptualized and solutions are constructed. From their consultations with Toronto residents, the *Poverty By Postal Code* report concluded that “even in the most ‘distressed’ neighbourhoods, there are strong, supportive networks where residents and neighbours help each other and work together to advance the interests of their communities” (UWGT & CCSD, 2004, p. 55). It is not simply a matter of changing the reputation of their community, but of developing cooperative efforts to directly address the problems that impact upon their own quality of life.

Historic Tenant and Landlord Relations

The “traditional welfare paradigm” in which social housing providers and tenants have interacted was historically one of a provider-recipient dynamic, where moralistic paternalism and bureaucratic authority were prominent themes (Burman, 1996, p. 40). This constructed the tenants as passive dependants of the professionals of the state who determined eligibility and access to social housing services. Burman (1996) identifies two alternative conceptions that have emerged: ‘welfare rights’ is a discourse where welfare is conceived as a right guaranteed to citizens by government, in the interests of justice (pp. 40-42), and ‘neo-conservative’ approaches such as the previously mentioned example of social housing devolution under the Harris Conservative Ontario Government. He has further articulated a typology of service provider role configurations, which illustrates a range of role dynamics that can be assembled into a continuum of welfare power relations from one extreme dichotomy of “moralistic giving of charity” and “self-receiving dependent”, to “anti-poverty activating” and “citizen-activist” (Burman, 1996, pp. 46-47).

While Burman constructed this typology on the basis of interviews with individuals, it is a useful means to consider an organizations’ self-perception of their role. Applied to an assessment of the dynamic between TCHC and tenants, it appears that the model of best fit is that of a “community developing” and “community participant” role relationship (Burman, 1996, p. 46). This role is characterized by a perspective of low-income people not as recipients but as “social subjects and citizens,” who suffer from a “lack of inclusion and resources”

(Burman, 1996, p. 126). The community developer seeks to oppose community barriers and sustain positive community ties, to reduce class differentiation and isolation (Burman, 1996). This process involves the low-income people in community-based action, to empower them “as active participants in the process of community” (Burman, 1996, p. 126). Within the TCHC organizational literature there are statements consistent with this model that indicate a similar perception of their role. Terms such as *empowerment* and *engagement* are prominent in their descriptions of TCHC community-focused activities. For example, the TCHC *Community Management Plan 2006/2007/2008* “recognizes the need to promote improved choice, decision-making and empowerment for tenants in their communities that also engages and connects them to the broader community where access to resources and supports can be tapped into” (TCHC, 2005b, p. 42). The organizational focus on empowerment and engagement of tenants as citizens and community members shall be examined further (in sections three and four) to explain how this relationship has been changing and developing, but first a preliminary explanation of the tenant participation structure is in order.

Organization of TCHC Community Management

There were different systems for formal tenant representation within the respective organizations prior to the incorporation of provincial and municipal non-profit housing providers into TCHC. The Toronto Housing Company initiated a two-tier Resident Participation System in 1999. Their portfolio was

divided into 16 geographically delineated Community Operating Units, each with a tenant council, from which two members were elected to sit on a 32 member City Wide Tenant Council that would provide input for THC staff on organizational policies (Iler Campbell Barristers and Solicitors, 2001). The former Chair of the City Wide Tenant Council, Sandy Nimmo, compared the tenant consultation cultures of the two merging organizations as that of a “ground-up approach” in THC and a residents advisory council in MTHC that was “not elected democratically” (Nasmith, 2001, para. 5). It was the THC tenant participation approach that was ultimately adapted for implementation by Toronto Community Housing Corporation.

The initial management plan for the amalgamated TCHC proposed a community model of governance that “enables tenants and community members to have a role in supporting, participating and holding local management accountable” and that “recognizes that all communities are different” (Zimmer, 2002, p. 4). This consisted of a division of the housing portfolio into 27 Community Housing Units (CHUs), geographic areas of roughly similar tenant populations, each with an operating budget managed by local staff in consultation with area tenants. A front-line staff team directed by a CHU Manager administers each CHU. The local staff includes a Health Promotion Officer (HPO), responsible for coordinating TCHC community development efforts and facilitating tenant involvement in initiatives supported by TCHC. The staff team is accessible to tenants through a CHU Office, and staff can liaise between the

tenant population and TCHC Head Office. This administrative management structure was designed so that despite the size and dispersion of the social housing portfolio, local issues could be addressed without requiring the intervention of TCHC Head Office. This includes daily building operations, CHU governance, and tenant activities such as TCHC supported community development initiatives or tenant-led projects on TCHC property. The corporate role of TCHC Head Office includes oversight, coordination of portfolio-wide programs, ensuring consistent adoption of policies and procedures, and adherence to TCHC organizational values. For example, the Tenant and Community Services Unit of TCHC includes Community Health Managers, staff based in Head Office who liaise with the HPOs, attend some CHU meetings, and provide support for CHU level community development initiatives.

In 2008, TCHC has undertaken a significant corporate restructuring, beginning with a reorganization of field staff around new geographic divisions of the portfolio. The original map of 27 Community Housing Units has been redrawn as 13 larger community Operating Units. The expressed purpose of this reorientation of the portfolio is to enable a greater emphasis on front-line staff, while reducing management administration (www.torontohousing.ca/future). Customer Service Representative and Housing Supervisor positions are being created in each Operating Unit. While the intention is to increase the focus on delivery of services at building level, ensuring there are Superintendents at each building, and new Community Health Managers to concentrate on community

development in each building, the decrease in the number of administrative units will result in less senior field staff such as CHU Managers. On the surface it appears to be a shift towards greater focus on delivery of core housing provider responsibilities, such as property maintenance and responsive service, but at the possible cost of disrupting existing cooperative relationships between tenants and staff within the CHUs. Given their financial and resource limitations, it appears the ongoing challenge is to effectively balance their responsibilities as landlord with a commitment to community development.

TCHC Role in Community Development

A closer examination of the TCHC interest in engaging tenants in community development requires an understanding of the underlying rationale. Community development is a process oriented towards increasing the knowledge and power of individuals and groups for the purpose of making change in their communities (Banks, 2003, p. 12). There are strong egalitarian and communalistic motives in community development, which has been defined as “building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect” and “changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives” (Banks, 2003, p. 12). As described in the 2007-2009 Community Management Plan, the TCHC mandate extends beyond simply providing housing, to the creation of “community conditions that minimize risk and promote resiliency” (TCHC, 2006b, 1). Torjman (2006) boils down the concept of resilience into “the capacity to thrive in

a changing context” (p. 7). The resiliency of a community allows it to adapt to ongoing change or threats, not merely surviving but actively seeking opportunities to improve (Torjman, 2006, p. 7). The use of the term by TCHC acknowledges that tenants are an economically vulnerable population, and that other challenges often associated with poverty such as health and mobility issues, substance addictions and psychological trauma might be proportionally more prevalent in TCHC tenant communities than in wider society. The organization has taken a position that recognizes a responsibility to contribute to improving the health of the communities in which it is present.⁴ As indicated by the employment of Health Promotion Officers as agents for community development, TCHC has assumed a role of not only working to improve the living conditions of its tenants, but to engage them in this effort. *Health promotion* is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the “process of enabling people to increase their control over the *determinants of health*” (WHO, 1998, pp. 1-2), and includes the “personal, social, economic and environmental factors which determine the *health status* of individuals or populations” (WHO, 1998, 6). This concept for enabling tenant participation in the management of their circumstances is expressed in one of the four stated TCHC organizational values for building community health: “support for engaged and empowered communities” (TCHC, 2006b, 1). As part of this commitment, the organization has developed programs and initiatives directed towards community development efforts, aimed at involving tenants in

⁴ The World Health Organization definition of *public health* includes the goal of “improving the *quality of life* among whole populations” and in more recent understanding also recognizes “the ways in which *lifestyles* and *living conditions* determine health status” (WHO, 1998, p. 3).

processes of community improvement.

Toronto Community Housing is active in localized community-building partnerships through CHU staff communication with tenants and other neighbourhood stakeholders, including local agencies and community organizations. This engagement could be characterized, following an identified trend of change in government services (Carter & Polevychok, 2004, p. 34), as a shift in the historic role from strictly that of housing *provider* to that of community-oriented *facilitator*. In fact, TCHC has identified four main roles for the organization: leader, catalyst, convenor, and participant (TCHC, 2006b, p. 2). These each reference a specific type of relationship interaction with tenants and other community partners (which could include non-profit agencies, private organizations, governments, citizen groups and associations). Relationship development is of importance to TCHC community-building efforts, because they are engaged in an *asset-based* approach, building upon the capacities of individuals, associations and institutions in each neighbourhood or tenant community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). In this approach, strengthening and forging relationship networks between community members is vital in order to mobilize inherent resources, multiply their individual effectiveness, and strengthen bonds of interdependence (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) that could nurture neighbourhood solidarity, sense of trust, and support systems. As part of a community development effort, it is not only important to identify the existing capacities within a community, but to engage in capacity-building. In practice

this means increasing specific skills and competencies of tenants by arranging training and learning opportunities. In instances of partnerships with local agencies, TCHC assists in increasing their potential impact, for example by providing free operating space on TCHC property for an agency to deliver a needed community service. The organization is forging partnerships with other community stakeholders, while also developing the potential to build community capacity through its own internal governance and management practices.

Participatory Budgeting

Following the merger of legacy corporations with different histories of tenant participation, TCHC has had to reconcile their distinct organizational cultures together. Once the City inherited a provincial non-profit housing organization, a participatory budget planning process was created through collaboration of their respective staff, to harmonize their differing systems in advance of the consolidation as TCHC. Community Based Business Planning was first introduced into both THC and MTHC in 2001, based on the ‘best practice’ model of participatory budgeting (PB) in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil (TCHC, 2004). The Porto Alegre PB system was conceived by a newly elected municipal government in 1989, led by a Mayor from the leftist Workers Party, in response to demands from organized neighbourhood associations to democratize the municipal budget (Baiocchi, 2003) and to provide a means for poor populations to gain access to public resources and decrease their extreme inequality (Avritzer, 2000). PB was developed for engaging citizens, particularly

those from poor communities, in municipal budget decision-making, and this concept has been adapted by Toronto Community Housing as a means to integrate tenant participation into their own budget allocation process. The Porto Alegre model, while more complex and larger in scope, has provided key concepts for the TCHC process: direct citizen participation in local assemblies, a representative level for elected citizens, and a method of determining capital spending priorities that involves deliberation between participants, within a system that is mutually beneficial to the interests of citizens and the governing institution (Avritzer, 2000; Santos, 1998). TCHC staff devised an initial PB process in order to establish a tenant role in the distribution of a portion of the capital budget to the community projects that are deemed most worthy. This first three-year Community Based Business Planning cycle began in 2001, involving about 6,000 tenant participants as part of a year-long process to decide upon the allocation of \$18 million from the TCHC budget towards capital expenditures for 2002 and 2003 (TCHC, 2004). This was a precursor to further opportunities for direct tenant contribution to the ongoing governance of CHU operations.

The second cycle of TCHC participatory budgeting commenced in 2004, revised into an annual process known as Community Business Planning (CBP). This begins with local budgetary meetings in each building complex, where all resident tenants are invited to raise issues for consideration in determining their top five capital budget priorities. They often use a process known as *dotmocracy* to simplify and visually aid the decision-making process, and use multi-lingual

text to overcome language barriers (Lerner & Van Wagner, 2006).⁵ The results of building-level decision-making are forwarded to further regional decision-making by the local Tenant Council, who select from the local building priorities to determine the overall CHU capital improvement priorities, eligible for an allocated portion of a total \$7.2 million of the TCHC capital budget. Since the CBP has been instituted, TCHC has annually relegated \$9 million from its capital operating budget into the participatory budgeting process, where \$7.2 million is divided amongst the CHU Tenant Councils to designate for community projects, and the remaining \$1.8 million is dispersed at a single event where tenant delegates from every CHU vote on specific nominated projects. While introduced by TCHC, the structure of the CBP process is now under tenant direction, subject to regular assessment and annual improvements. A Participatory Budgeting Committee composed of TCHC tenants meets on a monthly basis to discuss the process itself and co-ordinate planning for the annual Allocation Day event, a city-wide forum for participation where tenants are represented by their elected peers.

Tenant Representatives

The CHU Tenant Council is the regional forum where volunteer Tenant Representatives participate in partnership with TCHC frontline management staff

⁵ The method employed by TCHC, where a particular number of stickers are given to tenant participants who then place them next to their preferred ideas on a large wall-mounted listing of items (written in English and other languages of participants) in order to create a visual tally of votes, is described by Jason Diceman (n.d.) as a *traditional dotmocracy*, advantageous as a relatively simple method to learn and implement.

in the governance of the CHU as a whole. TCHC facilitates city-wide Tenant Representative elections for every three-year term. The inaugural tenant elections took place in June 2003 prior to the second CBP cycle commencing. Each building complex may elect one Tenant Representative for every 250 units on the property, and every tenant of at least 16 years of age is eligible to vote and to run for election (TCHC, n.d.b). Successful candidates, who have either won the election or been acclaimed (where there were no other candidates), may seek the position for unlimited consecutive terms. Significant duties of the Tenant Representative role include communication and information sharing with TCHC staff and their building tenants, and representing tenants' interests, not only in budgetary planning but also aspects of governance that impact TCHC communities such as TCHC policies and procedures (TCHC, n.d.a).

Representatives are expected to attend monthly meetings of their CHU Tenant Council, and are required to hold at least two annual meetings with tenants they represent, in order to disseminate information about Tenant Council activities (TCHC, n.d.b). One of the primary responsibilities of Tenant Representatives and TCHC staff at the Tenant Council is to jointly consider the CBP priorities for funding within their region, and determine how these items could be addressed by the budget of the CHU business plan. Tenant Representatives create a ranked list of issues that should receive TCHC capital funding from the CHU participatory budget, and help identify a project that is worthy of consideration on Allocation Day. They also elect tenant delegates from their local council to represent them at this event.

In the role as an elected liaison between communities of tenants and TCHC staff, Tenant Representatives assume a hierarchical position within the Tenant Participation System that distinguishes them from others in the general tenant population. It is part of the TCHC organizational strategy that “to move toward community governance, Toronto Community Housing needs to build strong tenant leaders with engaged communities” (TCHC, 2005b, p. 43). The Tenant Representative role is thus a central component of the TPS, and involves a significant time and energy commitment, as they assume a crucial position in the business planning process and the communication network between TCHC and tenants. As Evans and Advokaat (2001) state, community leaders emerge primarily through self-selection: “leaders often fill a role that the community wants and needs but which few individuals are prepared to fill themselves” (p. 65). Consequently, “those who are willing, able and inclined to devote their time and energy to community public life are those who become the community’s representatives” (Evans & Advokaat, 2001, p. 67). Although a voting process is involved in selecting Tenant Representatives, in some cases these community leaders have been uncontested in elections, even over successive three-year terms. One Tenant Representative explained that she was acclaimed to the position as nobody else wanted to run for election. She suggested that people are hesitant because they don’t know what they are in for as a Tenant Representative, as there is a lot of information to understand for the role and it takes time to get to know

the TCHC system; it is a learning process (Tess⁶, personal communication, September 4, 2008). TCHC has developed a support system for Tenant Representatives, through both corporately organized events and local CHU assistance provided by the HPO and other staff. For example, annual Tenant Representative forums allow tenants from across the city to gather together for workshops and discussions that provide a social, informational and learning opportunity (TCHC, 2005a, 2006a). Within CHUs, the HPOs and CHU Managers have organized for Tenant Representatives to attend training courses, workshops and conferences to acquire new skills and information. Because they are the most directly engaged with the TPS, Tenant Representatives are the focus of TCHC capacity-building efforts and conferred with a great deal of responsibility to represent the interests of their fellow tenants, and make decisions on their behalf.

Tenant Participation System

A citywide tenant Budget Council congregates at an annual forum known as Allocation Day, where an additional \$1.8 million in funds is distributed to community-based capital projects nominated by tenant presenters from different CHUs, and voted upon by the CHU delegates. Tenants who have identified a need for an improvement to a building structure or communal space, outside grounds, or an increase in safety on TCHC property that is too costly to be funded within the CHU budgeting process, can present their proposal to the assembly on

⁶ Pseudonym used to protect anonymity.

behalf of their CHU. Following presentations, each CHU delegation deliberates amongst themselves and then cast votes on ten projects from other CHUs (excluding their own) they decide to be worthy of funding. After the votes are tallied, the \$1.8 million is then allocated to cover the projected cost of each project, in order based on their popularity (by total votes), until the funds are exhausted. This event is a significant component of the CBP process, as the intention of TCHC is to reserve a portion of the funding that would otherwise be divided into the CHU participatory budget allowances, and instead orchestrate a central deliberative allocation process where all the participants may gain an awareness of the needs in other communities, by considering the relative benefits to other CHUs before each delegation determines where they will cast their support. It also functions to rally community solidarity behind a CHU Allocation Day proposal, developing a sense of ownership and responsibility over a project. The corporation has taken the difficult dilemma of making spending priorities for their limited discretionary capital budget, given circumstances of insufficient funding and the great demand for investment in community properties, and transferred the decision-making responsibility to the tenants who have the greatest stake in those decisions.

Understood as interrelated elements, the Community Business Planning process, Tenant Councils, Allocation Day event and Tenant Representative positions all constitute facets of the TCHC Tenant Participation System (TPS). The original aim of the Tenant Participation System was to “empower residents to

strengthen their communities through active participation in matters that affect them and their neighbours” (TCHC, 2002, p. 1). Thus, the TPS was not only considered a mechanism for community development but also a communicative tool for responsible and responsive service provision to tenants, “ a strategy to ensure community input to management decisions and ensure TCHC accountability to communities for the services that are delivered” (TCHC, 2002, p. 2). Because of inadequate funding to address all requests for capital funds, compromises would have to be made and priorities set which could not satisfy all tenant demands or community concerns. The individual and collective frustration of tenants at the deficiencies in building repairs and renovations can be refocused into constructive action through participatory governance processes of the TPS.

Summary

This section has sketched the context in which Toronto Community Housing operates and strives to manage their corporately mandated responsibilities towards their shareholder the City of Toronto, and their tenant clientele. As a result of structural changes to the administration of non-profit housing and the provision of governmental support relative to need, TCHC has adapted a strategy of formalizing mechanisms for tenant participation in budgetary decisions and daily housing operations management. The organizational and professional commitment to community capacity-building and involvement in neighbourhood development outlined thus far will be further explored in subsequent sections, following the elaboration of a suitable theoretical

foundation upon which to construct critical analysis. The second section will outline deliberative democratic theory as the basis for supporting participatory governance in TCHC communities. The third section will explore how tenant participation in community governance can provide individual and collective benefits that empower the participants and increase their sense of efficacy. In the fourth section the development of co-operative relationships between tenants and TCHC in governance practices will be examined, and the potential of deliberation in TCHC is given new consideration. The final section will speculate on the growth and enlargement of tenant deliberative democratic communities, the possible influence of active tenants in civil society and the prospects for greater citizen participation in municipal governance in the City of Toronto.

Section Two: Deliberative Democracy

Much like other levels of democratic government relate to their constituencies through strategic communication practices, TCHC has chosen processes and procedures for interacting with their tenants that circumscribes the level of access to the institutional decision-making apparatus. Public involvement with governing institutions assumes a broad range of intensities that can be analyzed through the conceptual framework of planning theory, democratic theory or community development, among other disciplines. Classification of these different possible interactions illustrates the relative power and communicative distance between the public citizens and the governing institution. One notable measure from community development discourse is Arnstein's eight-rung *ladder of citizen participation* model, which by its metaphor implies a hierarchical scale of ascending degrees of participation (corresponding with an increasing redistribution of power to citizens) from levels of *nonparticipation* to levels of *tokenism* to levels of *citizen power* (Arnstein, 1969; Gauvin, Abelson, MacKinnon & Watling, 2006, p. 9).⁷ A simpler categorization by Rowe and Fewer of three different levels of public involvement distinguishes processes of *communication*, *consultation*, and *participation* based on their respective flows of information (Gauvin et al., 2006, p. 10). While public communication involves one-way dissemination of information, consultation is an opposite flow of feedback from

⁷ The eight rungs of citizen participation, in ascending order: manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217).

the public to the institution, and participation involves processes where there is a bi-directional dialogue between the institution and public (Gauvin et al., 2006, p. 10). Both variables of participant power and the flow of information are significant factors for assessing the official communications practices between TCHC staff and tenants in their community-building relationship. Their interaction through the TPS is structured to facilitate a bi-directional flow of communication between tenants and local staff, who are the disseminators of information from TCHC head office (Rajesh Kanhai, personal communication, July 24, 2008). Indications from TCHC and its staff suggest that they have aspired to raise tenant participation in community management to at least a level equivalent with *partnership* on Arnstein's ladder: where power is redistributed through negotiation and agreement to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through formal structures (Arnstein, 1969, p. 221). Before examining evidence of these relational dynamics within TCHC community management and considering the accuracy and implications of such claims (in later sections), principles and practices of democratic participation will be explored to understand the foundational social and political premises upon which the argument for tenant participation is based.

Distinguishing Dialogue and Deliberation

Dialogue has previously been mentioned as a bi-directional flow of communication, but there are additional distinguishing qualities of dialogue that reveal a democratic character. Yankelovich (1999) identifies three features in his

conception of dialogue. The first, “equality and the absence of coercive influences,” requires that even where participants occupy differing status or authority, they relate in mutual trust as equals (Yankelovich, 1999, p. 41). The second, “listening with empathy,” requires participants to respond empathically to the viewpoints of others (Yankelovich, 1999, p. 43). Thirdly, “bringing assumptions into the open” requires the uninhibited exploration of participants’ personal assumptions in a non-judgmental atmosphere (Yankelovich, 1999, p. 44). These are high standards that separate dialogue from mere discussion, and can enable participants to bring values in addition to factual knowledge to bear on decision-making processes (Yankelovich, 1999, p. 191). Dialogue may be further characterized as a face-to-face exchange (National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, n.d.). While dialogue is not a decision-making process, participants can explore their individual beliefs together and seek mutual understanding as a means to enhance the quality of subsequent democratic decision-making, and therefore dialogue can be employed as a precursor to *deliberation* (NCDD, n.d.).

Deliberation is an approach for making reasoned, rational decisions through collective group participation, characterized by critical thinking and thoughtful consideration of the relevant facts from different viewpoints (Torres, 2006). One basic distinction from many other forms of public participation is that, as with dialogue, deliberation “emphasizes information *processing* . . . as much as information *exchange*” (Lukensmeyer & Torres, 2006, p. 20). Some forms of deliberation are referred to as *deliberative dialogue*, in recognition of a

process that formally merges the two practices together (McCoy & Scully, 2002). McCoy and Scully (2002) assert that “deliberative dialogue creates a more holistic form of communication that acknowledges the importance of building community connections and of collective action and shared work” (p. 130), making it an ideal process for expanding civic engagement and involving the public in community organizing. In light of this conception of deliberation as a form of democratic decision-making based upon participation in a dialogue process, deliberative democracy shall be explored as the theoretical grounds for justifying processes of tenant engagement in TCHC community governance.

Deliberative Democracy Theory

In contrast to the liberal tradition of democratic theory, where individual freedom and personal rights are paramount and political decisions are made by aggregating votes, a republican model emphasizes collective political participation through deliberative decision-making to reach an agreed understanding of the common good (Eriksen & Weigard, 2003, chap. 6). Within contemporary multi-cultural society, the republican model may be impractical because of pluralistic values and worldviews (Eriksen & Weigard, 2003, p. 120). Furthermore, individual rights are necessary to ensure the freedom of minority viewpoints from the tyranny of the majority (Eriksen & Weigard, 2003, p. 120). Our current political system of liberal democracy is one which Barber (1984) asserts has only a thin foundation for democratic values such as “citizenship, participation, public goods, or civic virtue,” as it is “concerned more to promote

individual liberty than to secure public justice, to advance interests rather than to discover goods, and to keep men safely apart rather than to bring them fruitfully together” (p. 4).

There is another political discourse that incorporates deliberation while resolving the apparent dichotomy between liberal individual rights and the republican communal good. Habermas has established a discourse theory that incorporates the central principles of both liberal and republican models, into an understanding of constitutional democracies that function as “a *procedure of problem solving and conflict resolution* which is not itself based on any comprehensive agreement about world views and values” (Eriksen & Weigard, 2003, p. 124). Rather it is through the deliberative institutions, in which individuals have the freedom to express their opinions autonomously, that conflicts may be resolved in a rational manner and that majority consensus can be realized (Eriksen & Weigard, 2003, p. 124). Furthermore, Habermas stresses the importance of the public sphere of civil society as the site of free-flowing communication and opinion formation, informing and interacting with the political-administrative apparatus where decisions are deliberated according to democratic procedures (Eriksen & Weigard, 2003, p. 126). While this might be a representative rather than a direct deliberative democracy, responsibility does not rest solely with the state, but a civic political culture that embodies democratic rights to communication and participation (Eriksen & Weigard, 2003, p. 127). Habermas provides an ethical ideal for the development of a more democratic

civil society, but his fixation upon rational procedures for achieving consensus is subject to some critique for disregarding the power dynamics that underlie communication (Flyvbjerg, 1998). As Flyvbjerg (1998) suggests, social conflict may be integral to democratic society as the means to express differences in power, and should not be precluded by the notion of a consensual and communal public sphere (p. 209). However, deliberation need not be understood as precluding conflict or requiring consensus, as will be discussed below. While this paper is concerned with tenant access to political agency through participation in an institutionalized deliberative democratic process, social activism and protest outside of the TPS shall also be considered (in section 5) as a vital counterpoint.

Given the identification of deliberation as a central component in the conception of a democracy that values both personal rights and collective participatory responsibilities, its norms and ideals deserve elaboration. A consideration of deliberative democracy in the *International Association of Facilitators Handbook* notes that

critical norms of deliberation include equality of participation and respect for expert, decision maker, and citizen alike; political tolerance; a sense of increased political efficacy by citizen participants; and the recognition of common grounds for action even in the face of continuing disagreement.

(Ball, 2006, p. 399)

Muhlberger (2006) locates the role of deliberation as meeting a need to coordinate action between people through reasoning, but also for the “construction of a

coherent identity within a person”(p. 6) by facilitating a critical self-reflection upon personal values and views, resulting in self-transformation. While the deliberative process has certain instrumental aims (such as decision-making), there are also intrinsic outcomes (such as participant learning) stemming from its dialogical nature. Bohman (1996) cites three conditions for deliberation: non-tyranny, equality and publicity (p. 35). Non-tyranny, he explains, refers to a constraint on the distribution of power in both the process and the product of deliberation to prevent the automatic domination of any majority group (Bohman, 1996, pp. 35-36). Political equality includes equal access to the deliberative process, equal standing within it, and equal opportunity to participate (Bohman, 1996, p. 36). The publicity of deliberation, the public sphere of operation, “creates the social space for deliberation, it governs processes of deliberation and the reasons produced in them, and it provides a standard by which to judge agreements” (Bohman, 1996, pp. 37-38). This public character means that deliberative reasoning must be comprehensive and intelligible to all, and convincing when subjected to the scrutiny of dialogue (Bohman, 1996, pp. 38-39). In summary, deliberation can be characterized as having several recognized attributes that describe both its operations and outcomes: a formalized equality, public reasoning which provides direction, tolerance and respect of the rights of others, and a learning process that changes the self-perception of participants. As will be further elaborated, these qualities are strikingly consistent with the goals and intentions of participatory governance practices that are developing in TCHC communities.

There are many critiques of deliberation which question whether in practice it is capable of realizing its ideals and presenting a viable alternative to existing democratic political practices. Bohman (1996) cites cultural pluralism, large social inequalities, and social complexity as contemporary factors that shape the possibilities for deliberation. A primary complication is the risk that inclusion of diverse groups in deliberation will invariably result in a confrontation of incompatible or conflicting moral values, where the participants cannot find a basis for arriving at a common reasoning. But in fact a deliberative process can be designed to resolve contentious issues through a democratic vote following the full exploration of participant viewpoints, rather than necessitating a “thin consensus” (Neuman, 2000, p. 348) by imposing the requirement of unanimity. Bohman (1996) contends that the goals of deliberation have been misinterpreted by critics, and that “success is measured not by the strong requirement that all can agree with the outcome but by the weaker requirement that agents are sufficiently convinced to continue their ongoing cooperation” (p. 33). With regards to decision-making, “deliberation succeeds to the extent that participants in the joint activity recognize that they have contributed to and influenced the outcome, even when they disagree with it” (Bohman, 1996, p. 33). His conception is of participants reaching “moral compromise”, where they have taken account of others’ perspectives and modified their own interpretation of the issue to consider these other moral values (Bohman, 1996, p. 91). Rather than a goal of consensus on a *common good*, it is a more realistic proposition in light of differing interests

to identify *common ground* (Mansbridge, Hartz-Karp, Amengual & Gastil, 2006). As Valadez (2001) indicates, deliberation can promote intercultural understanding and cooperation by encompassing diverse participants in dialogue that exposes intercultural tensions and their causes while building social trust and awareness between participants (pp. 36-37). He asserts that deliberative democracy can contribute to the political legitimacy of the multicultural state by including formerly excluded citizen's voices in the process and demonstrating to participants that the outcomes result from fair and inclusive procedures (Valadez, 2001, p. 39).

A second consideration is that inequalities within the deliberative process could adversely affect the agency of politically marginalized or disadvantaged groups. Miller (2002) asserts that equal representation in deliberative institutions is insufficient to avert inequality, as there is no guarantee of equal treatment of participants within the deliberative framework (pp. 204-205). He distinguishes deliberations that unfold in an "evidence-driven" rather than "verdict-driven" form, allowing for an exploration of all arguments before participants declare their position and influence the course of the discussion (Miller, 2002, p. 205). However, socioeconomic differences between individuals may entail a disparity in resources, such as education and information, a factor that could be a hindrance on the deliberative capacities of the disadvantaged (Valadez, 2001). Another possible difficulty is for minorities to receive sufficient recognition and uptake of their viewpoints in deliberative decision-making, as there may exist a "political

poverty line” below which unequal citizens might not reasonably expect to have the efficacy to affect decisions (Bohman, 1996, p. 126). A proposed solution is not to find an alternative process, but to encourage more opportunities for high-quality public deliberation, improving mechanisms that will ensure the process is co-operative and that the conviction of the reasoning alone determines the outcome, thus correcting for social inequalities (Bohman, 1996). Deliberative democracy theory has also evolved to enlarge the discourse over deliberative reasoning, to include the possibility of dialogue that is not fixed upon one form of rational logic that may privilege some participants, but that may encompass emotional appeals and different ways of knowing and speaking into the process (Mansbridge, Hartz-Karp, Amengual & Gastil, 2006, pp. 8-9). To put deliberation in perspective, Miller (2002) highlights the crucial difference between suppressing or ignoring a viewpoint on the one hand, and the consideration of a viewpoint through deliberation, which promises at least the possibility of adopting that option (p. 215). He concludes that for disadvantaged groups, deliberative democracy “seems to provide the best chance of using political power to counteract social disadvantage,” but only if there is an opportunity for decision-making to arrive at practical and acceptable solutions, rather than simply conducting a view-sharing dialogue (Miller, 2002, p. 221). Thus, deliberation offers a means of democratizing politics, and for incorporating local citizens into the process of governance. Furthermore, it can potentially address the divide of inequality and build social bonds within civil society.

Activism and Deliberation

There are alternative approaches for involving citizens in organizing for social change, outside of participation in institutional decision-making. When considering deliberative dialogue as an ideal practice for participatory governance, its values of equality, inclusion, respect for others and social learning seem to align with those of social movements seeking structural change in the cause of social justice. But social activists may have reason to be wary of choosing to engage in deliberation, precisely because the open-ended principles do not guarantee a predictable outcome, and therefore as the process cannot ensure that participants will be converted to the activists' values and viewpoint, from a purely strategic perspective deliberation might not be worthwhile (Levine & Nierras, 2007, p. 8). Another objection is that social activists may feel that they are the most knowledgeable and emotionally invested in particular issues, and because their primary concern is not the principles of deliberative democracy but the advancement of their cause itself, "thus it would be unfair for randomly selected people or casual volunteers to acquire equal voice as a result of a deliberative process imported from outside of their community" (Levine & Nierras, 2007, p. 8). However, Levine and Nierras (2007) argue that deliberation should not be viewed strictly as a strategic tool, but as a learning opportunity through which activists might have their views tested and even changed (pp. 12-13). It is important to recognize that the views of activists are not necessarily complete and correct, but are assumptions that should withstand deliberative challenges if their validity is to be affirmed (Deliberative Democracy Consortium,

2008, p. 14). While some issue positions championed by social movements such as equality rights might not be open to negotiation and compromise in a deliberation process, deliberative democracy suggests that those whose lives are directly affected by particular decisions should have the opportunity to participate in the discourse to determine such outcomes. Therefore in matters pertaining to a specific community such as tenants of TCHC, activists might not be the best representatives of those concerned, when a forum can be convened for the tenants themselves to directly express their multitude of perspectives in a productive dialogue.

Deliberative Forms

Deliberation can be considered a specific participatory innovation with fundamental characteristics and ideals, but it serves as an umbrella term for a spectrum of applications that share common principles but vary in purpose and structure. Some have been devised specifically to function as a stable democratic component of a larger political process, while other methods are adapted to the circumstantial needs of an unresolved issue and organized as episodic events to inform and influence policy-makers. Deliberative forums that are facilitated by private organizations may not be directly connected to the political process or sponsored by governments, but serve an advisory role, or aspire to generate attention and influence decision-makers (Lukensmeyer & Brigham, 2005). The example of participatory budgeting has most often been adopted on a municipal level, but there are also contexts where national governments are endorsing

deliberative processes. For example, the New Labour Government⁸ in the U.K. has introduced national policies for increasing community involvement, through which “government institutions are being encouraged to devolve decision making and promote participation through new forms of deliberative democracy and participatory planning which recognize the limitations of relying solely on the electoral process” (Taylor, 2003, p. 31). Regardless of their specific origin or intention, deliberation methods require a very structured, resource-intensive support framework.

The practice of deliberation requires significant preparation and coordination, to facilitate face-to-face meetings between participants in which prepared issues are discussed and the products of these dialogues are recorded, analyzed and given consideration by institutional decision-makers. Succinctly put, “good deliberation is not self-generating” (Levine, Fung & Gastil, 2005, p. 274). The credentials and experience of the organizers, and their connections to the relevant political processes, are substantial factors in the reception of a deliberation process by the participating stakeholders and the institutional decision-makers. As Button and Ryfe (2005) plainly state, “decisions about who initiates and who participates in forums shape the talk that will ensue, the outcomes one might expect, and the challenges likely to arise in a deliberative encounter” (pp. 22-23). Furthermore, they realize that “the nature of any given initiative can be made clearer when organizers recognize the conceptual

⁸ The New Labour Government came to power in 1997 with the election of Tony Blair as Prime Minister of Great Britain.

implications of their pragmatic choices. Mundane, practical decisions...constitute deliberation in particular ways” (Button & Ryfe, 2005, p. 24). Thus, great care in forecasting the consequences of how a particular deliberative format is staged, and avoiding oversight of a significant detail, may mitigate the chance of process breakdown. Levine, Fung and Gastil (2005) suggest “there is a danger that deliberation will be overly influenced by skilled organizers, but the greatest danger is having no competent organization at all” (p. 275). There are deliberative methods that are inherently more robust, in that they are long-term processes that allow organizers and participants to learn, adapt and change the structural details to improve their relevance and effectiveness.

Co-Governance

While many forums of deliberation convene to discuss the values of particular issues, there are also deliberative mechanisms directly incorporated into financial management and governance, particularly for public institutions such as city governments. Some political theorists such as Smith (2005) and Stoker (2006) distinguish participatory budgeting from deliberation as a *co-governance* arrangement, which allows for on-going rather than episodic citizen participation in political decision-making, sharing the responsibility for budget allocations previously monopolized by elected officials.

Whereas deliberation initiatives tend to be focused on the *design* of programmes and policies and allow citizens to propose changes, co-governance schemes encourage citizens to share power with elected

decision makers and take responsibility for making *choices* about what to do in their communities. (Stoker, 2006, p. 187)

One advantage of co-governance described by Smith (2005) is that “the fact citizens are involved in actual decision-making and have some degree of power should lead to a *deepening* of participation and act as an incentive to take engagement more seriously” (p. 77). In participatory budgeting, there are two major variants to the form of citizen participation: direct democracy, and community-based representative democracy (Cabannes, 2004). The first form is evident in local public assemblies in which all attendees may engage in the process, thus participating directly. Where there are elected representatives engaged in deliberation on behalf of their fellow citizens, it is a community-based representative democracy. It is clear in both the case of Porto Alegre and in TCHC that PB is not a static or prescribed model, and as Lerner and Van Wagner (2006) note, “because of its flexibility and constant evolution, participatory budgeting can be extended and adapted to new spaces in new ways” (s.2, p. 5). As a distinct application of deliberation, PB has inherent qualities that differentiate it from other forms of participatory governance while allowing process development.

Empowered Participatory Governance

Fung and Wright (2003b) have classified a number of democratic reform experiments, including the participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, as *Empowered Participatory Governance* (EPG), distinguished by the authors as

possessing common general principles and design features. The three principles of EPG are: a practical orientation to address concrete problems, the involvement of ordinary citizens who are most affected by the problems, and the use of deliberative decision-making to generate solutions (Fung & Wright, 2003b, p. 15). The three design properties of EPG include the devolution of the political and administrative apparatus to local units, the oversight of centralized supervisory and coordinating bodies, and the reform or transformation of state institutions (Fung & Wright, 2003b, pp. 20-22). On this last design characteristic, Fung and Wright (2003b) remark: “these experiments generally seek to transform the mechanisms of state power into permanently mobilized deliberative-democratic, grassroots forms” (p. 22). The principle of bottom-up participation in EPG is rationalized by Fung and Wright (2003b) on the basis that certain public problems require a diversity of experience and knowledge to find effective solutions, and direct grassroots participation increases accountability while reducing the command-and-control network of the bureaucratic apparatus (pp. 15-16). From the earlier description of the Tenant Participation System structure, it appears that all these properties of EPG are also present in the design and intent of the TCHC community-building strategy.

Conceptions of Citizenship

Citizenship can be conceived as an active process rather than simply a legal status, implying responsibilities to contribute to society. Darin Barney, Canada Research Chair for Technology and Citizenship at McGill University, has

aply described citizenship as “a practice as well as a status” (Bertrand, 2007). The term “practice” encapsulates the notion of a dynamic, iterative activity; one that requires attention to sustain and improve. In his vision of a strong democracy, Barber (1984) outlines a dialectical relationship between participation and community as dual aspects of citizenship, such that “community without participation merely rationalizes collectivism,” and “participation without community merely rationalizes individualism” (p. 155). A series of cross-country discussions organized by the Institute for Canadian Citizenship in 2006 resulted in a report identifying an emergent definition of citizenship which consists of six essential pillars: economic security, social networks, political participation, cultural identity, and public discourse, in addition to legal status (Dankelman, 2007). In all these understandings of citizenship, there is an expectation for individuals to uphold some form of obligations to each other as members of civic society. Robert Putnam has made the contrast that in civic community, citizens are “bound together by horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation, not vertical relations of authority and dependency” (Eberly, 2000, p. 18) which typify interactions between state and citizen. But the historic duty of citizenship to care for others has in the past century been transferred to the welfare state, and professionalized social service providers, in effect removing an ethic of care from the responsibility of the community. A noted symptom of perceived civic decline is an “ongoing fragmentation and atomization of citizens” (Deth, 1997, p. 5) through the erosion of familial and community relationships, particularly in the anonymity of urban existence. There is evidence of a shift in our individual and

collective civic values and priorities, paralleling societal changes. A prevailing ideology of liberal individualism, promoted on both ends of the political spectrum as the goal of personal freedom unencumbered by a sense of civic duty, has stripped citizenship of any responsibility to serve a public good of community life (Eberly, 2000). Rose (2000) conceptualizes this as a “pluralization of the moral order” through the coupling of consumerism and identity, a shift “from compliance with an externally imposed code of conduct and values in the name of the collective good to the active and detailed shaping by individuals of their daily lives in the name of their own pleasures, contentments, or fulfillments” (p. 1402).

The social role of citizenship, apart from formal political activities, is vital to maintaining the social bonds of civil society that are essential to the functioning of democracy. Walzer has defined civil society as “the space of uncoerced human association” that consists of relational networks, derived from “family, faith, interest, and ideology” (Eberly, 2000, p. 7). As Eberly (2000) notes, civil society is frequently associated with localism, as the scale of community and association activity. Pateman describes the significance of the local sphere to political involvement:

If individuals in a large state are to be able to participate effectively in the government of the ‘great society’, then the necessary qualities underlying this participation have to be fostered and developed at the local level. ... It is by participating at the local level that the individual ‘learns democracy.’ (Body-Gendrot & Gittel, 2003, p. xv)

Putnam (2000) espoused the value of voluntary associations in his seminal work *Bowling Alone*, as providing opportunities to develop ‘civic virtues’ such as active participation, trustworthiness, and reciprocity. These virtues contribute not only to personal growth, but also towards a betterment of civil society, for as Gittell (2003) writes, “public life cultivates civic virtue that in turn creates liberty and choice for society’s members and concern for the public good” (p. 5). Civil society has also been perceived as a site of resistance and source of alternatives to state and corporate hegemonies (Friedmann, 1998, p. 28). In operation, a healthy civil society is described as performing functions of mediating between individuals and state and market structures, creating social capital, and infusing democratic habits and values (Eberly, 2000, p. 7). Eberly (2000) notes that civil society has been touted “as a means of improving democratic deliberation, creating more ‘public space,’ and curbing distrust and cynicism” (p. 5). In their work of the early 1970s, Verba and Nie found that increased individual involvement in social organizations similarly increased the likelihood of developing skills applicable to political decision-making processes, thus stimulating individuals to participate in such processes (Deth, 1997). While social organizations transform civic skills into political engagement, they additionally operate as two-way intermediaries for the flow of communications and influence between citizens articulating their demands to the state, and governments seeking contact with constituent citizens or groups (Deth, 1997, p. 5). When a government-affiliated institution such as TCHC involves citizens in local community engagement, it can similarly foster civic skills and political

participation, as we shall explore in the following sections. The importance of civic life extends from the personal to the political. Civil society stimulates participation in societal discourse in addition to enabling social relationships that form the basis of community.

Social Capital and Social Cohesion

It was in the context of his documentation of declining civic engagement that Putnam (2000) popularized the concept of *social capital*, a theory “that social networks have value”, including “norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness” that are comparable to civic virtues (p. 19). Forms of social capital have three identifiable components: a social *network* (the setting), a cluster of social *norms, values and expectancies* (the rules of behaviour for the setting), and *sanctions* (reinforcements of behaviour, or consequences) (Halpern, 2005, p. 10). Social networks exist in our society as the interactions between people associating as neighbours, members of an organization or group, even in family relations. Social capital is perceived as both a means to increase civic engagement, and a measure for quantifying the formation of intangible relations, which cumulatively have significant societal impact. The positive social relationships that are foundational to a sense of community are important not only for the sake of building solidarity and trust, but also to provide personal support against the stresses of struggles for social change (Lee, 1999, p. 37) and against the experience of social alienation that can disempower some marginalized individuals (Lee, 1999, p. 46). Light (2004) considers social capital to be a

democratic resource, and as the most abundant form of capital in deprived communities, he suggests that it is a means for the poor to improve their welfare, transforming it into less abundant resources such as money, education and property (p. 30). The influence of community social capital upon political power dynamics, and the possibility of converting social capital into political capital, shall be further explored through the examination of tenant engagement in their communities.

Summary

In this section the theoretical rationale behind the implementation of processes for tenant participation in TCHC community management have been outlined. In their optimal forms deliberative and dialogical group methods have attributes that are an ideal basis for tenant engagement in the TPS. Firstly, deliberative dialogue processes are a deeper form of communication between participants than the discussions or debates generated through conventional consultations, incorporating a reflective element that implies individual and group learning. Rather than soliciting top-of-mind responses from participants, logical reasoning and a more thorough consideration are expectations of deliberative dialogue. This process can potentially resolve group conflicts and bridge differences, in addition to arriving at consensus, common ground or acceptable solutions. Through a deliberative dialogue premised on inclusion of all affected interests and equal participation, diverse perspectives can be expressed and considered before arriving at final outcomes, whilst nurturing a broader

understanding of the issues for all involved. A strength of dialogue and deliberation processes is that although they require a support structure that includes facilitators, they are adaptable to different forms, goals and scales of operation to fit the particular context and needs.

Empowered Participatory Governance innovations are examples of a specific format that employs dialogue and deliberation as a practical means for participants to address concrete problems and prioritize decisions. TCHC has adopted participatory budgeting as the central mechanism of their Community Business Planning process, and a key component of the Tenant Participation System, with the stated intention of allowing tenants an opportunity to participate in making the decisions that affect their housing environments and impact upon their lives. In this way TCHC appears to be acknowledging and nurturing an inclusive notion of social citizenship. Thereby tenants can also participate as citizens of a community with equal rights and responsibilities to contribute, and a part of civil society as diverse individuals in solidarity as members of a shared neighbourhood.

Section Three: Tenant Participation in Community Governance

There are many factors that might dissuade tenant interest and commitment to engaging with the Tenant Participation System. This includes the psychological perceptions of tenants whose lives may be more distressed relative to households with secure financial and other resources. *Learned helplessness theory* suggests that individuals who experience uncontrollable events, but attribute their inability to control the outcome to internal factors (such as personal failure), may experience self-depreciation, motivational deficit, and emotional withdrawal, and adversely affect performance of future tasks (Miller & Norman, 1979; Zimmerman, 1990). By extrapolation, tenants who blame themselves for poverty-induced challenges that seem overwhelming and intractable may lack the required enthusiasm or confidence to pursue a course of action, such as participation in community governance, if they deem it to be futile. The ability to influence our environment is mediated by personal (emotions and relations), instrumental (concrete needs and issues), and structural (social, political and economic institutions) factors (Lee, 1999, p. 6). Some of these factors are indeed beyond the influence of individual action, and while they may impose challenges upon participation in civil society, it is through collective action that individuals can create a movement for change.

Efficacy and Empowerment

While there may be many demoralizing pressures that impede tenant participation in community-building efforts, the capability of individuals to assert their social and political power can be activated. Friedmann identifies three kinds of power exhibited by households in civil society: social, political and psychological (Lopes & Rakodi, 2002, p. 121). Psychological power refers to an individual's sense of potency, the self-confidence that will have a positive impact on increasing a household's social and political power (Lopes & Rakodi, 2002, p. 121). This might otherwise be described as the perception of *self-efficacy*, the belief about one's agency to affect the factors that influence our experience (Smith, Tang & Nutbeam, 2006, p. 343). An increased sense of efficacy is the opposite of learned helplessness - it is *learned hopefulness*. Zimmerman (1990) constructs a concept of learned hopefulness which suggests "experiences that provide opportunities to enhance perceived control will help individuals cope with stress and solve problems in their personal lives" (pp. 72-73). Furthermore, through the development of learned hopefulness, "individuals learn and utilize skills that enable them to develop a sense of psychological empowerment" (Zimmerman, 1990, p. 73). *Empowerment* is a process intended to redistribute power and challenge existing power relations with the aim of increasing personal or group control over the sources of power (Lopes & Rakodi, 2002, pp. 121-122). Zimmerman (1990) believes that involvement with community organizations may develop the skills that empower participants, and in particular "participatory decision-making structures or the development of social support may enhance psychological empowerment" (p. 73). Lee (1999) explains empowerment as a

process rather than an outcome, not “a state of mind that arrives after, or is caused by, the attainment of the objectives” but something that is “reflected in, and experienced in, the actual achieving of the objectives” (p. 51). He presents a pragmatic community practice model that conceives of community organizing for the purpose of achieving empowerment and social justice, with five objectives: “citizen involvement; sense of community; organization development; concrete benefits; and social learning” (Lee, 1999, p. 42). These objectives can be applied as benchmarks to assess the effectiveness of models of Empowered Participatory Governance in improving the lives of their participants, and also provide a means to evaluate the impact of the Tenant Participation System.

It has been previously mentioned that one of the stated values of TCHC is “support for engaged and empowered communities” (TCHC, 2006b, p.1). In speaking with TCHC staff and tenants, their accounts provide anecdotal indications and assertions of tenant empowerment through participation in the TPS, but there is also quantitative data that provides some indication of the empowerment and sense of efficacy developing among TCHC tenants. Following a 2006 survey of over 3,000 randomly selected TCHC tenants, it was reported that 44% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they “have a say and participate in decisions that TCHC makes about my building and community” - an indication of their empowerment (see Figure 2) (Decima Research & TCHC, 2006, p. 47). In response to a related statement, that “my participation has impact on issues/decisions that matter to me” - an indication of their sense of efficacy -

41% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed (see Figure 3) (Decima Research & TCHC, 2006, p. 47). However, while almost twice as many respondents agreed or strongly agreed with each of these statements compared to those who disagreed or strongly disagreed (as shown in Figures 2 and 3), there was an 8% decline in agreement with the first statement and 4% decline in agreement with the second statement compared to a previous tenant survey in 2004 (Decima Research & TCHC, 2006, p. 47). The survey report concludes that: “over the past two years, tenants have increased their involvement with TCHC, but feel as though their participation has little or no impact on TCHC decisions affecting their building or issues of importance” (Decima Research & TCHC, 2006, p. 12). To improve tenant perceptions of the effectiveness of their involvement in the TPS, TCHC may need to focus upon increasing opportunities for meaningful tenant participation in community governance, so that tenants do not feel excluded by a process centred upon Tenant Representatives at Tenant Council, while also ensuring tenant decision-making processes are connected to organizational actions, that decisions are implemented and supported. Tenant participation alone does not increase tenants’ power, the structures and processes in place, the political climate, and power relations with other parties are all determining factors (Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad, 1994). We shall examine further how the current TPS process is engaging tenants, and how change to the TPS may realize organizational goals to increase the participation and empowerment of tenants in community management and community-building efforts.

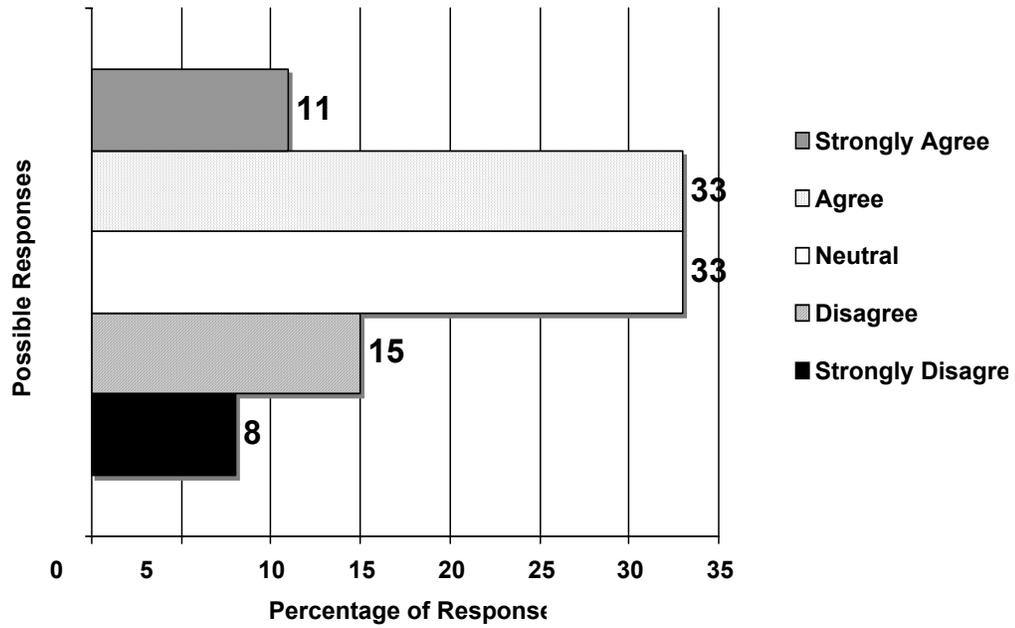


Figure 2: Responses to statement: “I have a say and participate in decisions that TCHC makes about my building and community” in 2006 TCHC tenant survey. From *Toronto Community Housing 2006 tenant survey: Final report* (p. 47), by Decima Research & Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006.

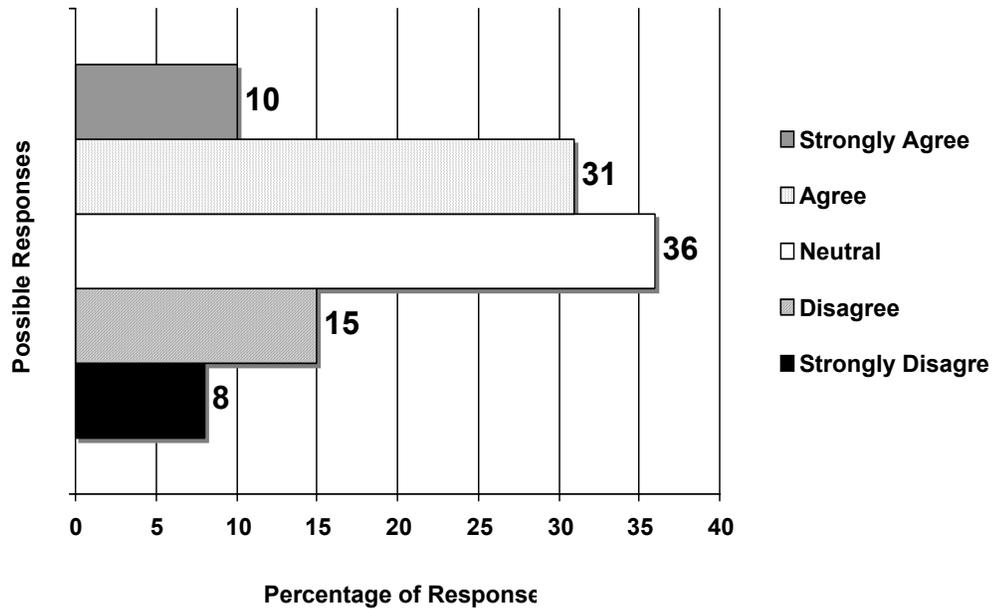


Figure 3: Responses to statement: “My participation has had an impact on issues/decisions that matter to me” in 2006 TCHC tenant survey. From *Toronto Community Housing 2006 tenant survey: Final report* (p. 47), by Decima Research & Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006.

Tenant Social Learning

Through engagement in an empowering process such as the TPS, particularly when deliberative dialogue is an integral component, individuals ideally undergo *social learning*. As one of his five objectives of community organizing, Lee (1999, p. 48) describes social learning by outlining its three facets: skills development; increased knowledge of systems (such as relevant political, legal and organizational systems); and analysis of self, community and larger society. Critical self-reflection and group exploration of assumptions and

perspectives, activities previously discussed as elements of dialogue and deliberative processes, would constitute the analytical facet of social learning. In examining PB in Porto Alegre, Rebecca Abers (1998a, p. 529) discovered that over time “enlarged thinking” developed among participants as a result of their social learning experience of reconciling their personal concerns with broader interests. She conceptualizes deliberative fora of PB as “civic learning spaces” where “through the participatory process itself, people begin to perceive the needs of others, develop some solidarity, and conceptualize their own interests more broadly” (Abers, 2003, p. 206). In *Empowered Participatory Governance*, where strategies and solutions are not pre-determined but are produced through the deliberative process, Fung and Wright (2003b) suggest that “participants in these settings are united in their ignorance of how best to improve the general situation” and therefore “it is no surprise that participants often form or transform their preferences and opinions in light of that undertaking” (p. 18). In the TPS processes of TCHC, tenant participants active on Tenant Councils or involved in the Allocation Day event have the opportunity to undertake social learning. Health Promotion Officer Penny Lamy described how tenants who have constructed proposals for the annual Allocation Day have acquired skills such as the abilities of speech-making, analysis, making linkages, and developing power (Lamy, personal communication, August 5, 2008). More widespread opportunities for tenants to engage in dialogue and deliberation within their communities could provide means for diffusion and development of all forms of social learning amongst a larger tenant participant base.

Social and Political Power

Through the development of social capital networks, neighbourhood residents can both enhance their own livelihoods, and aspire towards a cohesive community that is engaged in a campaign to improve conditions. While empowerment has been discussed as a personal process, social justice requires change at the societal scale (Lee, 1999, p. 53). Although self-efficacy and empowerment enhance personal efforts to achieve certain goals, there are large-scale structural realities in our society that cannot be overcome through individual accomplishment alone. If citizens press for social and political change through civil society associations, how can social capital resources be translated into political power? Weir identifies three political strategies employed by community groups to gain access to resources: those of protest, participation and networking (Keyes, 2001, p. 158). The networks are *political* networks, distinct from social capital networks because they operate through control, influence, power, and so forth, rather than trust, reciprocity and shared vision (Keyes, 2001, p. 158). For poor and marginalized communities, the predominant concern might not be any lack of social capital, but its inability to adequately compensate for a lack of resources or deficits in political power (Cohen, 2001, p. 272). That stated, the existing (and potential) community social capital represents the relationships that drive asset-based community development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), and can be channeled as a means to generate increased political power. DeFilippis (2001) argues that social capital should be considered a means to economic

capital rather than an end in itself, and social networks must be able to “realize the power needed to attract and control that capital (for the benefit of those in the networks)” (p. 799). Social capital can be leveraged to engage the community members in protest, participation or networking strategies, through a cohesive movement or association. Within TCHC communities, tenant organizing and development efforts, supported by TCHC and other agencies and associations, are occurring through protest, participation and networking strategies. The concern of this paper is with the process whereby TCHC is involved in engaging tenants in a participatory community-building process to access and generate greater political power.

Sense of Community

The focus of community development extends beyond the capacities of individual residents to consider the current state and further potential of a community as a source of identity and a shared project, such as the *active community* described earlier (Banks, 2003). Temkin and Rohe (1998) introduce the concept of *sociocultural milieu* to assess the degree that residents perceive and reproduce a positive neighbourhood identity, by gauging “both observable behaviors of neighborhood residents and their unobservable affective sentiments toward the area” (p. 69). They hypothesize that neighbourhoods exhibiting strong sociocultural milieus are more likely to be viewed by residents as unique spatial communities, worth defending against threats to community stability (Temkin & Rohe, 1998, p. 69). In fact, community cohesion may increase when faced with

an acute threat that presents a concrete reason for organizing, and conversely ebb when the concern has diminished (Evans & Advokaat, 2001). Importantly, Evans and Advokaat (2001) note that community participation does not require cohesive unity, because debate, conflict and controversy also shape its development and vitality (p. 73). We have already noted that realizing common ground rather than consensus is a plausible and productive outcome for deliberation participants, and the same logic applies to the general relations between community members. Ensuring a proper forum in the public sphere to constructively facilitate and manage such dialogue appears to be a critical component of the long-term project of community-building.

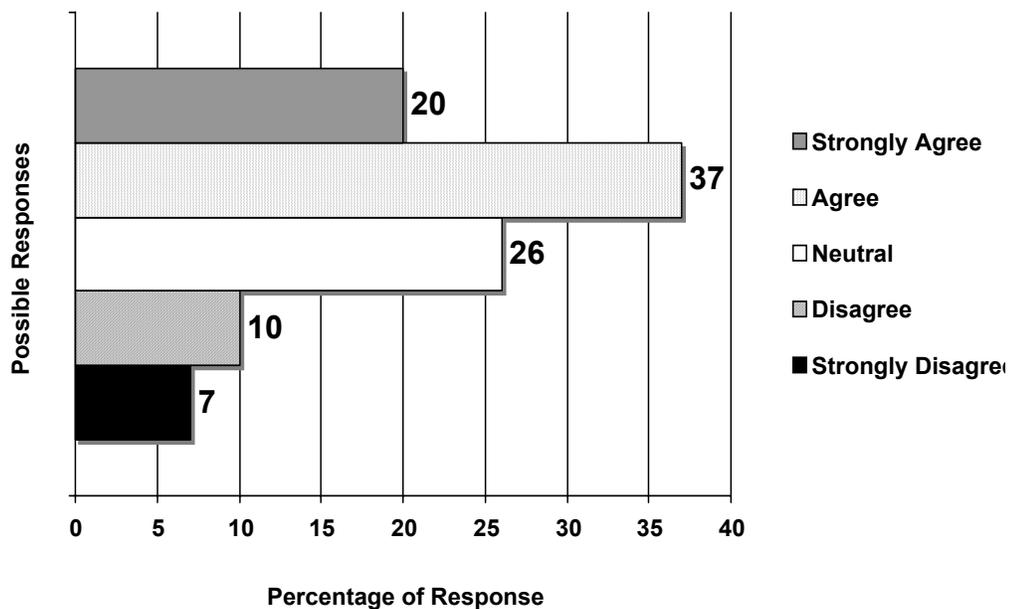


Figure 4: Responses to statement: “I am proud to live in the neighbourhood” in TCHC 2006 tenant survey. From *Toronto Community Housing 2006 tenant survey: Final report* (p. 51), by Decima Research & Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006.

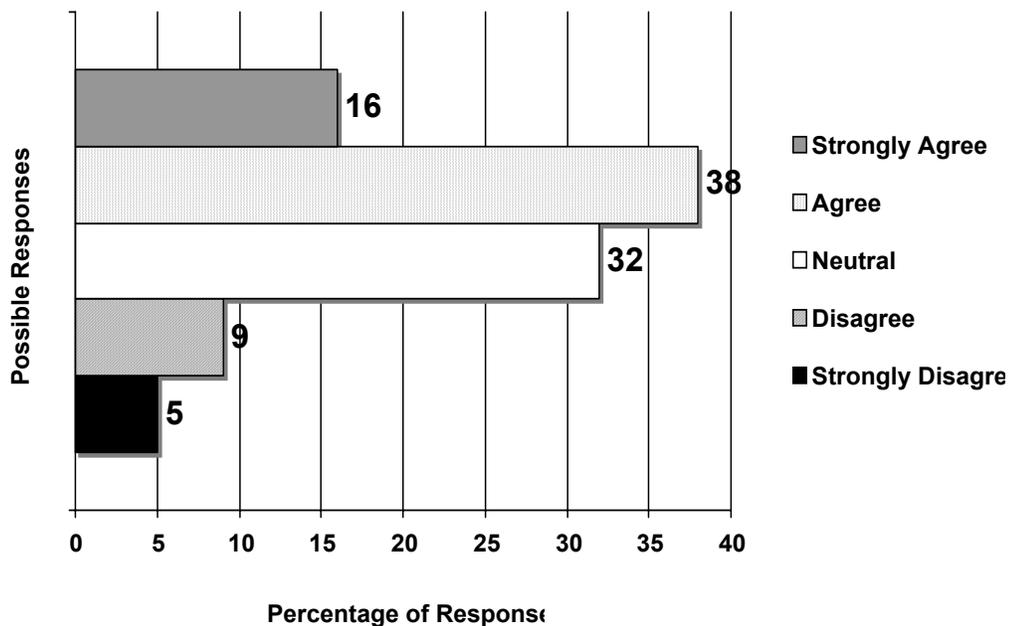


Figure 5: Responses to statement: “I have a strong sense of belonging to the community” in 2006 TCHC tenant survey. From *Toronto Community Housing 2006 tenant survey: Final report* (p. 51), by Decima Research & Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006.

There are some indications of community pride and neighbourhood attachment among TCHC tenants. The 2006 tenant survey found that 57% of tenant respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were proud to live in their neighbourhood, compared to only 17% who disagreed or strongly disagreed (see

Figure 4) (Decima Research & TCHC, 2006, p. 51). Similarly, 54% agreed or strongly agreed that there was a strong sense of belonging to a community, compared to only 14% who disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Figure 5) (Decima Research & TCHC, 2006, p. 51). Despite the survey results, Tenant Representatives who were interviewed for this paper explained that in their respective communities, many tenants were not interested in being involved (Tess, personal communication, September 4, 2008) or were despondent and felt that nothing will change for the better, in spite of visible community investments achieved through the PB process (Allan⁹, personal communication, August 19, 2008). A Tenant Representative pointed out that if tenants have no interest outside their own building, and are unaware of the “big picture” of the community, then they would not vote for things that will benefit the community (Allan, personal communication, August 28, 2008). Through participation in group dialogue as part of the TPS, tenants can potentially develop their familiarity with others in their living community, identify with this community and gain an understanding and interest in local issues and concerns.

Rhetoric of Community Empowerment

One critical interpretation of governmental efforts to empower the poor and marginalized to participate in community-oriented processes of engagement is that the intention is one motivated by institutional self-interest for control over civic order. Nikolas Rose perceives that such interventions seek to activate

⁹ Pseudonym used to protect anonymity.

individuals into self-identifying as members of a community, as a condition for receiving state assistance (Evans and Advokaat, 2001, p. 39). Rose (2000) describes this conceptually as an *ethopolitics* for governing human behaviour through the promotion of individual engagement with a community that shares and re-enforces ethical values. Because moral order “is embodied and taught through the rituals and traditions in the everyday life of communities,” therefore “a strategy to recreate civic morality cannot succeed if it seeks to articulate and enforce a fixed set of virtues, but must seek to recreate community engagement” (Rose, 2000, p. 1403). In an analysis of the American “war on poverty” Cruikshank (1994) describes an ideological process of governmental “modeling the poor” into a single demographic defined by “lack of political participation, lack of shared interest, and lack of motivation to solve the problems - their own problems - of poverty” (1994, pp. 41-42). In order to govern the poor, they had to first be empowered to political participation as a communal group, even to foster aspirations for local community self-governance (Cruikshank, 1994). As Cruikshank (1994) recognizes that empowerment is itself not a neutral process but involves power relations of resistance and participation (p. 31), therefore relations of empowerment involved “both a voluntary and coercive exercise of power upon the subjectivity of the empowered” (p. 35). She defines this phenomenon as the “will to empower,” a process to “mediate relations of power and resistance” (1994, p. 50) that ultimately facilitated co-optation and governance over the poor by first constituting them into an organized political group.

This analysis suggests that if the Tenant Participation System is an analogous mode of empowerment, it similarly constitutes and activates the tenant population for the purpose of controlling the nature of tenant social and political activity. It is indeed a quality of Empowered Participatory Governance (and a reality of the TPS) that the governing institutions are responsible for coordination of the participatory infrastructure and retain political control over its continuation. However, if purely deliberative practices governed communication and decision-making within the TPS, the process could extend beyond generating interest, motivation and participation from tenants to also cultivate values of equality, inclusion and diversity, social learning, co-operation, and even bring conflict to the surface to be addressed and resolved. Furthermore, it is an institutional objective of EPG that it serves to “advance public ends . . . more effectively than alternative institutional arrangements” (Fung & Olin Wright, 2003b, p. 25). Similarly, Lee’s (1999) community practice model requires that processes are not merely participatory, but generate concrete benefits in addition to social learning and sense of community. These models provide tests that can be applied to evaluate the extent to which programs of empowerment deliver lasting and apparent benefits to participants. If the TPS is serving a government agenda and advancing the interests of the TCHC institutional structure, perhaps it is a mute point if the process is advantageous to participants and their communities, and can provides access to political power they previously lacked.

Community Governance

The community management model that TCHC initiated is premised on the merits of local community governance. The concept of *democratic subsidiarity*, the assignment of a social role to the smallest institutional scale that can perform the function (Stewart, 2000, p. 180), may be a philosophical underpinning, but there are a range of strategic and pragmatic motives from both community development and government policy perspectives. The City of Toronto's Social Development Strategy outlines principles of equity, equality, access, participation and cohesion (City of Toronto, 2001, p. 4), and promotes values of civic participation and public engagement (p. 12), such as "having the opportunity for regular participation at the community level in all aspects of civic life" (p. 15). As with TCHC, these values originate in part from an interest in building communities to strengthen their economic and social vitality in the face of all the aforementioned challenges facing the municipality and its neighbourhoods. Institutional support for public participation may also be a response to demands from organized citizen groups, civic associations and social agencies for greater direct access to and involvement in political decision-making processes. Evans and Advokaat highlight many social benefits of bringing communities into processes of governance, such as "inclusion of isolated or marginal members of society; improved social cohesion; the delivery of services which are tailored to the needs of real people at lower cost; and the restoration of a sense of shared values and belonging" (2003, p. 76). More cynically, they also point out that community governance allows for the transfer of responsibility for some of the management and administration of services from the state to civil

society, diminishing the bureaucratic apparatus while creating budgetary savings through parallel community structures that perform “volunteerism for the government” (Evans & Advokaat, 2003, pp. 47-48). Given their staffing structure, this does not seem to be the case in TCHC, as they retain core landlord responsibilities in addition to time- and labour-intensive tenant engagement processes. That stated, tenant volunteerism certainly enhances community-building efforts. One intention behind their development of community governance was to decentralize their administrative structure and eventually lead to self-governance in some communities, such as a co-operative model of building management (TCHC, 2006b; Beatriz Tabak, personal communication, August 5, 2008). In the TCHC literature the organization concedes that this has not yet been successful, as additional development and support is required (TCHC, 2006b, pp. 34-35).¹⁰ While such outcomes are elusive, by incorporating tenants into TCHC community management, the organization is facilitating greater tenant understanding of the financial constraints and operational challenges, while gaining access to tenant knowledge, skills and perspectives.

Tenant Civic Engagement

A probable by-product of community governance is increased civic engagement, which may be a stepping-stone towards greater social and political interest and activity. One supposition is that through participatory decision-

¹⁰ The exception being the conversion of a non-profit housing project in Alexandra Park into the Atkinson Housing Co-operative in 2003 (Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto, n.d.).

making, “participants can learn about political life and broaden their interests to other spheres” (Abers, 2003, p. 207). In TCHC communities, the community involvement options of the TPS provide an incentive for an initial venture into civil society. There is a belief expressed by TCHC staff and tenants that the TPS is offering an opportunity and motivation for individuals to expand their civic participation, fostering an interest in the potential of democratic political activity or social activism to realize change in their lives, communities and society at large. One tenant described how since becoming a Tenant Representative she has learned many skills and become more interested in government and politics, and now writes letters to her political representatives to express concerns (Tess, personal communication, September 4, 2008). Beatriz Tabak, the former TCHC participatory budgeting process manager, explained that a sign of improvement in tenant participation efforts is that “we have reached people that have never participated in anything. . . . The whole idea is, moving it into a larger civic engagement, not only in your building . . . but also in the neighbourhood” (Tabak, personal communication, August 5, 2008). One channel through which TCHC has sought to encourage tenant engagement in the political realm is through a voter education campaign, run prior to the 2007 provincial election and 2008 federal election. This initiative is in partnership with the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (CSPC-T) and was aimed at providing information and resources to TCHC residents on key housing-related issues, to facilitate tenant understanding and engagement in the electoral process (CSPC-T, n.d.a, n.d.b; TCHC, 2007b, p. 48). This is still a nascent pursuit for TCHC, but as an

expansion of civic engagement into larger realms of political activity there is much potential for development. Community Health Manager Gail Johnson explained that the recent tenant engagement consultations of Summer 2008 posed the question to tenants of “what is the role of TCHC in facilitating broader involvement, be it civic engagement, be it community advocacy. . . . We’re asking tenants to help us figure that piece out” (Johnson, personal communication, July 25, 2008). Widespread tenant interest and participation in community and political life will not spring automatically from the presence of the TPS, it requires active support and promotion by TCHC and other community stakeholders, in addition to creating the opportune conditions for community governance to evolve.

Tenant Representatives are among the most engaged tenants, and their position confers a degree of power and access as well as opportunity. While there is a *Code of Conduct for Tenant Representatives*, which indicates that they will receive no special benefits or consideration, and must not exert inappropriate influence or intimidation towards tenants or staff (TCHC, n.d.c), in reality it does not prevent problems resulting from charges of perceived favouritism or personal gain. Asked about the presence of a hierarchy within the tenant communities as a result of the Tenant Representative positions, Gail Johnson admitted this was the case, explaining that

the whole structure of the organization, the 27 CHUs, all of that, was designed to have as much decision-making as close as possible to the

people that were affected. But in order to have a decision-making structure, you have to have decision-makers. . . .Some areas work better than others at trying to cultivate a broader base of tenant leadership. (Johnson, personal communication, July 25, 2008).

The level of cooperation and respect between Tenant Representatives and their fellow tenants is to some degree a matter of individual personalities, but also the culture that is cultivated in the CHU or within their building. HPO Penny Lamy stated that while there are many Tenant Representatives who regularly exchange information with their tenant community, some do use their position as a base of personal power, and do not consistently consult with tenants or accurately reflect the needs of the community (Lamy, personal communication, August 5, 2008).

The challenge for HPOs is articulated by Lamy through her question: “Is there a way that you can ensure that the Tenant Representative is actually engaging with the population that they represent?” (Lamy, personal communication, August 5, 2008). Some tenants seem concerned about the concentration of power and monopolization of engagement by Tenant Representatives. One Tenant Representative who was interviewed expressed support for other tenants being selected as delegates for TCHC decision-making committees, in order to broaden the scope of conversations so it is not just Tenant Representatives involved, protecting their own interests (Allan, personal communication, August 28, 2008). Although Tenant Representatives are integral to the development of community governance as representative decision-makers for a very large population, there is

a case to be made for the benefits of expanding opportunities for wider inclusion of tenants in the TPS and community governance processes.

Social Inclusion in Community Governance

In his discussion of the community organizing objectives for citizen participation, Lee (1999) states that “the point of participation, however, is not simply leadership. It is participation in action” (p. 44). He describes four assumptions underlining this participation: that it must be meaningful, that decisions made with the input of the people affected will be better, that those who contribute to a decision have a greater stake in ensuring it is implemented well, and that participation in the decisions that affect their lives has a healthy, positive impact on people (Lee, 1999, p. 45). These general beliefs underline the advantages of opening up the governance process from the exclusive domain of professional policy-makers to wider public participation. Cohen (2001) asserts that:

we do not want to build power in poor communities at the expense of an inclusive participatory process. Instead, our goal . . . must be to facilitate the use of social capital for political empowerment built on open democratic participation that generates greater political activity among all the residents of these communities. (pp. 277-278)

Similarly, TCHC literature indicates an interest in inclusive community governance, premised upon the right of all tenants to participate. The 2008 TCHC Community Management Plan highlights their efforts to maximize tenant

participation in TCHC communities, stating that “the outcomes of social inclusion initiatives include engaging all tenants in community planning and decision-making and in creating communities where individuals feel part of the broader community” (TCHC, 2007b, p. 37). Conversely, although TCHC properties are a public asset of the City of Toronto funded in part by municipal tax dollars, to argue that the general public has a right to participate in deliberations such as the allocation of the TCHC capital budget would violate the representative legitimacy of the deliberative democratic process - the premise that all those who are affected by a decision have the right to participate or be represented (Parkinson, 2006, p.68). Given that non-tenants in the public are not directly affected by these spending decisions and have little stake in the outcomes nor share the experiences of tenants living in TCHC housing environments, their participation can be justifiably limited to deliberations on issues that extend beyond TCHC properties. The project of expanding the participant base of TCHC tenants in the TPS and community-building activities is not a simple matter, even with the incentives of achieving direct community benefits and experiencing personal development.

Tension between Leadership Development and Participation

The process of integrating leadership development with a mandate for promoting inclusionary community participation is challenging and potentially problematic. A Tenant Representative commented that they need more and different tenants to be involved in the community, not just the same few active Tenant Representatives (Allan, personal communication, August 28, 2008). The

2006 Tenant Survey reported that while 60% of tenant respondents indicated that they were aware of the TPS, only 15% stated that they had participated in the TPS (Decima Research & TCHC, 2006, p. 56). However, 38% of respondents did indicate that they had attended a TCHC meeting in the past year (Decima Research & TCHC, 2006, p. 48). Evelyn Murialdo, the Director of the TCHC Community Health Unit, describes how all the options for tenant participation in TCHC communities, including the TPS initiatives, are complementary:

there are many forms that are valued within TCHC, and not one is exclusionary of the other, and not one is the solution to all participatory issues. So I think it's the range of options to participate which now we are trying to expand. Not at the expense of an electoral process. (Murialdo, personal conversation, August 7, 2008).

Alina Chatterjee, TCHC Community Practice Unit Manager, responded to a question about the opportunities for tenant participation by stating:

it's very clear to me that we don't have a system that has supported tenants in general to participate. What we've done is we've focused very much on the governance system, on the Tenant Participation System . . . which doesn't necessarily allow for that breadth of representation, especially when we're looking at the demographics of our population. (Chatterjee, personal communication, July 30, 2008)

She further explains that the Tenant Engagement Consultations have a dual purpose, "one is around the governance element and the other is around broader opportunities for engagement without being a Tenant Rep" (Chatterjee, personal

communication, July 30, 2008). The TCHC Manager of Community Engagement, Rajesh Kanhai, suggested that one intent in the consultations and the October 2008 Tenant Forum - all of which have been opened up to attendance and participation from any interested tenants - was “trying to get rid of those tiers . . . that formal leadership is different from informal leadership, and we’re trying to build capacity with everyone that is interested in having it develop” (Kanhai, personal communication, July 24, 2008). Rather than restricting or encumbering active engagement by tenants outside the Tenant Representative group, TCHC seems committed to finding means for broader participation and facilitating new opportunities for involvement in tenant communities and TCHC community management.

Summary

The current Tenant Participation System has developed tenant leadership in community governance through the CHU Tenant Councils, and those engaged in the TPS as Tenant Representatives have become active citizens in their communities while benefiting from opportunities for social learning. However, many tenants are not engaged with TCHC activities, and many feel that their participation has little beneficial impact. It is no longer sufficient for the purposes of realizing TCHC organizational goals to restrict or focus skills capacity-building and participatory governance opportunities solely upon a small number of tenant leaders. To build the capacities of a greater proportion of tenants, and increase participation in local community governance to better reflect and represent the

large and diverse TCHC population, group processes such as deliberative decision-making can offer individuals and their communities mechanisms for empowerment which not only generate instrumental process benefits but are also transformative experiences.

Section Four: Development of Deliberative Practices in TCHC

Learning Organizations

Because the Tenant Participation System requires the ongoing support of TCHC staff, changing dynamics within the ranks of the organization and the state of relationships between staff and tenants can have a critical influence on tenant engagement. Tenant participation strategies can evolve concurrently with organizational development and institutional learning. Reid and Hickman (2002) have examined whether U.K. social housing organizations incorporating tenant participation were themselves becoming ‘learning organizations’, that facilitate learning by their members through both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ communications and use participatory policy-making and enabling structures, in order to sustain transformative organizational change (p. 899). They investigate the possibility that tenant participation might contribute to organizational learning, noting that “tenant participation at the very least confronts organizations with the prospect that they might learn something from their tenants, and that the communicative relationship might generate a range of options for change in service delivery” (Reid & Hickman, 2002, p. 908). It is their assessment from evaluation of the literature and from interviews with social housing staff, that organizations that “focus predominantly on individualised tenant participation mechanisms, and rely upon organisationally (and centrally) programmed participation exercises” may be incapable of organizational learning (Reid & Hickman, 2002, p. 915). They conclude that “the attitudes expressed by organisations suggest that change and learning may indeed occur when the range

of participation techniques used expands to incorporate collectivised methods alongside individualised methods” (Reid & Hickman, 2002, p. 916). Collective tenant participation practices focus on group communications rather than individual contact (Reid & Hickman, 2002), reflecting a treatment of tenants as community members rather than clients. Hickman (2006) outlines a typology of tenant participation approaches, including *consumerist* and *citizenship* models. In practice the former model is most concerned with tenant satisfaction as consumers, and participation is a feedback mechanism for improving service provision and offering greater choice (Hickman, 2006, p. 213). By contrast, the other approach considers tenants as citizens, and engages them in collective consultation and dialogue using a full range of participation structures to involve tenants, including representative decision-making intended to empower tenants (Hickman, 2006, p. 213). Drawing a linkage between the assessments of Reid and Hickman, and the participation models described by Hickman, a social housing *learning organization* is more likely to support tenant participation through the treatment of tenants as communities of citizens rather than as individual clients, and would structure their communications and governance accordingly. Tenant participation is interlinked with the organizational development of TCHC, and if relations proceed in a form closer to an engaged partnership, then there is opportunity for mutual learning.

Although a comprehensive organizational assessment is beyond the scope of this paper, there are several strong indications that TCHC has qualities of a

learning organization, and is transforming its practices of tenant engagement to embrace a citizenship approach to tenant participation. It is explicitly stated in the Community Management Plan that “Toronto Community Housing has been a ‘learning organization.’ . . . It has been open to learning and trying new experiences, new practices and new approaches” (TCHC, 2007b, p.81). A consideration of the recent TCHC reorganization as a realignment of staffing roles and internal organizational dynamics suggests some interesting changes in operational priorities. The Tenant and Community Services Unit, directed by Evelyn Murialdo, has been re-branded as the Community Health Unit, in her own words as a “strategic unit that focuses on . . . the organizational change piece, that connects the Community Management Plan objectives, the directions that TCHC is going, and connects them with life in local communities” (Murialdo, personal communication, August 7, 2008). This includes the new Community Practice Unit, managed by Alina Chatterjee, which she describes as: “in a nutshell: the purpose of the unit is to figure out how to align the operations of the organization with the community health vision of the organization” (Chatterjee, personal communication, October 30, 2008). Another key addition is an Organizational Development Unit within the TCHC Human Resources department, that will be hiring ‘change agents’ who function as “catalysts for change” within the organization (Alina Chatterjee, personal communication, October 30, 2008). It is apparent from these formations that it is a current TCHC priority to operationalize change. Speaking philosophically, Evelyn Murialdo stated that change “is part of what organizations ought to do on a constant basis,” and furthermore, “change in

itself is not an outcome, only, change is a way of working” (Murialdo, personal communication, August 7, 2008). Significantly, there is also a new position of Manager of Community Engagement, focusing upon governance, including the TPS and participatory budgeting, with the intention of “opening up access to allow people to make decisions on the communities they live in” (Rajesh Kanhai, personal communication, July 24, 2008). Additionally, The 2008 Tenant Engagement Consultations have been reflective of the two relevant organizational concerns in discussion here: a process to consider enlargement of current tenant engagement practices in TCHC communities, and an incorporation of tenant participation into the discussions and decision-making of the change process itself.

For the prospect of a co-operative partnership between tenants and TCHC staff to become an operational norm, the disparity of administrative control and technical information needs to be resolved so that the power differential framing tenant and housing provider interactions is not a persistent point of contention. There exists what might be generally described as an “elite-public gap” (Yankelovich, 1999, p. 158) of communicative power between the professionals of institutions and public citizens. The professional bureaucrats wield an advantage in access to information and specialized knowledge, a distinction that confers status and authority they may be loath to relinquish. However, TCHC staff may adopt different patterns of communication with tenants. In the context of the TPS and community management, a more appropriate conception of

process leadership is necessary. In place of the top-down command-and-control of a more traditional corporation, the combination of top-down and bottom-up communication indicative of a learning organization is required, in a spirit of co-operation. Yankelovich (1999) suggests that a new model of *relational leadership* has emerged, concerned with the complex organizational change process, and employing dialogue in pursuit of relationship networks and the refinement of a shared vision (p. 172). Wilson (1997) discusses an alternative perception of the community development planner not as a technical expert but a *reflective practitioner* seeking connection with the client rather than assuming a professional pretense (p. 748). In this model a “mutual learning-in-action” takes place, in which both parties must abandon their contractual relationship roles in favour of “a collaborative exploration of trust-building” (Wilson, 1997, p. 748). In addition to assuming a more co-operative communication style, TCHC staff may be required to relinquish any outdated assumptions regarding tenant participation. In particular, those in contact with tenants in local operations and community management are required to suspend the pretenses of their professional authority and specialized vocabulary and learn new methods for engaging tenants in dialogue. One Tenant Representative felt that there are some staff who are used to being in control of information, carrying an attitude derived from the corporate culture of the TCHC predecessor MTHA, and this causes communication problems for tenants (Allan, personal communication, August 28, 2008). On the other hand, he also felt that TCHC as an organization does have

the community interest in mind (Allan, personal communication, August 28, 2008).

Tenant-Staff Social Trust

The development of relationships of trust and mutual respect between tenants and TCHC staff is crucial to co-operative endeavours such as Community Business Planning. Tenant participation in the TPS depends upon their belief in the validity and worthiness of the process, hinging on their trust of the staff who have introduced, coordinated, facilitated and supported the procedures. The nature of the relationship that develops between the staff and tenants is reflected in tenant perceptions of the corporation as a whole. When asked about any difference between Tenant Representatives and other tenants in their trust of TCHC staff, Gail Johnson replied that in general “you’d find that tenant reps are much more trusting of the staff” and it is her assumption this is due to their “exposure to how hard it is to make some of the decisions” as well as “more familiarity with the staff and what they do” (Johnson, personal communication, July 25, 2008). HPO Zeinab Adan felt that in her CHU there was not a significant difference in trust, but that Tenant Representatives do cooperate more with TCHC than do their fellow tenants, as they “have more understanding and appreciation for the problems that TCHC is going through, than the regular tenants who don’t always know exact details” (Adan, personal communication, August 7, 2008). TCHC must earn the trust of some tenants through action, particularly for long-time residents who had negative experiences under the regimes of previous

housing organizations, and became cynical or distrustful. A Tenant Representative who was interviewed described tenant skepticism and loss of faith towards TCHC promises and programs because of bad impressions left by past interactions with staff (Tess, personal communication, August 4, 2008). The TPS has provided a vehicle for improving communication and trust-building between tenants and staff, although to this point the most meaningful interaction and flow of information has been concentrated upon Tenant Representatives. For many tenants, contact with TCHC staff is limited to matters relating to rent payment and unit repairs, and their impression of TCHC performance is based on frontline staff responsiveness. One means to improve awareness of TCHC community improvement efforts and build personal trust between staff and tenants would be to involve more tenants in participatory processes that nurture co-operative communication between tenants and frontline staff, as well as between engaged tenants and new participants. If such opportunities are connected to the implementation of tenant-directed community improvement, the organization re-enforces its accountability to the tenant constituency, and organizational credibility is improved.

Outreach and Promotion

Given that TCHC staff have expressed an interest in both deepening and broadening tenant participation opportunities, it may be beneficial for them to assume a more active role in encouraging attendance at events and recruiting tenants as volunteers. However, this must be tempered with a sensitivity to

individual inclinations, interests and available time. Health Promotion Officer Penny Lamy raised a valid caution about using the tenant participation rate as a measure of TPS success. “It isn’t about involvement, it’s about contentment. . . . I think our ultimate goal in terms of participation should be making sure that our tenants feel proud to call Toronto Community Housing their home, regardless of whether or not they are participating” (Lamy, personal communication, August 5, 2008). That stated, there is a need for new participants to renew the TPS, ensuring new and diverse perspectives in local and portfolio-wide decision-making processes. The concerns from Tenant Representatives about ensuring there are successors for their positions and different tenant voices on groups and committees have already been mentioned. Those tenants who were interviewed suggested that TCHC could better promote tenant involvement and provide more information to “sell” the idea of running in Tenant Representative elections (Tess, personal communication, September 4, 2008), and advertise TCHC and tenant successes (such as activities and educational programs) to inspire and encourage tenant involvement (Allan, personal communication, August 28, 2008). In his analysis of a deliberative process for the National Health Service Plan in England, Parkinson (2006) describes how organizers seeking a representative sample of participants “do not give up on people who would normally face great motivational problems to do with low efficacy” but instead “actively ‘shoulder tap’ such people and encourage them to attend, helping them with payment for time and expenses, child care arrangements, transport, and so on” (p. 88). The TCHC staff who were interviewed generally felt that the organization has done a

good job to address barriers to tenant participation in TCHC meetings, and that language, cultural, mobility and transportation concerns as well as the meeting environment as a whole are considered (Kanhai, personal communication, July 7, 2008). Outreach by TCHC staff and tenant leaders can take the form of information, publicity and encouragement ranging from personal conversations to concerted campaign efforts, but the visible improvements to tenant communities as a result of Community Business Planning can also provide an incentive for tenant involvement. From her study of resident participation in the Porto Alegre participatory budget, Abers (1998b) describes the “demonstration effect” of PB as previously uninvolved residents became aware of the capital investments that neighbourhoods were receiving as a result of their participation (p. 56). “The confidence that people have that participating is meaningful to their everyday lives has a mobilizing effect” (Abers, 1998b, p. 63). Furthermore, TCHC can provide opportunities for democratic participation in community governance and create meaningful spaces for expression that do not require the commitment or profile of a three-year Tenant Representative term.

TPS Process Ownership and Control

Toronto Community Housing introduced the programs within the TPS as the framework for engaging tenants in community management, and they retain control over the parameters of its processes. To enable tenant participation within their communities, TCHC arranges for the provision of resources such as meeting space on TCHC property, the supply of materials and information, administrative

co-ordination, and staff to advise and facilitate. However, their influence extends beyond a supporting role. The corporation may have established local management to co-operate with tenants in developing community-based participatory infrastructure, but this is derived from a central template and is governed by corporate policies and standards; Community Business Planning in particular must conform to a budget and schedule dictated by the requirements of the TCHC Community Management Plan. One of the design properties of Empowered Participatory Governance is *centralized supervision and coordination*, the premise that local decision-making is not autonomous and independent but rather linked to a supervisory structure that can resolve problems in local groups, and that oversees distribution and diffusion of resources, information and learning (Fung & Wright, 2003b, p. 21). While the design of EPG entails the devolution of power, it is in the pragmatic form of *a coordinated decentralization* (Fung & Wright, 2003b, p. 21). Within TCHC it is professed that the intention is to transfer increasing governance power directly to tenant communities, but it is clear that TCHC retains proprietary control of the TPS and its operations. Gail Johnson explained, “it was always clear [to tenants] that the Tenant Participation System was by and large a creation of the organization, for the purposes of the organization” (Johnson, personal communication, July 25, 2008). HPO Penny Lamy further affirmed that “tenants and tenant reps know that the Tenant Participation System really is the creature of Toronto Community Housing, it’s not a creature of themselves. And so therefore they get to have input but they also feel that they ultimately don’t have real control” (Lamy,

personal communication, August 5, 2008). The TPS is not a static system but is continuing to develop, and through the current 2008 reorganization of tenant engagement it is undergoing reassessment by staff and tenants. Alina Chatterjee addressed the role for tenants in organizational change by explaining:

we recognize that we might have to figure out a better way to manage that system, but we want tenants to figure it out for us because it's their system. I mean we own it and will manage it, but the content needs to really come from them. (Chatterjee, personal communication, July 30, 2008)

The Participatory Budgeting Committee and Tenant Engagement Reference Committee are examples where tenants are the decision-makers on the evolving form and details of the process itself. These committees offer the opportunity for representative tenant groups to deliberate on changes in the operating structure of the TPS. What has been observed in the PB of Porto Alegre and might be happening through the TCHC Participatory Budgeting Committee, is that through experience the participants shift from a focus upon decision-making within the process to a more general consideration of the entire apparatus, including parameters and procedural rules such as the criteria for making budget allocations (Abers, 1998a, p. 528). However, tenants are unable to direct or enact all desired alterations of TCHC programs unilaterally as significant changes ultimately require approval by TCHC management and the Board of Directors.

Facilitating Tenant Participation

In their role as a convenor for meetings related to the TPS, TCHC staff often facilitates these gatherings in support of tenant participants. A general description of group facilitator responsibilities at meetings includes keeping a group focused on their tasks and goals, minimizing internal and external distractions, maintaining participant enthusiasm (McFadzean & Nelson, 1998, p. 7), and ensuring positive relationships between group members while managing conflict (McFadzean & Nelson, 1998, p. 9). A facilitator can potentially influence the meeting process, the meeting content, and the group relationship dynamics (McFadzean & Nelson, 1998, p. 9). Doyle (1996, p. x) makes the distinction between *content neutrality* and *process neutrality* for group facilitation - where the former requires that facilitators take no position on the subject issues, the latter requires no advocacy of any specific process. Doyle (1996) asserts that the facilitator's role can be content neutral but act as a process advocate (p. x). While tenant deliberations should be free of facilitator bias that would sway decision-making, the staff of TCHC must be process advocates in order to ensure that formal dialogue and deliberation procedures and ground rules are followed in practice, to provide the checks and balances against abuse of process by participants. Deliberation requires that participants are properly informed by organizers about the issues at hand, but allowed to engage in their own discourse free of manipulation.

A paradox of deliberation is that it is premised upon public inclusion in democratic decision-making, yet to stage effective deliberative dialogue requires

relatively small groups of participants to enable a manageable conversation. One major concern of deliberation facilitators, as reported by Mansbridge, Hartz-Karp, Amengual and Gastil (2006) in their study of operational deliberative norms, is to ensure a “free flow” of ideas through dialogue, which requires that all participants contribute to the discussion - suggesting that groups need to be both small in size and capable of articulating many perspectives and ideas. This does not preclude large deliberative forums, but requires that such events be divided into smaller parallel group dialogues, and this adds to the logistical considerations. A couple TCHC frontline staff might capably moderate an open information meeting of a few dozen building tenants, but for a deliberative dialogue of the same size that is divided into four discussion tables, a facilitator is needed for each group. Furthermore, to ensure adherence to a deliberative dialogue model skilled facilitators are required, with knowledge of participatory group practices and specific principles of deliberation, including techniques to help resolve group problems. This is more time and resource intensive. However, there are consultants and organizations capable of providing professional facilitation services for TCHC, although a more beneficial and cost-efficient long-term strategy might be to incorporate the appropriate specialized skills development into the training and occupational learning of frontline staff.

Beyond facilitating the mechanics of process, facilitators “can help groups understand the dynamics and values of group decision-making” (Doyle, 1996, p. xv). The values in question for group decision-making are *participatory values*

(Doyle, 1996, p. xiii), which are identified as: full participation, mutual learning, inclusive solutions, and shared responsibility (Kaner, Lind, Toldi, Fisk & Berger, 1996, p. 24). It is apparent that these participatory values are congruent with qualities previously identified with deliberative dialogue. The facilitator role is crucial to establishing and enforcing the norms and values of the process undertaken by the group. Fung and Wright (2003b) observe that because “most non-professionals lack the capacities to participate effectively in functionally specific and empowered groups” therefore some EPG experiments “not only consist of fora for honing and practicing deliberative-democratic skills, but also literally establish schools of democracy to develop participants’ political and technical capacities” (p. 29). As TCHC is seeking to both deepen and broaden tenant democratic participation in community-building, there is certainly a case for nurturing the principles and practice of deliberative dialogue within the TPS. The issue is to what degree deliberative dialogue can and should be integrated into Community Business Planning meetings, Allocation Day proceedings, Tenant Councils, tenant-based committees and other manifestations of the TPS. While some decision-making may only require a simple aggregation of votes, there are more complex issues that would be better addressed by tenants through a more formally deliberative process. The cultivation of deliberative dialogue practices within TCHC would also allow for an expansion of the scope and complexity of issues that could be brought into tenant consideration.

Deliberative Culture in TCHC

Some events within the TPS can be identified as deliberative practices, but many discussions and decision-making processes proceed through means that do not exhibit all the qualities of deliberative dialogue and therefore do not generate all the associated intrinsic benefits to participants and their communities. The Allocation Day event is an example of an opportunity intended for tenant delegates to deliberate on which projects should receive their votes, but it can also proceed through strategic bargaining where delegates make deals to trade support with other groups, effectively ‘swapping votes’ (as has been described in interviews with Tenant Representatives and TCHC staff). The degree to which particular group meetings engage in deliberation is determined by factors such as the time available for dialogue, the structure and active facilitation of the process, and the complexity of the issues under discussion, but also depends upon the inclinations and behaviours of participants. Abers (2003) suggests that in forms of EPG such as participatory budgeting, the lure of achieving concrete benefits draws participants out of self-interest, who may initially engage in strategic bargaining but develop more deliberative attributes over time.

I doubt very much that purely deliberative processes ever occur in participatory fora, except where issues are not particularly contentious. . . . Competitive participation, I would argue, initiates a learning process from which deliberation results, and which leads to continued learning as participants develop their capacity to argue and reason. (Abers, 2003, p. 206)

Mansbridge (2003) contends that personal awareness of one's own self-interest is crucial to deliberation, as a defense against succumbing to deliberative "group-think" or conforming to "a hegemonic definition of the common good" (p. 183). She departs from some deliberative democracy theorists in arguing that self-interested participants, seeking a deal with mutually beneficial results, can still deepen their understanding of others' needs and collective concerns and thereby engage in bona fide deliberation (Mansbridge, 2003, p. 182-183). In communities with greater bonds of social capital, members may already have a broader understanding of self-interest that encompasses general community benefits (or a notion of a 'public good') within one's own personal interests (Evans & Advokaat, 2001, p. 65). However it is not participant motives or initial intentions that distinguishes deliberation, but whether they engage in a dialogue that values equal participation, active listening, mutual respect, and consideration of self-perceptions and other perspectives. This raises another hurdle in fostering deliberative practices within the TPS, and that is one of cultural norms of communication. Beatriz Tabak made the point that in Porto Alegre, Brazil, deliberation is a constant part of the public culture of daily life, whereas here in Toronto we live in a "decision-making culture" concerned with the quickest means to achieve a result (Tabak, personal communication, August 5, 2008). Although tenants of TCHC come from many different cultures, some of which have stronger oral traditions or practices of public conversation, in Canadian society our habits of civic discussion are different from Latin America, from where both participatory budgeting and popular education originates. Tenants

will not all naturally gravitate towards dialogue and deliberation over more familiar modes of public speaking and debate, unless the rules and principles are made explicit and are encouraged, acquired and then reinforced through practice.

Enforcement of Ongoing Deliberative Practices

This paper has already noted the main distinctions between the priorities and orientation of co-governance forms such as PB, and one-time deliberative exercises. While TCHC tenants and staff seem to have generally accepted the TPS processes and continue to develop and refine its operations, it is not clear that dialogue and deliberation are consistently practiced in group discussions in building meetings, Tenant Council meetings or city-wide tenant forums and committees. While TCHC may be developing a *participatory* culture within the organization and in tenant communities, there is little evidence of a truly *deliberative* culture. When asked, some TCHC management staff expressed interest and awareness of deliberative models of participation and supported the introduction of such opportunities:

Deliberative forums will help us, and I think help tenants as well, have a commonality of understanding over what a particular issue is. And also from an ethno-racial diversity perspective, it would create I think a more inclusive process, so that people learn from each other about cultures, instead of making stereotypical assumptions and operating from that premise. (Alina Chatterjee, personal communication, July 30, 2008)

There is also a recognition that deliberative groups are a promising method for tenants to become active citizens in their communities by considering issues that may extend beyond the scope of TCHC budgetary and property interests, even if the outcomes are not directly connected to political decision-makers. “If you can support these deliberative groups, that can make recommendations, there is a power behind that. . . . We want to see where that can take us” (Rajesh Kanhai, personal communication, July 24, 2008).

Thematic Deliberative Groups

One possibility for opening new opportunities for TCHC tenants to participate in deliberative dialogue is through thematic or issue-based groups. There seems to be an organizational inclination to form committees and working groups as the participatory mechanism for tenants to address portfolio-wide issues and consider corporate programs and responsibilities. The Tenant Engagement Reference Committee, a case in point, was convened for tenant delegates to consider options for development of the TPS following TCHC reorganization, and presented their proposal at a Tenant Forum in October 2008. Their new framework involves issue-based committees as one avenue for tenants to participate in larger city-wide concerns and topics of relevance for TCHC tenants. While there are some advantages to this format as a means to convene interested tenant leaders and create an efficient action-oriented body, it does not explicitly invite wider participation, nor prioritize dialogical and deliberative values.

An alternative model for consideration are *thematic plenaries* such as those developed in Porto Alegre as an addition to the participatory budgeting process, described by Santos (1998) as a “means of expanding both the matters for discussion and participatory decision making and the social composition of the participants, thereby improving the quality and complexity of the participation” (p. 480). Five different themed plenaries were created so that any municipal citizens can attend and vote, regardless of their geographic area of residence, in consideration of general municipal issues: transportation, health and social assistance, education, economic development, and city organization (Abers, 1998b, p. 49; Santos, 1998, p. 479-480). This innovation to PB provided deliberative forums for residents with a greater interest in addressing overarching municipal concerns, particularly middle-class citizens whose neighbourhoods were not in need of the basic infrastructure that motivated members of poor areas to participate in local PB assemblies and regional plenaries (Santos, 1998). Such a format differs from a committee in that it is open to greater participation, and less likely to appear ensconced in institutional bureaucracy. The larger size of a plenary does raise concerns about the likelihood of effective dialogue. This can be addressed through design of a process that incorporates both an open forum and smaller group dialogues, and there are existing models in this fashion, such as the 21st Century Town Meeting concept devised by America Speaks (Lukensmeyer & Brigham, 2005). TCHC could organize deliberative forums on prevalent issues of concern to tenants city-wide, such as community safety for example. Such events could be linked to committee activities, providing an opportunity for tenants with

an ongoing commitment to the issues to involve a larger portion of the tenant population in the iterative process of identifying the problems, considering options and prioritizing action.

Another possibility is the establishment of *study circles* to explore a particular issue in depth, a model already introduced into TCHC practice. In 2007 TCHC started anti-racism study circles as pilot programs in three CHUs, for staff and tenant leaders to attend together. These discussion groups met repeatedly over the course of the year to share their experiences and thoughts on the topic of racism, and eventually develop workplans for the TCHC Anti-Racism program (TCHC, 2007b). Study circles are a method of small group meetings, ideally composed of participants from diverse backgrounds and experiences, that employ dialogue and then deliberation with the aid of a facilitator and informational discussion materials (McCoy & Scully, 2002). Separate study circles can operate simultaneously across a community (or portfolio-wide for that matter), and convene together at certain points to share their progress. This concept obviously requires a greater time commitment than a single-day deliberative forum, but perhaps no more than an ongoing committee. Through the aforementioned examples it is clear that there are deliberative models that offer an alternative to traditional group decision-making structures, and although there is a certain resource cost to introduce them into TCHC tenant communities, there are many potential benefits.

Opportunities for Deliberation

Deliberation has a role in the development of democratic local governance and tenant engagement in TCHC communities. Toronto Community Housing and tenant leaders can choose to convert some of the TPS decision-making practices into more genuinely deliberative forms, or create new deliberative opportunities. The recent proposal of the Tenant Engagement Reference Committee for tenants to establish their own Neighbourhood Councils in addition to Operating Unit Councils (which supplant CHU Tenant Councils) within the new geographic units of the portfolio, would create additional layers of representation within the governance model of the TPS, and offer new possibilities for engaging tenants. It is important to consider which tasks and purposes are best suited for deliberation, and which functions are more effectively and efficiently performed through more traditional democratic methods. If the subject is more complex or contentious, or requires exploration to reach a deeper understanding and find innovative solutions, then a dialogical deliberation may be advantageous. Group discussions that concern value-based decisions, or that potentially affect many diverse communities with differing perspectives, are also suitable for a deliberative framework. The final section will explore the potential for larger community and municipal networks built upon tenant civic engagement, and the inherent possibilities in deliberative democracy for generating new pathways for tenants and other citizens to effect political and social change.

Section Five: Future Possibilities for Deliberative Democracy

Deliberation and Social Movements

It is not necessary that citizens forgo either activism or deliberation in pursuit of change, for both options can be vehicles for moving ideas and concerns forward, and can be employed as mutually complementary and reinforcing strategies. Young (2003) explores counter-arguments from both perspectives to interrogate the relative merits of deliberation versus activism. She concludes that individuals and organizations seeking to undermine injustice and promote justice need *both* to engage in discussion with others to persuade them that there are injustices which ought to be remedied, and to protest and engage in direct action. . . . The best democratic theory and practice will affirm them both while recognizing the tension between them. (Young, 2003, p. 119)

Deliberation can be understood “as one phase in a cycle of social change” that includes social movements (Levine & Nierras, 2007, p. 11), rather than as the sole and paramount activity of a deliberative democracy. Ultimately, through both activism and the practice of deliberative politics, the achievement of incrementally greater political and social equality could render institutions of power more responsive and accountable to public deliberations. Hartz-Karp (2007, p. 4) suggests that the roles of government and local activist groups must be integrated if we are to realize a new world view that accommodates deliberative democracy rather than hierarchical and technocratic government

control. Within this framework, it would be understood that “the role of activist lobby groups is to provide ‘expert’ knowledge to those deliberating rather than to participate as deliberators” (Hartz-Karp, p. 4). In support of a deliberation exercise, opposing interest groups, experts and activists might be given equal opportunity to present their viewpoint to deliberators so that different perspectives inform the dialogue and a particular informational bias is avoided (Levine & Nierras, 2007, p. 3). For deliberations in TCHC communities, locally active advocates and activist groups from outside the tenant population, including non-governmental organizations, could be brought into the process by facilitators to contribute to informational materials, or as allies in campaigning for government support, and for translating deliberative outcomes into action.

The possibility of deliberative democracy presents the opportunity for configuring new relationships between social movement activism and governments. Fung and Wright (2003a) contend that for Empowered Participatory Governance to be effective in ensuring democratic equality, requires the presence of *countervailing power*. They employ this term to describe “mechanisms that reduce, and perhaps even neutralize, the power-advantages of ordinarily powerful actors” (Fung & Wright, 2003a, p. 260). Their argument centres upon concern for threats to EPG from both powerful entrenched interests seeking to subvert collaborative governance for their advantage, and from adversarial social movement organizations opposed to all governance institutions

(Fung & Wright, 2003a, pp. 263-264). Providing a critical assessment of possible scenarios, Fung and Wright (2003a) suggest that:

the shift from top-down adversarial governance to collaborative governance, where there is no countervailing power or capacity, can amount in practice to a state-shrinking, deregulatory maneuver in which oppositional forces are co-opted and neutralized and the collaborative participation become mere window dressing. (2003a, p. 265)

Where there is a participatory-collaborative form of governance such as EPG, then a collaborative form of countervailing power is required - such as local agencies that might transition from an adversarial role and oppositional stance to seeking engagement, inclusion and representation (Fung & Wright, 2003a).

Santos (1998) reports that in Porto Alegre, “it is today generally recognized that the PB changed the political culture of community organizations, from a culture of protest and confrontation to a culture of conflict and negotiation” (p. 482). In the context under examination here, rather than seeking to discredit the Tenant Participation System and TCHC efforts to open up participatory community governance, sources of countervailing power from within and without tenant communities might seek a partnership with TCHC or some standing in their community-building processes to provide critical insight and oversight of community development.

Deliberation and Community Partnerships

While a partnership might ideally involve the redistribution of decision-making power between all participating groups, according to Kernaghan (1993) such is not necessarily the norm, and partnership is better described as “a relationship involving *the sharing of power, work, support and/or information* with others for the achievement of joint goals and/or mutual benefits” (p. 61). Partnerships with other organizations and groups play a significant role in the TCHC community-building vision, as made apparent in the organizational literature that associates partnerships with the outcome of creating healthy communities (TCHC, 2006b, p. 2). Alina Chatterjee explained that TCHC has recently created a Manager of Partnerships and Community Investment position, and will be developing a partnership framework to consider questions such as “what kinds of organizations need to be institutional partners” and “what is our role in supporting the development of local partnerships, what does that look like? What does partnership mean?” (Chatterjee, personal communication, July 30, 2008). The 2008 Community Management Plan touts community partnership development as a “key strategy to facilitate tenants’ access to programs and services as well as their integration into neighbourhoods” (TCHC, 2007b, p. 56). Lowndes and Sullivan (2004) warn that local partnerships might incorporate community representatives (such as tenant leaders) into their formal network at the expense of wider direct public participation. Their strategic solution is for public participation to be a part of the design of local partnerships, in which a variety of mechanisms are developed for involving citizens in governance (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2004).

Deliberation can provide an approach for ensuring the accessibility and accountability of partnership governance to community residents. Conversely, partnerships can offer an opportunity for the further development of deliberative dialogue within TCHC, and in their neighbourhoods at large. Asked about the prospect of TCHC supporting neighbourhood deliberative forums, Rajesh Kanhai responded: “I don’t think we have the capacity to run these things on our own, if we wanted it to expand beyond just our tenants” (Kanhai, personal communication, July 24, 2008). However, he asserted that “with partners and other people with vested interests, we would definitely be able to play a role in making that happen” (Kanhai, personal communication, July 24, 2008). Community partners can contribute by providing logistical support for deliberative dialogue, applying their expertise on particular issues to inform participants, or leveraging their relationships with particular sub-populations to engage new participants. Some of the tenants and staff interviewed for this paper expressed concern about TCHC over-extending beyond its core responsibility as a housing provider, and partnerships offer a means for the organization to secure their influence in addressing larger issues without the necessity of assuming ‘ownership’ and sole responsibility. In fact, partnerships may be an opportunity to realize community governance that extends the network beyond TCHC properties and tenants, involving all stakeholders in dialogue and decision-making on matters of local and regional importance.

Neighbourhood Revitalization

Toronto Community Housing is deeply invested in the revitalization of certain neighbourhoods in which TCHC properties are the predominant residential buildings, as a strategy to address their deteriorating infrastructure and to improve community living conditions. They have undertaken the ambitious projects of rebuilding Don Mount Court, Regent Park and Lawrence Heights neighbourhoods, demolishing the TCHC properties in order to intensify the communities by constructing and integrating TCHC and private market housing. As the Community Management Plan describes it, “developing mixed-communities through the large-scale revitalization of existing social housing is a strategy that not only replaces aging housing, but also creates healthier, viable neighborhoods through investment in social and community infrastructure as well as mixed income housing” (TCHC, 2007b, p. 29). One motive of redevelopment is to break down the stigma of low-income social housing that has been embedded into neighbourhoods through geographic, architectural, economic and social segregation. Evelyn Murialdo remarked on the organizational concern for removing such divisions, and nurturing connections between TCHC tenants and their neighbours.

The TCHC buildings, even if they are 400 units, are not a community unto themselves, they are part of broader communities and bigger neighbourhoods. Since we began thinking that way, many subliminal and covert barriers that locked people of modest incomes together, with an inability to break those, begins to disappear, because they are in common

endeavours with the local community. . . . And that you see also accentuated by the revitalization of Regent Park, now Lawrence Heights, and potentially Alexandra Park, where the idea is to mix communities. (Murialdo, personal communication, August 7, 2008).

Through the redevelopment of TCHC propertied areas into neighbourhoods with a wider spectrum of housing types and family incomes, one intended impact of new demographics is to increase the community assets, including the formation of *linking* social capital networks between TCHC tenants and other residents.¹¹

Deliberative dialogue offers a means for individuals in diverse mixed communities to develop awareness of their neighbours and build social trust, finding common ground as the basis for setting goals and making plans as an active community. While structures such as neighbourhood associations allow for the formal representation of building populations in a local political body, they are not intended or configured to be sites of inclusive community conversations. As discussed earlier, thematic deliberative groups or local deliberative forums could be established to extend participatory governance beyond the TPS into entire neighbourhoods, through the collaboration of community partners including TCHC. While the revitalization of neighbourhoods to create new mixed communities offers the prospect of a clean slate for introducing deliberative approaches to governance and decision-making, deliberative governance could

¹¹ *Linking social capital* describes the connections in social networks between those with differentiated power or resources, specifically recognizing relationships across hierarchical social-political-economic divides (Halpern, 2005, p. 25).

also evolve within existing neighbourhood dynamics given the proper conditions and support from government institutions, residents and other stakeholders.

Tenant Participation as a Model for Citizen Participation

To address the TCHC organizational interest in connecting tenants with their surrounding neighbourhoods and reducing the segregation and stigmatization of social housing, deliberative democracy can provide a framework for conceiving a more integrated network of community governance, where tenants have a place at the table with all other stakeholders. Through the development of democratic networks that extend beyond TCHC properties, tenants can contribute their experiences, energy and voices to dialogues in the wider communities and the city as a whole. By taking up the municipal goal of strong healthy communities through a city-building agenda that prioritizes civic engagement, TCHC can contribute to the awareness and interest for increasing citizen participation in governance and engagement with municipal government. As the *Strong Neighbourhoods Report* indicates, it is recognized by the municipal government that “neighbourhoods are strengthened when their residents work together to achieve common goals and aspirations, and develop a common vision” (City of Toronto & United Way of Greater Toronto, 2005, p. 14). However, in spite of these sentiments a concerted effort to facilitate municipal civic engagement on the part of politicians and government bureaucracy is less apparent. A 2005 report for the City of Toronto’s Governing Toronto Advisory Panel found that although the City “has a long-standing interest in civic

engagement issues and strong in-house capacity to conduct civic engagement work,” current civic engagement opportunities lacked central coordination, performance measures or even a formal strategy (Robinson, 2005, p. 7). As Friedman (2006) points out, “there is too little incentive to create the conditions for effective civic engagement by those with the most resources and natural opportunities to do so,” including governments and politicians (p. 4). Through the incubation and growth of deliberative processes in groups and organizations embedded in local communities, the demonstrable benefits and outcomes of the approach can be highlighted and championed, encouraging uptake of deliberative principles and practices into the municipal governance sphere with the support of stakeholders and the participating public. The Tenant Participation System might provide a feasible model and impetus for eventually scaling deliberative democracy up to higher levels of organization within the City of Toronto.

A case in point is the tenant impact upon the *Listening to Toronto* consultations for the 2004 and 2005 City of Toronto municipal budgets, a short-lived experiment in non-binding participatory budgeting forums modeled on the 21st Century Town Meeting format (Lerner & Van Wagner, 2006; Robinson, 2005). Because TCHC tenants had been practicing and learning a form of PB in their CHUs for a few years prior to the *Listening to Toronto* exercises, they had not only acquired a familiarity with the process and the necessary civic skills, but many had a ready interest and enthusiasm for municipal participatory budgeting. Evelyn Murialdo described how the organizers of the session called TCHC staff

to explain that 400 or 500 tenants had registered to attend the event and their number had to be reduced so that they were not a disproportionate presence among the 2000 total participants (Murialdo, personal communication, August 7, 2008). There is an evident tenant appetite for seeking out opportunities for greater political participation, and in public forums such as Listening to Toronto their experience and skills as veterans of PB ensure they can actively contribute to the outcome, voicing their perspectives and demonstrating their proficiency to other participants from beyond TCHC communities. More opportunities for tenants to participate in governance dialogues and decisions with other citizens will benefit TCHC aspirations for integrating tenants with their neighbourhoods and promoting inclusion of marginalized individuals into civil society, while furthering the City of Toronto aim of increasing resident participation in their communities.

Conclusions

Through this exploration of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation Tenant Participation System, several discernable overarching themes have served to link together the respective discourses in non-profit housing, community development, and deliberative democracy fields of practice. *Relationships* and *communication* are key factors in the success of collaborations and partnerships of individuals and communities involved in TCHC governance. Genuine *dialogues* can build trust between all stakeholders in community-building, provide the means to find common ground for decision-making, confront and address conflicts, and enhance a sense of community among tenants across existing social networks. This is the basis for improved cooperation between TCHC staff and tenants, and integral to a professional conceptualization of tenants as citizens rather than consumers or recipients. Thus tenants can be active participants, and become collectively engaged through their communities. *Empowerment* is prominent in the organizational language and in theoretical literature, and it is important to acknowledge the impact of shifting power relations between tenants and TCHC. While the organization retains control over the parameters of tenant decision-making in the TPS, the increase in tenant agency and active participation in TCHC governance can have the effect of enlarging the scope of tenant involvement in civil society. Mutual sharing experiences that catalyze *learning* and *change* processes at individual, community and institutional scales are a fundamental intention of deliberative democracy. In community development and deliberation methodology, providing opportunities for empowerment is important

but not necessarily sufficient for equality of political participation. Change agents must also facilitate the *inclusion* of all stakeholders, through invitation into the process, the removal of barriers, and maintaining systems of support. The present and future roles of TCHC in community management practices as a facilitator, coordinator and leader have been outlined to highlight the importance of organizational guidance in shaping the nature of tenant engagement, and thus their potential influence in the promotion and support of deliberative dialogue for tenant participation processes. Deliberation is not the sole means to effect tenant empowerment, but in practice such participation can be an important tactic for social change in conjunction with activism and political networking.

It has been a purpose of this paper to illustrate the fledgling change in TCHC organization, culture and practice that suggests a possible transition in strategies of tenant engagement from representative leadership development towards the inclusion of all interested tenants in dialogical and deliberative practices. Tenants of TCHC who are engaged in the TPS have the opportunity to develop civic skills, and through an increased sense of efficacy and awareness become more engaged in local, regional and national issues. They can and have become influential figures and role models in their neighbourhood, involved in neighbourhood associations, community initiatives and local movements, countering the stigma of social housing residents and low-income communities. However, there must be alternative options for contributing to TCHC community management decisions aside from election to the Tenant Representative position.

If there were wider opportunities for tenant participation in forums of deliberative dialogue, the potential benefits to individuals, their communities, the TCHC, and the larger civic sphere are considerable. From the organizational perspective, greater tenant inclusion and engagement in TCHC community management can increase corporate accountability to tenants, improve communications and cooperation within tenant communities and between tenants and TCHC staff, and advance goals and values of the TCHC mandate such as the achievement of healthy, safe, resilient, equitable and inclusive communities.

The development of community self-governance is an unfinished project of TCHC. This paper is not a technical blueprint for the implementation of successful and sustainable deliberative dialogue practices in TCHC communities. Rather, it develops the rationale for such change as a stage in the long-term evolution of the Tenant Participation System, and suggests that now is the opportune time for TCHC to nurture a more deliberative culture and make a concerted effort to widen tenant community dialogues through processes such as deliberative forums and study circles. Judging from personal contact with the staff at TCHC, it seems clear that the organization has the knowledge base to determine their own best approach for integrating such innovations. Through support for the development of individual and community capacities, and inclusion of residents in participatory governance processes, there is great potential for the further evolution of TCHC communities towards a future where tenants might jointly govern as equal stakeholders and fellow citizens.

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