REGULATING ACTIVISM
AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
IN OTTAWA'S MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT

'Participation' is increasingly celebrated as a 'better way' for marginalized groups to influence political policy. However, critics caution that participatory methods and assumptions can obscure and reinforce dominant power structures which perpetuate oppression. This mixed discourse of celebration and skepticism has inspired authors to advocate for the 'unpacking' of participation within specific contexts. Using Dorothy Smith's Institutional Ethnography, this research explicates the way in which the 'public participation' of Ottawa's Poverty Issues Advisory Committee (PIAC) is coordinated by social relations. While engaging in anti-poverty activism within City structures, PIAC members negotiate and overcome significant barriers, yet their participation is simultaneously arranged, contained and sometimes bypassed; there is a 'disjuncture' between their lived experiences, and how these are manifested within organizational processes. This inquiry is undertaken with and for participation activists in the hope that their practice will be informed by exploring how larger democratic and economic structures regulate their activism.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VI
LIST OF APPENDICES	IX
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	X
 1: INTRODUCTION	 1
CONTEXT	4
OTTAWA’S MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT	7
PARTICIPATION IN OTTAWA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES	9
PARTICIPATORY DISCOURSE	11
THE IRONY OF PARTICIPATION	14
 2: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH.....	 17
THE EVERYDAY WORLD AS PROBLEMATIC.....	17
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	28
INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY	30
DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH.....	37
SAMPLING/SELECTION PROCEDURE	38
DATA COLLECTION: SOURCES AND METHODS.....	39
RESEARCH INSTRUMENT	41
DATA ANALYSIS	41

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VALIDITY/RELIABILITY	46
3: PARTICIPATION IN CONTEXT: A RISING WAVE OF INTEREST	48
PARTICIPATION: DEVELOPMENT ORTHODOXY.....	48
PARTICIPATION AND GOVERNANCE	51
THE CONTEXTS OF GOVERNANCE	54
CRITICAL UNCERTAINTY	56
‘UNPACKING’ PARTICIPATION	58
4: PARTICIPATORY IDEALS AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES.....	61
EMPOWERMENT	61
PARTICIPATORY METHODS	65
MUTUAL LEARNING.....	69
CHALLENGES AND DEBATES.....	73
PARTICIPATION: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE	81
5: A SENSE OF DISJUNCTURE.....	93
AUTHORING ACTIVISM: “I KNOW HOW TO GET AROUND THAT KIND OF NONSENSE”	93
AN EMERGING PROBLEMATIC.....	97
6: ARRANGING PARTICIPATION: CITY WORK PROCESSES.....	104
AGENDA-SETTING: DEFINING ‘POVERTY ISSUES’	104
ORIENTING: TERMS OF REFERENCE	117
MANDATING: MANAGING POVERTY	130
7: CONTAINING PARTICIPATION: “GETTING IT RIGHT”.....	143
ENFORCING PRODUCTIVE PARTICIPATION: “IMPROVING AND STREAMLINING”	143
PERFECT PARTICIPATION: “EXACTLY AS IT WAS SUPPOSED TO”	159

TABLE OF CONTENTS

8: BYPASSING PARTICIPATION: COUNCIL ‘RECESS’	170
DIFFERENT RULES: CORPORATE OWNERSHIP	172
A BIFURCATED CONSCIOUSNESS: “WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?”	185
9: CONCLUSION: REGULATING ACTIVISM.....	191
POVERTY ACTIVISTS: “BLATHERING AWAY ABOUT NONSENSE”	191
REGULATING ACTIVISM: SPACES FOR DISSENT	196
BIBLIOGRAPHY	201
APPENDICES	207
APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION	208
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	210

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CHC:	Community Health Centre
HRSSC:	Health, Recreation and Social Services Committee
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
OAP:	Ottawa Action On Poverty / Action – Pauvreté Ottawa
OBCA:	Ontario Business Corporations Act
OCHC:	Ottawa Community Housing Corporation
PA:	Poverty Assessment
PAR:	Participatory Action Research
PIAC:	Poverty Issues Advisory Committee
PM&E:	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
PPA:	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PPC:	Public Participation Coordinator
PPP:	Public Participation Policy
PRA:	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RRA:	Rapid Rural Appraisal
SAP:	Structural Adjustment Program
TFOP:	Task Force On Poverty
UPR:	Universal Program Review

1: INTRODUCTION

On September 8th, 2003, elected Councillors approved the new *Public Participation Policy* for the City of Ottawa. After twelve municipalities were amalgamated in 2001 to become the new City of Ottawa, the City developed an approach to citizen engagement so as to co-ordinate the implementation of ‘best practices’ for facilitating the involvement of citizens in decision-making. Improved public participation, reads the *Policy*, “enhances interaction with the community, strengthens groups and networks and is an important component of promoting the well being of the community” (City of Ottawa, 2003b, p. 2). Developed with the input of residents and stakeholders in the City, the *Public Participation Policy* “makes a commitment to citizens that administrative and policy processes are open and accessible, respectful of the public’s right to be involved, and are responsive to the public’s need for information” (City of Ottawa, 2003b, p. 2).

As they engage in a process of ‘public participation’, Ottawa citizens and City employees perform activities – such as speaking, writing, planning, and facilitating - in an attempt to put their understanding of ‘participation’ into practice. These activities, however, do not take place in a contextual vacuum; instead they are affected by the many interpersonal, social, political, and institutional realities in which they occur. Though these activities are enacted in a particular setting, they are shaped by, and directed towards, the practices of individuals in other settings (Smith, 1987). For example, a

woman who participates in a public consultation session may voice concern about the proposed elimination of a recreation subsidy program. Her comment may be recorded by a City staff member, and categorized and summarized in a report that is read by various City staff members and a Standing Committee which is attempting to choose between hundreds of 'cuts' to produce a 'balanced budget' in the wake of provincial devolution of funding burdens and neo-liberal notions of 'efficiency'. These inter-setting connections and their place within dominant power structures are often not clearly visible to participants. Yet they can produce tensions for individuals who sense a discrepancy between the lived experience of their activities and the way in which these activities become transformed or organized by the practices of external others (Smith, 1987, p. 7).

This research was undertaken in an attempt to explicate (to unfold or lay out) the way in which activists' 'public participation' in Ottawa's municipal government is socially organized. Here, the term 'activist' is used to refer to any individual who chooses to participate in municipal political contexts such as consultation sessions, Standing Committee and Advisory Committee meetings, and community group meetings and activities. This application of 'activist' is broader than typical uses of the term that refer to a 'militant reformer'¹ and which denote full-time devotion to controversial and often 'grand' social and environmental issues through actions that are often inflammatory or radical. For many people, the common meaning of 'activist' may have negative

¹ Princeton University. (1997). 'Wordnet 1.6' in *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved March 8th, 2004, from <http://dictionary.reference.com/>

associations that do not fit with their own self-concept or with their notions of 'appropriate' citizenship (Jones, Haenfler, & Johnson, with Klocke, 2001); they may view 'activists' as villainized 'others' and may be, in turn, dissuaded from public activities that challenge dominant power structures. By using the term to describe regular and 'acceptable' participation activities, we can reclaim the meaning of 'activism' and emphasize the agency and the constructive power that can be exercised by those who choose to actively participate in government processes.

There are numerous community activists involved in various municipal-level public participation activities in Ottawa. This research began with a very broad focus, involving conversations with several different individuals who are currently, or had been previously, involved in a wide range of activities. Participants discussed membership in task forces, committees, and working groups as well as involvement in rallies, demonstrations, and delegations to Council and Standing Committee meetings. Activists shared a wide range of experiences and displayed significant participatory expertise and insight into their interesting encounters. In the end, however, the story that has emerged through this project specifically explores the experiences of anti-poverty activists who are currently members of the City of Ottawa's Poverty Issues Advisory Committee (PIAC). The PIAC's existence can be attributed to the persistent advocacy of Ottawa-area activists, and has emerged as one of the City's most active and vibrant Citizen Advisory Committees.

Through focusing on PIAC members' everyday participation activities, we can 'map' and make visible the inter-setting connections that these activists, and others, may experience but not necessarily perceive. This research does not aim to propose a 'solution' or theorize a 'better' way of engaging in public participation; instead, it draws on the expertise of experienced participants in order to offer additional insight to all of us who wish to better understand our experiences of political agency.

CONTEXT

The 2001 amalgamation of 11 urban and rural municipalities (previously in a 'regional government' structure) into one municipal government body helped to open, shift, or maintain a number of spaces for citizen participation in government. In 1997, prior to amalgamation, the joint efforts of many local community organizations and social service providers resulted in a series of 'People's Hearings' that were held in five locations in Ottawa. As a result of the Hearings, a committee of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton established a Task Force on Poverty (TFOP), consisting of both elected representatives from 'communities of the poor' with appointed delegates of the Region (Reimer, 2003). The Task Force issued two major reports, and established an ongoing 'Interim Committee of the Task Force on Poverty' (originally, the 'Monitoring Committee') to ensure the implementation of TFOP recommendations. The Interim Committee issued an evaluation report in 2000, which addressed the institutional structures needed to implement Task Force recommendations, including the establishment of a standing Advisory Committee on Poverty within the government

structure of the City, and the creation of a Public Participation Coordinator (PPC) Position. The PPC's mandate would be to ensure greater participation by low-income residents in the decision-making processes of their city (Reimer, 2003). Acting swiftly, the Regional government provided funds for the PPC position, and a coordinator was hired and placed under the joint supervision of two local Community Health Centres (CHCs).

With amalgamation, the future of the recommended Advisory Committee on Poverty became unclear (Reimer, 2003). In some respects, there was a sense that the lack of clarity came from within the Interim Committee of the TFOP itself. Partially due to the efforts of the PPC, the makeup and structure of the Committee was changing from one in which agency representatives predominated, to one in which people with low-income were more numerous and, by September of 2001, had full decision-making power. Agency representatives remained as non-voting participants on the Committee, which was renamed the 'Ottawa Action on Poverty / Action – Pauvreté Ottawa' (OAP) (Reimer, 2003).

In November 2001, the new City of Ottawa followed through on the second major recommendation of the TFOP with the creation of the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee. The structure of the PIAC differed from the original vision of the TFOP, which had envisioned that representatives of 'cluster groups' would make up the membership of the Advisory Committee. In the original conception of the PIAC, the

‘cluster groups’ were to consist of geographically-determined representatives of people with low-income who would be mobilized and supported by Community Developers located at each of 13 Ottawa-area CHCs, along with other community organizations. In this vision, the PPC would have aimed to facilitate linking between the Advisory Committee, and the cluster groups it represented. However, in the actual formation of the PIAC, membership was declared by the City to be open to all residents, consistent with the membership of all other City Advisory Committees (Reimer, 2003). *The Interim Evaluation Report* on the PPC project describes how this discrepancy motivated the OAP to remain in existence beyond its original function of ensuring the formation of the PIAC; there seemed a need now to represent the ‘cluster groups’, called ‘Community Action Groups’. Further, the *Report* describes that tensions developed between the various groups (OAP, CHCs, PPC, PIAC) who had to redefine their expectations and relationships of accountability with respect to one another (Reimer, 2003). Currently, the PPC plays a number of roles including support, information dissemination and communication, accessing resources, advocacy, mobilizing, and networking. Of these roles, mobilization of Community Action Groups is seen as a key achievement (Reimer, 2003, p. 18). These Action Groups, in various stages of formation and activity, now exist in several locations, and are engaged in a number of issues, throughout the city. One such group, the Somerset West Action Network (SWAN) with its associated low-income newsletter, *Poverty Matters*, is particularly vibrant and self-sufficient; participants were emphatic that SWAN would survive even without the continued support of the PPC (Reimer, 2003, p. 18).

OTTAWA'S MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

As a result of amalgamation, the new City of Ottawa is responsible for providing services to a population of about 800,000, and is now among Canada's most geographically extensive and populous urban areas (City of Ottawa, 2004). Ottawa City Council is comprised of 1 elected mayor and 21 elected Councillors, each representing one of the City's 21 wards. Councillors are elected for three-year terms, and are accountable for the provision of the City's wide range of services whose administration is structured in six major areas: Corporate Services, Planning and Development, Emergency and Protective Services, Human Resources, People Services, and Transportation, Utilities and Public Works. To better address the multi-faceted nature of municipal service provision, Councillors are each members of a number of Standing Committees that examine issues in particular sectors (e.g. Health, Recreation, and Social Services; Planning and Environment; and Emergency and Protective Services). After deliberation, and hearing citizen or Advisory Committee presentations on various issues, the Standing Committees then make recommendations to Council. All Council and Standing Committee meetings are open to the public, and Council meetings are televised and can be viewed online. Council, Standing Committee, and Advisory Committee agendas and minutes are prepared by City staff members, and are also available for viewing on-line.

Within the City of Ottawa's governance structure, are located 15 Citizen Advisory Committees comprised of volunteers who advise the Standing Committees. Each

Advisory Committee is comprised of between 9 and 15 (voting and non-voting) positions, and makes recommendations to Council Committees with respect to various topics (such as Accessibility, Arts, Heritage and Culture, Seniors, and Equity and Diversity). Membership requirements for Advisory Committees are the following: 18 years of age (with the exception of the Youth Advisory Committee, or 'Youth Cabinet') and residence in Ottawa. In addition, the City of Ottawa states that Advisory Committee members will 'as much as possible, reflect Ottawa's diversity and demographics in such areas as gender, official language, geographic representation, race and ability' (2004). Advisory committee members serve for one, two, or three-year terms, meet once per month, and have access to limited reimbursement for costs associated with participation – such as child care, parking, bus fare, and mileage – through the City's *Participation Expense Policy*. In addition to the PIAC, the PPC, CHCs, and Community Action Groups, there are countless other organizations, community groups, and individuals who interact with various aspects of the City government structure in an attempt to address the challenges faced by Ottawa citizens who are marginalized, and/or have very little income.

With the creation of an amalgamated City in 2001, came the need to explore and plan for the implementation of a new vision for Ottawa's government. Ottawa's first City Council spearheaded the development of *Ottawa 20/20*, a legal *Official Plan* document that seeks to lay out objectives for managing growth over the next 20 years. In the spring of 2002, the City conducted a series of public consultations which were designed to establish guiding principles which would guide Ottawa's growth into the 21st

century. The seven principles that resulted from these *Charting a Course* consultations have “become the backbone of the *Ottawa 20/20* initiative” and also aim to “guide the municipality’s day to day decision-making”:

1. A Caring and Inclusive City
2. A Creative City Rich in Heritage, Unique in Identity
3. A Green and Environmentally-Sensitive City
4. A City of Distinct, Liveable Communities
5. An Innovative City Where Prosperity is Shared Among All
6. A Responsible and Responsive City
7. A Healthy and Active City (City of Ottawa, 2004)

Numerous other stages and types of public consultation activities – involving citizens, community organizations, and businesses – as well as input from those who administer and deliver City services, took place throughout the course of the *Official Plan*’s development. After many revisions and despite some opposition from a land development interest group, the whole process culminated with the outgoing City Council’s official adoption of the completed *Official Plan* in May 2003.

PARTICIPATION IN OTTAWA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Many of the *Official Plan*’s Guiding Principles, along with their accompanying objectives, refer directly or indirectly to complex aspects of participation. Throughout descriptions of these principles, a number of concepts are emphasized:

- Citizen engagement and barrier-free access to full participation,
- A sense of community ‘belonging’ that includes diverse groups and seniors,
- The sharing of economic prosperity and universal access to services that increase employment and reduce poverty,

- Collaboration and multi-sector partnerships amongst institutions and organizations, and
- Public accountability and responsibility (City of Ottawa, 2004).

It is within context of these guiding principles that the outgoing City Councillors (who, in most cases, were subsequently re-elected by their constituents) supported a general commitment to ‘participation’ through approval of the City’s new *Public Participation Policy*. As well, the City of Ottawa has implemented more specific attempts to engage citizens in parts of the policy-making process. For example, during the first term of the amalgamated City Council, the new ‘Contribution Rebate Program’ was designed to encourage “more citizens to participate in [elections] by supporting [their] candidate of choice” (City of Ottawa, 2004).

A second specific application of the broad-based participatory statements of both the City’s *Official Plan* and its *Public Participation Policy* was its 2004 *Budget Process*. City staff persons designed a number of documents to assist City Councillors and community members to undertake this process. The *Budget Guidelines Report* outlined the City’s budget pressures and depicted taxation and spending scenarios. The *Universal Program Review (UPR)* provided an inventory of every City program and service, and the *UPR Opportunity Log* presented a collection of suggestions for the savings or revenue-generating potential associated with each. An initial round of public consultations asked residents to voice their budget priorities to their Councillor, and provide feedback on the spending scenarios put forth by staff. Draft operating and draft

capital budgets were then tabled by City Council, along with a staff report “summarizing the public’s feedback on budget priorities” (City of Ottawa, 2003a). A second round of consultations, and review by Standing Committees along with presentations by public delegations, occurred prior to Council’s deliberation, amendment, and approval of the final *2004 Budget*.

The City’s *2004 Budget* process was tumultuous and tiring for both residents of Ottawa and City Councillors; proposed cuts sparked a significant outcry from Ottawa’s arts, culture, and social services communities, resulting in a number of rallies, and hundreds of public delegations lining up to speak at the various Advisory Committee and Standing Committee meetings. As Councillors deliberated and approved the final *2004 Budget*, the Council meeting hall was packed with community members advocating for fewer cuts, and passing out stickers that read: “You vote in 2004; we vote [in the next Municipal elections] in 2006!”.

PARTICIPATORY DISCOURSE

While *Official Plan* statements of ‘public accountability’, ‘barrier-free’, and ‘access to full participation’ evoke positive images of constructive harmony, in practice, they are vague and elusive concepts – difficult to grasp or implement. Through her work in tracing the discourse of ‘participation’ in international anti-poverty development work from the 1970s to the end of the 20th century, Cornwall (2000) describes a number of shifts in the attributed meanings, arguments, and practices of ‘participation’; it is this

history of participatory discourse that underlies, in part, the way in which we conceptualize and implement ‘participation’ within a particular local context such as the City of Ottawa’s municipal government.

Many authors describe the way in which ‘participation’ has become a loaded ‘buzzword’ that is used to describe almost anything (see, for example, Abers, 2000; Cleaver, 2002; Rahnema, 1992). Mosse has suggested that ‘participation’ remains an approach or methodology that is not provable, but is simply a way of ‘talking about’ rather than ‘doing’ things (2002). Even enthusiastic participatory practitioners observe a need, in participatory projects, to negotiate a common language to build the confidence of participants because of the way in which language has been used to exclude (Johnson, 2000, p. 224).

Cornwall describes how, beginning in the 1970s, ‘popular participation’ had become part of ‘basic needs’ strategies to poverty reduction wherein calls for the poor to gain access to and control over resources began to be heeded (2000, p. 15). The idea of ‘participation as a basic need’ featured in the programmatic statements of many international agencies (Laderchi, 2001, p. 3). While the 1980s ‘animation’ work of Paulo Freire (1972 in Cornwall, 2000, p. 24) was popularizing ideas of peoples’ self-development and agency, these discourses of grass-roots self-reliance and self-help became used to support the mainstream idea of ‘participatory development’. Cornwall describes how the concept of ‘ownership’ became stripped of ideas of power and control,

and came to refer to the 'buy-in' of less powerful groups to activities that were initiated by governments or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). In this way, participatory projects began to be looked upon not only as feel-good ways to 'fashion' people into 'good citizens' (p. 23), but were also touted in terms of 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency' in that they took advantage of community 'resources' (Cornwall, 2000).

Arguments for the effectiveness and efficiency of participatory projects at the end of the 1980s dovetailed smoothly with neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s that contributed to the general retreat of states (Cornwall, 2000, p. 31). Cornwall and Gaventa describe the way in which ideals of 'community capacity' and 'self reliance' transformed development project 'beneficiaries' into 'stakeholders', 'customers', and 'partners', who were seen as having a more active role to play as consumers, and 'users and choosers' (2001, p. 9) of services. With the use of such language, Laderchi (2001) suggests that the concept of 'participation' has become compatible with contemporary overarching market-oriented paradigms (p. 4).

In the late 1990s, critiques of the failure of 'project' approaches to development were put forward, and discussions of the need for peoples' involvement not only in the implementation, but also in the planning-level aspects of initiatives emerged (Cornwall, 2000). This 'scaling out' and 'scaling up' of participation, resulted in the acceptance of ideas of participation into spheres that were once closed off to legitimate public involvement; now notions of 'empowerment' and 'participation' are seen as an important

means of developing social, economic, and political policy objectives, as well as being viewed as a legitimate end (Cornwall, 2000; Gaventa & Blauert 2000; Laderchi, 2001).

THE IRONY OF PARTICIPATION

Cornwall's work on the history of participatory discourse alerts us to the way in which ideals of citizen participation not only have the capacity to influence prevailing social development and anti-poverty dialogue, but may also become subsumed by it in such a way as to reinforce and legitimate dominant economic, social and political power structures. The adoption of 'participation' by so many actors (e.g. governments, NGOs, private organizations, donors and lending institutions, individuals, and various civil society groups) allowed it to become firmly placed in mainstream development rhetoric, but many feel this has also resulted in the loss of the political emphasis on power relations that lies at the heart of the concept of 'empowerment' (Laderchi, 2001, p. 4).

This ironic potential of participation – to both liberate and oppress (sometimes simultaneously) – is evident in the ongoing implementation of participatory practices within the City of Ottawa. After a decade of federal and provincial under-funding of municipalities, and drastic government cut-backs in spending on education, health, and income security programs, *City Budget 2004* documents announce that “[the City of Ottawa] can no longer afford to provide residents with the same level of services as in previous years” (2003a, p. 3). Through the 2004 budget activities and associated discussions of the *UPR* and *UPR Opportunity Log*, Ottawa residents were asked to

participate in a process which is likely to result in substantial funding cuts to the services upon which they – especially those with low income – depend. In requiring citizens to choose between various taxation and funding scenarios (asking, in essence, ‘which program would you cut?’), the process steers debate away from ‘the common good’ and forces service providers, interest groups, and individuals to compete for funding through advocating the relative importance of their particular program (Marguarite Keeley, personal communication, January 2004).

Hence, experiences of ‘participation’ in this and other City of Ottawa contexts will no doubt be conflicted. Any one of the individuals or groups engaged in public participation in Ottawa may experience their participation activities as comfortable and rewarding; conversely, many will undoubtedly face instances of confusion or frustration. Such is the nature of the complex and shifting concept of participation, and the reason that some have called for more ‘grounded’ or ‘specific’ understandings of how the concept of participation plays out in the particularities of actual, situated spaces (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980 in Cornwall, 2000; Cornwall, 2002; Mosse, 2002).

This research is presented with the intent of exploring the particular details of the anti-poverty-focused participation of PIAC activists within the City of Ottawa. As we attend to activists’ descriptions of their activities, we can gain insight into the ways in which their activities are negotiated, arranged, contained, and even bypassed, within larger democratic and economic structures. It is hoped that increased awareness of the

external coordination of local participation activities, and how this coordination is enacted by various people (eg. City staff members and Councillors) will help PIAC members, and all those who engage in public participation, to be better equipped to confront and address the contradictions that they encounter in their work.

2: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

THE EVERYDAY WORLD AS PROBLEMATIC

As we begin to examine the way in which the practice of participation can reflect assumptions, and the particular standpoint of practitioners and writers, we recognize that an approach to a more ‘grounded’ understanding of participation not only benefits from a different ‘focus’, but also a different ‘way’ of engaging in social research that is based on a different ‘understanding’ of the social world. Here, we can use Dorothy Smith’s feminist sociology as the basis for a method of inquiry that allows us to investigate the complexities of the social organization of participation activities as they are constituted by specific practices in local contexts.

Informed particularly by her involvement in the feminist movement, the study of phenomenology, and by her reading of Marx, Dorothy Smith’s sociology suggests that we are all social beings, and that our social life is complex, but also organized (1987). Our world, she believes, arises through people’s activities and through the ongoing and purposeful concerting and coordinating of these activities (1990c). Campbell & Gregor note that Smith’s analysis demonstrates how we all play a part in generating phenomena that seem to occur independently (2002).

Smith’s analysis begins in the problematic, or contradictions, experienced in the everyday world of individuals: ‘local’ settings, where life is lived and experienced by

people. She focuses on the activities and practices that occur in specific contexts, and attends to the way in which material objects (such as chairs and microphones at a meeting) organize our practices by virtue of where they are used and what individuals do with them (see for example, 1990c, pp. 53-85). Furthermore, she emphasizes the way in which the use of material objects (especially documents, or 'texts') creates connections with the activities of others in 'extralocal', or 'translocal' settings – those settings that are outside the boundaries of everyday experience (1987, 1990c). For activists in Ottawa, these extralocal settings could include numerous work spaces within the City of Ottawa government, as well as in other locations – such as buildings where newspapers are produced, and the homes where individuals engage in the consumption of media products.

Smith's approach describes what she calls the 'social organization' of everyday life. This occurs, she describes, through the interplay of 'social relations': "concerted sequences or courses of social action implicating more than one individual whose participants are not necessarily present or known to one another" (1987, p. 155). Social relations are evident in everyday settings as people act competently and knowledgeably to coordinate their actions in accordance with standards, expectations, or rules (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). It is important to note that social relations are not the same as 'relationships' (such as those that exist between family members, co-workers, or lovers). Smith's use of the concept follows from Marx, who viewed social relations as courses of action or practices that organize persons in relation to one another (Hick, 1991).

While people actively constitute social relations, they often do so unknowingly, or unconsciously. As a woman goes to a store and purchases an item with a credit card, for example, she becomes connected to the cashier at the store who accepts her card as payment. She is also connected to employees of the credit card company who send her a bill that month, and to the postal employee who delivers her cheque to the credit card company when she pays her bill. In any one particular context (for example, the store where the item is purchased, or the office of the credit card company), we witness merely a segment of this social relation. The rest of the connection – an extended course of action that takes place across a number of social settings – is invisible here. Although a conceptual approach, the investigation of social organization supports the inquiry of material things; something (for example, the credit card, the bill, or the cheque) is actually connecting what goes on ‘there’ to what goes on ‘here’.

When we are aware of the social organization of everyday life, state Campbell and Gregor, we begin to see things are put together systematically, but more or less mysteriously and outside people’s knowledge, for purposes that may not be theirs (2002). We begin to realize that our actions are replicating, or contributing to, social structures with which we may be uncomfortable. In this way, Campbell and Gregor suggest, the examination of social organization has not only explicatory but also emancipatory potential; an awareness of social relations that enable social organization has the potential to help individuals resist domination by organizations (2002).

Smith pays particular attention to power, and the way in which many social relations are also 'ruling relations' (1987). More than an imposition of rules, explain Campbell and Gregor, ruling relations require that people know how to take them up and act in the appropriate manner. Often, this happens inexplicitly as people consult their own understandings of prevailing and dominant discourses and act accordingly (2002). Smith uses the terms 'ruling relations', or 'ruling apparatus' to bring into view the intersection of the many institutions that organize and regulate society; this concept, she notes, addresses the structures of power, organization, direction, and regulation in a more complex way than is visible when we separate these concepts into more traditional categories such as 'class' and 'gender' (1987). For example, the *Methodology Guide* for the World Bank's (1999) *Consultations with the Poor* Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) project is written by World Bank researchers and contains instructions that lay out how participatory research is to be conducted in each of the communities involved in the study. However, Owen (1998 in Holland with Blackburn) describes the way in which the timelines mandated by the Bank actually prevented researchers from spending time in rural areas, in effect, causing them to collect the bulk of their 'fieldwork' data about 'the poor' from administrative centres. In another account of the implementation of participatory methodology, Mukasa (2000 in Cornwall, 2000) describes how facilitators' efforts to give women 'more of a say' sparked indignance in older men, and eventually resulted in some women experiencing physical and other forms of abuse. Hence, the concept of ruling relations allows us to see concepts such as 'class', 'gender' and

‘participation’ as multiple and complex social practices through which the interests of those who rule determine and shape the representation and experiences of specific individuals in local settings (Campbell & Gregor, 2002).

Smith’s sociology is well-suited to the study of social organization within the current context of increasingly globalized capitalism. Smith (1987) highlights the centrality of a market economy to an understanding of relations of ruling. The emergence of capitalism, she notes, created a whole new terrain of social relations through which the exercise of ruling could occur. Through the exchange of capital, the creation of a market economy resulted in a multitude of social relations that reflected a split between the public and the private sphere (Smith, 1987). Marx describes how market relations are no longer local and face-to-face (as they once were); instead they have become extra-local and impersonal, objective, and seemingly neutral, requiring only exchanges of capital and commodity wherein the subject is invisible (1954 in Smith, 1987). But the apparently rational neutrality of capitalism, notes Smith, produces gender-based ruling relations; within capitalism, women are confined to the domestic sphere, where our practices (and therefore our subjectivity) are invisible and uncounted in market-based social relations. In this way, Smith describes how the practice of ruling occurs as activities are organized and regulated by what Marx terms the ‘governing processes of capitalist enterprise’ – processes which, for Smith, include government, law, business and management, professional organization, educational institutions and textual discourse (1987).

In her discussion of power and ruling, Smith defines 'authority' as a particular form of power that is the distinctive capacity to get things done in words. The 'author', she explains, has power in that what he writes counts; men, she adds, are assumed to have authority in that they are representatives of organizational power (1987). Authority is realized through 'textually-mediated social organization' wherein engagement with texts arranges and coordinates the actions of people (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Textually-mediated social organization occurs, for example, as we create 'records' or 'case files' to document an event; on an ongoing basis, we create representations of our lived experiences as texts. Whether on paper or in computer, the depiction of our world in texts becomes the basis for institutional action, such as when an individual is refused admission to law school based on the review of his criminal record. Smith asserts that although texts are not the substance of power, they are its primary medium (1987).

Smith's analysis of texts is conducive to locating the study of the participatory practices with particular sites. Smith views texts not merely as information about phenomena, but instead as materials produced by people working within specific, socially organized contexts. In the creation of textual representations of lived experience, she notes, the interests of organizational action influence particular uses of words, language and documents to build organizational versions of what people say, do, or know (see for example, 1990c, pp. 120-158). Darville (1995 in Campbell & Gregor), following Smith (1984 in Campbell & Gregor), describes how the construction of knowledge is anchored

in particular places and uses; there is meaning in the way that things ‘get written up’ for organizational action. When texts are produced, forms of consciousness (for example, the account of an individual on a registration form) are created that are the property of an organization rather than of subjects (Smith, 1987). Smith sees a contrast between situated experiences and textual reality, the awareness of which she describes as a ‘bifurcated consciousness’ (1987). It is the tension that results from this contrast, she notes, that allows us to locate the problematic of the everyday world (1987).

In the analysis of texts therefore, Smith emphasizes that it is important to focus upon the ‘activation’ of the text – the activities of people in ‘actual’² sites in the moments where the text is produced or used, and subjects commit to the textual version of ‘what has happened’ (1990c). The activation of texts is more than a technical task; as in the case of the World Bank PPAs, texts draw their user into the dominant practices of organizational management as an agent of these practices (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Darville uses the term ‘organizational literacy’ to highlight the way in which organizational texts are constructed in a way that controls and is disempowering (1995 in Campbell & Gregor). However, Hick grounds this concept by using Smith’s analysis to remind us it is not helpful to treat organizations as a single homogenous entity; organizations, he notes, exist only as they are constituted by the practices of people (1991).

² Smith uses the term ‘actual’ to direct the reader’s attention towards individuals and experiences that exist outside of texts, as opposed to the ‘textual representation’ of peoples’ practices (1999).

Campbell and Gregor use the example of human service delivery in order to illustrate the concept of textually-mediated social organization. They describe the way in which texts in human services organizations regularize the delivery of services in order to promote efficiency and accountability. As such, they note, texts are unquestioningly accepted as legitimate and as beneficial to clients. The authors reframe the activation of texts in this context as ruling relations: as forms are filled out, people are processed, assumptions are made, and organizational power is exercised (2002).

Smith's analysis of textually-mediated ruling shares some similarities with Foucault's notion of 'discourse', and she also employs this term. Hick states that while Foucault also addresses social relations that are mediated by texts (which he calls 'power-knowledge', he does so from a standpoint that is objectified, and external to the subject (1986 in Hick, 1991). De Vault and McCoy note that Smith shares Foucault's interest in texts, power and governance, but that there are some differences in the way in which Smith adapts the term to her use. They suggest that while Foucault's 'discourse' indicates "a kind of large-scale conversation in and through texts", Smith uses the term to refer to a field of relation that consists not only of the texts and their inter-textual conversation, but also the ways in which these texts are activated; this understanding of 'discourse' they note, never loses the presence of the subjects who interact with the text in any local moment of its use (2002 in Campbell & Gregor, p. 40; see also Smith, 1990c, pp.161-162).

With her attention to the settings in which texts are created and used, Smith's analysis treats texts as a form of knowledge that functions as a specialized ruling technology (1990c). Through texts, a shift takes place: lived experience is no longer recognized as valid; instead textually-mediated knowledge (that is, 'reality' as it is presented in texts) becomes the basis for engaging in action. As accounts are constructed and categorized into objective versions that allow for their usefulness within an organizational context (for example, as feedback is documented in a public consultation session), textually-mediated knowledge becomes administratively useful, but may not reflect the subjectivity, or 'real' experiences of the individuals whose experiences it portrays (Smith, 1990c).

As information is transformed from being based in 'hands-on' experience to being based in texts that are produced for and by a ruling organization, the functions of knowledge, judgement, and skill, notes Smith, are transferred from individuals to governing processes. In this way, she notes, local settings are increasingly penetrated and organized by extralocal ruling processes (1987). As the interests of those who rule shape the actions of those in local settings, ruling takes place; power is exercised in local settings to accomplish extralocal interests (Smith, 1987). Gaining access to 'community knowledge' through participatory activities in order to decrease the cost to NGOs of development projects, for example, reveals the way in which knowledge can become a tool for managing and ordering people in conformity with interests that are not their own.

Smith notes that users of a particular text often do not recognize the transformation that occurs as knowledge shifts from local to extralocal, and from 'hands-on' to textually-mediated. Often, the construction of texts is treated as objective, and those who interact with texts may become committed to the version of reality that is depicted. Smith describes this version of knowledge as 'ideological' due to the socially organized practices of its construction (1990a). While the term 'ideology' is generally used to denote knowledge that stems from a particular social position (such as religion or class), Smith's use of the term is close to Marx and Engel's definition: knowledge that is produced by a governing superstructure in the interests of its own dominance (1970 in Hick, 1991). Smith uses the term to refer to "those ideas and images through which the class that rules the society by virtue of its domination of the means of production orders, organizes, and sanctions the social relations that sustain its domination" (1987, p. 54).

As an ideological version of knowledge is produced and activated within the social relations of an organization, it is impossible to go back to the 'original' local experience; rather, the official objectified version dominates and is taken for granted to describe the 'actual' (Smith, 1990c). An experientially-based account is not useful for organizational action, nor is it likely to be believed. The text replaces and trumps competing versions; officially, individuals exist only as objects – just as they appear in organizational documents (Smith, 1990c). Although there is nothing inherently wrong with the conceptual representation of individuals' experiences, notes Hick, the problem

with ideological conceptualizations relates to the way in which they fail to construct the 'actual' as based in the perspectives, interests and concerns of the people experiencing the phenomena under investigation; instead, ideological accounts reflect knowledge that is rooted in the interest of institutional categories and functions (1991).

Based on this notion of 'ideological' knowledge that conceals (and therefore sustains) exploitative social relations (Hick, 1991), Smith points to the inadequacy of traditional methods of social research (1987). Latour and Woolgar (1979 in Campbell & Gregor) point out that accepted 'ways of looking' are turned into instruments that have generations of theory embedded in them; when scientific methods are used, so is theory. The organization, through institutions, of established scholarly knowing requires new ideas to be validated by referencing 'authorities'; new findings must be built up from, and refer back to, concepts that already exist in 'credible' literature (Smith, 1987, 1989). Hence, methods of study become organized in the same way as the institutions that they attempt to investigate. Sociology, as society's consciousness of the complexities of its own social life, is systematically organized according to conventional types of knowledge; it is not a coincidence that it is the interests, relevancies, and perspectives of those in power that are objectified and authorized as 'rational' social knowledge. Our conceptualization of 'culture' then, results from the work of specialists who are most often members of a single (ruling) sex and class (Smith, 1987). Those who fall outside of this ruling group, Smith notes, learn to know themselves from the standpoint of those who have the power of authority (Smith, 1987).

Traditional sociology approaches social activities, including political participation, as though it is possible for the knower to stand outside of the social world that is being investigated; the ‘facticity’ of a particular statement of knowledge is dependent upon the research-writer’s standpoint disappearing from the final version (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Smith (1990) depicts the way in which the invisibility of the author allows the ruling perspective to come to be equated with neutrality and objectivity (see pp. 12-52). Her work challenges us to examine the complexities of ‘participation’ in a different way. Smith’s approach to sociological research developed with the intent of producing an analysis for those about whom knowledge is being constructed (1987, 1990b). Within this new way of looking at accepted and authoritative ways of knowing, note Campbell and Gregor, there is the potential for the marriage of scholarly research with activism (2002).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A focus on Smith’s analysis of social life invites us to study the sociological world from the standpoint of activists who engage in activities of public participation in a local municipal government setting; the ‘problematic’ we investigate stems from the questions and challenges expressed by the people who are engaged in anti-poverty activism within the structure of the City of Ottawa. Based on Smith’s understanding of the social world, we can begin to pose questions about the way in which social relations

facilitate the coordination and ruling, by those in extralocal contexts, of activists' participation.

With a view to identifying the problematic in the everyday world of municipal public participation, this inquiry has been guided by the following questions:

In what way are the activities of participants socially organized?

- What are the activities of individuals in public participation contexts?
- What are the connections across and beyond the boundaries of these settings and how are they actually enacted by people? (from Campbell & Gregor, 2002)
- How do institutional procedures structure the everyday work processes of those who engage in public participation activities?
- How do these activities express themselves to institutional practices?
- How are institutional practices, in turn, structured by and expressed to broader macro relations (such as class, gender, race, market relations) of society? (adapted from Hick, 1991)

What is the evidence of the 'problematic' in local public participation settings?

- In what way is there an indication of questions that exist but are latent or unnamed?
- How is there an indication of a disjuncture between different versions of reality? (adapted from Smith, 1987, 1990 in Campbell & Gregor)

- What is the evidence of tension or contradiction between local and extralocal practices?

INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

In developing an alternative way of understanding the problematic of the social world, Smith grounds her approach by specifically addressing the practices through which we can investigate the construction of this problematic. In her time as a sociologist, Smith notes, she has “seen many bold critiques of sociology that have abandoned their project at the point of spelling out a research practice flowing from the proposal”. She describes her desire to “track through on the lines of thinking that [she] had been doing to a research approach that would realize them” (1989, p. 10). Smith developed the practice of Institutional Ethnography to explicate the development of her ‘rebel’ sociology (1990), and in so doing, provides us with a methodology with which to investigate the practiced meaning of participation in particular contexts.

Institutional Ethnography aims to discover and analyze the institutionally arranged social relations of power. Its focus is on processes and practice – how participants were and are involved in coordinating the actions of everyday life – in an attempt to create a ‘map’ of the complex practices of ruling. In beginning from the everyday standpoint of individuals in local settings, Institutional Ethnography functions to reverse the normal flow of information and inquiry in which knowledge about people is transferred to the institutions (namely, universities and academic discourses) that

produce knowledge for the ruling of society (1989). Smith's methodology challenges the tradition of sociological study that aims to explain human behaviour instead of explaining the behaviour of the economy, society, and political processes as these enter into, organize, and disorganize the everyday lives of individuals. As Institutional Ethnographers, says Smith, we need to do our work in such a way as to continually address and explicate the 'actual' world that is known directly and practically outside of texts. Participants need to be able to speak to us and through us to others as subjects; in this way, we are responsible for our research to those with whom we stand and for whom we write (Smith, 1987, 1989). Hence, the identification of the participatory 'problematic' needs to stem not from organizational reports of participatory processes, but from the lived experiences of those who practice participation 'on the ground'. Participants should hear this analysis of their experiences and say 'yes; that is how it happened'.

The intent of Institutional Ethnography is to explore, but not theorize. There is no interest in constructing 'blame' or in explaining the motivation of individuals' behaviour; a focus on motivation, explains Smith, is not useful to the subject; she or he already knows 'why' her or his activity is taking place (1987). Instead, she notes, the methodology takes the standpoint of those who are being ruled in an attempt to make power understandable by explaining 'how' it exists in terms of the actual relations that exist between people (1987). The 'map' of social relations that will be produced by this research may help to give activism increased potential in that it can serve as a guide to the subordinating practices of the ruling apparatus; this construction of knowledge from a

non-ruling place, note Campbell and Gregor, can help actors to subvert institutionalization and point to institutional practices that need to be reviewed and changed (2002).

Within this Institutional Ethnographic research, the focus is maintained on the subject, or knower, as she or he is actually situated. Discursive representations of activities (such as texts or talk) are analyzed with respect to the setting in which they were written, spoken, or took place; the text or dialogue itself is not the specimen studied, rather it is used as a 'means of access' to the relations through which it was created (1990c). In this way, our inquiry can attempt to keep activists as subjects at its centre.

In order to accomplish this focus, we need to address concepts, beliefs, ideology, and other categories of thought or mind as 'activities' that occur in local participation settings. Implementation of Institutional Ethnography requires that the traditional split between theory and practice is avoided (Smith, 1999). Anti-poverty activists are located in their own bodies, and theoretical concepts such as class, gender, and race, are treated as relations that are produced by specific practices (Smith, 1987). As we explore samples of data, we can look for the ways in which participants bring into being (and make 'real') something that otherwise seems to exist only in the virtual form of words, ideas, directives, and policy (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). The failure to focus on practices, notes Smith, allows the construction of discourse to subsume and displace actual activities and people (1999).

In addition to its focus on the situated location of the subject, Institutional Ethnography requires the recognition of our own location in the positions of researcher-writer and audience. Researchers, Smith believes, cannot stand apart from what they know and what they learn about the world because people enact the world of which they are aware in concert with others and with the material objects that individuals operate (1999, p. 4). As researcher, my knowing is always embodied; I am drawn into the map as an actor who must take the side of potential informants. I must self-consciously attend to my own research stance – as an ‘academic’ and a former employee of the City of Ottawa; I need to take care not to import dominant perspectives into my thinking, but to maintain instead, the particular positions of informants, researcher-writer and readers (Smith, 1990 in Campbell & Gregor). A particular set of puzzles (the problematic) arises for ‘someone’; understanding what is happening within these puzzles makes a difference to ‘someone’. Throughout this work, I need to identify ‘to whom’ and ‘why’ (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). As this research is framed from the perspective of those ‘who need to know’, I will need to ‘take sides’ (Smith, 1989) by attempting to write for an audience of my informants.

While traditional sociological research considers the researcher’s and the knower’s location a problem of bias, Institutional Ethnography considers this to form the basis of the inquiry. Rather than constructing an outside ‘neutral’ point from which to write a ‘positionless’ account, this project attempts to reflect attention to my own

embodied knowing as an inquirer and a participant in the social relations that we explore (1999). As I attempt to address myself to issues in the same way as do Ottawa-area activists, I accept these individuals' perspectives as 'true'; beginning from these perspectives, I can begin to explore a setting's social organization (Campbell & Gregor, 2002).

Despite Institutional Ethnography's grounding in the standpoint of individuals, Smith's methodology does not limit the researcher's study to the investigation of local activities and behaviours. Instead, Smith notes that she bases her approach on an ontology that originates with Marx and Engel's (1976) formulation in *The German Ideology*, wherein the focus is on actual practices, but the study of these is used to realize the social context in which individuals' activities exist (in Smith, 1999). Smith emphasizes the importance of recognizing the way in which activities are socially organized, without either reducing the social to individuals' characteristics, or reconstituting the social as a 'supra-individual blob' (1999).

As we focus on local activities as a point of entry into the investigation of a participation 'problematic', we can perform our investigation with the intent of examining the social organization of activities through various social relations. Social relations are central to this work, and we can use these as a means of seeing how "what people are doing and experiencing in a given local site is hooked into sequences of action implicating and coordinating multiple local sites where others are active" (Smith, 1999,

p. 7). As well, we can focus on texts, which Campbell and Gregor describe as a form of ‘crystallized’ social relations (2002). In Institutional Ethnography, texts are studied in material as well as in symbolic aspects as a sort of ‘bridge’ between local experiences and ruling relations. Texts are seen as material objects that bring into the contexts of their activation, standardized words and/or images that can be witnessed by many individuals in many settings at many times; Smith believes that as textual technology is deployed, subjects are displaced (see 1990c, pp. 153-154, 1999, pp. 7-8).

It is this attention to the real aspects of the interplay between local and extralocal that distinguishes Institutional Ethnography from other ethnographies. Traditional ethnographies have their roots in social and cultural anthropology; anthropologists wanted a method of describing the details of historical or contemporary ‘ways of doing’ of particular groups according to their ‘own’ perspective. These methods are primarily descriptive and attempt to objectively depict the features of a way of life from an ‘insider’s perspective’ (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). However, the ability of traditional ethnography to maintain an ‘objective’ standpoint, note Campbell and Gregor (2002) is limited in that this approach brings with it, pre-determined elements and terms within which the description takes place, for example “... kinship patterns, symbols, politics, economic systems ...” (Fetterman 1989 in Campbell & Gregor, p. 87). Hick states that while traditional ethnographies often reveal extremely detailed and interesting accounts of local settings in a particular time and place, the information collected is often of little

benefit to those who wish to gain an understanding of activities that occur in other contexts (1991).

Various other techniques have been developed as researchers attempt to not only describe, but also theorize about a particular setting. 'Grounded Theory' (Glazer & Strauss, 1967 in Campbell & Gregor), is a technique that attempts to construct meanings that account for the way in which individuals understand their lives and solve the problems that they encounter (Schreiber, 2001 in Campbell & Gregor). A complex set of procedures is used to arrive at a more general theory that explains participants' understanding of their experiences. Similarly, 'Symbolic Interactionism' is an analysis of the ways in which people make meaning of their activities and work out their activities in conjunction with others (Prus, 1994 in Campbell & Gregor). This perspective looks for the strategies used by individuals as they seek to influence, engage in relationships, or interpret behaviours based on their inter-subjective experiences and an awareness of 'others'. It does not tend to focus on external causes and effects. As with Grounded Theory, the aim of Symbolic Interactionism is to theorize as to how individuals' experiences can be abstracted and generalized (Campbell & Gregor, 2002).

Institutional Ethnography varies from these methods of study in the way that it moves between the explorations of two levels of data: it not only examines the features of phenomena, but also explicates how it is that the phenomenon is there to be observed. In this way, the researcher is not limited to an exploration of the local setting, but moves

back and forth between the local and extralocal to ‘map out’ how the institutional order of society comes out in people’s daily activities. The aim is not to establish an objective ‘insider’ perspective, but to explore how a setting functions so that participants can talk about experiences in the way they do (Hick, 1991). As well, Institutional Ethnography’s analysis does not aim to theorize generalizable abstractions from its data. Instead, its generalizability stems from actual material or empirical connections that exist across, and organize, multiple settings. In theoretical terms, these connections are described as ruling relations, however they are not abstract; it is always possible for the researcher to go back to the field and observe these connections actually taking place (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). It is for this reason, that Institutional Ethnography is well suited to a study of ‘participation’ that is both situated in the local actualities of Ottawa contexts, yet also attends to the pervasive social forces that shape the work of local activists; here, local connections are identified, traced, and described to reveal larger social relations that are relevant to many participants in many settings.

DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

The data presented throughout this project is the result of the observation of activists in public spaces, and interviews with them, in order to make visible how their municipal government public participation activities are embedded within larger social relations. The research focuses on the exploration of the ‘regular’ or ‘typical’ participation activities of PIAC activists in an attempt to more fully understand these

experiences and the ways in which they are connected to the activities of individuals in other contexts.

SAMPLING/SELECTION PROCEDURE

The persons involved in the study are individuals in Ottawa who are publicly known as community activists, and who are current or previous participants in City of Ottawa public participation contexts. These include:

- Municipal government public consultation sessions and / or public town hall meetings
- Municipal government Council meetings, Committee meetings, and Citizen Advisory Council meetings
- Community action group public meetings, and public activities that are centred around municipal issues

A sample of seven community activists was recruited to take part in this project. Initial participants were contacted through pre-established professional relationships, and further contacts were made through ‘Snowball’ (or ‘Chain’) Sampling, which occurred in the following way: If a contact suggested someone else who might be interested in taking part in the project, the individual was contacted and provided with the project’s letter of information (see *Appendix A*). The potential informant was informed of the source of the referral, and the inability to guarantee anonymity or confidentiality was

emphasized. Participants were asked to consider the request and to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating in the study. If this contact was made, the participant was asked to indicate which of her/his public participation activities she/he wished to make available for study.

DATA COLLECTION: SOURCES AND METHODS

Data collection for this project occurred in three ways:

1. Observation of activists in the aforementioned public participation settings (see *Sampling/Selection Procedure*, above) for which the participant had given permission, and the recording – through written notes, or with the use of an audio recording device (where permitted) – the activities and talk of participants in this setting.
2. The review and analysis of public texts or documents (e.g. minutes, agendas) related to the above activities.
3. The recruitment of seven activists to take part in up to three semi-structured, intensive, 60-90 minute interviews, which were conducted according to an interview guide (See *Appendix B*). The interviews took place at a time and location of the participant's choice.

Within Institutional Ethnography, there is no prescription for a particular set of research activities (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Nonetheless, Campbell and Gregor describe the collection of two 'levels' of data, and this distinction is helpful in engaging

in an Institutional Ethnography. In collecting level one, or 'entry level' data, our inquiry is focused on the local setting, or lived experiences, of community activists in the contexts in which they participate. Using written notes or an audio recording device (where permitted), it was possible to record what was happening and what was said, with particular attention to expressions of 'how to be a competent participant' in that particular setting. 'Insider' behaviours and talk were questioned and defined in order to construct the perspective from which we could begin our analysis. This research attempts to describe what people are actually doing, rather than simply how they understand and name their work.

It is important to attend to the materials (especially texts) that connect what actually happens to what triggers actions or events. We can look for patterns that indicate the organization of a recurrence, and attempt to name or describe these relations. In collecting and considering entry-level data, we can attempt to begin creation of a 'map' of activists' activity, and of how this is connected with the activities of others. Based on this map, we can begin to identify a sense of a problem – of something going on, some disquiet, or tension that could be explicated (Smith, 1999).

As the 'problematic' begins to emerge more clearly, we can seek out 'level two' data that can be used to explicate this tension. This is information that is not necessarily visible within a local participation context, but that describes more fully, the way in which these visible activities are organized. Level two data is that which gives insight

into the activities of others in extralocal settings and aims to respond to the question of ‘how does this local participation activity come to happen as it does?’ (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Although we initiate our inquiry with the collection of level one data, the collection of the two levels of data are not mutually exclusive stages; as the problematic begins to emerge, we need to be engaged with both levels of data simultaneously in order to explicate the connections between them.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Interviews were conducted using an *Interview Guide* (See *Appendix B*) from which specific and/or probing questions were formulated to relate to the particular interview context and/or flow of the interview conversation.

During interviews, the informants were provided with the overall topic, and the general framework for the interview. Informants were encouraged to explore their experience in open-ended ways, to speak freely and to control the ways in which their accounts were sequenced. Participants were encouraged to speak concretely (i.e. about specific circumstances) and were asked to explain or define the terms they use (Smith, 1987). Topics that emerged were often the basis for subsequent questioning.

DATA ANALYSIS

Our analysis of the data is disciplined by Smith’s theoretical approach, using various techniques of Institutional Ethnography. The gathering and analysis of data has

been a simultaneous process, so that emerging themes and patterns could be explored in subsequent interviews and analysis could occur in an ongoing fashion.

Smith's approach emphasizes the importance of beginning the analysis with a focus on the data within the setting from which it emerged. While most academic analysis uses coding to organize and interpret data according to typical themes or discourse, Smith (1987), and Campbell and Gregor (2002), caution that this practice removes the standpoint of the subjects and makes the analysis less relevant to those whose experience is problematized. The analysis is held to activists' accounts by the writing up of 'stories' about discrete pieces of data, and later, the organization of these stories into sections (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). As these stories remain intact throughout the analysis, the data remains embedded within its contextual elements. The data collected are used to discover and illuminate linkages within and across the boundaries of various participation contexts as we look for 'clues' in individual accounts that indicate what informs participants' actions, where these messages come from, and how others are implicated (Campbell & Gregor, 2002).

Perhaps Smith's most important analytical tool, a second technique we can attempt to use is to treat theoretical ideas and concepts as practices that are socially organized and carried out by situated individuals (see Smith, 1990c, p. 70). Concepts such as class, gender, race, and production, notes Hick (1991), are practices, not entities to be captured; they are social relations sustained by the activities of actual people. In the

analysis of verbal and textual data, we can make explicit the informant's and our own positions with respect to the account of an experience, and can attend to its social organization, including the purposes of the account, the activities supported or made invisible by the account, and the specific ways in which the account is constructed by its author as 'factual' (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 1990). This practice, notes Smith, preserves the presence of subjects as knowers and actors – not just objects of study (1987).

Another technique we can use to attend to the social organization of a particular setting is to make explicit the 'template' through which the participants in a particular setting talk about their work (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). The language of a particular context, notes Smith, observes the relations of its social organization (1987); 'insider' words used by an informant indicate how a participant, speaking about his or her life, misses its social organization (Smith, 1990c). Through identification of 'insider' language, we realize that informants see certain features as 'the only way' things could be done (Campbell & Gregor, 2002) and use insider language because it is "the only way in which it makes sense to talk" (Smith, 1987, p. 189). This is particularly true, notes Pence (2001 in Campbell & Gregor) for those with increased power or authority in a particular setting. Smith makes use of the technique of 'substructuring', wherein she explicates the social relations through which 'insider' language arose, and which it therefore expresses (1990c). In addition, notes Smith, 'deictic' terms (such as 'now', 'here', 'there', 'we', 'I', 'they', 'you', etc.) indicate the particular social organization of a local context; they are

indicative of what is 'present' for both speaker and listener in terms of time, distance, and arrangements, and require – without a direct reference – a known position of the speaker (Smith, 1990c). It is these types of socially organized talk that semi-structured interviews aim to leave intact. By attending to the way in which settings are an underlying determinant of how informants talk about their work, we can attempt to gain insight into the social organization and relations of activists' experiences (Smith, 1987).

Smith describes a number of techniques which she uses to treat texts as crystallized social relations, rather than accepting textual accounts – which she considers to be 'ideological' – as objective and factual (1990a). Texts, she notes, display what the writer knows how to do in writing, and what the reader knows how to do in reading, and therefore are a means of access to the relations they organize (1990c). In our analysis of public texts in participation contexts, we can explore the particular settings in which texts are created and activated by attending to the way in which the author constructs her/his 'authority'. In her textual analysis, Smith highlights the presence of 'instructions' that the writer uses to concert the reader's activation of the text, such as the way in which an author constructs his account as 'factual' by indicating that proper procedures (e.g. the statement of good intentions, a succession of 'independent' witnesses, formal sanction by a professional) have been used to establish the account's objectivity (see 1990c, pp.27-29). Smith highlights the definitional privilege of the author – the teller's right to name situations and actions – that must be sanctioned by the reader at the moment that she/he accepts the author's 'working up' of 'fact' (1990c). 'Fact', she describes, is constructed

by various grammatical and linguistic devices such as the portrayal of individuals as either subjects or as objects (e.g. 'we' are talking about 'them'), the 'cutting out' of particular characters in order to exclude them or treat them as anomalous, the use of 'contrast structures' to highlight differences (e.g. 'normal' vs. 'odd'), and the grammatical shifting of behaviours into a state-of-being (e.g. 'she did' into 'she would') (see Smith, 1990c, pp. 26-46, pp. 72-73). In the same way, we can hope to explicate the way in which texts are constructed to arrange a particular type of activation and thereby coordinate the practices of Ottawa activists.

In both verbal and textual accounts, Smith uses technical analysis as a means of seeing the ways in which narratives display subjects' active involvement in the practical concerting of social relations from their standpoint (1987). Through situating data in context, treating theory as practice, attending to participant language, and the analysis of texts, this research endeavours to make what Smith (1987) terms a 'design' of the relevant social relations that organize the everyday world of participation in Ottawa municipal government. Smith's 'design' is a sort of visual map of social relations that is open at the end where it is tied into the extended social relations of the political economy. By beginning from the particular standpoint of our informants, this 'map' reproduces the focused character of the investigation. It is important to note that a design aims to suggest how relations might be analyzed, but is not intended to supply a theoretical model (Smith, 1987).

Hence, we can attempt to lay out how social relations in the everyday world of Ottawa activists are organized from elsewhere (Smith, 1987) in order to better explicate a particular contradiction, or problematic, that these individuals experience in their participation work. We can attend to the contrasts and tensions that exist between the lived expertise of activists and their ‘commonsense’ theorizing about their own life (e.g. their perceptions, attitudes, and interpretations of their own behaviour and experiences) as a situated practice of ‘making meaning’ of participation activities; we can attempt to explicate the way in which this practice is organized (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Smith uses the term ‘institutional ideologies’ to describe methods of analyzing experience that are located in the work processes of institutions (that is, wherein professional training teaches people how to view the actualities of their experience into forms that are recognizable in institutional discourse), and highlights the selectivity of institutional documentation, wherein the work processes of some individuals are specifically obscured (Smith, 1987). As we examine the ‘processing’ of a particular activity, the sequencing and arrangement of actions and events, and their links to other contexts, we can look for unanswered questions, and instances of ‘disjuncture’ between ruling and experiential versions of reality that are indicated when participants feel that ‘something chafes’ (Smith, 1990 in Campbell & Gregor).

VALIDITY/RELIABILITY

Smith addresses the concept of ‘validity’ in a way that differs somewhat from traditional scientific uses of the term. In Institutional Ethnography, the researcher does

not rely on a technical method for producing 'objectivity', as this is not the aim of the research (Smith, 1987). Instead, the validity of Smith's mode of inquiry stems from the fact that it is always oriented to the prospective questions from others, who may ask 'is it really so?', and 'does it really happen like that?' Because of the nature of the method, it is possible for others to return to the object of the inquiry and, on the basis of their own work, respond 'no, she is wrong; it does not work like that but like this' (Smith, 1987). Hence, this project does not aim to construct a third 'neutral' version of reality out of other contending versions; it does not aim to produce an objective knowledge of the world. Data collection has involved multiple contexts and informants and attention to similarly organized phenomena in order to investigate the potential idiosyncrasy of a particular story. Within interviews, it has been possible to 'check' understanding with informants on an ongoing basis in an attempt to ensure the accuracy of analysis; participants are viewed as the 'experts' on what they routinely know how to do (Campbell & Gregor, 2002).

3: PARTICIPATION IN CONTEXT: A RISING WAVE OF INTEREST

PARTICIPATION: DEVELOPMENT ORTHODOXY

Although the City of Ottawa's new public participation policy is one of few in existence in Canada (City of Ottawa, 2003b), it represents the emergence of a decade-long trend that began as consensus on the importance of 'participation' which has gradually grown and spread from the margins of global social movement discourses to the very heart of the international development mainstream and beyond (Cornwall, 2000). This trend reveals a widespread growing awareness of the need to attend to the interests of the many stakeholders – including donors, governments, and other institutions – who support various types of development at the local level. Cornwall, Musyoki, and Pratt note that use of the term 'participatory' has become virtually mandatory in any community development project, program, or policy (2001, p. 1).

The 'scaling out and scaling up' of participation that is described by Cornwall (2000) is occurring in international development initiatives as participatory strategies are being used by those who recognize the need for broad institutional change and linking individuals across various levels (Gaventa & Blauert, 2000). One of the best examples of 'scaling up' are the Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) that have been performed by the World Bank as a complement to its more traditional Poverty Assessments (PAs) (Laderchi 2001). PPAs spread rapidly in the face of criticisms of the Bank's exclusive 'money metric' focus. By 1998, half of the PAs performed by the World Bank involved

a participatory component (Robb, 1999 in Laderchi). Part of *Voices of the Poor*, the 2001 World Development Report on Poverty, was a major PPA project involving research teams working in numerous communities in each of 23 countries. This project presented many new questions related to the issue of standardization in participatory processes (Robb, 1999 in Laderchi), and illustrates the implementation of participatory practice as a key challenge in the field of development. Cornwall states that calls for the active engagement of the poor have come of age; the new respectability and legitimacy of participation, she notes, indicates its status as 'development orthodoxy' (2000).

Just as participation is increasingly 'going to scale' within the field of development, a 'rising wave of interest' in participatory approaches is also emerging outside of traditional development contexts (Cornwall, 2000). Not only are participatory approaches being used at policy and program design levels within the field of international development, but participatory approaches are being applied in almost every sector, including health, agriculture, community development, local governance and many more (Gaventa & Blauert, 2000). Gaventa and Blauert (2000) note that innovations in the field abound, as participation is involving a broad range of stakeholders and participants, and is moving from project and community levels to larger-scale institutions. Some participatory evaluation and accounting processes emerging from the private sector (e.g. 'social auditing') are proving to be 'quick and effective' ways for large-scale institutions to gather information (Zadek et al., 1997 in Gaventa & Blauert). No longer is participation used only, as in the Freireian tradition, to

challenge mainstream power structures; systems of government are now drawing on participatory activities as a key feature of institutional learning (Gaventa & Blauert, 2000).

The convergence of alternative and mainstream that has resulted in governments' use of participatory approaches has not occurred in a vacuum. As the neoliberal perspective on development dominated an increasingly globalized world economy, the poverty-reduction strategy of international development actors that had emerged in the 1970s was replaced by a vision of 'economic growth' as the best solution to the problem of poverty. The 1990 'Washington consensus' amongst economists established the pursuit of macro-economic stability through trade and capital liberalization, privatization, and deregulation, as the correct path to economic growth (Brock, Cornwall, & Gaventa, 2001). This view supported the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) mandated by international lenders, which required the retreat of the state from the economy, thereby opening up all economic activity to 'free market' forces.

Participation gained a place in the 1990s as a significant feature in policy narratives that described the enhanced equity and efficiency of decentralized governance (Blair, 2000, Gaventa, 2002 in Cornwall, 2002). Advocates of 'participation' describe how the localization of responsibility favours the use of participatory strategies, such as Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E), over standardized top-down models

that are less versatile and therefore less able to assess the diverse priorities and changes that exist in local communities (Guijt & Gaventa, 1998).

Participatory approaches continued in popularity as critics of international lending policies later highlighted the devastating effects of SAPs: declining social services, wages, and employment rates – which have resulted in deepened poverty for many vulnerable citizens. Participatory approaches were introduced into reform strategies that were advocated to offset these effects as part of the ‘marriage of convenience’ that occurred between orthodox and participatory approaches to development (Hoebink, 2000 in Brock, Cornwall & Gaventa). As NGOs attempted to fill the void left by the retreating state, institutional reforms increasingly involved participatory language, framing the poor as ‘beneficiaries’ and defining their participation in terms of efficiency and investment of time and labour. Linkages between the state (increasingly in decentralized local government), the private sector, NGOs, and ‘the community’ were increasingly developed and framed in terms of ‘consensus’ and ‘partnership’ (Brock, Cornwall, & Gaventa, 2001). Through the 1990s, debates on ‘scaling up’, ‘mainstreaming’, and ‘institutionalizing’ participation bordered on issues of governance (Blackburn with Holland, 1998; Thompson, 1995 in Cornwall, 2000).

PARTICIPATION AND GOVERNANCE

Public participation has often been linked to ideals of governance. Aristotle theorized that polity – rule by the many, who are neither wealthy nor poor, in the interests

of the whole community – was generally the most favourable form of government (Ball & Dagger, 1999). Habermas asserts that only plain talk between citizens can knit bonds for human society (1985 in Eliasoph). Rahnema (1992) describes participation as a manifestation of freedom, wherein individuals are unhindered and unbiased in their learning, listening and sharing – free from fear of predetermined conclusion, belief or judgment. Without such unhindered political talk that creates a vibrant public sphere, notes Eliasoph (1998), democratic citizenship is impossible.

In practical terms, however, popular participation has not been a central feature of many democratic government structures. Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, the input of ‘beneficiaries’ or ‘consumers’ did not feature in global policy debates; policy deliberation was left up to experts, professionals, politicians and managers, and others who ‘knew best’ (Richardson, 1983 in Cornwall & Gaventa). The 1960s and 1970s, however, brought a growing demand for citizen involvement in decisions that affected their lives; a number of generally consultative mechanisms emerged in the form of user committees – such as community health councils, parent committees in schools, tenant councils, etc. While some of these models stemmed from a sort of assertive consumerism that aimed to maximize self interest, others – such as a more radical version that grew from the struggles of the disability movement – were based more on collective action that emerged from common experiences of oppression, disadvantage and social exclusion (Barnes, 1999 in Cornwall & Gaventa). These activities created spaces for dissent, and the latter

type would later resonate with those who advocated a more fundamental claim to basic civil rights that the state had a responsibility to support.

However, the ideas of participation in social development and politics remained separate until the late 1990s when the boundaries began to blur (Cornwall, 2000). The decentralization of government and the associated 'good governance' agenda created a series of points of intersection and gave rise to discussions of 'citizenship participation' which described "direct ways in which citizens influence and exercise control in governance" (Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999 in Cornwall, 2000, p. 60). The return to a focus on the state in international development discourse has widened spaces for citizen participation; the *1997 World Development Report* discusses the importance of 'bridging the gap' between state and citizen (Cornwall, 2000). Blackburn and de Toma (1998 in Cornwall 2002) describe the emergence in Bolivia of a 'Law of Popular Participation' wherein national legislation required citizen participation in local governance. All over the world, the enhancement of public participation in budgeting, policy dialogue, planning, project appraisal, poverty assessment, and monitoring is being undertaken in an effort to ensure quality and legitimacy in democratic decision-making (Fung & Wright, 2001; Goetz & Gaventa, 2001; Gaventa, 2002 in Cornwall, 2002). Discussions of participation are becoming increasingly tied to ideals of 'good governance' and are creating new public spaces for political activity (Cornwall, 2000, 2002). Furthermore, Cornwall (2000) describes how today's discussions of participation and governance echo

the radical calls of the 1970s that frame political participation as a ‘basic human right’, leading to new conceptions of citizenship and a new perspective on rights.

THE CONTEXTS OF GOVERNANCE

The emerging attempt to locate spaces for meaningful citizen participation in governance contexts reveals the complexities of power and agency within these policy-making processes. Held and Krieger’s definition of power depicts the way in which strategic choices are made within organizational realities:

Power is not merely the voluntarist expression of the capacity of an actor to influence the conduct of others, nor is it merely structured power following from institutional bias. Rather, power is the facility of agents to act within institutions and collectivities – to apply the resources of these institutions and collectivities to their own ends, even while institutional arrangements narrow the scope of their activities (1984 in Abers, p. 14)

In the current reality of the globalization of economies and governance that promotes the trans-local flow of ideas, people, and resources, we face ever more complex configurations of political actors in spaces within and beyond the state (Cornwall, 2002). Any of these actors may work to open or constrict spaces for the engagement of others, to wage their own struggles, or cultivate discourses and alliances across and beyond boundaries to press for change. These actors may have competing allegiances and identifications that are embedded in social, professional and political networks. They may have career aspirations and departmental loyalties, and experience external pressures

and normative expectations in the form of unwritten rules (Brock, Cornwall, & Gaventa, 2001).

While initial applications of ‘participation’ to government contexts attempted to simply feed extracted information into a policy-making practice that was seen to be linear and rational, the intricacies of political settings create tensions that inevitably shape the policies that are their products. Maarten Hajer discusses policy as discourse wherein policy narratives are developed as ‘story lines’ that gain their discursive power from combining elements from different domains. These policy ‘stories’ provide actors with a series of symbolic references that suggest not only a common understanding, but one that ‘sounds right’ (1995 in Brock, Cornwall, & Gaventa). There are rules, state Brock, Cornwall, and Gaventa, to what constitutes legitimate and useful knowledge within policy processes (2001).

The intricacies of policy development make it difficult to attribute particular changes to particular processes (see for example, Inglis & Guy, 1998). Failure to understand the legal, bureaucratic, discursive, historical, economic, political and other complexities of policy formation leaves non-governmental advocates ‘powerless in their ignorance’; these advocates must know precisely which element needs to change (Holland with Blackburn, 1998). Moreover, changes in policy do not necessarily lead to changes in outcome; policy can be a symbol of intention that is never practiced (Walt, 1994 in Holland with Blackburn; Moser, 1993 in Holland with Blackburn).

CRITICAL UNCERTAINTY

As we trace the relatively recent upsurge in a variety of participatory practices then, it is difficult to ignore the corresponding increase in the number of people who have turned a critical eye to the implementation of participatory approaches as they materialize in many challenging and complex settings. Rahnema (1992) and Cooke and Kothari (2002) note that the advancement of participation has resulted in some successes, but add that these have not been enough to warrant the lack of questioning on the part of participatory thinkers, who have sometimes failed to recognize their own biases in the construction of participatory knowledge. Cooke and Kothari caution that participatory practitioners – i.e. facilitators and organizers – have been naïve about the complexities of power and power relations, not only ‘on the ground’ but also historically and discursively in the construction of knowledge and social norms (2002).

Based on a review of American, European, and ‘third world’ literature on participation, Abers (2000) identifies three major types of challenges or debates within participatory discourse. The first set of challenges relates to the ‘implementation’ of participatory practices – its incompatibility with bureaucratic priorities, the difficulty of negotiation between the potentially conflicting interests of many different parties, and the reluctance of powerful actors to relinquish decision-making control. The second type of challenge relates to issues of ‘inequality’, wherein participatory practices are not able to adequately challenge existing power structures, and therefore do not effectively represent

the voices of less powerful groups. The third group of problems described by Abers relates to the potential for 'co-optation' that occurs as participatory initiatives are made 'safe' for dominant actors by creating a veneer of public legitimacy which obscures the demobilization of potentially destabilizing civic leaders by 'including' them instead of giving them legitimate power (2000). These types of problems are intertwined (Cornwall, 2000).

In addition to the issues that Abers discusses, Cooke and Kothari's summary of critical literature on participation highlights the way in which the language of participation can mask a concern for managerial effectiveness. As well, they emphasize the dangers associated with quasi-religious associations of participatory rhetoric and practice, and describe how an emphasis on micro-level intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro-level inequalities and injustice (2002).

Caught between the contagious optimism of the participatory ideal, and the skepticism of critical reflection, those whose everyday work is devoted to increasing individuals' political participation are in danger of being immobilized by feelings of uncertainty. Organizers, social workers, politicians, bureaucrats, managers, and development workers are faced with the reality of having to engage in everyday practice regardless of whether or not they can be certain of the multiple implications of their activities. While this sense of uncertainty can bring unease, it also brings awareness of our need for critical self-reflection – and an opportunity to learn. The discomfort of

doubt can bring a new perspective and the capacity for creativity as we re-evaluate our practice and adapt to the shifting realities that we encounter. It is with this possibility in mind that many authors have called for a 'grounding' of participatory discourse within the particularities of the actual spaces in which participatory activities occur.

'UNPACKING' PARTICIPATION

There is much to decipher and clarify within the rapid expansion of 'participation' during the last several decades. Rahema cautions that the popularity, and modern jargon associated with participation has allowed it to become separated from any context, allowing it to be easily manipulated (1992). As well, Smith (1995) warns that "to be caught up in the merely fashionable use of the term is to obscure the nature of the challenges the citizen participation movement is making and to defuse, dilute, or divert the energies of people dissatisfied with the present patterns of decision-making in our society" (p. 66). With the rush to 'scale up' participation and the need for technical methods to facilitate this, popular participatory techniques such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) became absorbed into virtually any methodology, obscuring and transforming the original form of this tool (Cornwall, 2000).

Cornwall (2000) is among the many authors who call for a setting of participation in-context; she argues for an 'unpacking' of the term through the taking-up of Cohen and Uphoff's (1980) call for 'clarity through specificity' in the discussion of participatory practice. In a similar vein, Mosse (2002) advocates increased research that focuses on the

development of a grounded understanding of the relationship between policy ideas and development practices, with particular attention to the development projects, organizations, and professionals that frame and control 'participation' practices. Particularly, Mosse highlights the need for analysis of the meaning of participation in specific organizational practices (2002). Supporting the realization of inclusive, active citizenship requires greater understanding of the micro-politics of participation as a situated practice – locating participation in the places where it occurs (Cornwall, 2002). While ideals of participation may possess emancipatory possibilities, if they are to be realized we must frame these possibilities with respect to actual political, social, cultural and historical particularities. 'Who', asks Cornwall, 'participates in what and how?' (2000)

This research is undertaken as a contribution to the call, in participatory discourse, for 'clarity through specificity'. Local government is seen by many as the level where participation by 'the poor' and other marginalized stakeholders is most likely to occur; it is the level where many feel there is the most potential for making poverty reduction policies real (Brock, Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001). By uncovering the broader social and organizational detail in the participation of PIAC members, we can discover and reflect on insight that can be applied by those that practice participation in local government, as well as in numerous other forms or contexts.

More importantly, however, this research is undertaken as a contribution to the everyday practice of those who are members of the PIAC, or engage in other participatory activities in the City of Ottawa. Smith (1987) suggests that the type of research most useful for social change comes not from grappling with ideas of ‘truth’, but by posing problems at a more ‘mundane’ level – by simply attempting to lay out what is happening with respect to the social organization of activities in specific, everyday, contexts. This research is undertaken with and for the activists who participate in anti-poverty work within the structure of the City of Ottawa in the hope that their practice will be informed by the explication of the actual material ways in which their activities are negotiated within, and arranged by, larger social processes and structures. It is when ‘ordinary people’ acquire technical knowledge, notes Cornwall (2002), that they become equipped with ‘the weapons of the powerful’.

4: PARTICIPATORY IDEALS AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

In a review of literature on the subject of participation, we find some truth in Arnstein's suggestion that the idea of participation is like eating spinach: "no one is against it in principle because it is good for you" (1969, p. 216). Citizen participation in government is, in theory, essential to democracy – "a revered idea that is vigorously applauded by virtually everyone" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). Nonetheless, Arnstein cautions, this 'vigorous applause' is reduced to 'polite handclaps' when the real-world application of this participatory ideal threatens to shift established structures of power (1969). The crux of the matter, argue many authors, is that this unpopular shift in power relations is exactly what participation requires (Abers, 2000; Arai, 1996; Arnstein, 1969; Chambers, 1997).

EMPOWERMENT

In her article, *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, Arnstein defines citizen participation as:

... a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out. In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society (1969 p. 216).

The concept of participation is closely associated with the empowerment of individuals, groups, and communities (Arai, 1996). Lack of engagement, conversely, is associated with feelings of powerlessness (Eliasoph, 1998). In arguing the merits of participation based on the success of the *Participatory Budget* in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Abers (2000) cites empowerment as a key benefit. While contributing to efficient decision-making, she states, participatory activities resulted not only in a transfer of responsibility to citizens, but also increased citizen control over the state and an improvement in the capacity of ordinary people to understand and decide about issues affecting their lives. In Porto Alegre, asserts Abers, participation resulted in the political development of individuals, an increase in social consciousness, and a sense of political community. This increased control improved peoples' political development – skills, knowledge, and organizing capability to not only control the state more effectively, but also to subsequently respond to their own problems without state help (2000). The development of community capacity to carry out participatory research on key policy issues, and the familiarization of key policymakers in government and donor agencies with the benefits of participation is thought to be just as important as the actual outcomes of a given project (Norton, 1998).

In his discussion of PRA, Chambers uses the concept of 'uppers' and 'lowers' to describe the power imbalance found within traditional 'third world' 'development' projects wherein professional 'outsiders' (uppers) prescribe development plans for local 'insiders' (lowers). Chambers discusses PRA in terms of its capacity for empowerment,

and for promoting change at the institutional, professional, and personal levels. He describes the potential for PRA to change hierarchical upper-lower institutions, and liberate individuals from North-South dominance patterns (1997).

This theme of ‘empowering the powerless’ runs through much, if not all, of the discourse on participation. Abers (2000) describes how empowering participatory policy requires three characteristics: it is open to all who were ‘hitherto excluded’ from policy-making, it involves the discussion of government policy goals and agendas rather than merely the implementation of pre-designed programs, and it involves effective citizen control in the form of real deliberative power. Guijt (2000) describes the involvement of the ‘hitherto excluded’ as the distinguishing factor of participatory approaches; among this group she counts not only members of the ‘community’ and primary stakeholders, but also individuals within organizations or institutions – such as junior staff persons – who typically lack decision-making power.

The flip side of ‘empowering the powerless’, participatory approaches are often described as contributing to the disempowerment of the powerful. Abers (2000) describes how traditionally excluded groups gained access to the state, and made decisions that had previously been made by representatives; in Porto Alegre, although the policy that created citizen forums and fostered participation of the marginalized was state-initiated, the citizen-controlled nature of the forums created an environment wherein groups mobilized autonomously, “even to the point of challenging the goals of the very

government actors that had created participatory spaces in the first place” (Abers, 2000, p. 12). Similarly, Sidersky and Guijt (2000 in Guijt) describe how the initial passive involvement of community members in local seed banks grew into more proactive interest that promised to see the banks taking on new roles, and the NGOs that initiated the projects eventually losing control.

Furthermore, practitioners have described the way in which participatory approaches can result in a flip of traditional structures of power and accountability processes. Gaventa & Blauert (2000) describe projects in the Philippines, Colombia, and Ecuador wherein citizen groups, civic organizations and coalitions have used Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) to develop sets of indicators with which to evaluate state institutions, organizations, programs and governments with respect to qualities such as democracy, participation, leadership, and the functionality of alliances; in this way, these structures are held accountable to citizens. One national program in the United States involved the formation of ‘citizen learning teams’ that monitored the impact of the program on the community, and conveyed their findings at both the local and federal level (Gaventa & Blauert, 2000). In India, the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) coordinated a process through which 23 voluntary health organizations, governments, and donors evaluated the US Agency for International Development (USAID)’s national health programs (Acharya et al., 1997 in Gaventa & Blauert). As well, Tandon and Cordeiro (1998 in Gaventa & Blauert) describe how an NGO working group on the World Bank conducted a large-scale monitoring process to

assess how effectively the Bank was in implementing its own policies on ‘participation’ in local projects. They outline how the results of this process contributed to a dialogue between NGOs and Bank representatives on the subject of the improvement of the Bank’s participatory practices. Gaventa and Blauert (2000) note that, in this way, participatory processes can reverse the usual relationship of ‘upward accountability’ wherein data about individuals and groups are collected and used in organizational decision-making; here, citizens and citizen groups can use participatory approaches to demand and encourage greater responsiveness by public, private, and NGO institutions. Those who advocate participatory approaches highlight a number of ways in which the empowering capacity of participation results in shifts from more traditional modes of practice. Participatory practitioners give much attention to the relationship between participatory empowerment and the associated methodological and epistemological shifts.

PARTICIPATORY METHODS

In participatory practice, methods and ethics are intertwined (Chambers, 1998). Chambers’ 1997 chapter on participatory methodology (*What Works and Why?*) provides a good overview of the way in which participatory strategies aim to differ from traditional ways of collecting knowledge and decision-making. The primary difference is best viewed in the shifting role of the professional or community ‘outsider’ who traditionally determines the structure and purpose of the participatory activity, gathers and compiles data, and processes and analyzes it in order to produce outputs that

correspond to a pre-determined task or question (1997). In participatory activities, describes Chambers, the 'outsider' acts as a facilitator, observer, learner, and consultant who establishes rapport, convenes and catalyses, encourages, and 'hands over the stick' of authority while local people take the lead in determining the research agenda, gathering and expressing data, analyzing and planning (1997). Within participatory approaches, improvisation and flexibility are encouraged.

Chambers (1997) describes the difference in principle between traditional methods and PRA in terms of 'reversals'; these include: moving from 'closed to open' through participation and open-ended dialogue; from 'individual to group' activities for formation of data; and from 'reserve to rapport, and frustration to fun' in terms of outsider-insider and group interaction. In relation to traditional methods of research, notes Holland with Blackburn (1998), participatory methods empower communities by promoting local analysis and local ownership of courses of action that aim to change current realities.

Consistent with the view of participation as being founded upon the involvement of excluded individuals and groups, the 'accessibility' of participatory approaches is frequently emphasized as a key feature of this methodology. Gaventa and Blauert (2000) state the importance of creating a safe space for the participation of those with less power. Johnson (2000) discusses the need to ensure different types of access – including not only physical access, but also social access (i.e. recognition as an equal contributor),

adequate skill (including experience and knowledge of participatory techniques), attitudinal capacity, and adequate resources (e.g. time). Ensuring access, she notes, may include working with stakeholders to develop self-confidence, and the opening of institutional structures. While total participation may not be realistic or desired, participatory settings must be accessible to all (Abers, 2000).

A final component of accessibility described by many authors relates to the duration of participant involvement. Stakeholder involvement from the beginning of a project is frequently described as critical (Attwood & May, 1998; Freudenberger, 1998; Gujja, Pimbert & Shah, 1998). As well, a number of authors emphasize the responsibility of participatory practitioners to ensure that projects include an adequate follow-up component (Chambers, 1998; Holland with Blackburn, 1998; The World Bank, 1999).

A second key feature that is emphasized in numerous practitioner descriptions relates to the group-oriented nature of participatory activities, and the resulting capacity of methods to be flexible, and to be adapted to the needs of professionals and stakeholders. Depending on the audience, there are multiple possibilities for information gathering and sharing (Guijt 2000). While core steps of PM&E involve defining who is involved and what to look for, she states, it is important to leave room to adjust and adapt methodology as needed. As methods are developed together and adjusted by participants, there is a shift from pre-defined to negotiated ways of knowing, and reaching consensus can become more complicated as more groups are involved. Booth (1998) and Norton

(1998) suggest the possibility of combining participatory approaches with other methods of information gathering. Participatory activities such as PPAs, note Booth et al., can be classified as a 'contextual method of analysis' because they attempt to understand the dimensions of poverty within the social, cultural, economic, and political environment of a particular locality or of a group (1998 in Laderchi). Johnson describes how, as multi-stakeholder teams engage in an activity together, they develop their own style of working which leads to an increased commitment to the project (2000).

A third feature that is commonly highlighted by participatory practitioners is the position of professionals, who in participatory activities recognize themselves as 'outsider' and attempt to redefine their role as that of facilitator who shares in community knowledge and reviews her / his own values and perceptions critically (Laderchi, 2001). Attitudinal and behavioural elements are central to the success and truthfulness of the exercise, and are increasingly being recognized as such (Holmes, 2001; Laderchi, 2001). "The magic only works if the 'magician' understands the tricks" states Guijt (2000, p. 209) in discussing the fundamental importance of facilitation. In a review of writing about the 'scaling up' of participation, Blackburn with Holland (1998 in Chambers, 1998) conclude that the quality of development depends on 'what sort of people' development professionals are.

Chambers (1997) describes how a pressure for change is created 'from below' because participatory methods often produce very different priorities than traditional

methods. He describes how ‘reversals’ address power imbalances, and move from a view of ‘extracting information from communities’ towards community ownership of knowledge, and a better solution.

MUTUAL LEARNING

Chambers addresses the construction of knowledge as he describes the unexpected capabilities of community members that result in the replacing of dominant forms of knowledge with a better, ‘local’ knowledge. In his chapter entitled *All Power Deceives* (in *Whose Reality Counts?*), Chambers (1997) describes an inverse relationship between power and the ability to ‘know’. Chambers describes how power is actually a ‘disability’ when it comes to learning; he illustrates the ways in which individuals with power experience a distorted view of reality as a result of their own bias, and others’ relation to them. Those who are powerful are often conditioned to internalize certain beliefs, constructs, and systems of interpretation that predetermine and limit the way in which they are able to learn from others (Chambers, 1997). Here, we see a similarity with Smith’s ‘ideological’ knowledge (1987). Chambers describes the way in which new ideas and groups are often marginalized or hidden, making dominant ‘uppers’ unable to learn from new groups’ experiences. The powerful, he states, often react to these experiences by denying their legitimacy – reframing information to fit their dominant perspective – and by blaming problems on ‘lowers’. In this way, he comments, dominant groups take up beliefs and explanations that maintain their status and require others to change (1997). Likewise, he describes situations wherein ‘lowers’, being aware of

‘uppers’ capacity for influence and control, will say or show whatever will minimize penalties and maximize gains. Chambers explores how powerful and dominant old males, with their multiple forms of privilege, are among the most vulnerable to error and “can be a public menace” (1997, p. 91):

Sadly and dangerously, old, male multiple uppers are denied the opportunities to interact, experience and learn which are open to more ordinary mortals ... Face-to-face mutual reinforcement between uppers sustains the errors of being out-of-date and out-of-touch. Clubs for elite old men and seminaries for the celibate are classic sites for the incestuous inbreeding of ignorance (1997, p. 92).

As well, Chambers discusses the implications of these barriers to learning for power centres: governments, and the international ‘Bretton Woods’ institutions – specifically, the World Bank. The answer for dominant groups, he suggests, is to ‘put the first last’ through intentional self-disempowerment; in this way he presents disempowerment as not only loss, but also gain. Chambers describes the capacity of community knowledge to reflect multiple and individual realities with more complexity than can be expressed in words. He explores the way in which this knowledge brings new insight and understanding with more force and credibility (1998). Participatory methodology recognizes, accepts, enhances, and celebrates community members’ perceptions (Chambers, 1997).

This notion of a ‘better’ knowledge is shared by many supporters of participatory approaches, and reflects what Goulet (1989 in Abers) terms an ‘instrumental’ view of

participation as a tool to more effectively achieve policy goals. Chambers describes the knowledge that is produced through open-ended, interactive, qualitative and interpretive participatory activities as having great explanatory power in that it reflects diversity, depth, richness, and realism of data and analysis (1994 in Holland with Blackburn). Participatory analysis of issues, note Holland with Blackburn, can improve the quality of decision-making outcomes because it is grounded in reality and can depict the differing priorities of policy-makers and 'beneficiaries'; through qualitative triangulation it may produce explanations that would be less possible through regular assessments and indicate a need for the challenging of norms, or produce 'surprise' information that is unlooked-for (1998). Booth (1998) describes participatory community work as having great potential as a lever towards sectoral policy-making that is more realistic about grass-roots conditions. He describes how this approach can reveal discrepancies between 'policy-in-principle' and 'policy-in-practice'. In addition, many have described the instrumental benefit that occurs wherein increased ownership through participatory approaches ensures that community members continue to invest in projects over time, for example, by maintaining infrastructure improvements long after government investment has ceased to continue (Abers, 2000). Hence, relevant and sustainable policy-making demands that the powerful 'disempower themselves' and ensure the meaningful inclusion of community perceptions and priorities at an early stage in policy-making initiatives (Holland with Blackburn, 1998).

In addition to focusing on the instrumental benefits of access to 'local' community knowledge, practitioners link participatory methodology's privileging of this knowledge to the reversal of dominant power structures. In PM&E, note Macgillivray and Zadek, the issue "is not merely a question of which indicators are best for describing a particular process or set of events. It is more a matter of 'who' is empowered or disempowered in the process of selection, development and application." (1995 in Guijt, p. 205) Increasingly, advocates of participation are attending to the way in which knowledge is constructed for particular uses and to benefit particular audiences:

Learning to change involves learning from change: if we cannot learn effectively from our action, we cannot improve our understanding of the world, nor act more effectively on it. Who asks the questions about change affects what questions are asked, and whose realities are considered important. Who benefits from the questions – that is, who learns from the process – will affect who changes, who acts, and how. Learning from change means changing who learns, and looking at how differing stakeholders in change processes learn and act together. (Gaventa & Blauert, 2000, p. 243)

Hence, practitioners suggest that by prioritizing the perceptions and queries of marginalized people (Laderchi, 2001), participatory approaches produce a knowledge that is not only better, but in the interests of these excluded groups. As community members establish their own analytical framework (Mukherjee, 1995 in Holland with Blackburn), they begin to challenge 'top-down' models of change.

CHALLENGES AND DEBATES

While the work of Abers (2000), Arnstein (1969), Chambers (1997), Holland with Blackburn (1998), Laderchi (2001), and many others suggest a predominantly positive outlook on participatory activities and their products, these authors also recognize, to some extent, the gap that exists between the ideal of participation and how it is manifested in real-world contexts. While Abers' experience of state-initiated public participation was undoubtedly positive, she acknowledges that participatory policies differ according to who is invited to participate, what tasks they engage in, and the decision-making power that participants have (2000). Likewise, Chambers (1997) acknowledges the problems that have occurred as participatory approaches have become widely practiced in title, but not in substance.

In what has become one of the 'classic' pieces of writing on citizen participation (Smith, 1995), Arnstein attempts to clarify the meaning of participation, which she claims has been purposely buried in innocuous euphemisms like 'self-help' or 'citizen involvement' (1969). In an attempt to understand the concept of participation as it is translated by various actors in a number of settings, Arnstein puts forth a typology that she hopes may help with analysis of the issue. Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Participation* depicts eight levels of citizen participation, where each level, or rung, corresponds to "the extent of citizen power in determining the end product" (p. 217). Arnstein's rungs (from the lowest extent of citizen power to the highest) are: manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. Arnstein

describes how ‘manipulation’ and ‘therapy’ do not promote a power shift, but facilitate the ‘education’, or ‘curing’ of participants by those who are in power. Similarly, Arnstein illustrates how ‘informing’, ‘consultation’, and ‘placation’ imply ‘degrees of tokenism’ wherein participants can express ideas, but have little ability to determine decision-making outcomes. Only ‘partnership’, ‘delegated power’, and ‘citizen control’ are categorized by Arnstein as types of ‘citizen power’ wherein participants have the ability to determine decisions. In this way, Arnstein begins to break down the indistinct concept of ‘participation’ to question its use by dominant structures (1969).

Despite early attempts to clarify the nature of participation, the ambiguity of the concept continues to be regarded by many as major challenge for the advancement of mode of work. In his response to Arnstein’s *Ladder*, Smith (1995) criticizes her lack of definitional clarity, the logical disorganization of her ladder, and the lack of direction about how exactly to move up it. Cornwall (2000) criticizes the World Bank’s use of the term: “‘Participation’ for the World Bank is subsumed under an umbrella so broad it could comfortably accommodate most forms of development practice” (p. 40). Cornwall, Musyoki, and Pratt convey one facilitator’s comment that “everyone is doing something and calling it PRA” (2001, p. iii). The authors state that this lack of precision in the conceptualization and use of established techniques has heightened the debate about the nature and implementation of participatory methodology so that many practitioners are anxious for clarification. They caution that the lack of lucidity with respect to PRA is causing many people to discredit the whole field of participation (p. 1), and that the sheer

variety of meanings and practices associated with PRA pose serious challenges to efforts to enhance the quality of participatory practice. However, Johnson (2000) suggests that the struggle to find definitional clarity for participatory approaches is a positive thing in that it reflects the need for the application of these techniques to a wide range of uses. Cornwall, Musyoki, and Pratt concur that there is need for deliberation on this topic, even if no clear agreement is reached (2001).

Many of the challenges expressed by practitioners reflect the complications they encounter while implementing participatory techniques in communities. From one group to another, the implementation of common methods does not mean common understandings or common agendas. Negotiation amongst stakeholders can reinforce shared visions, but the reality is that sometimes different perspectives will not merge smoothly and may not ever be reconciled (Guijt, 2000). However, notes Espinosa (2000 in Gaventa & Blauert), consensus is not a precondition for working together.

The issues that are raised by participation practitioners reveal the discrepancies that exist between 'participation-in-theory' and 'participation-in-practice', as well as efforts to redress these gaps. Guijt (2000) describes the reality that total participation is impossible to achieve and sustain, and therefore suggests the need for a limited group of project co-ordinators / drivers who are negotiated and selected by as many stakeholders as possible. Laderchi (2001) has observed that while the final analysis of a participatory project is ideally done by 'the people', in reality, it is more common for a report to be

written up, and then sent back to a community for scrutiny. Hence, we begin to recognize the way in which participatory ‘ideals’ are compromised as they encounter the complexities of real-world implementation.

Like the ideal of ‘total participation’, the reality of using open-ended verbal methods can result in practical complications. For one project described by Guijt, participatory techniques led to mountains of taped data – requiring laborious transcription for which the project had inadequate resources (2000). In addition, participatory techniques often lead to questions about ‘rigour’ within methods, indicators, data collection, and analysis, notes Guijt. Nonetheless, she counters this concern by questioning the ideal of ‘rigour’, and suggesting that it depends on the audience and the context of the information-gathering; the definition of rigour, she suggests, is determined by ‘whose norms count?’ (2000). An understanding of lived community experience is enhanced by the investigation of shifting processes and meanings that cannot necessarily be treated as ‘fact’.

Another weakness in the implementation of participatory approaches that is described by practitioners is the centrality of facilitators to participatory processes. The reliance on champions, suggest Gaventa and Blauert (2000), is problematic in that these individuals can move on, or be replaced by their employers or constituency. Furthermore, Rutherford (2000 in Johnson), states that these visionary and charismatic leaders are often limited in numbers and too overworked.

However, even when an adequate number of energetic and skilled facilitators is involved, note practitioners, the methodological centrality of these individuals in participatory approaches is a problem. Laderchi describes how challenges occur as professionals inevitably have their own beliefs, and are aware of the desired 'end' of the project; "should researchers prompt participants to discuss something that didn't otherwise come up?" she asks (2001). It seems that there is an escapable element of arbitrariness in the process, even when following the 'best practice'; making sense of a complex reality as revealed by multiple outcomes, she states, means that some effort of synthesizing has been undertaken, and this effort is not value-free. (Laderchi, 2001). Although the ideas of facilitators obviously shape the outcomes of participatory practices, Holmes (2001) found that most community development workers involved in fieldwork in the Gambia did not consider their personal characteristics and the social relations of gender, class, generation, and ethnicity to be particularly relevant to how participatory techniques were practiced.

Many advocates of participatory approaches are skeptical of the implementation of participatory practices as they are 'scaled up' in institutional contexts. The policies, procedures, and systems within government agencies and other large agencies, note Abers (2000), and Gaventa and Blauert (2000), tend to be rigid and hierarchical and can therefore mitigate against the core principals of participatory methods which include sharing, flexibility, negotiation and learning. Holmes (2001) cautions that institutional

features such as policy documentation, accountability, rule systems, planning procedures, physical targets, financing mechanisms, incentives, rewards, sanctions, recruitment, training, and a particular organizational culture can block participatory approaches. Nonetheless, Johnson (2000) suggests that the success of participatory approaches within institutional environments can be greatly improved with the political will to support wider stakeholder access and the flexibility to explore alternative methods. Johnson and Guijt observe that resistance to new methods can be overcome by education, training, experiential learning, and mentoring (2000 in Johnson).

In the discussion of challenges related to participatory approaches, many practitioners describe a tension between product and process. The high cost of participatory exercises can promote dependency on external funders and can necessitate taking their interests into account (Freudenberger, 1998). In implementing World Bank – sponsored PPAs, a number of authors describe the contradiction that occurred for them as they tried to promote community ownership and prevent extraction of information, while at the same time being forced to work within the deadlines and the structure for data collection that was set by the Bank (see Owen, 1998; Dogbe, 1998). In Ghana, ownership and responsibility for the PPA series was progressively transferred to the implementing agency so that by the third phase, it was responsible for every aspect of the process (Dogbe, 1998). In Ottawa, the struggle over membership and voting responsibilities in bodies such as the OAP has been indicative of this same tension (see

Reimer, 2003) – the desire to promote ‘community ownership’ that is tempered by the need to function within a bureaucratic structure.

Dogbe argues that despite this tension, even the extractive PPA process in Ghana did give a voice to the poor by conveying to policy-makers, their perceptions of poverty and their priorities for poverty reduction; subsequent World Bank policies for Ghana, he notes, are likely to have been influenced by this information. As well, he describes the way in which the credibility of participatory methods in Ghana was heightened, thereby increasing the likelihood of the inclusion of the public in future development projects (1998). Similarly, Gill (1998) states that although a particular approach may, in reality, be less participatory than the pure process-base of PRA theory, eliciting analysis and extracting information at the local level are justifiable activities if they lead to locally beneficial outputs. Thus, investigations of participation need to consider both process and outcome-oriented implications; we can learn to look for and weigh the value of change that is ‘partial’, or ‘less-than-ideal’.

Those who examine participatory practice highlight the difficulties that can occur as processes are inevitably affected by the unequal distribution of power among stakeholders. Freudenberger (1998) describes how Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) techniques can expose competing interests, challenge dominant assumptions, and reveal social, political, and economic complexities. Organizations are generally willing to discuss power issues, note Gaventa and Blauert (2000), except when it comes to

questioning their own; power holders are often nervous to hand over real power to participants (Abers, 2000).

The implications of inequality are that marginalized groups are less likely to participate due to inadequate time, resources, and confidence (Abers, 2000). In Canada, membership in advisory committees frequently consists of professionals and representatives of the upper-middle class; participants are characterized by advanced education, high income, professional occupations, and higher-than-average age (Jewkes, & Murcott, 1998 in Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf; Lomas & Veenstra, 1995 in Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf), as well as a sense of empowerment (Smith, 1995 in Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf), and extensive community involvement (Putnam, 2000 in Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf).

Another significant hindrance for marginalized groups is their vulnerability. Gaventa and Blauert note that in aiming to privilege the voice of weaker or excluded groups, participatory approaches can often raise sensitive or threatening questions (2000). Furthermore, note Moser and Holland (1998), attempts to disseminate highly sensitive information in a participatory and effective manner to the widest possible audience can be constrained by the need to preserve the anonymity of vulnerable participants.

In addition to various issues associated with implementation, as well as the reality of inequality amongst stakeholders, many authors discuss the potential, in participatory

practice, for co-optation. Political co-optation of participatory approaches can occur as participatory methods create a veneer of legitimacy wherein champions are included as a means of controlling their activities (Abers, 2000). Citing examples in Brazil, she notes that often power-holders refuse to devolve genuine decision-making control, or that when they do, groups are insufficiently organized to take advantaged. In this way, she describes, participatory forums can be easily manipulated by interest-groups or politicians for their own benefit. Gaventa and Blauert (2000) describe how champions can use new 'participatory' arenas to build their own personal strongholds, or to close down processes when their own personal behaviour and performance is critically appraised. For example, the City of Ottawa's 2004 budget process, and the resulting mobilization of various stakeholder groups who were effectively 'in competition' for funding, had the potential to reinforce the lack of political power experienced by Ottawa-area groups who are the most marginalized.

PARTICIPATION: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

While many proponents of participatory approaches acknowledge the difficulty of implementing this complex concept in real-life settings, their writing does not tend to question the legitimacy of the participatory ideal. Recently, however, critical theorists have begun to question even the most basic assumptions of participatory practitioners; these questions are relevant to a study of participation in Ottawa.

In her critical work on the subject of participation, Rahnema (1992) summarizes assumptions which she regards as the foundation of popular participatory approaches to development. The first is that “present obstacles to people’s development can and should be overcome by giving the populations concerned the full opportunity of participating in all the activities related to their own development” (p. 121). This assumption is evident in Dahl’s (1970) ‘principal of affected interests’ – that everyone who is affected by a given decision should have the right to participate (in Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf, 2003). As well, Rahnema cautions against uncritical reliance on participatory methodology as she describes facilitators’ frequent assumption that “‘dialogical interaction’, ‘conscientization’, ‘PAR’ and other similar activities can make it possible for all the people to organize themselves in a manner best suited to meet their desired ends” (p. 121). Critical theorists like Rahnema have begun to interrogate these basic tenets of what Cooke and Kothari (2002) describe as “participatory orthodoxy” (p. 1).

In a critical treatment of the subject of participation, Cooke and Kothari, along with other writers, pose a startling question to practitioners of participatory approaches: is participation ‘The New Tyranny?’ (2002). The authors note that while an ongoing ‘self-critical epistemological awareness’ is frequently claimed by participatory practitioners, the criticisms that these individuals raise often relate to problems of technique – tools and methodology. A second level of criticism – which is directed towards the theoretical, political, and conceptual limitations of participation – is rarely addressed (Cooke & Kothari, 2002). As they confront this latter topic, Cooke and Kothari attempt to identify

some themes around which the theoretical, political, and conceptual criticisms of participation are often based (2002).

The first theme that is identified by the authors is the naivety of professionals' assumptions about the authenticity of motivations and behaviour in participatory processes. Despite the fact that there is little evidence of the long-term effectiveness of participation in contributing to real material improvements in the conditions of the most vulnerable people or as a strategy for social change, notes Cleaver (2002), it continues to be celebrated as a means of 'empowering the powerless'. In this way, he states, participation is therefore an act of faith – its legitimacy is believed and rarely questioned.

Critics of 'orthodox participation' describe the way in which participatory practices have failed to recognize the complexity of central concepts such as 'power' and 'community'. Francis (2002) describes the way in which the formation of 'community priorities' or 'community plans' can mask the diverse nature of the interests of individual community members and groups. While participatory techniques frequently attend to the communication that takes place between the 'community' and the professional, they rarely attempt to address the communication that occurs between community members (Francis, 2002). Not only are formal participation exercises unlikely to elicit responses from marginalized groups, states Francis, but they ignore or focus less on other local and informal decision-making structures (such as families, and social or work-group norms, etc.) that exist above and below the public 'community' level. Francis describes how the

group-based nature of participatory activities may be inconsistent with informal community or individual norms; employment of these methods with attention to community realities may obscure the actual way in which participation is occurring (2002). Bureaucratic computer-based planning, emphasis on textual data and the professional norms associated with the value of citizen input will affect the way in which participatory activities are taken up within City of Ottawa processes. Conversely, individual, professional, or cultural norms will affect the way the policy results of participatory decision-making are actually carried-out in particular contexts. By drawing our attention to informal and hidden processes, Francis illustrates how the 'real' decisions may be made 'elsewhere' (2002).

In a discussion of participation in western policy processes, Findlay (1993) suggests that attempts to promote participation through forms of representation established since the 1960s (that is, advocacy councils, special offices, equity programs, etc.) have strengthened the power of departmental commissioners in relation to elected officials. 'Responsiveness' is now built into the policy process in a way that has shifted representation from the political to the bureaucratic level. The argument for more direct citizen participation has lost its appeal as the representation of community interest is seen as being incorporated into the policy process in principle as required; here, it is less visible and more easily overlooked, and the relationship between the community and government becomes one of containment (Findlay, 1993).

A review by Shackleton (1977 in Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf) of the work of advisory bodies established two criteria by which to evaluate their effectiveness in the promotion of participation: 1) the council is consulted by the government while policy and legislation is still in the planning state, and 2) the council has to its credit at least a couple of occasions where a decision has been altered because of its intervention. Based on this analysis, Shackleton concluded that each of the councils have been dismal failures; by now, virtually all of them have been eliminated (Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf). This same story of meaningless participation is echoed through recounts of health care reforms that took place in British Columbia in the mid 1990s. Citizens were involved in various committees and consultation processes, but their input was blatantly ignored by officials (Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf, 2003). Departmental advisors, advocacy councils, special offices, equal opportunity / employment equity programs, and support for community groups to deliver state services are among the various forms of representation that have been established since the 1960s. While the development of many of these mechanisms have been seen by some as 'victories', Findlay considers them to have done little to advance meaningful democratization (1993); her analysis invites us to examine accounts of 'victory' more closely, so that we might 'unpack' our assumptions by asking: 'what victory for who?'.

Many authors cite as problematic, the treatment of individuals in communities as categories. 'The poor' is particularly obvious as a category into which a multiplicity of different kinds of people are conveniently shunted (Chambers, 1997; Moore, Choudhary,

& Singh, 1998 in Cornwall, 2000; Narayan, Patel, Shafft, Radernacher, & Koch-Schulte, 2000 in Cornwall, 2000). This tendency, warns Cornwall, masks the relationships – either exploitative or enabling – that some poor individuals have with ‘non poor’ others; it removes potentially important alliances from view and may serve to isolate or neglect the individuals who are categorized. In addition, she notes, categories can lead to ‘one size fits all’ types of solutions. The category of ‘women’, she explains, contains individuals who are rich, young, poor, religious, deaf, members of an ethnic majority or minority, and members of the upper class; each of these individuals is likely to have different needs and different goals. In the process of achieving ‘consensus’, she asks, ‘who benefits, and who is left out?’ (2000). Emergent ‘community needs’ may only reflect those of dominant members. As well, Cleaver (2002) describes how ‘community practices’ are sometimes unquestioningly categorized as a moral value. ‘What happens’, he asks, ‘when these practices are exclusionary or oppressive?’

Hence, inclusion in participatory activities, notes Cleaver, is assumed to be desirable but could result in subordination by others, or by the definitions that are imposed by the participatory practices themselves (2002). Approaches do not necessarily acknowledge the range of multiple cost / benefit motivations, or the benefits of non-participation. Decision-making is assumed to be based on notions of ‘self-interest’ among ‘equals’ and does not attend to individual motivations and social interactions, and their impacts over time (such as a sense of reciprocity, recognition, or respect) (Cleaver, 2002). Because of the failure of participatory approaches to adequately address these

complexities many authors suggest that ‘participation’ is a technical fix that leaves the root causes of inequity unchallenged (Cornwall, 2000).

Cooke and Kothari’s second theme of criticisms of participatory practice relates to the way in which orthodox participatory approaches’ emphasis on a micro level of intervention can also sustain broader macro-level inequalities and injustices by making them obscure (2002). One example is the way in which the widespread debate about participatory practices functions to sustain the establishment of orthodox participatory development. In exploring the increasingly widespread popularity of participatory approaches to development, Rahnema (1992) identifies four ways in which popular participation functions to advance its own interests. By celebrating ‘participation’ as the replacement for the old ‘irrelevant’ system of engaging in social initiatives, participation’s claim to ‘new knowledge’, ‘empowerment’ ‘linking’ and ‘efficiency’, has actually functioned to secure its central status in anti-poverty and social development initiatives (Rahnema, 1992).

Cleaver (2002) notes that while radical empowerment discourse – with its roots in Freirean discourse, is associated with both individual *and* class action, ‘participation’ has lost its radical, challenging, and transformatory edge as it has become a ‘buzzword’. The concept of participatory action has become individualized, and empowerment depoliticized. Cleaver describes that as participatory practice has become mainstream and institutionalized, participatory activities have come to shape behaviour in predictable,

recognizable, and acceptable ways – for example, in associations, committees, and contracts. As these activities come to mirror bureaucratic structures, these visible and formal manifestations of activity are attributed normative value, denoting initiative, responsibility, good citizenship, democratic engagement, and financial activity. Activities that occur outside this framework are assumed to be undesirable, marginalizing, and inefficient. Although there is a tendency to recognize social and informal institutions, explains Cleaver, analysis is generally focused on formal structures that seem to practitioners to have clearer rules and are considered to be more enduring. This favouring of formal arrangements, he suggests, is clearly linked to evolutionism: the transition from traditional (weak) organizations to modern (strong) organization is sought as a goal of development (2002). In this way, notes Rahnema (1992) traditional, local manifestations of power are de-valued, and politically-sanctioned power – attainable through participation – is the only type of power that is recognized as valuable.

Chambers (1974 in Cornwall 2000) describes the way in which dominant power arrangements are reinforced through participatory methods. ‘Participation’, he notes, can widen inequalities by favouring those sectors that are better able to produce and implement plans. Furthermore, Chambers suggests these plans are most often drawn up by civil servants, or by civil servants in conjunction with a few community elites. Participation through ‘voluntary’ contributions, says Chambers, can become a flat-rate tax directed at the poor, and failure to participate can result in the loss of important public services. In Ottawa, those who sit on the PIAC are undoubtedly some of the more

experienced and connected members of the city's low-income community; others who do not have the resources (for example, in terms of time or transportation) to become members may end up 'losing out' because they cannot advocate for their particular service needs.

In addition, a number of practitioners describe the way in which a focus on 'community knowledge' as it emerges through participatory techniques has actually proved to be compatible with top-down approaches, and has therefore not required any *real* change on the part of those in power. Villareal describes the importance of recognizing that knowledge is not a fixed commodity, but must be looked at as a product of the social relationships through which it was constructed (1994 in Mosse); what is taken as 'people's knowledge' is constructed in the context of planning and therefore reflects the social organization that these planning systems entail (Mosse, 2002).

Not only do participatory approaches have the potential to mimic oppressive power structures, but their 'feel-good' ideology can also function to obscure and therefore perpetuate these very arrangements. In his discussion of one *World Development Report*, Moore describes how the concept of empowerment is more decorative than directional and does not really structure the analysis. Moore states that the term is used in diffuse and ambiguous ways (2000 in Brock, Cornwall & Gaventa). Garry Kinsman (1997 in Campbell & Gregor) discusses how the term 'partnership' that is so often used in participatory discourse masks the underlying differences in the social

power and interests of those involved. While the language of ‘partnership’ denoted a common status shared by all actors, in fact, the views of ‘partners’ with professional knowledge, as well as the state’s position as ‘neutral’ were privileged over the interests of others. Loewenson, (1999 in Cornwall 2000) describes how the term ‘partnership’ has become increasingly slippery – giving rise to increasingly complex interactions between actors, and the creation of new questions of representation, agency, and voice. Cornwall, Musyoki, and Pratt suggest that the language of ‘partnership’ masks the reality, for non-powerful groups, of “begging for money” (2001, p. 27).

The third theme of criticisms that are identified by Cooke and Kothari is the sense that the language of participation masks a real concern for managerial effectiveness (2002). Rahnema (1992) describes the way in which ‘participation’ has moved away from its socio-cultural roots and is increasingly seen as an economic resource. Rahnema describes how organizations have learned to structure participatory activities to limit the power of participants, and how the political attractiveness of ‘participation’ is used as a key public relations tool. She also describes how participation is recognized as an efficient and effective way to gain valuable commodities (e.g. such as networks and on-the-ground knowledge) while much of the implementation work is done by stakeholders (1992).

Similarly, Mosse (2002) notes that participatory ‘products’ have become a commodity to be distributed in order to improve a project or agency’s image for local,

national, or international audiences. In this way, he describes, participatory goals are 'official' models that are directed outward and upwards as much, if not more, than inward and downward in practice. Participation, then, can represent to bureaucracies the possibility for 'greater productivity at lower costs', as these organizations seek to gain the benefits but avoid the risks of 'participation'.

This manipulative use of citizen participation in bureaucracy is apparent in White's review of the experience of citizen and community involvement in healthcare planning (2000 in Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf). White concludes that participation in this context did not lead to either increased community control of programs, or to individual empowerment. However, health care planners and administrators continued to be enthusiastic about the need for citizen 'participation' despite this method's inability to achieve its stated goals. In an attempt to explain the phenomenon, White found that the preferred 'participation' model was to consult citizens about pre-established plans. After this 'participatory' activity, professionals could present their initiatives as having the support of the 'community'.

Cooke and Kothari's (2002) fourth theme in participatory criticism is the quasi-religious associations of participatory rhetoric and practice. Guijt describes the role of practitioners as "particularly essential as guardians of the core principles and aims" of participation (2000, p. 213). This phrase, and the statement that "the magic only works if the magician understands the tricks" (Guijt, 2000, p. 209), reflect a belief in the centrality

of facilitators to an experience of ‘transformation’ that participants should undergo during a participatory exercise. These images, note Cooke and Kothari, have an underlying theme of moral superiority wherein practitioners view themselves as the change agent, and ‘liberator’ of community members. The promotion of this change of which they consider themselves agents, note the authors, reflects a predefined ideal that is imposed on those who are supposed to be ‘transformed’ (2002).

This role of ‘shamen’, the focus on ‘inner’ qualities, and the transformational imagery that have been taken up by practitioners, notes Francis, call to the ‘well-springs’ of the moral imagination and have obvious feel-good appeal (2002). Nonetheless, Cooke and Kothari caution that the ritualism associated with participatory activities is reflected in the refusal of ruling establishments to ignore the challenges posed by their understandings and analyses of their participatory work.

5: A SENSE OF DISJUNCTURE

As we respond to authors' calls to 'unpack' the way in which participation occurs in situated contexts, it is important to produce an analysis that is written from the position of those for whom we write. In this way, our exploration of participation attempts to be 'useful' for our informants; this is knowledge produced from a 'non-ruling' place. When we ask members of the City of Ottawa's Poverty Issues Advisory Committee (PIAC) to describe their participation work in the City of Ottawa, they naturally tell their stories with the purpose of helping us understand their activities from their perspective. It is from this position that we can begin our inquiry; we can attempt to explore these activists' work by viewing PIAC members' role in the City of Ottawa from their own standpoint.

AUTHORING ACTIVISM: "I KNOW HOW TO GET AROUND THAT KIND OF NONSENSE"

In their descriptions of participation, PIAC members establish their expertise as competent City of Ottawa 'insiders'; they function within the City's governance structure and are skilled at working within City processes. PIAC members describe their ability to both work through bureaucratic processes, and also to 'get around' bureaucratic 'road blocks' in order to successfully accomplish their participation work. Hence, we begin our exploration of activists' activities by understanding them as 'organizational experts'; PIAC members exhibit considerable expertise as they describe how they skillfully negotiate bureaucratic procedure in order to achieve anti-poverty activism.

Here, a PIAC member describes how her ability to work both through, and around, organizational processes enables the PIAC to achieve anti-poverty advocacy through a press conference. Her story tells of PIAC activists' capacity to subvert staff members' attempts to control the PIAC's activities in the midst of the charged atmosphere of the 2004 budget process. The speaker displays her ability to challenge procedural 'barriers':

We had developed and had a budget committee which met every week for like three and four hours at a time. We went through the entire Universal Program Review. We were probably the only people in the city who have read it, and the entire Budget, from beginning to end, through a poverty lens, and pulled out maybe 50 or 60 things that we identified as – we didn't pull out everything that had an effect on poor people, but sort-of the really – just the 'this is not acceptable' stuff. Some of it was – I think there was only one Committee, one Standing Committee that we didn't respond to their proposals for... We prepared a response for all of these different Committees and then we prepared sort-of an overall thing and we wanted to hold a press conference. It was in our minutes of our meetings. It was approved by PIAC. Obviously they didn't read the minutes that week to see what we were up to. I asked them to find a room for us for the press conference – and I got a call back saying "you can't hold a press conference". And I said "well excuse me? Why not?" And they said "well, it's not in your Terms of Reference". And I said "you know what... just because it's not in my Terms of Reference doesn't mean I can't do it. And by the way it does say in my Terms of Reference we can do advocacy on low-income issues, and that's exactly what we're doing. And, in your – I can't remember if it is a procedural by-law or the rules and regulations regarding Advisory Committees – it specifically says that only the chair and vice-chair can speak to the media. So you've said #1) I can do advocacy and #2) I can speak to the media. So I'm going to speak to the media and advocate certain positions that PIAC is going to take when they speak in front of all these standing committees. What's the problem? You can find me where it says I can't do that. I'm not asking you to find me where it doesn't say I can, I'm asking you to find me where it says I can't, because I'll be speaking to the media. The question is will I be speaking to the media at a press conference or will I just be speaking to the media wherever I find them? I can hold the press conference on the front lawn, or across the street from City Hall if you like, but I will be holding a press conference. And I will either be discussing this item, or I will be discussing the fact that you won't let me discuss this item." So they thought about it for, I think, an hour and they called me back and said that they were unable, because of the overload of work that

they had right now, that the Communications branch was unable right now to help us draft a press release. And I said "oh, that's fine. I can write my own press release." And she went "what do you mean?" So they said that they couldn't help us write a press-release and they thought that that would stop us from being able to do it. They put up barrier A and found that it didn't work, so they found barrier B. They couldn't help us write a press-release so it was not be possible for this to go forward – "that's OK we have the press-release drafted already." "Well, we don't have any way of helping you get it out" – "that's OK, we have a way of getting it out". And they were just like, freaked. And then they said "you know City Hall is booked. Every room in City Hall is booked at the time you want to do it." "We are quite flexible about the time. We can do it any time that day, so if there is another room, another time, it doesn't really matter to us." "No, no, sorry, every room in City Hall is booked for the whole day." "That's ok – never mind – if we have to go off-site that's cool – I mean I don't mind." They went nuts, because they had thought that those three things would stop us. So, I went upstairs and I spoke with a Councillor's office and I said "do you think you could book us a room to hold a press conference on Tuesday?" And funnily enough, even though every room in City Hall was booked on Tuesday, they were able to find us a room. And then of course we sent out our press-release on our own. We used another Councillor's media e-mail list or fax list or whatever – One of the Councillors sent that out for us. Because we did it on our own, they didn't know when or where or who we were conferencing with. It was quite distressing to them. And then, they started getting questions and comments back afterwards from people and they're going "they had a press conference?"

KB: And this is who? Communications?

This is, what do they call it, Council and Community Services, which is the secretariat that oversees, and it's under the City clerk's Office. So, if you're not... I mean, #1) I know how to get around that kind of nonsense, but you are talking about tenants who are elected from their community who may or may not have any knowledge of how the systems work...

The speaker emphasizes the PIAC's competent performance of its advisory role as she describes the committee's thorough assessment of the City's Universal Program Review (UPR), a massive document outlining all City programs and services as well as projected budget cut scenarios: *"We were probably the only people in the city who have read it, and the entire Budget, from beginning to end"*. Her description underlines the comprehensive nature of the work accomplished by the Advisory Committee: *"I think*

there was only one committee, one standing committee that we didn't respond to their proposals for...". Hence, the account describes the PIAC's comprehensive knowledge of City of Ottawa initiatives, and its capacity to provide competent and thorough anti-poverty advice through reports to Council's Standing Committees. With this, we begin to become aware of the extent to which PIAC members are organizational 'experts'.

Throughout the speaker's conversation, we see that her narrative is most notably an account of empowered victory; it is a story of overcoming 'obstacles'. She describes the way in which City staff members attempted to sabotage the PIAC's advocacy goals by using procedural practices as blockages: "*They put up barrier A and found that it didn't work, so they found barrier B*". In order to overcome these obstacles, the speaker had to draw upon her organizational expertise. She uses her knowledge of the Committee *Terms of Reference*, a 'legitimate' bureaucratic document, to justify the PIAC's work according to its sanctioned role. Her ability to draw on her expertise ("*I can write my own press release...We have a way of getting it out*") demonstrates the ability to work around established procedure when it becomes cumbersome.

Yet, the most exciting moment of the narrative occurs as the speaker recounts how she asserts PIAC's ability to engage in advocacy by drawing upon her understanding of the larger social structures within which City practices are embedded:

You can find me where it says I can't do that. I'm not asking you to find me where it doesn't say I can, I'm asking you to find me where it says I can't, because I'll be speaking to the media... And I will either be discussing this item, or I will be discussing the fact that you won't let me discuss this item.

Here, the speaker draws upon her awareness of the way in which City practices are shaped by its relations with media; she invokes the threat of bad publicity to achieve her goal. Our informant contrasts her expertise – the ability to “*get around that kind of nonsense*” – with the ignorance of other public participants who “*may not have any knowledge of how the systems work*”. In this way, the account emphasizes how PIAC members’ organizational expertise allows the PIAC to ultimately subvert Staff members’ attempts to block its advocacy work.

AN EMERGING PROBLEMATIC

When we view activists’ participation as the skillful negotiation of barriers, we are aligning ourselves with the standpoint of our informants. It is from this perspective that we can become sensitive to the unnamed tensions which PIAC members experience with respect to how their work is organized within the structure of the City. Because of our familiarity with activists’ accounts of ‘how things happen’, we are able to notice instances that somehow do not fit. This ‘lack of fit’ often occurs subtly as taken-for-granted arrangements that make us uncomfortable, but which we do not stop to question (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). However we sometimes experience it acutely, as a sudden jarring event: On July 14th, 2004, Ottawa City Councillors voted to fire the entire

volunteer Board of Directors, and the General Manager, of the Ottawa Community Housing Corporation (OCHC), the City-owned provider of low-income housing for eligible applicants. The outgoing Board – including elected tenant representatives – was replaced by an interim Board consisting of 4 Councillors and 3 non-Councillors. This July 14th decision was arranged via a motion presented publicly at the preceding June 23rd City Council meeting, where Councillors expressed the importance of the issue:

For the past month, we heard horror stories of the unacceptable conditions in some of this housing...In the future we wish to implement the necessary measures in order to ensure that our citizens don't fear, and have security – they are secure in their own apartments... It would be irresponsible not to act of course. This is a serious problem and we have to find solutions as soon as possible.

In this statement, a Councillor describes the “*horror stories*” that Councillors have been hearing “*for the past month*”; he stresses the urgency of the issue and the responsibility for immediate resolution of the problem by Councillors.

However, despite the reported severity of this issue and its impact on members of Ottawa’s low-income community, prior to June 23rd, PIAC members were not aware of the impending decision. One PIAC member describes her dissatisfaction with the decision that was made by Councillors:

...had we known exactly what the proposals were in time, we would have responded to that for sure ...we would have come forward and said that's not adequate; it's not acceptable.

Yet, her comments illustrate that the PIAC did not find out about the proposal to fire and replace the board “*in time*” to do anything about it. Although PIAC members would

have chosen to advise Council on this decision, they were never aware it was being considered.

Councillors' decision to fire and replace the OCHC Board – removing elected tenants – without the input of PIAC members reflects a 'disjuncture' between informants' accounts of their participation expertise, and how their participation activities were actually taken up in the organizational processes of the City of Ottawa. On July 14th, Councillors seized managerial control of the vast majority of social housing in Ottawa³, removing an experienced volunteer Board that included members who were democratically elected as representatives by poor people living in OCHC buildings. This major decision regarding the role of people with low-income in the management of affordable housing is a significant 'poverty issue', yet the decision was made without the input of the poverty experts appointed by City Council to act as its advisors. The decision to fire and replace the OCHC Board without PIAC members' participation reflects a startlingly different reality than activists' description of their 'organizational expertise', and their ability to skilfully work through – and around – bureaucratic processes to accomplish their anti-poverty goals. PIAC members wanted to have input into this decision, yet they were not able to "*get around*" the procedural barriers that blocked their participation in this issue.

³ OCHC is the largest social housing provider in Ottawa, and the second largest in Ontario; the corporation operates 14,723 units in 142 communities in the Ottawa area (Ottawa Community Housing, 2004).

This disjuncture between activists' experiences of 'organizational expertise', and Councillors' removal of the OCHC Board of Directors orients us to a 'problematic' that we can begin to explore: How did Ottawa Community Housing Corporation Board members – including elected tenant representatives - come to be fired and the whole Board replaced by Councillors without PIAC members' involvement or input? This question cues us to move between the standpoints of 'activists' and 'researcher' to investigate accounts of activism in order to explicate the social relations that organize and arrange the participation activities of PIAC members.

As we explore accounts of activism, we can begin to question and to lay out the arrangements within which the work of activists is embedded. Accounts, such as the story of 'accomplishing a press conference', outline the way in which activists skillfully negotiate bureaucratic barriers; yet they also reflect the way in which PIAC members' participation is shaped by and articulated to regulating structures that are more difficult for activists to recognize and circumvent. In the 'press conference' account, the speaker describes a process of pulling out "*50 or 60 things*" that PIAC "*identified*" as crucial poverty issues that needed to be addressed to various Standing Committees. This seemingly-simple process of 'agenda-setting', determining what counts as a 'poverty issue', and how this should be addressed by PIAC, is situated within a complex set of relations that PIAC members must accommodate. Although PIAC members are aware of many dimensions and 'levels' upon which poverty exists and can be addressed, their anti-poverty work is defined and prioritized according to the way in which poverty takes

shape within the City budget. To address the issue of poverty, they must respond to the information that is provided by staff members, and produce a response that is itemized and divided so as to be distinctly within the mandate of each Standing Committee of Council.

In addition, the speaker refers to the PIAC's *Terms of Reference*, an organizational document that outlines the Committee's mandate, responsibilities, organization, and reporting relationships. Her use of this document to assert PIAC's interest reveals skilled maneuvering of barriers, yet also signifies the boundaries within which this maneuvering must occur. She is able to accomplish a press conference only because the City has mandated that “#1) [she] *can do advocacy* and #2) [she] *can speak to the media*”. Thus, we become aware of a process of ‘orienting’: PIAC's composition and structure, its interaction with the community, and its duty to report through the HRSSC are parameters which arrange its position with respect to other groups. Although in this case PIAC's identified responsibilities allow members to accomplish their advocacy goal, we can recognize the potential for this arrangement to be limiting because the PIAC's *Terms of Reference* must be sanctioned by City Council. It is Council, and not PIAC, who ultimately determines that which is ‘acceptable’ as anti-poverty activism.

These processes of ‘agenda-setting’ and ‘orienting’ are interrelated and are also tied into a process of ‘mandating’, wherein PIAC's purpose and goals are defined for its members. In the ‘press conference’ account, the speaker describes a process of

prioritizing poverty issues, and breaking these down into recognizable items that can be addressed by the various Council Standing Committees. Here, PIAC members need to negotiate factors such community input, time constraints, financial resources, and Standing Committee mandates. The speaker describes a process of selection: “*we didn’t pull out everything that had an effect on poor people*” based on a determination of only the most urgent or basic, the “*not acceptable*” proposals. Hence, we can begin to explore a process wherein PIAC is mandated to support Council by breaking down and prioritizing poverty issues in such a way as to make anti-poverty work achievable and manageable for the City.

These processes of ‘agenda-setting’, ‘orienting’, and ‘mandating’ occur through the network of social relations that arrange PIAC members’ work within the City of Ottawa structure. As these processes occur, they function to shape and to direct the work of activists so that it is in-line with City processes. Hence, we can find accounts of ‘perfect work’ – participation that occurred ‘exactly as it was supposed to’; it is recognizable and successful as ‘public participation in municipal government’ because it occurred comfortably within the limits established by the relations through which it was shaped. While this ‘perfect participation’ often results in the accomplishment of activists’ anti-poverty goals, we can also recognize activists’ anti-poverty goals as products of the social contexts in which they are constructed (Villareal, 1994 in Mosse). ‘Perfect participation’ occurs within boundaries that function to contain activism – limiting the nature, scope, and direction of activists’ work. These boundaries often

establish the context within which goals of anti-poverty activism are formulated and thereby dictate not only the extent to which goals are achieved, but also the very way in which the goals are conceptualized.

Exploring PIAC members' accounts of activism in the context of the July 14th firing of the OCHC Board enables us to explicate the way in which these activists' participation is controlled and restrained by external 'others' in ways that some may not realize, or may take for granted. Although we have started our inquiry by understanding that activists are organizational experts who are able to accomplish their goals by both 'getting around' and working through the system, we will begin to explicate the way in which their participation is at the same time sectioned-off and contained within specific and limited aspects of City functioning. We will see how, because of the bureaucratic and economic ruling structures that organize the way in which participants' activities are taken up within the City's institutional processes, PIAC members' expertise with respect to poverty and social housing tenancy, and their concern for citizen involvement was blocked from consideration in Councillors' OCHC decision. Here, we maintain our recognition of the skillful way in which PIAC members accomplish significant feats of anti-poverty activism. At the same time, this analysis will seek to lay out for participants, the way in which their activism is not only negotiated, but simultaneously arranged, contained – and sometimes bypassed altogether.

6: ARRANGING PARTICIPATION: CITY WORK PROCESSES

AGENDA-SETTING: DEFINING 'POVERTY ISSUES'

PIAC members' accounts of anti-poverty work demonstrate that they are conscious of having to negotiate anti-poverty activism within the confines of bureaucratic structures:

Part of the reason for that is the problem with housing is so huge that if we were to start addressing every little corner of it... well, not even individuals... if we were to address all the people who are homeless who are sleeping in the Rideau Centre – we can't create a solution to that and it would just swamp our entire agenda. So we have to sort-of say "we can't be all things to all people." That's part of the reason for us focusing on things like the 'Basic Needs' and whatever, because we are trying to look at how can we resolve the problem generically as opposed to solving the problem through Mary this week and through Johnny next week and so on. If we can get the City to turn around and look at housing as a basic need and then get the City to turn around and look at ways of providing that housing and requiring that developers meet certain criteria, or whatever... And that is a much more long-term solution that affects everybody. I know there have been some people who have a problem with us not ... has told us several times that we're – well, we won't use exact words, but that in fact we are part of the problem because we won't go and 'man the barricades' or whatever, and that's not our role. Our role is to try and affect policy at City Hall or to affect policy provincially or federally through City Hall, which we have done a couple of times – that we have asked the City to lobby – it's not their mandate to do such-and-such, so we've asked them to lobby the province to change whatever and likewise the feds. It's very hard for a lot of people to understand why we won't go beyond that. I mean, aside from anything else, if we did go beyond that we run the risk of being shut down by the City and it's better to be there doing the little bit you can within their... and we push the boundaries a fair amount. We get told about it. But you have to be careful where you push those boundaries.

Here, a PIAC member describes the process of prioritization and compromise that occurs as the Committee determines how it will address the complex issue of poverty. From her account, we can gain insight into the way in which PIAC's agenda-setting process is organized by its position within City structure. The speaker describes a number of

criteria that PIAC members use as they are determining their anti-poverty work. The first of these is 'achievability'; in her account, the speaker describes a complex local homelessness issue and identifies it as beyond the scope of PIAC's work, explaining that "*we can't create a solution to that and it would just swamp our entire agenda*". PIAC members are aware of their 'agenda' – a fixed amount of time and resources they have in which to address poverty issues, and produce 'results'. Hence, they are looking for anti-poverty goals that won't "*swamp*", or overwhelm; they are looking to address poverty in a way that enables a straightforward response – one that can be clearly recognized as a '*solution*'.

As well, the speaker describes a second criterion for the definition of PIAC's anti-poverty work: "*we are trying to look at how can we resolve the problem generically... Our role is to try and affect policy*". Successful policy-focused activism can result in significant and widespread changes for people who are living in poverty; the creation of a national housing program, for example, is widely seen as a policy-centered solution that will significantly improve the lives of people with low-income (see for example, National Housing and Homelessness Network, 2003; Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, 2003). However, PIAC members' sole focus on policy issues also functions to organize and arrange their activities in a way that can limit the scope of their work. Holland with Blackburn describe how the complexities and complications of policy formation often exclude those who are not sufficiently well-versed in this art (1998); with their limited time and resources, it is very possible that PIAC members would have difficulty sorting

through convoluted policy processes and getting to the ‘heart’ of a particular policy issue in time to effect change. As well, Holland with Blackburn’s (1998) portrayal of policy as often only symbolic change, rather than substantive change is helpful here; changes to City policy may result in a public statement of ‘good intention’, but will not necessarily result in increased access to material resources for people living in poverty. City Council can support an issue in principle by lobbying other government or non-government bodies, thereby diverting expectations that the City should allocate its own resources and escaping the perception of responsibility should the solution not be achieved. Hence, the anti-poverty work of PIAC activists can result in little material change as they are required to maintain their focus on those policy issues which fit comfortably within the structure and mandate of the City.

This ‘fit’ within City structure is a third criteria emphasized by the speaker: “*Our role is to try and affect policy at City Hall or to affect policy provincially or federally through City Hall*”. Here, it is clear that all of PIAC’s work is shaped by and articulated to its relation to the City through HRSSC and ultimately, to City Council. PIAC’s ‘agenda’ must consist of work that is within the mandate of the City, or must be an issue for which the City has an interest in lobbying other levels of government. Hence, the complex and difficult reality of ‘poverty’ must be broken down by activists into ‘municipal’, ‘provincial’, and ‘federal’ policy aspects – in addition to ‘achievable’ and ‘solvable’ policy aspects. While PIAC members may have otherwise chosen to take an approach that was less focused on easily identifiable ‘solutions’, more focused on

demanding specific material resource allocation, or included a direct multi-governmental approach, these strategies may not be pursued if they are thought to be outside PIAC's City-mandated role. While she describes and compares the merits of individual, group, or policy-based approaches to addressing poverty, the speaker of the account identifies this role as the factor that ultimately determines PIAC's agenda "*aside from anything else*". That is, regardless of all the ways in which the PIAC 'could' choose to address poverty issues, it is the mandate of the City that trumps all other agenda-setting criteria.

The speaker describes ways in which these agenda-setting processes are shaped and enforced. City Council provides PIAC with certain benefits of 'insider' status: meeting space, some money for transportation and childcare, access to City documents, and increased ability to influence Standing Committee agendas. They value this position and describe a sense that even limited work within the City structure is better from having no 'insider' access at all: "*it's better to be there doing the little bit you can within...*". Hence, we begin to see the way in which this highly regulated process of participation can promote a focus on formal and structured 'insider' decision-making opportunities, and a shift away from community based 'grass-roots' activities. 'Insider' status within institutional decision-making structures is rewarded with access to resources, and is held up as a valued position that PIAC members do not want to jeopardize; Cleaver (2002) suggests that this favouring of formal arrangements that are seen to have 'clearer' rules, and to be stronger and more enduring, is linked to evolutionism.

PIAC members are aware that their ‘insider’ status is somewhat precarious. There are boundaries, and these boundaries are enforced: “*We get told about it*”. PIAC members are aware that they can be “*shut down*” if they are deemed to be stepping too far out of the role that the City has designated for the Committee. Because the committee falls within the structure of the City, City Council has the ability to change the function of the PIAC, to impose limitations on its members, to reduce its access to City resources, or to dissolve it altogether. Hence, there are varying ways in which City staff and Councillors could propose changes that would overtly or subtly limit PIAC members’ ability to accomplish their desired anti-poverty work. PIAC members experience formal control of their activities as they are bound by the Committee mandate and *Terms of Reference*, but they also perceive the practical ways in which City administrative practices function to block their interaction with others, and their access to information. Here, a PIAC member describes her awareness of the constraints that the City can, and does, impose in order to limit her participatory role:

Any board that has an advisory group can define the mandate of that advisory group and they can put a box around it that says “you can’t comment in public. You can’t do this...”

So things like – and this is a way of controlling what we can do – they won’t pay for my child care or transportation to come to a Council meeting, even though something from PIAC is on that Council agenda. So, when, for instance, they had a Governance Report last November or so, which changed the composition of PIAC ...

So that Report never went to Corporate Services [Standing Committee]. It never went to the various Standing Committees, it went directly to Council. So the only way for us to influence a Councillor or hear what the Councillors were actually saying when they spoke to the item was to physically be in the Council chamber. Because that wasn’t an

“official meeting” of PIAC and it wasn’t a meeting of our Standing Committee, they would not reimburse my child care and transportation. ... So by doing that ...as a person who lives in poverty, who cannot fund the child care and the transportation otherwise, they are in fact controlling my ability to participate.⁴

The speaker describes how the participation of PIAC members is overtly controlled based on the City’s definition of what constitutes legitimate ‘participation’; here, we begin to see a pattern that flows through many accounts of PIAC members’ anti-poverty work. PIAC members are minimally reimbursed for participation expenses when they are officially meeting, or when they are making a presentation to HRSSC or Council. They are not reimbursed to attend meetings to observe or to be a supportive presence for another group. Hence, PIAC members are encouraged to be focused on their own agenda, to work at producing anti-poverty recommendations that can be brought forward to HRSSC and acted upon by Council; they are not supported to broaden their understanding of other groups’ positions, to hear about other issues that are ongoing in the City, or even to respond to the outcome of their own work when it is considered by Council. Thus, we begin to see the way in which PIAC members’ work is steered away from coalition-building and open dialogue. Rather, their agenda is restricted to the one-way provision of advice to Council on issues that Council and staff deem is a ‘poverty issue’ that is within the scope of the HRSSC.

⁴ Breaks in narrative attempt to present the account as it was spoken; breaks indicate instances where speakers address a different topic for some time before returning to the narrative that is captured here.

The author discusses how the City's 2003 *Governance Review* proposed changes to all Advisory Committees, including the PIAC. But because the *Review* was not deemed to be a 'poverty issue', it was not until these governance changes had been approved by Council that PIAC had the opportunity to provide input and to draw upon their expertise to negotiate a few key compromises. One of the important agenda-setting processes that PIAC members sought to negotiate with respect to their *Terms of Reference* was a commitment from City Council and staff which would outline the specific way in which the City would support the PIAC's mandated responsibility for "reviewing new policies when they are considered to have an impact on poverty issues". This process of negotiation can be traced through a City organizational document – an excerpt from a draft February 2004 PIAC report to HRSSC, which recommends that the HRSSC approve an amended version of the PIAC's Terms of Reference. The report includes background documentation outlining the process of negotiation which occurred between City staff members and members of PIAC:

POVERTY ISSUES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESPONSIBILITIES

[Proposed items]

- *Reviewing new policies when they are considered to have an impact on poverty issues;
- *Reviewing and advising on training to sensitize staff and the community on the issues and concerns affecting the low-income community.

[PIAC Response]* REMOVE THESE TWO SECTIONS UNTIL THE CITY TELLS US HOW THEY WILL SUPPORT THEM

[Staff Comments] (Staff Position: First bullet in question concerning the review of new policies when they are considered to have an impact on poverty issues has been amended to specify the People Services Department requirement to bring forward such matters to allow the Committee to advise on...)

The report demonstrates the original items mandated as ‘Responsibilities’ of the PIAC, PIAC members’ recommendations that the items be removed pending more specific explanation on the part of the City, and City staff members’ comments which indicate their support of PIAC members’ recommendations.

As a result of PIAC members’ request and staff amendments to the document, the *Terms of Reference* finally passed by Council includes a specific reference to the People Services department, and acknowledges the cross-departmental nature of poverty issues:

- **Advising on new policies originating from the People Services Department and other departments where applicable** when they are considered to have an impact on poverty issues;

Here, the bolded text highlights the altered portions of the item, which according to staff comments (above), represents the “People Services Department requirement to bring forward such matters”. Hence, we see how departmental staff members are highly involved in the process of establishing the PIAC’s anti-poverty agenda because of their role in determining ‘applicability’, and ‘considering’ which issues impact on poverty. It is their assessment of ‘poverty issue’ that determines whether or not an item is brought to the attention of PIAC members. Yet despite staff assertions that a ‘requirement’ has been specified, the item does not clearly lay out the process for determining a policy’s

‘applicability’ for review by PIAC, nor does it lay out exactly what is involved in ‘considering’ a policy to affect poverty.

As PIAC members describe their agenda-setting process, they highlight staff members’ role with respect to bringing forward ‘poverty issues’ for their consideration:

Theoretically, what’s supposed to happen is any issue that comes up that we might have an interest in, they’re supposed to send it to us and make us aware of it in case we need to respond to it, like if Parks and Recreation is planning on closing a park, we’re supposed to be able to say, ‘you know what, all the community uses that park and all the poor people won’t have anywhere to go blah blah blah’ that sort of thing; we’re supposed to have that opportunity to say that. So they’re supposed to send us that information, and certainly any changes to the way – the structure of PIAC or the way it works – gets sent to us. Again, through City staff we receive all that stuff... The City’s got a certain obligation to keep their Advisory Committee informed.

Yet even as the speaker describes City procedure in terms of the City’s “*certain obligation*” to keep PIAC members informed of ‘poverty issues’, her narrative betrays a discrepancy between the official version of the procedural flow of information and the way in which it actually occurs. As she is describing the way in which City staff members bring forward ‘poverty issues’ for the consideration of the PIAC, she constantly qualifies her statements – cueing us to the provisional nature of this information flow:

*...what’s supposed to happen is...
 ...they’re supposed to send...
 ...we’re supposed to be able to say...
 ...we’re supposed to have that opportunity...*

As she orients us to this agenda-setting process, her statement that it happens ‘*theoretically*’ suggests that in actuality, it often happens a different way.

This pattern is particularly pronounced when, in the same sentence, it abruptly ends. Here, she begins to describe the procedure whereby PIAC members are informed of any changes to the structure or function of PIAC; immediately, she is describing ‘what actually happens’ and her description accordingly has no provisions: “*certainly any changes ...gets sent ...we receive all that stuff.*” Our informant’s account contrasts the certainty with which PIAC members are made aware of ‘rules’, with the uncertain nature of their opportunities to respond to poverty-related issues.

Through recognizing the subtle shift in this speaker’s account, we can attend to both the formal and the de facto ways in which PIAC members’ anti-poverty agenda can be significantly determined by City staff members’ actions. An examination of the everyday ways in which staff members actually take up, or ‘activate’, the procedural ‘requirement’ to “bring forward such matters” to the PIAC enables us to further lay out the work processes that arrange the PIAC’s anti-poverty agenda.

It is important to recognize that agenda-setting processes do not rest solely with the decisions of staff members; they are not one-sided. Rather, these are intricate processes of interaction that occur within the context of organizational timelines, political prioritization, and varying understandings of the meaning of ‘poverty’. The contexts of governance are complex (see Abers, 2000; Brock, Cornwall, & Gaventa, 2001; Cornwall, 2002). Activists’ accounts reveal not only the way in which City staff members’ consideration of ‘poverty issues’ can dictate their anti-poverty work agenda, but also the

way in which PIAC members draw upon their organizational expertise to negotiate and extend the boundaries within which they engage in their participation work. Like White's (2000 in Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf) description of the preferred bureaucratic 'participation' model wherein citizens were involved 'after-the-fact', PIAC members describe instances of being left out in the critical beginning stages of policy development:

But sometimes what's happened is that things are just sort of sprung on us ... I have actually gone in [to a Standing Committee meeting] and said things like "Well nobody asked PIAC what we thought about this, but I think that if PIAC had been asked, this might be what they might have said..." which puts the message out to the Councillors on the Committee. And we've actually had (twice) that staff have been chastised by a Councillor saying "excuse me Beth, I'm not quite sure I understood what you said. PIAC didn't know about this?" And I said "No!" Then they have asked staff "could you explain to us why, when we have an Advisory Committee, that this has not been - they didn't even know it was coming to [Standing] Committee? What's that about?" Which puts staff in an interesting position. So I think through that process, we've been able to get – I mean HRSS, their staff would have a very difficult time bringing anything forward that they haven't run by us now. Some of the other departments are not...

... We are in the process very gradually of training people in other departments to realize that certain things are poverty issues whether they are social services issues or not... That is a very long education process.

Here, the speaker describes how PIAC members actively negotiate and assert their entitlement to advise Councillors on issues that are commonly considered to impact on poverty. In addition to attempting to ensure that recognized 'poverty issues' are brought forward to them, activists are also engaged in a process of expanding City staff and Councillor's definition of 'poverty issue'. While their *Terms of Reference* lays out a formal reporting relationship with the People Services department and the HRSSC, activists initiate an "*education process*" with staff members from other departments;

rather than narrow their participation agenda in order to focus upon only those items addressed by the HRSSC, PIAC members attempt to interact with staff members in other departments in an effort to draw compartmentalized City reporting processes in-line with their own cross-departmental understanding of poverty.

As we lay out the various relations that arrange the process of agenda-setting, we can begin to see the complex way in which PIAC members' work is both shaped and contained within boundaries that are defined elsewhere. The PIAC agenda is determined according to its City-mandated role; 'poverty' is broken down and categorized into policy work that 'fits' within the City's structure and mandate, and PIAC members are cautiously aware of the risk of being "*shut down*". Activists' anti-poverty work is shaped overtly through administrative procedures that support only certain activities as legitimate participation, but is also shaped more subtly by the everyday reporting practices that enable, or overlook, their access to issues 'considered' to effect poverty. Nonetheless, the anti-poverty agenda of PIAC members is also negotiated and asserted through these activists' use of their organizational expertise.

PIAC members' ability to successfully negotiate the 'requirement' that People Services staff bring forward issues of interest, and their work in 'training' staff members in other departments reflects a skilled use of their 'insider' status to claim control in agenda-setting processes. Yet even this process of negotiation reflects the way in which

their participation is simultaneously arranged by others. Struggling for the ability to ‘respond’ to policy initiatives is significant, yet PIAC members describe the ability to “respond” as less desirable than being involved in earlier stages of policy development. As one activist discusses the difference in power between a governing body and its advisory board, she highlights the latter’s ability to become involved only ‘after-the-fact’:

And [the advisory board] also will not have any input to the budget discussions, in the sense of talking about developing a budget. You can respond to a budget once it’s developed...

Despite the speaker’s obvious preference for involvement in the development stages of an issue rather than being restricted to providing a ‘response’, PIAC members have devoted much work to achieving even this less desirable goal. Hence, we can see the way in which PIAC members’ focus on identifiable and ‘doable’ poverty issues, and micro-level institutional processes, can fail to challenge broader macro-level inequalities and injustices (see Cooke & Kothari, 2002). In their roles as members of the PIAC, activists are prevented from addressing broader poverty issues that involve too many variables, require too many resources, and for which they can’t identify an ‘answer’.

Hence, PIAC’s position within the City’s reporting structure clearly affects the way in which PIAC members come to know about, and have the ability to act upon poverty-related issues. While PIAC members struggle to have input and involvement in many aspects of City functioning, we can see that they must ultimately work within boundaries that are established by City Council, and mediated by the way in which these

boundaries are activated by City staff. We can become aware of the significance of PIAC's standpoint with respect to other bodies, that is, its 'orientation' with respect to City Council, City staff, and also 'outside' individuals – such as members of Ottawa's low-income community. As we continue our analysis, attention to this aspect of PIAC members' accounts of activism will allow us to see how this process of 'orientation' is both accomplished and maintained in order to organize and arrange the anti-poverty work of PIAC activists.

ORIENTING: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Activists' accounts reflect the way in which their anti-poverty work is shaped because they function as City of Ottawa 'insiders' with a formal reporting requirement that aligns their anti-poverty work with the governance structure of the City. Here, the way in which this work is shaped is particularly evident when the speaker contrasts the PIAC's anti-poverty work with that of its extra-bureaucratic predecessor, Ottawa Action on Poverty (OAP):

Unfortunately PIAC is slightly different than was originally envisioned, so OAP is off on one side kind of merrily going on its way doing its thing. That's not a bad thing, because the thing is OAP can do stuff that PIAC can't. OAP can be very outspoken and activist and partisan if they want to be and PIAC can't do that. If we want to align ourselves with the NDP, we can do that. PIAC can't. PIAC has to be scrupulously non-partisan and they have to watch how much criticism... We're not particularly hand-tied, but we have to watch how much lobbying-type stuff we do. We can't really go ourselves to the provincial government and say "Smarten-up you twirps", whereas OAP can do that. If PIAC wants to do that then they have to send a letter to People's Services saying "we think that the City of Ottawa should tell the provincial government, or request the

provincial government do this” and Peoples Services sends it to City Council and City Councils goes “Yes. That’s actually a good idea. We’ll do that.” Then City Council sends a letter off to the provincial government saying “We think you should do this.” So it’s just a little bit of how you do things, and that’s a little bit different.

In her account, the speaker lays out the advantages and disadvantages of the way in which the PIAC’s anti poverty work is shaped by its position within the City of Ottawa. She recognizes the continued existence of OAP as helpful because it can be partisan, it can openly align itself with a particular political interest, and it can directly lobby other entities or levels of government; the boundaries within which PIAC members must work are clearly identified as we are told about the things that “*PIAC can’t do*”. Hence, this account lays out the way in which the PIAC’s anti-poverty work is limited because it must be accomplished entirely through the work of City Council – it is unable to approach other entities directly. However, the speaker minimizes these limitations of PIAC’s location within City structure by referring to PIAC’s functioning as just “*a little bit different*” from that of OAP.

In this way, PIAC’s orientation with respect to Council and to outside entities is reflected in a matter-of-fact account of ‘things working smoothly’; the speaker is simply describing the steps that occur as PIAC members accomplish their goal of lobbying the provincial government. PIAC’s goal is sent in letter form to People Services, and from People Services to City Council, to which City Council responds: “*Yes. That’s actually a good idea. We’ll do that.*” PIAC’s goal is unquestioningly achieved as City Council then “*sends a letter off*” to the province. However, this matter-of-fact description of

unfettered goal achievement obscures the way in which activists' participation is organized by their arranged orientation.

As we examine this account more closely, we see that the speaker has described for us not only the way in which PIAC members' advocacy goals are achieved, but also the way in which their work is mediated and re-authored by others before it is articulated to its intended recipients. Hence, it is not PIAC's work, but Council's 'representation' of People Services' 'representation' of PIAC's work, that is finally articulated to the provincial government. Each mediating entity has ownership over the product that it articulates forward to the next; it therefore has the ability to alter the original work in accordance with its objectives. An excerpt from the City's *Appointment Policy* clearly lays out Council's absolute authority over the anti-poverty work that PIAC members produce in their role as advisors to Council:

Advisory Committees to Council

- ◆ provide advice to City Council, through relevant standing committees, on major public issues and social trends
- ◆ City Council has sole authority to accept, reject or amend the advice or recommendations

As such, the extent to which PIAC members are able to accomplish their anti-poverty goals ultimately depends on the extent to which these goals are in-line with those of City staff, HRSSC, and Council. It would clearly be difficult for PIAC members to accomplish empowered action that is either 'radical' or 'transformatory' (Cleaver, 2002).

There are overt limits to the decision-making power that participants actually have (Abers, 2000).

The way in which activists' anti-poverty goals are mediated by City staff members and City Council is apparent in a PIAC member's description of the way in which the structure of PIAC was modified from the original vision of those groups which lobbied for its formation. As we attend to the way in which the structure of PIAC was modified, we can gain insight into the processes that 'orient' activists' work:

So what was originally supposed to happen was little groups like OAP were supposed to happen all over the city. And each of these groups were supposed to send people to this body that was supposed to take place at a City level – this permanent poverty advisory body. These groups would all send members...

But the City got a hold of it and changed it a little bit and it didn't end up working out that way... They just went through and made up new mandates for all of the Advisory Committees... The City basically made the same one for everybody across the board, just changing the words accordingly ...

This informant describes the original vision of anti-poverty advocates who lobbied City Council for the formation of a Poverty Issues Advisory Committee within the structure of the City. Advocates originally proposed that the PIAC should be comprised of representatives from 'cluster groups' of low-income citizens from across the City.

However, the recruitment and membership structure of the PIAC that was adopted by City Council upon amalgamation was the same across-the-board for each of the 16 Advisory Committees that were created at the time:

Appointment Policy
Citizen Members of Boards, Committees and Authorities

Recruitment and Selection Procedure For Citizen Membership

- a. Recruitment/Advertisements for interested applicants shall be placed by the Corporate Services Department in the daily and/or weekly community newspapers in accordance with the City's advertising policy as well as on the City's website. Advertisements will also be distributed throughout Client Service Centres, libraries and City facilities. In addition, for specific committees, an effort will be made to tailor the recruitment process specifically to the particular groups that are potential members, for example in area high schools for the Youth Advisory Committee and through the Disability Resource Centre for the Accessibility Committee.

Selection

- Standing Committees responsible for the individual Advisory Committee will appoint two of its members to sit on a Selection Panel to review applications and make recommendations to Council.
- The Selection Committees will also include two members appointed by the Committee, who are not seeking reappointment.
- The Committee Coordinator for the Committee will provide advice and assistance to the Selection Panel.
- The Selection Panel shall recommend appointments as well as a reserve list of people who could be appointed should a vacancy occur ...
- The Corporate Services Department shall forward the Selection Panel recommendations to the relevant Standing Committee (or Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee if there is no assigned Standing Committee).
- The Standing Committee may review the Selection Panel recommendations at a closed meeting and recommend appointments to City Council.

Recruitment is achieved through general advertisement; selection occurs through a process of input by Councillors, retiring Committee members, and staff, but is definitively controlled by City Council who must approve all appointees to Citizen Committees.

While the City's *Appointment Policy* states that this across-the-board appointment process seeks to ensure "equity and accommodation for all candidates", we can recognize that it also serves to alter the PIAC's orientation with respect to the community of individuals with low income who advocated for its creation. In the Ottawa Task Force on Poverty (TFOP)'s original image of PIAC as comprised of cluster-group representatives, PIAC members would have had a formal structure within which to move back and forth between PIAC and the low-income community. The TFOP envisioned a process of two-way communication and accountability wherein PIAC members would not only transmit community perspectives to Council, but would also report back to these cluster groups (Interim Committee of the Task Force on Poverty, 2000). In reporting back, PIAC members would have had a structured format through which to inform community members of Council activities, and also to receive feedback about PIAC activities from the communities it represents. However, Council's decision to disregard the 'cluster group' structure for selection of PIAC membership functioned to prevent PIAC members from having a formal responsibility to any entity outside of the structure of the City; PIAC members are distinctly oriented towards accomplishing work through the activities of City Council. In this way, PIAC's selection and appointment process functions to accomplish a 'disconnect' between PIAC members and the low-income community that they represent. The PIAC's activities are formally shaped by and articulated to Council and HRSSC alone; there is no other group to which its members are officially accountable.

As the informant continues to describe the changes made to the PIAC when it was taken up by the City, we can recognize the way in which these changes further contribute to a 'disconnect' between the PIAC and the low-income communities it ostensibly represents. Here, she explains how the absence of cluster-groups and cluster-group representation structure has resulted in fewer people with low-income who are available or prepared to become PIAC members:

...part of the original plan with these cluster-groups and everything was that they were going to have a whole slew of people to choose from, that people were going to be constantly groomed to go beyond this committee [cluster group]. What's happened is that there is a core group of us that's been there since the beginning, but that new group hasn't really been coming up the way it should be. And so they just haven't had people to choose from really... We've already got the crème de la crème on the committee...

The speaker describes how, without a formal structure of cluster-groups who are actively recruiting and supporting individuals with low-income to become involved in public participation activities, these individuals are unlikely to become informed of and involved in the work of the PIAC. When asked how potential members of this community might find out about the opportunity to become involved in the Advisory Committee, our informant suggests that the City's across-the-board recruitment procedures are insufficient:

As far as PIAC is concerned, they do post it in the paper, so one would hope you would be paying attention. Unfortunately, like me, a lot of poor people don't read the paper.

In this way, the speaker describes an ongoing shift in the membership of PIAC wherein fewer of PIAC members are in fact, individuals who are currently living in poverty.

Despite the City's attempts to "tailor the recruitment process specifically to the particular groups that are potential members" (above), it is often difficult for less powerful groups to participate due to inadequate time, resources, and confidence (Abers, 2000; Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf, 2003). Further, it is unlikely that City staff and Councillors would 'tailor' their search for potential members towards 'activist' low-income groups; they may be more apt to recruit individuals who would be a good 'fit' within the current Advisory Committee structure. While various community-based processes such as the 'People's Hearings', the 'Task Force On Poverty', and 'cluster groups' have provided an infrastructure through which to 'groom' the current PIAC members to become "*the crème de la crème*" of Ottawa activists, these community-based processes have been largely replaced by the PIAC, which offers no such 'grooming' for activism. In the end, this process functions much like the problem of 'co-optation' described by Abers (2000), wherein champions are included in participatory activities as a means of controlling their activities.

As we trace how this shift occurs through City of Ottawa organizational processes, we can see how these processes both shape and reinforce this shift away from the involvement of low-income people. When PIAC's *Terms of Reference* were first established in 2001, its membership was mandated in the following way:

The Poverty Issues Advisory Committee shall have a maximum citizen membership of 17, and shall be composed of individuals who identify themselves as living in low income.

Yet, an excerpt from the Corporate Services report to HRSSC and Council that was addressed by Council in April of 2004 reflects alterations to the membership requirements outlined in PIAC's *Terms of Reference* following the 2003 Governance Review:

- Under "Organization" the composition has been amended as follows: "A majority of the membership shall be composed of individuals who self-identify as being low-income currently or within the preceding five years. The remaining membership may be composed of those that have a professional or personal knowledge, understanding and/or experience with the situation."

This revision more accurately reflects the current recruitment practice and membership of the Committee since its creation in 2001. It allows for the contribution of persons working in the social services or related fields, or for persons who may have previously lived in low income to sit on the Committee. This revision provides flexibility for the Committee in the area of membership and may avoid the inability to fill all 15 seats on Committee. As noted at the 9 March 2004 PIAC meeting, the membership may be maintained at a maximum of 15 members, and the criteria regarding self-identification as being low-income may prevail in any given year depending on the experience / qualifications of the membership at that time. The option of a minority of the membership fulfilling the criteria of those that have a professional or personal knowledge, understanding and/or experience with the situation, provides the necessary flexibility and merit added with such membership, but once again is dependent on the experience / qualifications of the membership at that given time.

Here, we can see how the PIAC *Terms of Reference* were modified to permit this increased 'disconnect' between the Committee and Ottawa's low-income community. By extending membership to those with only a 'professional' knowledge of poverty issues to "more accurately reflect the current recruitment practice and membership" of the Committee, City Council is enabling and supporting the decreased involvement of individuals with low-income. Rather than addressing the decline of poor peoples' involvement by modifying and increasing recruitment efforts and participation supports

to enable the continued involvement of these individuals, City Council has increased its capacity to appoint PIAC members who fit the dominant institutional model of 'professional expert'. These incremental shifts have culminated in a current PIAC structure that differs significantly from the original vision of the TFOP and other Ottawa anti-poverty advocates; while professional 'experts' are increasingly included, a process of 'disconnect' from low-income communities is enabled.

Although the alteration in the PIAC membership criteria reflects a significant shift away from the sole inclusion of people living in poverty, this alteration is also the end result of a process of negotiation undertaken by PIAC members. The draft February 2004 HRSSC report provided to PIAC in January 2004, City staff originally suggested that PIAC membership:

... shall be composed of individuals who identify themselves as living in low income <i>or those that have experience with this situation.</i>
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Although this proposed *Terms of Reference* guideline was presented matter-of-factly to PIAC members as a result of the 2003 Governance Review process, PIAC members' response to this staff proposal reflects their recognition of the potential implications of this 'housekeeping' change in their structure. This proposal would have eliminated the need for any of the PIAC's members to be individuals who are currently living in poverty. PIAC members' February 10th response to this staff proposal reflects Advisory Committee members' attempts to strengthen the low-income membership criteria for the PIAC; however, we also see that staff members were clearly opposed to this effort:

ORGANIZATION

[PIAC Recommendation] The Poverty Issues Advisory Committee shall have a maximum citizen membership of 15 and shall be composed of individuals who self-identify as being low income currently or within the preceding five years. At least one member shall reside in the rural area of Ottawa and at least two members shall be francophones.

[Staff Comment] (Staff Position: As noted in the report, this revision does not reflect the current recruitment practice and membership of the Committee since its creation in 2001. The above restricts the ability for the contribution of persons working in the social services or related fields, or for persons that may have previously lived in low income but are no longer, to sit on the Committee.)

[PIAC Recommendation] Current members who do not meet the low-income criteria may, at their discretion, complete their terms but are not eligible for re-appointment.

[Staff Comment] (Staff Position: Revision not supported and should not be contained in a Terms of Reference document.)

Hence, the insertion of ‘a majority of’ (in the phrase “a majority of the membership”) in the final Terms of Reference approved by Council (above) reflects the final compromise achieved between City staff members and PIAC members as activists attempted to maintain some control over the composition of the Advisory Committee. PIAC members’ ability to ensure that poor individuals comprise ‘a majority’ of the committee reflects definite, although somewhat mitigated, success in their attempt to slow the process of ‘disconnect’ by ensuring the continued involvement of people with low-income within the City structure.

In the Corporate Services report which presented the final *Terms of Reference* to Council in April 2004, the change to the PIAC *Terms of Reference* is not highlighted as a

shift away from the original vision of PIAC, but rather represented matter-of-factly as 'increased accuracy'. The issue is depicted as a kind of 'streamlining' in order to improve the "internal, administrative" functioning of the Advisory Committee:

CONSULTATION

...Additional consultation took place with the City Clerk and staff of the People Services Department. As this is an internal, administrative matter, public consultation was not conducted.

Hence, despite the impact of this *Terms of Reference* modification with respect to the involvement and representation of individuals in Ottawa's low-income community, City staff members did not consider this change to require community input. Here again, the 'disconnect' is reinforced; the PIAC is squarely designated as an 'internal' Committee, and the debate around its essential structure and functioning is not open to members of the community. Informal and community-based decision-making priorities are ignored in this formal internal orientation (Francis, 2000). Although PIAC members were active in a process of negotiating the continued mandated inclusion of people with low-income, their work on this issue was articulated entirely to Council through City staff and HRSSC – there was no community 'audience' to whom PIAC members could present their activities. As such, PIAC's 'insider' location as an internal Committee functioned to fortify the 'disconnect' that occurs as PIAC members' anti-poverty activities are increasingly oriented solely towards City of Ottawa processes, rather than towards a stakeholder audience of individuals with low-income.

At this juncture, we can find ourselves drawn to recall our informants' account of working to accomplish a press conference. As a direct articulation of anti-poverty advocacy to members of the community, the proposed press conference contradicted the arranged process of 'disconnect'. Though City staff opposition to the press conference was overt, attempts to limit the work of PIAC members are often more subtle and less clear. By explicating the work processes through which PIAC members' anti-poverty work is increasingly oriented towards the activities of City Council, and away from an audience of low-income community members, we can recognize the way in which their activism is arranged within the 'boundaries' set by Council. As we uncover the social relations that orient PIAC's activities internally, we see how activists' anti-poverty work is mediated and re-authored by City staff, HRSSC, and Council. Decision-making processes align PIAC's structure and activities in the interests of Council; they also function to accomplish 'disconnect' between PIAC members' and the communities of individuals to whom PIAC was originally intended to be accountable. This process of 'disconnect' is reinforced by City policies that more 'accurately reflect the current processes' instead of mandating the supported inclusion of people living in poverty. Thus it is difficult to imagine how, with its bounded internal orientation and 'disconnection' from low-income community groups, the PIAC could ever embark on a course of action that disrupts existing ruling apparatus. Hence, we return again to the suggestion that the practice of 'participation' can obscure the possibility that ending poverty requires a change in macro-level governing structures (Cooke & Kothari, 2002); 'change' must be conceptualized as occurring within and through 'the system'

MANDATING: MANAGING POVERTY

As we lay out the social relations that accomplish the work processes of agenda-setting and of orienting PIAC members' activities internally to Council, we can explore the way in which these processes intersect in a way that is organized and coherent. The processes involved in agenda-setting are part of the relations which ensure that the work of the PIAC is oriented towards Council through HRSSC and City staff, in accordance with the PIAC's *Terms of Reference*:

The mandate of the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee is to provide advice to Ottawa City Council, through the Health, Recreation and Social Services Committee, and its Departments, on issues that impact and address poverty in the City.

As we have explored the accounts of PIAC members, we have seen the ways in which the PIAC's internal orientation has functioned to produce boundaries and limits within which the anti-poverty work of PIAC activists is constrained.

However, in many accounts of PIAC members' activities, activists indicate their ability to make use of the position that is produced by this internal orientation. Here, a PIAC member outlines how PIAC's 'insider' status gives activists special sanction to place items on the HRSSC agenda:

The other way that stuff gets to us, is [through] community organizations coming with some issue... that they are working on and they are looking for one of two things: They are looking for us to ally with them and work with them on the thing, or they are looking for us as the route into Council, because you can actually present, like, you can be an individual and ask for time to make a presentation to HRSS on anything. Just as you could have guessed, most people a) don't know about it, and b) would never think of

doing it. So, a lot of organizations have seen us as – If we call up and ask to put something on the agenda, it goes on the agenda. There is not a discussion about whether ‘that’s something we want to talk about’ or blah blah blah... It goes on the agenda. Whereas if Suzie Q. Public calls up and says I’d like to do a presentation, you might be on the agenda next week, or you might be six months down the road... if PIAC brings an item in, we are the first item on the agenda.

In this account, the speaker contrasts PIAC members’ ‘insider’ privilege with the ‘outsider’ position of “Suzie Q. Public”. By emphasizing that PIAC has the specific ability to put forward the “*first item on the agenda*”, the speaker is demonstrating the benefits of PIAC’s standpoint inside the City structure; further, she highlights the way in which the PIAC is able to use this internal status to provide community organizations with a means of access to City Council.

While we recognize PIAC’s ability to provide community organizations with access to Councillors as significant, we can also attend to the way in which this account reflects the continued arranging of PIAC members’ activities. Here, the focus of the account is clearly the ability to access the HRSSC agenda. Agenda access is held up as a privilege of insider status, and the desired goal of many community groups who approach the PIAC. The ability to produce an ‘agenda item’ is displayed as an accomplishment; it is recognizable as productive institutional ‘action’. Hence, this account reinforces our understanding of the way in which PIAC members’ anti-poverty work is oriented towards the production of work that can gain access to the HRSSC agenda, and through it, to Council.

Our investigation of agenda-setting processes has made us aware of a series of criteria which determines the ‘acceptability’ of the work produced by PIAC members: anti-poverty policy work must be categorized so that it is aligned with the City’s internal reporting structure; it must be broken down into specific and achievable ‘solution’ – focused initiatives. As PIAC members’ activities are directed towards institutional ‘action’ – the production of motions and reports that will be acceptable as ‘agenda items’ – it is these criteria they are working to fulfill.

While PIAC members see their ‘insider’ access to the HRSSC agenda as a means of supporting members of the community to ‘achieve an audience’ with City Council, they are aware that in order to be placed on the HRSSC agenda, the work of these groups needs to meet the criteria for ‘acceptability’. Here, a PIAC member describes the Advisory Committee’s preferred format for community presentations:

KB: So, when groups come, they have how long to...?

That has been a problem – an ongoing problem. We ask groups to come with a – to send us something written in advance that we can circulate to the members so that the members are not looking at the issue cold. If they are able to come in and say “We would like you to support a recommendation to X, Y or Z,” you know that’s a bonus, we would like that as well.

In this account, the speaker describes the ideal version of PIAC’s anti-poverty work which occurs as community members are able to bring a recommendation that PIAC can forward to one of the various Standing Committees of Council. Yet while the speaker describes this ideal version of a community presentation, he is also beginning to lay out

the way in which PIAC activists work to manage the activities of community groups in order that they are aligned with City reporting processes, and the goal of producing agenda items.

In response to a question about presentation timelines, the speaker describes how PIAC members request that presenters submit a written document that will serve to provide background information about their presentation topic. As we examine the remainder of the speaker's account, we can see that this request to "*come prepared*" is driven by a concern with efficient use of time:

...They are asked, but often they don't come prepared really. They will get people that will come and sometimes the issue they are raising becomes very compelling, so we'll say "You've got five minutes to make your case." But, then, it's sort-of like members sitting around the table that are going to start asking "Well, what did you mean? Can you tell me more da da da?" This thing can go on for like 45 minutes. Then, often at the end of that, they don't have anything that we can kind of take an action on. It's like – OK – we received this for information – big deal. So that means that out of a month that we have say three hours to conduct business, we've taken whatever that works out to – a third or a quarter of it.

I'm a little bit of a stickler on that kind of thing: "Well OK – well what – where can we go from here? What can we support or what would you like to propose that we support?" If they can articulate something then we can sometimes put together a motion that would support – or maybe even just a letter from the Chair endorsing something that they are working on, saying "We, in principle, support the cause that they are involved in."

Here, we see reflections of emphasis on Cornwall's (2000) 'efficiency', and Cooke and Kothari's (2003) 'managerial effectiveness'. The speaker's account reflects not only 'bureaucratic' language, but a focus on time and the PIAC's efforts to ensure the efficient production of anti-poverty work that is recognizable as institutional 'action'. The

narrator lays out the time limitations within which the PIAC must ‘conduct business’ each month, and outlines the criteria for the effective use of this time. The speaker characterizes the time spent discussing and learning about an issue as time “*taken*” from PIAC meetings, and dismisses as a “*big deal*”, the receiving of information that doesn’t result in ‘action’. We are told that, as a second choice, a letter of support also counts as an acceptable use of time. While our informant attributes his concern for ‘action’ to his being “*a stickler on that kind of thing*”, we can also see how his attempts to focus on ‘productive’ work are aligned with the organizational context in which he is working, and with overarching market-oriented paradigms (see Laderchi, 2001), wherein he must produce work that is measurable and ‘counts’ (Chambers, 1997). His goal is clearly the articulation of a motion that can be forwarded internally – to Council via the various Standing Committees.

The speaker describes how the PIAC’s concern for productivity results in a process of negotiation wherein PIAC members attempt to cue presenters to articulate a motion or recommendation that could result in ‘action’: “*where can we go from here? What can we support or what would you like to propose that we support?*” In this way, PIAC members are attempting to manage the work of presenters to accomplish the production of acceptable agenda items; while the presentation goals of community members may include engaging in debate or discussion about a complex issue, or the presentation of information about an issue of interest, presenters are instructed that they have five minutes to ‘make their case’. As such, community members are required to

narrow their presentations to a specific focus; they must address complex issues as though they can be quickly defined, and outline a requested recommendation that is achievable by Council, and categorized according to the mandate of a particular Standing Committee. In much the same way as the PIAC's anti-poverty goals are mediated by City staff, Standing Committees, and Council, PIAC members can act to mediate the anti-poverty work of community members.

A PIAC member describes how the Committee's orientation towards 'conducting business' has required PIAC activists to modify the structure through which they interact with members of the community:

So, we had too many of those [unfocused presentations] for a while, so now we actually do screen our presenters; you can't just come, you have to actually submit in writing in advance why you're coming and what exactly you're hoping we'll do for you. We don't have a problem, even if, you know, we probably won't want to do this for you; we don't have a problem you coming in and telling us and explaining it and trying to convince us; that's fine. Just don't come in here and then not ask something of us; cause then all you've done is waste our time.

In her account, the speaker demonstrates how the PIAC attempts to ensure the efficient use of meeting time; presenters are "screened" according to their ability to produce a coherent textual version of "why" and "what exactly". PIAC activists demonstrate a sincere concern for ensuring that the possibility for action is imagined by the community member: "submit in writing ... what exactly you're hoping we'll do for you". However, it is difficult to say that this would be the case when these PIAC members are replaced (Gaventa & Blauert, 2000). There is no methodological mechanism that ensures PIAC

members' accountability to community members. Their central position in the participatory process determines their status as participatory 'facilitators' who mediate, and can therefore significantly alter or block, the goals of any community member who comes to make a presentation (see Laderchi, 2001); they remain in control of which suggestions are forwarded as 'action'. Even in this group of the "*crème de la crème*" of Ottawa's low-income community members, there is the potential for emergent 'community needs' to reflect predominately those of 'dominant' 'empowered' members (see Cleaver, 2002).

Here, the stipulation to produce a written version of experience is accepted as legitimate and beneficial, but leaves us with questions about 'who' benefits (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). As it organizes work for 'efficiency' and ease of processing, the requirement to submit a written backgrounder functions to coordinate the work of presenters within institutional reporting structures, and also within structures of class through, for example, the need for a certain level of education, or computer access.

With the addition of a requirement for a written submission, the presentation process becomes less accessible to those individuals who are unable or uncomfortable with expressing themselves in written English or French. Hence, important issues may never come forward to the Committee because prospective presenters do not read and write comfortably, do not have access to a computer, or do not have time to prepare a well-organized document. For members of the community who have little organizational

or governmental expertise, the format and language of institutional documents can be foreign and exclusive; the concept of 'organizational literacy' suggests this is not by accident (Darville, 1995 in Campbell & Gregor). Hence, the preparation of a written submission to PIAC, as a formal Advisory Committee of Council, may seem far more daunting than a verbal expression of experiences. The speaker's explanation that the presenter's document must explain "*why*" and "*what exactly you're hoping we'll do*" outlines the expectation of a clear focus, the provision of background information, and the articulation of appropriate and meaningful 'recommendations' that PIAC can support. The production of such a document and recommendations may be a difficult task for those who simply want to share their sense of an experience or issue without taking a stand or pronouncing a solution. As they are instructed to "*make your case*" (above), community members are apt to be intimidated by the suggestion of a legalistic framework within which they must argue to 'prove' the existence of a problem. It is common for community members to believe that they do not have enough technical detail or know 'the system' well enough to propose solutions; they may feel that such a task is better left to experts, or those 'who know' (Eliasoph, 1998). Further, this framework can address problems in such a way that they can become individualized. Rather than functioning as a community forum in which citizens can raise a concern and then work collaboratively with PIAC members to find a collective solution, the requirement of a written submission and presentation to 'make a case' can shape PIAC meetings to become more like a courtroom exercise; presenters are 'on trial' to prove their problem is, in fact, a poverty issue worthy of collective action and not an individual problem related to some personal

characteristic. In this way, the textually-mediated knowledge of a 'backgrounder' becomes administratively useful, but may not reflect the subjectivity, or 'real' experiences of the individuals whose experiences it portrays (Smith, 1990c). Presenters must follow the 'rules' that define what constitutes legitimate and useful knowledge (Brock, Cornwall, & Gaventa, 2001); important personal details and experiences may be withheld as the presenter deems them not appropriate for inclusion in a formal written submission.

As presenters are required to convert their experiences and knowledge into a written backgrounder, they are submitting a textual representation of their experience in place of much of their verbal explanation. Hence, instead of PIAC's interaction with community members taking the form of a two-way dialogue, the process becomes largely one of community knowledge being transferred to the PIAC, and ultimately, to the organization of the City of Ottawa. Smith (1987) describes how this results in a loss of ownership; presenters have no control over how PIAC members activate their submission – how the information will be used, or whether it is even read.

One informant (above) describes how receiving a written submission in advance serves to ensure that PIAC members "*are not looking at the issue cold*". While this statement reflects the desire of PIAC members to learn more about the important issues that they are working to address, it also indicates the process whereby textual representations of experience come to replace the actual lived experiences of individuals

(Smith, 1987). In institutional work processes, the production of texts is the way in which information is designated as meaningful. While textual information is transferred for uptake by others, that which is not documented cannot be used within organizational processes; it is omitted as 'insignificant', and it is indeed 'made' insignificant because it is left out. Because texts are so instrumental in the functioning of institutions, they can come to represent an experience or issue in its entirety – regardless of what version has actually been captured in the document. As such, the requirement for a written submission can facilitate the reduction of an issue or experience to that which is articulated in the text; possession of the text can come to be seen as 'full knowledge', and the sole basis of decision-making as it is easily transferred to PIAC members, and through HRSSC to Council.

Hence, we are made distinctly aware of the way in which PIAC members can act as poverty issue 'gatekeepers' for City Council. The account demonstrates how members of PIAC actively arrange the work of community members to ensure that poverty issues are brought forward in a way that is manageable for City Council; complex and dynamic personal narratives are largely replaced by a focused textual 'backgrounder' that can be transferred through organizational processes. Prospective presenters are screened according to their capacity to provide content for productive work that can be articulated to Standing Committees; those who do not bring forward issues that are easily actionable, and clearly within the City's mandate, are filtered out as 'wasting time'. This arrangement of community members' presentations is strikingly different from the

descriptions of participation enthusiasts who describe participatory methodology as focusing on ‘open-ended dialogue’ and ‘accessibility’ (see for example, Chambers, 1997; Gaventa & Blauert, 2000; Johnson, 2000).

PIAC members emphasize the importance of their role in producing work that is manageable for City Council. Here, the speaker highlights PIAC activists’ productivity with respect to producing ‘actionable’ items for Council:

City Council really likes our group in particular because apparently a lot of the other Advisory Committees complain a lot. They basically say “we don’t like the bike path where you put it”. Whereas the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee, if it was going to muck with a bike path, would say “We don’t think you should put a bike path there because...” And we’ll give you the reasons why “we don’t think you should put it there” and “we think you should put it here instead because...” That tends to be the way we function. We tell them not only what it is that we think they should do, but why we think they should do it and how we think they should do it. We give them stuff they can actually work with.

In this account, the speaker contrasts the productive work of the PIAC with the less productive work of other Advisory Committees. She emphasizes PIAC members’ ability to produce doable solutions and suggestions – instead of actionless ‘complaining’ about problems. While the presentation of achievable poverty items for Council has enabled PIAC to accomplish a number of their anti-poverty goals, we can also wonder about the significance of poverty issues that may have been somehow ‘screened out’ because they were not clear, actionable, within Council’s mandate, or because they had been rejected by Councillors in previous attempts.

Here, we have observed the way in which this accent on productivity has become part of PIAC members' conscious characterization of their work: "*That tends to be the way we function.*" While activists use their position within the City of Ottawa to help community groups to gain access to City Council, they also attempt to draw the work of these groups in-line with the criteria that define 'acceptable' agenda items. As 'gatekeepers', PIAC members screen community presenters according their ability to produce specific and solvable agenda items in order to present Council with "*stuff they can actually work with.*" While narrators' accounts reflect the accomplishment of activism and the use of organizational expertise to negotiate boundaries, they also make visible the way in which PIAC members act to manage the complex and difficult issue of 'poverty' for City Council.

Activists' focused work towards the production of actionable anti-poverty agenda items does not happen by accident; rather it is accomplished through the coordinated processes of agenda-setting, orienting, and mandating which intersect to draw PIAC members into an internally oriented location in the City where they focus to produce manageable anti-poverty work for City Council. As such, the extent to which PIAC members are able to accomplish their anti-poverty goals ultimately depends on the extent to which these goals are in-line with those of City staff, HRSSC, and Council. While activists draw upon their organizational expertise in order to negotiate their 'agenda' and the boundaries of 'legitimate' participation, they are also aware of limitations imposed by their City mandated 'role'. As activists describe the value of their privileged positions as

organizational ‘insiders’, they warn of the need to “*be careful where you push those boundaries*”. Hence, while PIAC members are activists who are able to accomplish their goals by both negotiating constraints and producing ‘actionable’ poverty work, their participation is simultaneously sectioned-off and contained within specific and limited aspects of City functioning.

7: CONTAINING PARTICIPATION: “GETTING IT RIGHT”

Activists’ accounts of PIAC’s anti-poverty work indicate that they are skilled at negotiating their position within institutional processes to ‘push the boundaries’ of what is deemed ‘acceptable’ as ‘public participation’. Yet as we explicate the way in which PIAC members’ anti-poverty work is arranged by organizational processes, we are aware of the way in which their participation is aligned in the interest of managing poverty for City Councillors. This alignment is accomplished through processes of ‘agenda-setting’, ‘orienting’, and ‘mandating’ which culminate to establish a model of ‘perfect participation’. It is this notion of ‘perfect participation’ that serves to fortify the boundaries within which PIAC members’ anti-poverty activism is contained.

ENFORCING PRODUCTIVE PARTICIPATION: “IMPROVING AND STREAMLINING”

Our examination of PIAC members’ accounts of their participation activities has reflected both the overt and the unrecognized ways in which their anti-poverty work is controlled with City-defined boundaries. The Committee’s location within the City makes it ultimately accountable to City Council alone. Council can overtly arrange the activities of activists through policy because it has the sole authority to change the function of the PIAC, to impose limitations on its members, to reduce its access to City resources, or to dissolve it altogether.

Abers (2000) and Gaventa and Blauert (2000) have described how rigid and hierarchical institutional processes can mitigate against core participatory principles of 'flexibility', 'sharing' and 'negotiation'; similarly, PIAC members' accounts reflect a concern for the efficient use of time in the production of manageable anti-poverty items that are recognizable as institutional 'action'. Narrators are aware of the time limitations within which they must 'conduct business', and their accounts describe the way in which they manage the work of presenters in accordance with these time constraints; there is a sense of a trade-off between 'product' and 'process' (see Dogbe, 1998; Freudenberger, 1998). Activists are 'sticklers' for ensuring the accomplishment of action. The recent 2003 City of Ottawa *Governance Review Report* lays out the way in which this focus on 'efficient productivity of advice to Council' is established and maintained through procedural policy:

...Creation of an advisory committee must be based on the following principles:

Annual Review - Council must review, at least annually, the mandate and ongoing need of the Committee to determine whether it is still relevant and has not been replaced by some other mechanism.

Terms of Reference - The Terms of Reference must be clearly defined and written in advance of any appointments to Committee.

Advisory Powers - The Committee is to be an advisory body unless given more powers by legislation or by-law.

Reporting Mechanism - The reporting mechanism is clear (i.e. an annual report and workplan from the Chair of the Committee to the applicable Standing Committee each year.)

Standing Committee relationship - Each Advisory Committee is to be designated to report to the appropriate Standing Committee to ensure administrative and committee review prior to any matter being considered by Council.

Relationship to staff - The Committee's relationship to staff is to be clear, wherein the Committee has no authority to direct staff.

Breadth of mandate - Over time, committees that have a narrow focus tend to become more administrative in nature and focus less on their policy advisory role. Complementary functions and mandates should be grouped together under one umbrella in order to ensure the most effective committee.

Annual Report - an annual report outlining definable results should be submitted to the appropriate Standing Committee for review. In addition an annual workplan outlining proposed projects and programs for the upcoming year, with associated budget implications should be submitted for Committee approval.

Staff comment - That the City Manager and/or General Managers be provided an opportunity to include comments on Advisory Committee recommendations.

The criteria for the creation of Advisory Committees were based on extensive research as well as benchmarking, and provided a framework for the establishment of Advisory Committees. As such, it is recommended that the use of these criteria continue.

This partial list of the criteria for the creation of Advisory Committees lays out for us how these Committees are shaped and determined based on their ability to conform to particular institutional criteria. The criteria accomplish clear limitations for the work of Committee members:

- Their *Terms of Reference* are defined by Council in advance of members' inclusion in the City structure.
- They are advisors with no authority to define how their work is taken up, and no authority to direct staff.
- They have a clearly defined reporting structure that enables both City staff and Council Standing Committees to mediate their work which is forwarded to Council.

- Their role is to address broad-based policy issues rather than more narrow or concrete administration of resources or services.
- They are required to demonstrate “definable results” on an annual basis, at which point their “relevance” is reassessed for approval by Council.

The 2003 *Governance Review Report* not only clearly defines the Council-imposed boundaries within which the work of the PIAC must be accomplished, but it also reflects Council and City staff’s efforts to actively reinforce these boundaries. As we begin to trace through some of the language and direction reflected in the *Report*, we can see how PIAC members’ orientation towards the efficient production of anti-poverty advice to Council is sustained and enforced:

As solutions were developed, efforts were made to ensure that necessary changes and improvement changes would align with identified priorities, ensure that programs and services met the designated expectations and objectives, allow for effective public/community consultation and participation, contribute to an efficient and effective decision-making process, and ensure that the governance structure and related processes remain accountable to the community.

Here, City staff members describe their efforts to “align” Advisory Committee activities with Council-defined “objectives” in order that Advisory Committee work is conducted in a way that is “efficient”, “effective”, and “accountable”. As City staff members describe the way in which the recommendations for the ‘improvement’ of Advisory Committee functioning were established, they are also describing the arrangement of activity towards a model of ‘perfect participation’. Findlay (1993) describes the way in which ‘responsiveness’ that occurs at the bureaucratic, rather than political, level of the

policy process is less visible and more easily overlooked. The emphasis here on staff members' "opportunity to include comments on Advisory Committee recommendations" (above) reflects the sanctioned way in which staff members assert this emphasis on a 'bureaucratic response'. Because City staff members ensure their ability to mediate (for example, through comments or reports) any Advisory Committee item that is articulated forward, activists' work is already altered by the time it is the subject of open debate and consideration by Councillors in public forums such as Council or Standing Committee meetings.

Staff members lay out a number of specific procedural processes for the accomplishment of this shift in selected *Governance Review Report* recommendations. These recommendations were forwarded to Ottawa City Council during their December 3rd 2003 Council meeting and were approved by Council on December 10th 2003 with only one amendment (addressed below):

SUBJECT: COUNCIL GOVERNANCE REVIEW – 2003 – 2006 COUNCIL

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- m) The Standing and Advisory Committee minutes and agenda standards as outlined in the report.
- n) An overall reduction in Advisory Committee membership to between 9-11 members for each Committee, to be achieved gradually over time for all Committees, and revisions to the Appointment Policy for Advisory Committees, Boards and Authorities as outlined in the report, as well as guidelines for addressing membership for merged Advisory Committees.
- o) The revised process for recruitment for Advisory Committee members as outlined in the report to improve and streamline the process.

- p) The guidelines for training for Advisory Committee members to improve member effectiveness and provision of advice to Council, to be provided by staff in a cost effective manner, as outlined in the report.
- q) The elimination of \$150,000 annually in Advisory Committee workplan funding, and confirm the requirement for Advisory Committees to submit annual reports and workplans outlining priorities for each year.
- r) The review of the Advisory Committee structure and Terms of Reference at the end of every term of Council.

Here, a number of procedural mechanisms are invoked to reinforce or accelerate Advisory Committees' movement towards an 'ideally' aligned and bounded version of public participation. Together, these recommendations bolster the processes of agenda-setting, orientation, and mandating the management of poverty issues.

One of the most significant recommendations of the *Report* – "the elimination of \$150,000 annually in Advisory Committee workplan funding" is particularly effective in reinforcing the agenda-setting processes that limit PIAC members' focus to policy-level poverty issues. Here, in an off-handed remark, a PIAC member alerts us to the way in which the removal of funding altered the PIAC's ability to achieve its anti-poverty work:

And so one of the items on that agenda was this Governance Report which took away all the funding... previously we had funding to do, like, actual stuff ...

Whereas the PIAC was previously able to engage in immediate and specific work towards the concrete provision of services or resources to poor individuals, the *Report*

outlines how the elimination of workplan funding functions to restrict their agenda to the provision of advice:

As noted in other sections of the report, Advisory Committees were created by City Council with the primary purposes of providing advice and liaising with the community on issues within their mandates. These types of activities do not generally tend to require the expenditure of funds.

In this way, PIAC's policy-focused role is not only mandated by its *Terms of Reference* but it is also guaranteed by the removal of funding that would enable it to directly allocate resources to improve the material conditions of people living in poverty. Instead PIAC members' work must remain oriented towards City Council as the only channel through which its anti-poverty goals can be achieved.

This internal orientation is further ensured through the adaptation of the remaining *Governance Review Report* recommendations. The recommended development of guidelines for "training for Advisory Committee members to improve member effectiveness and provision of advice to Council" is a clear way in which the City aims to accomplish the ideological 'institutional training' of Advisory Committee; rather than being 'groomed' by a system of 'cluster' groups to advocate in the interests of Ottawa's low-income community, the increased focus on City-developed training orients the 'grooming' of PIAC members towards their role as the efficient producers of manageable poverty advice for City Council.

We have discussed how the 'improvement' and 'streamlining' of the process of recruitment of PIAC members has functioned to enable the decreased participation of individuals with low-incomes in the Committee. This process of 'disconnect' is further accomplished through recommendation (m) that alters the Advisory Committee minutes and agenda standards, and recommendation (n), that allows the reduction of the size of the PIAC committee.

Recommendation (m) of the *Governance Review Report* outlines both a reduction in the number of Advisory Committees as well as a reduction in the membership of each. The *Report* later outlines the rationale for this objective:

Consultation and a review of the Advisory Committees have shown concerns relating to this size of membership. Problems in achieving quorum and in conducting effective meetings have resulted.
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After its initial consideration by Council, this recommendation was amended to permit membership to be nine to 15 members, depending on the needs of the particular Advisory Committee. However, despite the maintenance of the upwards limit of 15, this change in Advisory Committee structure functions to permit a decrease in the number of low-income community members who are able to voice their opinion with respect to important poverty issues. Like the adjustment of recruitment practices to 'more accurately reflect current processes', the allowance for reduced membership does not address the underlying issues of access or support that contribute to 'problems in achieving quorum'. Rather, this recommendation allows for quorum to be accomplished

and hence for 'productivity' to go on, without attempting to modify PIAC recruitment processes and City of Ottawa participation policy to ensure that more people with low-income are supported to be able to attend and take part in the PIAC committee. Here, the process of 'disconnect' is furthered as fewer low-income community 'voices' are required to be at the decision-making table.

Recommendation (m) reinforces this 'disconnect' as it accomplishes a shift to a less work-intensive format for Advisory Committee agenda and minutes production that is detailed later in the *Report*:

Presently, the agendas and minutes for Advisory Committees follow the same format as that for Standing Committees of Council, contributing to an increase in overtime hours for Council and Committee Services staff.

...With respect to Advisory Committee and Board minutes, it is recommended the minutes be revised and reduced to include only meeting particulars, declarations of interest, items of business, concise summary of public delegations, and "action items" only (i.e. the committee discussion will be eliminated and reduced to motions considered, records of votes, recommendations considered and approved or amended, and directions or inquiries to staff).

Not only are fewer community members required to be present at PIAC meetings, but the change in structure of meeting agendas and minutes also limits the number of perspectives, or 'voices' which are documented in organizational records. Recommendation (m) eliminates the documentation of diverging perspectives, uncertainty, decision-making rationale, and unsupported suggestions. Hence, the textual portrayal of complex and difficult issues is reduced to a focus on only their easily solvable and 'actionable' components; it is only these aspects of the PIAC's work which

are reflected as meaningful in the official 'record' of its activities, and which are available for later viewing by staff members, Councillors, or community members.

The review of meeting documents and minutes are one way in which community members who are unable to actually attend PIAC meetings are able to remain informed about Committee activities and discussion. For individuals in rural areas, with transportation difficulties, or with children to care for in the evenings, the ability to review detailed minutes may be a vital link to participation in Ottawa-area anti-poverty work. As such, we are able to explicate the way in which these *Governance Review Report* recommendations contribute to the process of orienting; the accomplishment of 'disconnect' is simultaneously strengthened through enabling fewer low-income Advisory Committee members, and also through the reduced ability of community members to remain connected to and aware of anti-poverty discussion and debate through access to detailed PIAC minutes.

As complex issues are reduced to specific and 'doable' action items through representation in PIAC meeting minutes, a richness of debate and discussion is lost not only to community members but also to members of Council. A summary of discussion that is documented in meeting minutes can be drawn upon by Councillors as they engage in deliberation on a difficult issue. While Councillors may receive more detailed advice from PIAC members in the form of a report or 'backgrounder' document, minority opinions and disagreeing perspectives may be omitted or replaced in favour of

information that supports an acceptable simplified ‘action’. Hence, this reduction in agenda and minute format contributes to the production of anti-poverty work that is manageable for City Council. Finally, recommendation (r) which calls for a scheduled “review of the Advisory Committee structure and Terms of Reference” functions to remind PIAC members that their position as City of Ottawa remains precarious, and that certain criteria must be met if they are to avoid the consequence of being “*shut down*”.

As we explore the documentation of the decision-making process that produced these recommendations, we increasingly find that the defining measure of ‘value’ for each Advisory Committee is explicitly tied to the production of acceptable agenda ‘items’ that move forward to Standing Committees. Here, we find that a measure of agenda-item outputs was a key aspect of the Governance Review:

The review of the City of Ottawa governance structure included an examination of the quantitative outputs and actions taken by the Advisory Committees created since 2001, as an attempt to offer some objective measure of their productivity and advice to Council.

COMMITTEE	# OF MEETINGS	# OF ITEMS DISCUSSED	# OF PUBLIC DELEGATIONS	# OF MEETING HOURS	# OF ITEMS THAT ROSE TO STANDING COMMITTEE IN A REPORT	# OF ITEMS IN A MEMO OR OTHER FORM PROVIDING ADVICE TO COUNCIL AND DEPARTMENTS
Accessibility Advisory Committee	23	234	19	55	4	8
Agriculture and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee	25	153	18	66.5	0	14
Health and Social Services Advisory Committee	21	139	9	74.5	1	2
Ottawa Youth Cabinet	20	171	36	48.5	5	1
Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee	21	163	31	53.25	1	5
Poverty Issues Advisory Committee	20	238	23	74	9	2

The Advisory Committees are compared based on their accomplishment of different categories, or types, of public participation 'work': "meetings", "items discussed", "public delegations", "meeting hours", "items that rose to Standing Committee", and "advice to Council and Departments". The quantities of 'work' accomplished in each category vary considerably from committee to committee; it is clear that different committees address their diverse participation interests in different ways. The

Agriculture and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee, for example, focused its work on the provision of items ‘in memos or other forms’ to Council and departments, whereas other Advisory Committees such as the PIAC and the Youth Council produced more items that rose to Standing Committees in report form. Hence, it was possible for different Advisory Committees to structure their work in ways that they felt best addressed their particular issues of interests, or according to how they were most comfortable working.

In addition to this “objective measure of their productivity and advice to Council”, the *Governance Review Report* also contains the acknowledgement that a number of additional factors contribute to the “overall effectiveness” of Advisory Committees:

It should be carefully noted that although quantifiable terms may be used to discern in some part, the overall effectiveness of some Advisory Committees within the existing governance structure, attention should be paid to the countless hours of volunteer effort and expertise provided to the City free of charge, as well as the hard work, perseverance and talent that Advisory Committee members bring to the governance process. The significant value provided to the City by these dedicated residents, both individually and collectively, is difficult to measure.

Hence, between the ‘objective’ and the ‘difficult to measure’ factors, the *Governance Review Report* introduces us to a broad number of intersecting criteria that are described as relevant to assessing the value of Citizen Advisory Committees.

Nonetheless, as we attend to discussion captured in the *Governance Review Report*, and to those summary, or ‘concluding’ statements that lay out the rationale for its

recommendations, we are able to discern the criteria that were prioritized in the assessment of Advisory Committee value, and the production of *Governance Review Report* recommendations:

Fewer meetings, increased focus strictly on provision of advice to City Council and Standing Committees, and community outreach within their mandated areas were generally seen as key contributors to the success and long-term value of an Advisory Committee.

The existing structure would be improved with opportunities for streamlining and efficiency, specifically related to imbalance in workloads, time spent in meetings, a refocus of priorities and attention for advice giving and decision-making by Council at a more refined level. A specific concern that has been raised is that the sheer volume of Advisory Committees significantly increases the meeting workload for everyone, and the outcomes are not always clear.

The criteria of "fewer meetings", "increased focus strictly on provision of advice to City Council and Standing Committees", and "community outreach within their mandated areas" are highlighted as key criteria for achieving 'streamlined efficiency' and 'clear outcomes'. While the *Governance Review Report* expresses the recognition of other types of participation work, including those which are 'difficult to measure', these key criteria are continuously emphasized through the *Report* discussion, summary statements, and recommendations. Thus, the organizational processes depicted through the *Governance Review Report* reflect the coordination of Advisory Committee members' activities for purposes that are not their own (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). While the 'quality' of participation experiences according to activists may be best indicated by measuring group diversity, the formation of alliances, the 'openness' and accessibility of debate, the flexibility of working processes, and the extent to which decision-making

power is controlled by citizens (see Abers, 2000; Chambers, 1997; Gaventa & Blauert, (2000; Guijt, 2000; Johnson, 2000), these factors are not present in the structure through which Advisory Committees are evaluated. Instead, members must arrange their work in accordance with the objective of 'streamlined efficiency', and forgo any aspects of participation which infringe on this central institutional goal.

The *Governance Review Report* outlines, almost ominously, the consequences faced by those Advisory Committees which are not "working well within the established framework":

Over the first term of Council, it became clear that, while much of the current structure was working well, there were clear challenges that needed to be addressed. The sheer number of committees meant that at least one Standing Committee, Advisory Committee, Board or Authority was meeting every day of the week, and often there were two meetings in a day... While some Advisory Committees were working well within the established framework, others needed to be redefined to optimize their efforts.

Hence, we come to understand that the cumbersome "sheer number" of Advisory Committees was a problem that needed to be addressed and rectified by the City; we are told that Advisory Committees which do not fit their mandated role will need to be 'redefined' and 'optimized'.

Further, the *Governance Review Report* demonstrates the way in which Advisory Committees which do not clearly meet these key criteria are deemed to be unproductive, and accordingly, are "*shut down*":

The Committee has met 25 times over the term of Council, and dealt with 153 items. However it received a total of only 18 public delegations, despite having regularly hosted meetings in rural wards. The Advisory Committee did not send any reports for consideration to the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Standing Committee in 2001, 2002, or 2003, although it did forward 14 memos to members of Council over the term, largely on the hog farm issue, making recommendations.

Consultation on the function of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee reflected a general consensus that the existing role, mandate and purpose of the Committee have been lacking in direction and focus. The City structure does not align itself with a reporting relationship directly focused on rural issues.

Here, the *Report* outlines staff members' rationale for recommending the dissolution of the City's Agriculture and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee. Because of this Advisory Committee's failure to produce reports for consideration of the City's Agriculture and Rural Affairs Standing Committee, and because of its inability to 'align' as a result of the proposed dissolution of this Standing Committee, it was deemed to be unproductive, and "lacking in direction and focus". Thus, we have a sense of the way in which 'participation' comes to be seen as a problem of 'inefficiency' to be 'solved' or limited through 'redefinition' or 'optimization'.

In this way, an examination of the City's 2003 Governance Review enables us to extend our exploration of activists' experiences to the organizational processes that not only arrange, but also reinforce and make compulsory the arrangement of their work within particular boundaries. The *Report* provides insight into 'ideological' City processes represented in texts such as the *Governance Review Report*, which not only establish boundaries for participation, but also impose consequences for failure to

produce and 'align' acceptable participation work. The ideological definition of value based on 'provision of advice to City Council and Standing Committees' and the enforcement of boundaries of 'alignment' are implicated in the social relations that arrange activists' own anti-poverty participation goals. PIAC members can become committed to these versions of 'objective' value (Smith 1990a). In this way, the model of 'perfect participation' that is developed and reinforced through organizational documents such as the 2003 *Governance Review Report* is echoed in PIAC members' own descriptions of 'perfect work'.

PERFECT PARTICIPATION: "EXACTLY AS IT WAS SUPPOSED TO"

As activists describe their participation activities, their accounts provide insight into their participation goals, and the way in which they define 'successful' anti-poverty work:

One of the best examples for having told them that we think they should go bug the province was the 'Pay the Rent and Feed the Kids' campaign. The premise was that the shelter portion of the Social Assistance cheque should be raised to reflect the actual cost of rent. We told the City that we thought that they should send Dick Stewart, who was the head of People Services at the time, to Toronto for the pre-budget hearings, and that he should tell the people in Toronto that they should raise this. This went to People Services, then eventually it went to City Council and they said "Well why the hell should we send Dick Stewart? Let's send the Mayor!" They were all set to send the Mayor to tell them that, and it actually worked out that the Mayor wasn't available that day, so they sent the Deputy Mayor and Dick Stewart. And the Deputy Mayor is not exactly... At the time it was Rick Chiarelli and he's not exactly sympathetic to poverty issues. We were hesitant to see what he was going to say, but he actually did really well. He actually did come out and say "This is ridiculous. These people can't pay rent on this kind of money. You've got to raise the allowance." They both did a pretty good job of it. It worked exactly as it was supposed to.

Here, a speaker describes an instance wherein the PIAC was able to accomplish successful anti-poverty work; based on a recommendation initiated by PIAC members, City Council made a presentation to the Ontario provincial government requesting that the province raise the shelter allowance portion of Social Assistance. In the description, we are told about the uninhibited accomplishment of activists' anti-poverty goals; in fact, the account describes how Council actually accomplished the anti-poverty work more completely than originally requested: "*Well why the hell should we send Dick Stewart?* [a Departmental Director] *Let's send the Mayor!*" [the recognized figurehead of the City as a whole]. Our informant emphasizes the scenario as a complete success: "*It worked exactly as it was supposed to.*"

As we consider this description of 'perfect participation', we are able to recognize the way in which it reflects not only the accomplishment of activists' goals, but also the alignment of the PIAC's work within City-arranged boundaries that call for the productive management of poverty issues for Council. The ideal of 'perfect participation' shapes activists' activities in predictable, recognized and acceptable ways (Cleaver, 2002). It recognizes politically-sanctioned power as valuable and fails to recognize as valuable informal activities (see Rahnema, 1992), such as those which exists outside of the production of 'agenda items'. Here, the speaker describes the way in which the PIAC was able to define and produce a specific, policy-focused People Services [HRSSC] agenda item which was forwarded to Council, and then implemented successfully as Council lobbied the then Conservative Ontario provincial government.

The PIAC produced an acceptable anti-poverty agenda item that was 'doable', especially because it required no expenditure of City resources. The item was mediated through the appropriate channels (People Services [HRSSC], City Council, and the Deputy Mayor) and accomplished as Council took ownership of the work and PIAC members were left as disempowered observers, waiting impotently to "see" whether or not their goal would be realized by the Deputy Mayor: "*We were hesitant to see what he was going to say...*"

A second description of a PIAC participation accomplishment reflects the production of manageable anti-poverty policy work that is oriented to Council through HRSSC, and effectively achieved as Council implements the item:

We have sub-committees, for example, and the sub-committees meet and come back with recommendations to be adopted by the full group. In many cases it may be a resolution. We can use the dental one for an example. It was – it came to PIAC's attention ... around the table actually, that that's an issue, and can we look into who's getting services and who's not getting services? So it was assigned to the sub-committee that we called Adequacy and Supports and which I also sit on. So we took that job on and members phoned and did some preliminary investigations ...pulling together the items and the recommendations that went forward to PIAC who ultimately approved it. It went to HRSS and then it went to full City Council and that resulted in – you were at the meeting - where the ... Dental Officer had to come back and report on the questions that were raised as a result of the motion that we had moved forward. But then now, it's rolling further to point where now they've introduced a motion that they are going to bring a motion to the Canadian Federation of Municipalities to pressure the federal government to begin the process of including oral health into the health-care system...

KB: I should try to take a look at the actual recommendation that went...

I have the PowerPoint. They emailed it to me the day before so that we could have a preview of it. Because we met with him in that as he was finalizing the report he wanted to make sure that he was getting it right. Some members of our sub-committee met with Dr. Aaron Burry. He's the Dental Officer of Health or something like that.

Here, the speaker demonstrates activists' considerable organizational expertise as he portrays their ability to accomplish their anti-poverty goals by working through the structure of the City; he describes how PIAC members identified an important poverty issue, and engaged in "*pulling together the items and the recommendations*" that went forward to HRSSC, and City Council. This work ultimately resulted in a presentation by the Dental Officer of Health and a motion that will 'roll forward' to the Canadian Federation of Municipalities. As the speaker describes his work, the production of Council-oriented and achievable anti-poverty recommendations, we are aware of the way in which it fits the model of 'perfect participation'.

However, our attention to the social relations which organize the PIAC's Dental Needs work cues us to trace and explicate the way in which this work was taken up through City work processes. A PIAC report entitled *Poverty Issues Advisory Committee – Identifying Gaps – A Preliminary Review of the Dental Services Available for Low-Income Families* reflects PIAC members' official account of their initial research on Dental Needs, and their recommendations to HRSSC, presented at the February 19th, 2004, HRSSC meeting:

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Health, Recreation and Social Services Committee recommend that Council approve the following:

1. That staff investigate and conduct research to identify the negative outcomes of poor dental health on low-income populations in Ottawa with the following questions in mind;
 - i) What is the dental-health needs of low-income families?

- ii) How many low-income families are unable to meet their needs with existing services?
- 2. That the City develop more adequate programs and subsidies that meet the dental health needs of low-income families, focus on prevention.
- 3. That the City partner with Dental Health Associations to create a centralized, public pro-bono program similar to that of the former Dental Wives' Association.
- 4. That the City lobby the provincial government to have dental health services covered under OHIP.

Here, we can see that the recommendations proposed by PIAC to the HRSSC suggest that Council should initiate an investigation of the dental needs of individuals with low-income. In addition recommendations (2) and (3), if approved by Council, would require the City to "develop more adequate programs and subsidies", and "create a centralized, public pro-bono program".

Upon being presented to HRSSC, however, PIAC members' recommendations were not approved without amendment; while the majority of the recommendations were carried by HRSSC, a recommendation (1a) was added, and one word in recommendation (2) was modified:

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AS AMENDED

That Council approve the following:

- 1(a) That the research alluded to in Recommendation 1 include the basis for existing services, waiting lists, partnerships and what is covered now.
- 2. That the City explore more adequate programs and subsidies that meet the dental health needs of low-income families, focus on prevention.

The minutes of the February 19th meeting reflect Councillors' comments with respect to the dental recommendations, as well as rationale for the changes made. The change in recommendation (2) from "the City develop" to "the City explore" [emphasis in original] is described as being made "in light of the current fiscal realities", and the need for "further data to make an informed decision". It was these amended versions of the recommendations, and not the PIAC's original work, which were carried by Council in March of 2004. Hence, instead of acting to 'develop' more adequate programs and subsidies for individuals with low-income, Councillors directed to staff to 'explore' this possibility. Although the change to recommendation (2) only involves this one word, it clearly changes the nature of the action to which Councillors are committing.

As a result of Council's March 10 direction to staff, the City's Dental Officer of Health made a presentation to the HRSSC in June 2004; the outcome of the presentation is outlined in an excerpt from the minutes of the June 17th HRSSC meeting:

Dr. Aaron Burry, Dental Officer of Health provided a detailed overview of the departmental response to the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee (PIAC) report of last February, plus an overall indication of dental services in the city. A copy of his presentation is held on file. Dr. Burry presented a Motion for the committee's consideration, which would essentially replace the original recommendations approved by Council on 10 March 2004.

Hence, as we trace through the organizational documents that detail the way in which the PIAC's Dental Needs work was taken up through City reporting structure and work processes, we are able to see the way in which their anti-poverty work is significantly

mediated by both City staff and Standing Committees. PIAC members have the opportunity to speak in support of or in opposition to their altered anti-poverty work; however once they submit their goals as recommendations to HRSSC, they automatically relinquish their authority over how these are activated.

As we follow this account of 'perfect participation' through to its final accomplishment by Council in July 2004, we see, reflected as recommendations of *HRSSC Report 7B* under 'item 10' on the July 14th Council agenda, the HRSSC-approved replacement motion presented by the Dental Officer of Health in June. When we consider these recommendations in light of PIAC members' original goals of 'development' and 'creation' of increased services to people with low-income, we are aware of a noticeable shift:

10. Motion to Introduce Reports

HEALTH, RECREATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT 7B
PRESENTATION ON DENTAL NEEDS
COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council approve the following Motion that would replace the Motion of 19 February 2004 (Item 2 of HRSSC Report 2A to Council on 10 March 2004 refers), on the same issue:
 - a. That staff continue to enhance, where possible, all of the existing partnerships to maximize the amount of dental services that can be provided to eligible recipients.
 - b. That staff participate in initiatives at the federal/provincial/municipal level that would foster the development of a national oral health strategy,
 - c. That staff continue to provide dental services to residents at the current program levels.

- d. That staff update Committee and Council on any progress or changes made at the federal and/or provincial level that impact the level of service currently available to social assistance and low-income residents.
 - e. That staff report to Committee and Council any emerging trends in utilization of city dental services that could potentially impact the services available.
2. That the City of Ottawa sponsor a resolution to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities recommending a National Dental Care Strategy and that Dr. Burry be directed to draft the resolution and provide background documentation and report back in the fall.

Here, we see the final culmination of the PIAC's Dental Needs work as it was carried by Council at their July 14th Council meeting. We are told (above) that this successful anti-poverty work "*went to HRSS and then... to full City Council and that resulted in...the... Dental Officer had to come back and report... now, it's rolling further to...pressure the federal government to begin the process of including oral health into the health-care system...*" The PIAC's original recommendations would have directed the City to "develop more adequate programs and subsidies" and "create a centralized, public pro-bono program", directly increasing low-income individuals' access to oral health services. However the recommendations as carried do not ensure an increase in access; instead, City staff are directed to "continue to provide dental services to residents at the current program levels". An excerpt from *HRSSC Report 7B* makes visible the fact that the PIAC's Dental Needs work has not accomplished a shift in resource allocation:

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications with this report.

DISPOSITION

The Coordinator, Health, Recreation and Social Services Committee will inform the PIAC of Council’s decision on this item.

Thus, while a number of the report recommendations do support the maximization of dental services where possible, the failure of Councillors to allocate financial resources to this ‘maximization’ does little to guarantee an improvement in access to dental health services for individuals with low-income. Our informant’s account (above) illustrates the successful accomplishment of mediated work wherein City staff met with PIAC members to ensure they were “*getting it right*”. Further – the fact that this issue is “*rolling further*” to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities is an important accomplishment. However, the outcome that was ultimately realized through the July 14th actions of Councillors reflects the way in which the original anti-poverty goals of PIAC members were significantly compromised. Further, the report excerpt lays out the way in which PIAC activists are left once again as bystanders, waiting to be ‘informed’ of the outcome of their work. This is the extent of the ‘follow-up’ that is called for by numerous participatory practitioners; here, the procedure clearly differs from the participatory ideal in which ‘stakeholders’ are involved from beginning to end of an initiative (Chambers, 1998; Holland with Blackburn, 1998; The World Bank, 1999).

The PIAC's work on the Dental Needs of individuals with low-income falls within the boundaries which define 'perfect' anti-poverty activism within the structure of the City of Ottawa; the issue of poverty is 'managed' so that 'doable' anti-poverty work is successfully accomplished by Council. PIAC members describe the way in which they draw upon their organizational expertise to identify and articulate acceptable anti-poverty goals that are ultimately achieved through the actions of Council; activists author accounts in which their work occurs "*exactly as it was supposed to*".

Nonetheless, our exploration of the way in which this model of 'perfect participation' is coordinated enables us to recognize how it functions to strengthen the boundaries within which the participation work of PIAC activists is contained. The work of PIAC activists has been managed so that they are limited in power, but produce a valued commodity – a 'doable' anti-poverty item – for Council (see Rahnema, 1992). City Councillors reap the benefits of PIAC members' participation, yet the threats to Councillors' status as decision-makers are avoided (see Mosse, 2002).

Holmes cautions that institutional features such as accountability, rule systems, sanctions and recruitment are all institutional features that can limit participatory approaches (2001). In Chamber's (1997) discussion of 'uppers' and 'lowers' he discusses how 'lowers', being aware of 'uppers' capacity for control, will say or show whatever will minimize penalties and maximize gains. The implication here is that participants are noticeably restricted and conscious of their subversion. However, the

way in which PIAC members' participation is limited is not necessarily as conspicuous as Chambers or Holmes seem to imply. Here, activists' very conceptualization of the ideal of productive and efficient poverty management is arranged through the 'taken-for-granted' processes of agenda-setting, orienting, and mandating, and enforced through definitions of 'value' and the threat of 're-definition'.

As the July 14th City Council meeting agenda reflects the accomplishment of PIAC members' anti-poverty activism, it also makes visible this structure within which this work was taken up by Councillors at the July 14th Council meeting. The agenda illustrates the containment of PIAC activism as the mediated production of a 'doable' poverty task - represented as HRSS Committee recommendations supported by its *Report 7B* to Council. As we continue our inquiry, we will become aware that the containment of the PIAC's work within the boundaries of 'perfect participation' not only functions to productively 'manage' the issue of poverty for Council, but also allows it to be 'sectioned off' into particular aspects of City functioning.

8: BYPASSING PARTICIPATION: COUNCIL ‘RECESS’

While the anti-poverty work of PIAC members is negotiated with expertise in order that it is accomplished by City Council, we have laid out the way in which it is simultaneously arranged by various work processes and contained within boundaries established by a model of ‘perfect participation’. Activists’ accounts reflect this ideal of ‘perfect participation’; we are told that the City has a “*certain obligation*” to keep the PIAC informed of poverty issues, and that activists draw upon their organizational expertise to negotiate the assurance of this opportunity through which they are able to accomplish their anti-poverty goals. Though Council has the sole authority to take up or to discard PIAC members’ anti-poverty advice as they see fit, we know that the PIAC is “*supposed to*” have the opportunity to present their input. Surely then, any significant poverty issue decision that is addressed by Council must have been informed by the advice of the City’s ‘poverty experts’?

With respect to the firing of the Ottawa Community Housing Corporation (OCHC) Board we know that this ‘supposed’ opportunity for PIAC members to provide advice did not occur. As the work of activists was arranged within boundaries of the focused provision of advice to City Council, their participation was not only contained, but somehow bypassed. Hence, as the Board of the OCHC was fired and replaced on July 14th, PIAC members were prevented from having the opportunity to respond to an

issue that Councillors described as critically affecting the welfare of many of Ottawa's low-income citizens.

The July 14th City Council agenda provides us with an organizational representation of the way in which the containment of PIAC members' anti-poverty participation work allowed it to be 'sectioned off' within a particular aspect of City functioning. It is this 'partitioning' that allowed Council to bypass the participation of PIAC members in order to effect a significant change to the level of involvement of people with low-income in the management of Ottawa's social housing properties. The agenda functions as representation of the social relations that 'section off' the participation work of PIAC members into – and out of – specific City structures. We have explored the way in which the PIAC's anti-poverty work is oriented towards the governance structure of 'elected representation' through City Council; yet the agenda reveals that this structure is separate from that within which the OCHC decision was made. The PIAC's successful Dental Needs participation work is located as the recommendations of *HRSSC Report 7B*; as such, it is portrayed as occurring through this 'elected representation' structure, wherein participation work is articulated to City Council through City Staff and Standing Committees. However, we find the OCHC decision reflected in a different aspect of City of Ottawa functioning – one that is clearly distinct from the structure of 'elected representation' such that its execution requires a 'recess' from the July 14th City Council meeting.

DIFFERENT RULES: CORPORATE OWNERSHIP

The July 14th City Council meeting agenda lays out the work of Council according to distinct agenda 'items' which are considered by Councillors. Each item is introduced, discussed and resolved before moving on to the next task to be addressed. Here, we see an excerpt from the agenda locating PIAC's Dental Needs work under 'item 10', immediately following 'item 9', a scheduled Council 'recess'.

8. Regrets

The following members of Council advised that they would be absent from the Council meeting on the date indicated:

Councillor J. Stavinga 14 July 2004

Councillor G. Hunter 14 July 2004

Councillor G. Bédard 14 July 2004

9. Recess to Hold Shareholder Meetings – Ottawa Community Housing Corporation and City Living (1:30 p.m.)**10. Motion to Introduce Reports**

[other reports listed have been omitted]

HEALTH, RECREATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT 7B**PRESENTATION ON DENTAL NEEDS**

Item 10, the "Motion to Introduce Reports" depicts the location of the staff and Standing Committee-mediated 'perfect' participation work of the PIAC. However, it is during 'item 9', a "Recess to Hold Shareholder Meetings", that City Councillors made the decision to fire the Board of Directors of Ottawa Community Housing Corporation. The

agenda makes visible the way in which this decision was made outside the context of the July 14th City Council meeting. Further, it outlines the structure for the OCHC decision; what occurred during the 'recess' from Council were 'Shareholder Meetings' for the Ottawa Community Housing Corporation and City Living. Hence, in order to lay out the process or 'rules' within which the decision to fire the Housing Board was made, it is necessary to explicate the processes that constitute the accomplishment of a 'Shareholder Meeting'.

The formal social relations that define the structure and 'orientation' of the Ottawa Community Housing Corporation are laid out in the introductory section of the OCHC's 'Board Briefing Book'. Here, we begin to understand the processes that arrange the governance of the OCHC by the City of Ottawa.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

MARCH 2004

1.1.1 Transition into the current OCH legal and organizational structure

Ottawa Community Housing is a social housing landlord with the City of Ottawa as its sole Shareholder. On August 8, 2001 the City of Ottawa, as shareholder of the former Ottawa Housing and the former City Living, decided to bring the two corporations together under the same roof. OCH is responsible for 14,495 social housing units, making it the largest social housing provider in the City of Ottawa.

Many changes in social housing occurred during 2002. On April 1, 2002, the Province transferred program administration of social housing to the City of Ottawa. The City is now the Service Manager responsible for the funding and administration of social housing programs...

On May 29, 2002, City Council as Shareholder gave final approval for the asset transfer of City Living to Ottawa Housing Corporation, as well as for the structure of the new Board and the process for selecting the Board.

...The tenant and community members were nominated from the former Boards of City Living and Ottawa Housing Corporation, and the Shareholder selected Council representatives. A nominations process was established for the community member component of the Board, and seven community members were appointed for three year terms in December 2002. ... Tenant Board members were replaced or re-elected through a tenant election process completed in the Spring of 2003 with appointments effective from July 1, 2003.

The Chair, Stéphane Émard-Chabot, was elected at the Board's first meeting on August 6, 2002, and ratified by the Shareholder shortly after that.

This excerpt makes visible a number of complicated processes within which the City of Ottawa, represented by City Councillors, exercises legal decision-making 'control' over the OCHC – including its assets, Board of Directors and staff members. Here, we find that the City of Ottawa is "sole Shareholder" of the OCHC, and is also the provincially designated "Service Manager" for all social housing programs within its jurisdiction. Each of these designations reflects a particular structure within which the work of City Councillors is taken up.

By tracing back through archived organizational documents, we are able to lay out the work processes which bring to fruition the City's role as 'Service Manager'. The City's *Joint Local Transfer Plan* was prepared by the City's Housing Branch, presented as a report to the HRSSC and Council, and approved by Council on May 9th, 2001. This document was created in preparation of the devolution of social housing administration from the provincial government to the City of Ottawa, and outlines the way in which this designation of 'Service Manager' is carried out by the City:

Background

Effective January 1, 1998, the municipality began funding social housing as a result of provincial devolution. Over the past three years, the Province has been preparing for the full transfer of administration of social housing and in December of 2000, enacted legislation to bring into effect complete social housing devolution. Section 14 of Bill 128, the *Social Housing Reform Act*, requires municipal Service Managers to prepare and submit to the Minister a plan for carrying out duties related to social housing, within five months of the legislation coming into force (May 14th, 2001). The Joint Local Transfer Plan is the subject of this report.

Discussion/Analysis

The transfer of Social Housing is occurring in two stages: Stage One was effective January 1, 2001 and involved the transfer of public housing from the Province. To enable this, the Province created the Ottawa Housing Corporation as a local housing corporation, with the City of Ottawa as the sole shareholder. Stage Two involves the transfer of administration for non-profit and co-operative housing, and is mandated to occur prior to June, 2002. The Joint Local Transfer Plan is intended to primarily address issues related to Stage Two.

Key elements of the Joint Local Transfer Plan are the following:

- The City of Ottawa becomes the Service Manager for administration of social housing, with the complete transfer scheduled to occur by April, 2002.
- Responsibility for social housing administration will rest with the Housing Branch of the People Services Department, with the Director of Housing named as the 'Administrator' for purposes of funding and administering programs in accordance with the Act and Council-approved budgets.

Here, we see the way in which the responsibilities of 'Service Manager' are enacted within the structure of the City of Ottawa. While the City of Ottawa is designated 'Service Manger', the duties that accompany this designation are actually carried out, in accordance with the *Social Housing Reform Act* and Council-approved budgets, by the City's Housing Branch with the Director of Housing as 'Administrator'.

As well, the *Joint Local Transfer Plan* makes visible the province's "Stage One" creation of Ottawa [Community] Housing Corporation⁵, with the City of Ottawa as the corporation's "sole Shareholder"; it is within this designation of 'shareholder' that City Councillors met during the Council 'recess' on July 14th. As sole Shareholder of the OCHC, the City of Ottawa has extensive power over the activities and composition of the Corporation. The *Ontario Business Corporations Act* (OBCA) is the legal document which outlines the decision-making power that is attained with ownership of OCHC shares.

Control

- 1(5) For the purposes of this Act, a body corporate shall be deemed to be controlled by another person or by two or more bodies corporate if, but only if,
- (a) voting securities of the first-mentioned body corporate carrying more than 50 per cent of the votes for the election of directors are held, other than by way of security only, by or for the benefit of such other person or by or for the benefit of such other bodies corporate; and
 - (b) the votes carried by such securities are sufficient, if exercised, to elect a majority of the board of directors of the first-mentioned body corporate. R.S.O. 1990, c. B.16, s. 1 (5).

The OBCA lays out the requirement for 'control' of a corporation – ownership of shares which carry "more than 50 percent of the votes for the election of directors", or which enable the election of the majority of directors. Hence, the OBCA represents the structure within which the City of Ottawa, as the owner of 100 percent of the shares of the OCHC, has the ability to designate the structure and activities of the OCHC, its Board, and its staff members.

⁵ 'Ottawa Housing Corporation' became 'Ottawa Community Housing Corporation' in December of 2000.

In addition to this designation of 'control' by ownership, section 108 of the OBCA also provides for a '*Shareholder Direction*' which can further restrict the activities and structure of the corporation under its control.

Agreement between shareholders

108.

Idem

- (2) A written agreement among all the shareholders of a corporation or among all the shareholders and one or more persons who are not shareholders may restrict in whole or in part the powers of the directors to manage or supervise the management of the business and affairs of the corporation. R.S.O. 1990, c. B.16, s. 108 (2).

Unanimous shareholder agreement

- (3) Where a person who is the beneficial owner of all the issued shares of a corporation makes a written declaration that restricts in whole or in part the powers of the directors to manage or supervise the management of the business and affairs of a corporation, the declaration shall be deemed to be a unanimous shareholder agreement. R.S.O. 1990, c. B.16, s. 108 (3).

Where shareholder has power, etc., of director

- (5) A shareholder who is a party to a unanimous shareholder agreement has all the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a director of the corporation, whether arising under this Act or otherwise, to which the agreement relates to the extent that the agreement restricts the discretion or powers of the directors to manage or supervise the management of the business and affairs of the corporation and the directors are thereby relieved of their duties and liabilities, including any liabilities under section 131, to the same extent. R.S.O. 1990, c. B.16, s. 108 (5).

Thus, the *Act* designates that, by virtue of a 'unanimous shareholder agreement', a sole shareholder may "in whole or in part" restrict and/or assume the powers of the corporation's directors. By virtue of ownership, the sole shareholder has unquestionable authority; it is the body which defines the extent to which it assumes the rights, powers,

duties and liabilities of directors and it ultimately has the ability to relieve the corporation's directors of their duties.

Hence, the structure which arranges the work that occurs within a shareholder meeting differs from the structure of 'elected representation'. Decisions made within the 'elected representation' context of a City Council meeting are coordinated through the processes that we have explored; Councillors' work is linked to the activities of City staff members, Standing Committees, and citizen Advisory Committees. Council and Committee decisions, and other information that is deemed 'meaningful', is represented through organizational documents – agendas, minutes, and reports. Community members have the ability to participate in these work processes by accessing organizational documents on-line, making presentations to Advisory Committees or Standing Committees, and electing Council representatives. Accordingly, the work of City Council is mediated, shaped, and informed by the work of various other individuals; the City has a "*certain obligation*" to keep the PIAC informed about poverty issues and the PIAC is "*supposed to*" have the opportunity to respond to a forthcoming 'poverty issues' item. Although PIAC members often have to exercise their expertise in order to negotiate and assert their ability to advise, the PIAC's *Terms of Reference*, and other official documents (see, for example, the City's *Public Participation Policy*, and the 'participation' language within its *Official Plan*) formally enshrine PIAC members' expectation of participation in 'poverty' decisions.

However, as we take a closer look at the context within which Council members decided to fire and replace the members of the OCHC Board of Directors, we see that the structure which arranges the interaction between the City of Ottawa and the OCHC is not one of elected representation, but one of corporate ownership. Within this structure, City Councillors are the designated representatives of the Shareholder, and their activities are taken up as such. The *Shareholder Direction* prepared by the City of Ottawa for OCHC represents the work of City Councillors as their work is taken up within this structure of corporate ownership.

Shareholder Direction

City of Ottawa
To
Ottawa Community Housing Corporation

As Approved by Ottawa City Council as Shareholder of Ottawa
Community Housing Corporation on August 28th, 2002

2. Purpose of the Shareholder Direction

The purposes of the Shareholder Direction to the Corporation are as follows:

- (d) to set out the accountability of the Corporation to the Shareholder in addition to the requirements as set out in the *Ontario Business Corporations Act* and other relevant statutes and by-laws.

4. Principles of Operation

The Corporation will operate at arm's length from the Shareholder and respect the following principles. The Corporation will:

- (c) ensure that the tenants of the Corporation have the opportunity to participate in decisions through elected representation on the Board and through participatory

processes such as consultations and committee structures where the Board seeks input from tenants;

- (d) communicate and consult with members of the public where appropriate;

5. Business of the Corporation

In support of the objectives and principles outlined above, the business of the Corporation shall be restricted primarily to:

- (a) the provision, operation and maintenance of housing accommodation, primarily for households of low or modest income, that may include any public space, recreational facilities, commercial space or buildings appropriate thereto;
- (b) the administration of programs providing rent-geared-to-income assistance to households of low to moderate income;
- (c) the provision of accommodation for persons having special needs;
- (d) any matter with respect to which the Corporation and the Minister, the Service Manager or any other person may enter into an agreement under the Act;
- (e) any other matter that is prescribed by the Act; and
- (f) any business or activity ancillary to any of (a) through (e) above.

6. Matter Requiring Shareholder Approval

The Corporation must seek the Shareholder's approval for the following:

- (d) any amendment to the Corporation's operating by-law(s) regarding the conduct, business and affairs of the Corporation...

This *Shareholder Direction* is a formal representation of City Councillors' work as they act in their role as 'Shareholder' to produce boundaries within which the OCHC must operate. This document clearly outlines the accountability of the OCHC to the Shareholder; it places restrictions on the activities that may be undertaken by the OCHC, including its ability to independently change its own structure and functioning. Hence, the City's 100 percent ownership of the OCHC defines the structure within which City Council is able to convene in the context of a 'Shareholder Meeting' in order to

deliberate on issues such as the removal and replacement of the Board of Directors of the OCHC. Formally sanctioned by the legal framework laid out in the OBCA, the work of City Councillors as 'Shareholder' is arranged by structure of corporate ownership.

This corporate ownership structure determines how the OCHC, its activities, and the decision to fire its Board of Directors are defined; it thereby arranges the work of Councillors as they act to perform their responsibilities as 'Shareholder'. As the City carries out this role of 'Shareholder', the language and structure of 'ownership' are used to act within the processes established by the OBCA; City Council approves a *Shareholder Direction* to reinforce the position of the OCHC within this 'ownership structure'. Through the processes enshrined in the OBCA and the *Shareholder Direction*, the OCHC is defined as a 'corporation' whose 'business' shall be restricted to "the provision, operation and maintenance of housing accommodation...", and "the administration of programs...". Hence, it is the rules of 'corporate ownership' that apply.

In this way, the functioning of the OCHC and its Board of Directors is clearly 'sectioned off' within this 'ownership' structure, and away from the structure of 'elected representation'. The OCHC is defined as a 'corporation', and not as a 'social service', or 'anti-poverty initiative' despite the fact that it is the City's largest provider of social housing, and therefore a significant factor with respect to the wellbeing of many poor individuals living in Ottawa. Nonetheless, this distinction between 'corporation' and 'anti-poverty initiative' is more difficult to accomplish in the day-to-day work of the

OCHC. The structure of the OCHC Board of Directors calls for four elected 'Tenant Board Members', and for six 'Community Board Members' in addition to members from City Council. Furthermore, the principles that guide the selection of Community Board Members reflect the recognized need for various qualities, and types of expertise in carrying out the activities of the Board:

5.3 PROCESS FOR THE SELECTION OF COMMUNITY BOARD MEMBERS FOR OCHC

- 1.3 The process for the selection of community representatives will strive to meet the following basic principles:
- (f) to promote diversity reflective of the demographic characteristics of the community;
 - (g) to achieve an overall mix of skills and experience that differs among individual members but ensures a multidisciplinary Board equipped to deal with the demands placed upon it.

Hence, the OCHC's Board membership structure depicts Council's recognition of the need for particular experiences and expertise in the implementation of Board activities. Not only does the structure of the Board ensure the presence of individuals with social housing tenancy expertise, but it also ensures the presence of community members with a wide variety of experience in order to achieve a 'multidisciplinary Board' that is thereby 'equipped to deal with the demands placed upon it'. Hence, it is clear that Councillors are aware of the OCHC's complex and difficult responsibilities as a provider of housing for people at risk of homelessness. However, while this recognition of the need for various types of experiences and expertise applies to the OCHC Board, it does not apply to Council as 'Shareholder'. Despite the critical role that the OCHC plays with respect to the support and security of many members of Ottawa's low-income community, the

OCHC 'Shareholder' does not need to have social housing 'expertise', nor does it need to seek the advice of individuals who possess this expertise. Councillors' ability to designate the OCHC Board's performance as 'unacceptable', and their capacity to remove and replace this Board without the participation of poverty and social housing 'advisors', is sanctioned by their position as '100 percent owners' within capitalism.

In the same way that shareholders are not required to employ 'expertise' in order to exercise their control by ownership, neither are they required to ensure the participation of OCHC stakeholders – tenants and members of Ottawa's low-income community who will be affected by their decision to fire and replace the current OCHC Board of Directors. Through its *Shareholder Direction*, the City has the ability to demand that the OCHC "ensure that the tenants of the Corporation have the opportunity to participate in decisions through elected representation ... and through participatory processes such as consultations and committee structures..." and that it also "communicate and consult with members of the public where appropriate". However, there is no direction within the OBCA that places a similar requirement on City Council as Shareholder. The *Ontario Business Corporations Act* does not require shareholders to develop participatory processes or to consult with members of the public.

Hence, it is this structure of 'ownership' within a larger capitalist economic system that enabled the firing and replacement of the OCHC Board of Directors to happen as it did – without the input of PIAC members. While the work processes that

occur within the structure of elected representation incorporate various formal opportunities for information, advice, and participation from City staff members, Advisory Committees and community members, the structure of corporate ownership demands no such involvement. These are different 'rules'; within this 'ownership' structure, it is the designation as 'sole Shareholder' which confers absolute 'control' over the structure and activities of the Corporation. Within the work processes that are arranged by the rules of the OBCA, the only criterion for decision-making power is 'ownership'; City Council, as sole Shareholder of the OCHC, is acting as a business owner to make a 'business' decision. These are market relations: objective, impersonal, and seemingly neutral, requiring only exchanges of capital (Marx, 1954 in Smith, 1987). Within this context, there is no expectation of either 'poverty expertise' or of 'citizen participation'.

Hence, as we explore the structure within which the City Councillors acted as 'Shareholder' to fire and replace the Board of Directors of the OCHC without the involvement of PIAC members, we become aware of the way in which the activities of City Councillors and the involvement of PIAC members are coordinated by larger social arrangements. Within the structure of 'elected representation', the City of Ottawa is the 'Service Manager' for the administration of social housing. This role is carried out by the City through the Director of the Housing Branch of the People Services Department as 'Administrator', who implements funding programs in accordance with the *Social Housing Reform Act*, and Council-approved budgets. Within this 'elected representation'

structure, the PIAC's anti-poverty work is oriented towards producing manageable anti-poverty agenda items for City Council; PIAC members draw upon their organizational expertise to negotiate processes of agenda-setting and orienting. Their participation is on one hand arranged and bounded within a process of mediated 'perfect participation', yet they are able to accomplish many goals through a process by which they are "*supposed to*" be involved in decisions that are considered to be 'poverty issues'. However, as Councillors act in their designated role as representatives of the City as 'sole Shareholder' of the OCHC, they function outside of this process that incorporates public 'participation' within the structure of 'elected representation'. As such, their activities are not arranged by the same set of relations which enable PIAC members' involvement.

A BIFURCATED CONSCIOUSNESS: "WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?"

On June 23rd, City Council voted to set up the July 14th Ottawa Community Housing Corporation and City Living Shareholder meetings. On the date of the meetings, Councillors gather for a City Council meeting starting at 10:00am in their usual 'Council Chambers' – Ottawa City Hall's Andrew S. Haydon Hall. At 1:30pm, the Council meeting agenda calls for a 'recess' from the City Council meeting in order to hold the Shareholder meetings that had been scheduled to take place on that date. During that 'recess', as during any break in discussion at Council or Standing Committee meetings, Council members may stand up, take a moment to get a refreshment, or walk across the room to discuss an issue with a colleague or an assistant. When, moments later, the Shareholder meeting begins, they all sit down again on the same day, in the

same room, and in the same chairs. However, as City Councillors reconvene, they do so as a different entity, operating in a different structure. These are the same 22 individuals, yet the structure of 'corporate ownership' re-defines the nature of their deliberations, and their role. They are no longer 'City Council' but 'Shareholder'; the OCHC decision is not a poverty issue, but a 'business' matter. Consultation with PIAC members is neither required nor expected; rather, it is simply bypassed. When the Shareholder meeting is complete, Councillors reconvene once again as 'City Council'. Here, they work within the structure of 'elected representation' to address 'Item 10' on the Council meeting agenda - which includes the 'perfect' dental needs participation work of PIAC members.

This distinction between Councillors deliberations as 'City Council' and as 'Shareholder' fits comfortably within the organizational processes of the City. In particular moments, both of the structures of 'elected representation' and 'corporate ownership' arrange various aspects of City Councillors and Staff members' activities. As we have seen here, the same individuals may articulate their activities to one structure, or to the other, or to both simultaneously. While this may seem like it should be disorienting or confusing, City work processes are organized to enable this organizational distinction to occur comfortably for City Councillors and staff members. There is no need to book a new room or convene on a different day; all that is required for 'City Council' to shift to 'Shareholder' is to schedule a 'recess' within the Council meeting agenda. Because of the need for City work processes to occur within and between these two different structures, the City has established 'rules of procedure' to enable and

normalize this shift. This way of doing things – operating within one structure, and then within another – makes 'sense' because it is the way that things 'have to happen'. The distinction between 'City Council' and 'Shareholder' exists as an organizational 'reality'; it is represented in texts such as the Council meeting agenda, and Councillors and staff members become committed to this version of a distinction in roles (Smith, 1990a). These texts depict a representation of 'the way things are' that overrules the actual experiences of PIAC members (Smith, 1987). This 'reality' arranges the activities of Councillors, City staff members, and members of PIAC, effectively blocking PIAC members from participating in a 'corporate ownership' 'business' decision.

However while this organizational 'reality' is represented matter-of-factly through documents and work processes that make real the distinction between Councillors as 'Council' and Councillors as 'Shareholder', PIAC members are aware of a clash between this organizational distinction and their situated experiences 'outside' of texts, as 'poverty advisors to Council'. This awareness is what Smith refers to as a 'bifurcated consciousness' (1987) and it produces a tension that cues us to recognize the 'problematic' that activists experience as they participate in anti-poverty activism within the structure of the City of Ottawa. As one member describes the arrangements through which the same 22 individuals are represented in organizational 'reality' as not one, but two or three, different entities, she highlights the extent to which this seems 'bizarre'.

They [the Housing Branch] report directly through HRSS – they report to City Council... The Housing Director is working directly for the 22 people who, on Tuesdays and alternate Thursdays are the 'Shareholders' and on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays are City Council. So what you have is City Council making decisions about how the Service Manager is going to oversee housing which means they have decided, City Council has decided, what instruction is going to be given to Russell Mawby as the... Director...of Housing to tell people how much money they are going to get for maintenance and repairs. So they have determined that Russell is going to say to Ottawa Housing "you can have \$45 for repairs". Then, the same group of 22 people changes their shirt, and comes back on Tuesday and says, as the Shareholders of Ottawa Housing "What the hell are you doing? How come you are not maintaining these units? Maybe you need to go back to your funder and tell them you need more money". It's interesting. They have no – there is no separation of... If any other funder was to be directing simultaneously how you were doing something, and then calling into question - because they owned you - how you were doing it, people would be saying "what the hell is this?" Yet there is absolutely no separation. The Service Manager function is not carried out by a separate entity set up by City Council off their side. It's carried out by City staff who are directed by Council. There is a structure.

Here, the speaker emphasizes the 'disjuncture' that occurs amid the organizational textual distinction between Councillors as 'Council' and as 'Shareholder', and her situated experience. She highlights the lack of continuity that occurs as the same 22 people take on multiple roles within multiple structures. While their decisions may make 'sense' within each structure in isolation, the fact that the same individuals seem to shift perspectives based on an 'organizational', rather than 'actual', distinction seems strange.

This same type of shift in perspective is evident with respect to the inclusion of PIAC members. Councillors are the same individuals in situated time and space; despite their dual existence as 'Council' and 'Shareholder', they live only one material life. Hence, Councillors don't get new information or insight as 'Shareholder'; they use the same way of contacting City staff for information, and the same way of interacting with

constituents via email or phone. Councillors draw upon the same knowledge and experience whether they make decisions as 'Council' or as 'Shareholder'; so how is it that they require the input of 'poverty advisors' when they sit as 'Council', yet not when they sit as 'Shareholder'?

As we lay out the processes through which PIAC members were prevented from being involved in the firing and replacement of the OCHC Board, we recognize the way in which the structures of 'elected representation' and 'corporate ownership' serve to arrange and contain the activities of Councillors, staff members, and PIAC activists. The firing and replacement of the OCHC Board of Directors was able to happen without the involvement of PIAC members because it did not happen within the structure of 'elected representation', but within the structure of 'ownership'. Through an organizational 'shift' from one structure to the other, the OCHC decision was not defined as 'anti-poverty' work, or as requiring 'citizen participation'; rather, it was addressed as a 'business' decision by the Corporation's 'sole Shareholder' who has complete 'control' over the structure and activities of the Board.

A sense of 'disjuncture' occurs for PIAC members as their anti-poverty work is 'sectioned off' at the moment when Council takes a 'recess'; however Councillors' designation as 'Shareholder' within a structure of 'corporate ownership' arranges their activities outside the structure of 'elected representation', and outside the boundaries of PIAC members' participation. As such, the textual organizational 'reality' that is

activated in this shift from 'Council' within 'elected representation' to 'Shareholder' within 'corporate ownership' enables the participation of PIAC activists to be bypassed; PIAC members are blocked from involvement in a significant change regarding the involvement of people with low-income in the management of Ottawa's social housing properties.

9: CONCLUSION: REGULATING ACTIVISM

POVERTY ACTIVISTS: “BLATHERING AWAY ABOUT NONSENSE”

Participatory decision-making is increasingly celebrated as a ‘different way’ for marginalized groups to present their realities to those in power, and in so doing, influence political decision-making (Chambers, 1998). While consensus on ‘participation’ began in the margins of radical social movement discourses, it has made its way to the centre of mainstream international development (Cornwall, 2000), and has been increasingly ‘scaled out’ and ‘scaled up’ to become a widely used, ‘feel good’, way of conducting ‘business’ in virtually every sector (Gaventa & Blauert, 2000). More recently, ‘participation’ has become tied to ideals of ‘good governance’ and is found globally in efforts to ensure quality and legitimacy in democratic decision-making (Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999 in Cornwall, 2000; Fung & Wright, 2001, Goetz and Gaventa, 2001, Gaventa 2002 in Cornwall, 2002)

Advocates of participatory approaches to development and inclusion associate the concept of participation with ‘empowerment’ (Arai, 1996); they describe ‘reversals’ towards ‘upward accountability’ (Gaventa & Blauert, 2000), and the advantages of ‘mutual learning’ and of a ‘better knowledge’ (Chambers, 1997). Participatory methodology is frequently described as ‘flexible’ (Guijt, 2000), and as suggesting the possibility of more complex, meaningful, and ‘contextual methods of analysis’ (Booth et al., 1998 in Laderchi).

However, critics from outside and from within the field of participatory development, have cautioned that the methods and assumptions of participatory practices can not only obscure, but sometimes reinforce the dominant power structures that perpetuate oppression (for example, see Cooke & Kothari, 2002). Abers (2000) has identified challenges relating to 'implementation', 'inequality', and 'co-optation'. Numerous authors comment that policies, procedures and systems within government and other large agencies can mitigate against the core principles of participatory methods (Abers, 2000; Gaventa & Blauert, 2000). Practitioners describe a tension between 'product' and 'process' (see Owen, 1998; Dogbe, 1998), and the difficulty of reduced access for marginalized groups (Abers, 2000; Findlay, 1993; Moser & Holland, 1998).

Cooke and Kothari's exploration of 'participation as tyranny' highlights the naivety of professionals' assumptions about motivations in 'participation', and the way in which the language of participation can mask a concern for managerial effectiveness. As well, they emphasize the dangers associated with quasi-religious associations of participatory rhetoric and practice, and describe how an emphasis on micro-level intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro-level inequalities and injustice (2002). It is this confusing mixed discourse of celebration and skepticism that has inspired numerous authors to call for the 'unpacking' of participation in the particularities of specific contexts. 'Participation' as it is described in policy documents does not necessarily reflect the local practice of this concept.

For PIAC members who experience the firing of the OCHC as a significant 'poverty issue' decision, their lack of participation in this decision produces a 'bifurcated consciousness' and uncomfortable tension. Their real-life experience of poverty expertise and their ability to draw upon organizational expertise to accomplish anti-poverty work through Council does not mesh with the organizational distinction that allows their involvement to be bypassed. The firing and replacement of the OCHC Board makes PIAC members suddenly aware of not only being contained within a particular process of mediated participation, but also of being 'blocked' from the achievement of their anti-poverty goals:

Actually, a couple of us were talking about this whole issue and we went through and did a count and were aware of ten people on PIAC who were either living in, or have very recently lived in social housing, so 10 out of 16. So obviously we have a very – even if we weren't the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee to City Council, we're a group of people who have a lot of knowledge about living in social housing and who can put that knowledge in a framework. So that's the other part of the angle that we will take with them. Not only are we people who are immersed in the poverty thing, we also are people who ...certainly, as people who are or have been tenants in social housing, are quite appalled that you would dump the tenants. So that's the sort of angle we are going to take. It's that we're not just do-gooders out there blathering away about nonsense. We're experts on poverty who also have an experience and knowledge of public housing and other social housing...

...The tenant participation one is certainly one that, had we known exactly what the proposals were in time, we would have responded to that for sure because that is a direct... I mean essentially what they are saying is, "you don't need to be at the table. You can sit in the next room and yell through the port-hole or whatever" and we would have come forward and said that's not adequate; it's not acceptable.

Here, a PIAC member communicates frustration at this 'disjuncture' between her lived experience outside of texts, and the organizational reality that sections-off the PIAC's

participation from Councillors' work as 'Shareholder'. The speaker emphasizes her poverty and social housing tenancy expertise and suggests that that this expertise should have been drawn upon by City Councillors. The speaker addresses PIAC's disagreement with Councillors' decision to replace the OCHC Board without including elected tenant representatives, recognizing the way in which this shift in Board structure clearly excludes tenants from full and equal decision-making power "*at the table*". Instead of involving PIAC members as poverty advisors who have the expertise required to understand the implications of this important shift, she notes, Councillors treated them as though they were simply "*out there blathering away about nonsense*".

PIAC members' sense of 'disjuncture' between their lived experience of poverty activism and organizational expertise, and the way in which their participation was bypassed in Councillors' firing and replacement of the OCHC Board, alerts us to the 'problematic' in the everyday participation experiences of activists who participate within the structure of City government. As such, it provides us with an opportunity to explicate the actual way in which 'participation' is manifested in a particular time and place; further, our construction of knowledge from the non-ruling location of PIAC members attempts to ensure that our inquiry is useful for these individuals. Our analysis of PIAC members' activities begins with the aligning our 'position' as researcher and readers with activists' own standpoint through attending to the way in which they describe their work. PIAC members view themselves as empowered organizational 'experts' who are skilled at working within and through bureaucratic processes in order to accomplish their anti-

poverty goals. Activists talk of overcoming obstacles, and of negotiating boundaries in order to ensure City staff members are required to seek their input in ‘poverty issues’.

At the same time however, their accounts reveal the way in which their participation is arranged by City work processes. Through processes of ‘agenda-setting’, their anti-poverty work is focused upon poverty issues that are achievable and broken down into items that and ‘fit’ within the City’s mandate, and within the mandates of particular Standing Committees. Through processes of ‘orienting’, PIAC members’ activities are articulated internally to City Council, and mediated by staff and Standing Committees. While activists’ original conceptualization of ‘cluster groups’ was intended to ‘groom’ PIAC members and produce relationships of mutual accountability with community groups, City recruitment and appointment policies have served to accomplish ‘disconnect’ between PIAC and low-income community members, and to ensure that the PIAC’s activities are oriented internally. These processes culminate in a third work processes of ‘mandating’, wherein PIAC members align their own goals to work as ‘gatekeepers’ to arrange the activities of community members in order to produce manageable – text-mediated, achievable and specific – anti-poverty agenda items for Council.

This arrangement of PIAC members’ activities is enforced and bounded by formal processes of accountability, wherein the threat of being ‘shut down’ for failing to achieve ‘streamlined efficiency’ and a ‘clear focus on provision of advice’ functions to contain

their work within specific and limited aspects of City functioning. This inhibition is fortified within a model of 'perfect participation' wherein aligned and mediated anti-poverty work is accomplished through the actions of Council.

The containment of PIAC members' activities within the boundaries of 'perfect participation' that occurs in a structure of 'elected representation' enables PIAC members to accomplish significant anti-poverty work, yet it also allows their participation to be 'sectioned-off' from particular aspects of City functioning. While in their situated lived experience outside of texts they are poverty experts who are "*supposed to*" advise City Council on significant poverty issues, Council's ability to 'shift' to 'Shareholder' through an ideological 'reality' leaves PIAC members uninvolved in a significant poverty decision. Hence, while PIAC activists are organizational 'experts' who are able to negotiate the limits imposed upon their participation by extralocal 'others', their PIAC anti-poverty participation activities are simultaneously contained in a way which enables their participation to be bypassed, and hence, their activism regulated.

REGULATING ACTIVISM: SPACES FOR DISSENT

When we consider how the participation of PIAC members can be bypassed within City work processes, we are immediately struck by the way in which activists' actual experience of participation clashes with claims of 'empowering the powerless'. The containment of PIAC activists' activities does not 'add up' with the City of Ottawa's *Public Participation Policy* which outlines its commitment to administrative and policy

processes that are “open and accessible, respectful of the public’s right to be involved, and are responsive to the public’s need for information” (2003b, p. 2). However, despite our sense of ‘frustration’ as we share in our informants’ sense of ‘disjuncture’, we can struggle to avoid the feeling that ‘all is lost!’

As we labour to find ways to promote meaningful participation in democratic structures, we need to think critically about dominant neo-liberal and capitalist apparatus, the complex processes of democratic structures, and the many ways in which particular groups of people are excluded from democratic structures. We can be critical of our assumptions and perspectives, questioning our desire to be ‘liberators’ and to engage in participation as a ‘feel-good ritual’ or ‘act of faith’ (Cleaver, 2002; Cooke & Kothari, 2002; Francis, 2002). Perhaps most importantly, we need to attempt to fully understand the implications of our actions and the extent to which we, as active subjects, are implicated in perpetuating the oppression that is arranged by the dominant ruling apparatus. As we strive to include, we must recognize the potential strengths of ‘participation’ but also the potential for ‘participatory’ activities to reinforce dominant structures. E.H. Carr (in Giroux) suggests that in order to adequately address the issue of democratic citizenship, we need to re-think our most basic assumptions:

To speak today of the defense of democracy as if we were defending something which we knew and had possessed for many decades or centuries is self-deception...we should be nearer the mark, and should have a more convincing slogan, if we spoke of the need not to defend democracy, but to create it (pp. 91-92).

Ife (2000) suggests that we need to engage in action while finding a balance between different kinds of 'knowing'. He suggests the need to be wary of both the 'sterile universalism' of positivism, and the "equally sterile relativism of a narrow postmodernism, denying the importance of universal themes of humanity, human rights and social justice" (p. 8). Clearly, the 'unpacking' of participation is not a simple or straightforward task. In a discussion of the emergence of participatory citizens groups, Barnes (1999 in Cornwall & Gaventa) describes how many became focused on their rights as consumers – as 'users and choosers' of services. However others, such as a more radical version growing from the disability movement, had their roots in collective action that emerged from common experiences of oppression, disadvantage and social exclusion. This latter form, suggests Barnes (1999 in Cornwall & Gaventa) created 'spaces for dissent', and would later resonate with more fundamental claims to basic civil rights.

Abers describes how Marxist perspectives of the state as ultimately determined by class struggles leads to pessimism with respect to the capacity of the left to change the structure of the state by winning elections, and therefore leaves only extra-governmental action as a possibility for change (2000). On the other hand, a situated examination of the state as the culmination of actors with their own interests and sources of power suggests the capacity for the state to act against the interest of dominant social groups and to promote the organization and strengthening of weaker social groups (Abers, 2000). Likewise, a number of authors invite us to consider democratic participation as opening

up 'spaces' wherein marginalized groups can move from 'invited' and 'bounded' modes of participation, to modes wherein they are makers and shapers of their own spaces and processes whereby they accomplish their goals, and seize access to power and resources (Cornwall, 2000, 2002). Kohn refers to these 'spaces for dissent' as 'sites of resistance', which can emerge throughout "the literal, the symbolic, and imaginary barricades forums and fortresses, where the people mount challenges to currently hegemonic visions of collective life" (2000 in Cornwall, 2002, p. 26).

Hence, as we attune ourselves to both ideal notions of participatory citizenship, and the distinctly 'less-than-ideal' ways in which these notions play out in the real lives of individuals, we need to be able to 'do our best' while all the while realizing our potential to be unknowingly 'doing the worst'. To engage in this critical self-reflexive practice, we will need to find comfort in ambiguity, uncertainty, and paradox (Ife, 2000). As we engage in experiences and explorations of participation we will, no doubt, grapple with feelings of both 'celebration' and 'cynicism'. However, we can also develop a way of working within this tension to better understand the way in which our ideals and goals are constructed, coordinated, facilitated and thwarted by the actualities of our everyday world. Held and Kreiger's (1984 in Abers, p. 14) discussion of power as "the facility of agents to act within institutions and collectivities – to apply the resources of these institutions and collectivities to their own ends, even while institutional arrangements narrow the scope of their activities" captures a sense of this negotiated activism. In her introductory discussion of democratic citizenship, Cruickshank (1999) challenges the

notion that any form of democracy presents answers to questions of power, inequality, and political participation. She notes that “like any mode of government, democracy both enables and constrains the possibilities for political action” (p. 2). Hence, we are invited to consider, in our exploration of participation “the twin possibilities of domination and freedom” (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 2).

It is within this awareness of ‘twin possibilities’ that we can work to achieve ‘clarity through specificity’ (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980) as we lay out our analysis of PIAC members’ anti-poverty participation within the structure of the City of Ottawa. Foucault draws our attention to the importance of ‘small things’ in the coordination and arrangement of ruling (in Cruickshank). Here, we can recognize the way in which these ‘small things’ are most important because of the way in which they are all around us, yet obscure; the familiarity of the ‘small things’ in our ‘everyday world’ allows us to take them for granted (Smith, 1987). As we make visible the way in which the everyday participation activities of PIAC activists are arranged, contained and bypassed within larger social structures, we are aware of ‘disjuncture’ and ‘frustration’, yet we are also aware of their feats of activism and skilled navigation of barriers and obstacles. In this way, we can temper our notions of ‘arranged’, ‘contained’, and ‘bypassed’ by recognizing the simultaneous potential for ‘agency’ ‘negotiation’, and ‘subjectivity’.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by me, Kate Belcher. I am a student enrolled in the Masters of Social Work degree program at Carleton University. My project is being supervised by Sarah Todd and Steven Hick of the School of Social Work at Carleton University.

The purpose of this research study is to explicate (make visible) the way in which experiences of 'public participation' in the City of Ottawa are socially organized. As part of the research process, I am observing 10 community activists in a number of public participation settings, such as:

- Municipal government public consultation sessions and / or public town hall meetings
- Municipal government Council meetings, Committee meetings, and Citizen Advisory Council meetings
- Community action group public meetings, & public activities that are centred around municipal issues.

As well, I am interviewing these participants in order to better understand how public participation activities are affected by external social factors. My completed research will be available at the Carleton University library, and a summary of the research will be available on the World Wide Web, for a period of up to five years. As of October, 2004, a copy of the summary maybe obtained by any member of the public (that is, there is no need to identify as a 'participant') at http://www.spcottawa.on.ca/CBRNO_website/avail_research.htm (select 'Civic Participation'), or by contacting the Social Planning Council of Ottawa (280 Metcalfe Street, Suite 501, Ottawa, ON, K2P 1R7; (613) 236-9300).

If you would like to participate in this study, I will ask you to identify which of your public participation activities you would permit me to study. Then, with your permission, I will gather information in the following three ways:

1. I will observe (without interrupting) your participation in the activities for which you have given permission. I will record – through written notes, or with the use of an audio recording device (where permitted) – the activities and talk of participants in this setting.
2. I will review and analyze public texts or documents (e.g. minutes, agendas) related to your public participation activities.
3. I will ask you to take part in up to three semi-structured, intensive, 60-90 minute interviews, which will be conducted according to an interview guide (attached). The interviews will take place at a time and location of your choice.

You may decline to answer any question I ask, and you may decide to cease participation at any time, for up to two days after your participation has taken place. At the time you decide to stop participating, you may indicate whether or not I may use the data collected up to that point, and any information you do not give permission to use will be immediately destroyed. After two days, I may begin to use the information I collected while watching or talking to you to shape analysis and further research and as such, I may not be able to 'un-do' the use of that information.

Participation activities that take place in *public* spaces (those that are open to the attendance of all) may be audio taped by any individual, however interview responses will only be recorded with your permission. I will not use identifying or personal information in any published documents. Nonetheless, because of the small number of participants, the descriptive nature of the information requested, and the public context of the activities being observed, I cannot ensure that the content of publications will not be traceable to you (or other participants); I cannot assure your anonymity. Please do not share information that you do not wish to be associated with you or your organization.

Through my research, I hope to draw on your expertise and learn about your experiences so that we are all better able to engage in public participation activities. It is possible, however, that the findings of the research may not directly benefit you or any organizations or individuals with whom you interact. There are some known risks associated with participating in this study. First, because I cannot ensure complete anonymity or confidentiality, potential risks may include negative reactions from others (eg. colleagues, employers) if they feel threatened by or opposed to research findings that they (correctly or incorrectly) attribute to a particular participant, activity, or organization. As well, it is possible that the research findings will be seen as an evaluation of certain public participation activities or contexts, and may therefore be used to justify undesirable changes to these activities or contexts. If, at any time, you decide not to participate in this study, your relationship with me or with any organization or group involved will not be affected.

Data that is collected will be stored until September 15th, 2004 in a locked filing cabinet to which only I will have access. At this time, the data will be confidentially destroyed using a mechanical shredder.

This project has been reviewed and received ethics approval from the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or questions about your involvement in the study, you may contact the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee:

Dr. Antonio Gualtieri, Committee Chair

Questions and concerns may also be directed to any of the following individuals:

Kate Belcher, Student Researcher

Steven Hick, Research Advisor

Sarah Todd, Research Advisor

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Kate Belcher

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Name of Participant:

Organization Name (if applicable):

Contact Information:

Informed Consent:
(attach copy)

Form Signed

☐

Verbal Agreement

☐

***NOTE:**

This guide does not outline every specific question, but rather suggests the tone and direction of the questions we will explore.

QUESTIONS

Exploring the social organization of public participation activities:

- What are your activities in the public participation contexts in which you are involved? What are the activities of others? What role do your activities play in the City of Ottawa? Please describe.
- How did you come to be involved in participation activities? What were you thinking at the time? Please describe.
- How are your activities structured or determined? That is, how do you decide or know what to do when you are participating? Who, or what, gives you instructions as to how your participation takes place? What do you say or do when you participate? What don't you say or do? Why?
- How are your activities evident to others in different settings? How does your participation affect the work or activities of these others? How do their activities or work become known to you? How does their work affect your activities?
- In what way are your activities affected by broader social circumstances? For example, what political or economic factors affect the contexts in which you participate? Does the media affect your participation in any way? Does your gender/age/ability/ethnicity/level of income (or any other personal or social factor) affect your experience of participation? Please describe (bearing in mind my inability to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality).

- What documents or other materials do you use as you participate? How do you use these? Are there any documents that tell you how to do your job?

Exploring the 'problematic', or tension, in activists' participation experiences:

- How does the City of Ottawa use your activities or comments? Do you know what happens to the information or ideas that you contribute? What has been the result(s) of your participation activities?
- Do you ever experience a sense of discomfort or frustration with respect to participation activities? If so, please describe.
- Does your participation in municipal government produce the result(s) that you expect? Why or why not? Please describe.
- Can you identify an aspect of your participation activities that you wish was different? If so, please describe.

NOTES:

1. If the participant wishes to cease participation, ask: 'Do you give me permission to use the data collected up to this point?'

Yes ☐

No ☐

Information Destroyed: ☐

2. Referral contact information:

If referral is provided, ask: 'Do you give me permission to disclose your name to the individual to whom you are referring me?'

Yes ☐

No ☐

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____