Title

Citizen Involvement in the City Planning Process: A Conceptual Model and Proposal for Action

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Introduction

When confronted with a directive to insure meaningful community participation in the development and adoption of city plans, a worker in the city planning process may legitimately wonder what he or she should do to comply. What do we mean by community participation? How will it effect my work role? How do I comply? How do I demonstrate compliance? These are just a very few of the complex questions which need to be explored before we can adequately deal with the directive.

The City Planning Commission of Los Angeles has issued such a directive. The members of the Group for Action Planning applaud the values from which this statement eminates. We are aware, however, that applause is not enough to make meaningful community participation a reality. We believe that research and action which we undertake can help more toward that goal.

The issues involved are at least as complex as the city planning process itself. We are dealing with problems and policies which cross many organizational boundaries and involves interactions among people in formal organizations, temporary organizations, and unorganized sections of the communities. We, as researchers, appreciate the complexity of the systems, and feel we must adopt a transorganizational and interdisciplinary perspectives if we wish to work in such a domain. We, as action oriented people, lay aside any sterile concept of scientific neutrality because we want things to occur. We maintain, however, hopefully complete candor as to our values, and general perspective so that we might see

ourselves as others see us.

In what follows we present our conceptual model for dealing with the complex issue of citizen participation, as well as the outline of our approach to action.

I. The changing context of urban government

In recent years there has been a widening physical and psychological gap between governments at all levels and the people they serve. As a consequence, decentralization of public services and citizen participation in planning and administration have become critical public policy issues confronting American federalism in the 1970's. Particularly in cities and counties, these approaches are receiving growing attention as means of increasing bureaucratic responsiveness, improving design and delivery of service systems, reducing citizen alienation, and restoring "grass roots" government.

Of course, citizen participation is nothing new to local government. In addition to voting, holding office, and belonging to educational, religious, business, taxpayers and homeowners groups, citizens have been involved in various public programs funded partially with federal dollars and administered by local agencies. These include programs such as public housing, urban renewal, comprehensive planning assistance, and later community action and model cities programs. In these last two especially, there has been a significant effort made to change the nature of the decision processes in urban planning, administration, and resource allocation, and (implicitly) to change the philosophies of the professions that deal with them. The local planning agencies established under

Community Action and Model Cities saw a shift in emphasis in terms of "maximum feasible participation" and "organizing the non- or under-represented." These local agencies were established to deal explicitly with geographically defined communities or "client groups" and were charged with the task of "planning with" rather than "planning for" these groups.

In spite of recent studies which have documented the initial failures of such programs (Moynihan 1969; Marshall 1971; Hallman 1972) it is certainly true that they are symptomatic of the dramatic changes which have occurred in the planning and administration of urban areas since the early 1960's. These changes involve a rejection of many of the tenets of municipal administration which were brought into city government with the rise of the reform movement in U.S. cities during the first half of this century--including centralization of authority under the chief executive, professionalism, efficiency, non-partisanship, and at-large elections--and substitute in their place such values as devolution of power, citizen control, responsiveness, effectiveness, and neighborhood-based political responsibility.

These changes reflect a shift in municipal planning models as well. Both the tradition of reformism and the theoretical history of urban planning tended to support the notion of a comprehensive urban planning framework in which city planning process consisted in drawing up a master plan based on the consensus of community values or the "public interest," and translating this plan's components into actions via the appropriate implementation agencies. To safeguard this public interest, an independent city planning commission was to be created that would

place the public interest above political considerations and protect it against interest group pressures.

This idea of comprehensive planning from above has gradually undergone a shift toward some notion of "transactive" or "advocacy" planning (Davidoff 1965; Friedmann 1973). Here it is assumed that planning should be linked with, rather than protected from the political process. Rather than viewing planning as an "objective" activity which is carried out in the "public interest" it recognizes that in a pluralistic polity there are always different interests which are interpenetrating with and being expressed through planning and decision processes. Planners are seen not as "value free technicians" but as participants in this process who may even be advocates of a particular interest or position. The notion that plans and policies are to be prepared by professionals and handed down to citizens for their approval is here replaced by a model of planning aimed at assisting local neighborhoods and communities to formulate and present their own plans to central authorities. Such a model places a major emphasis on citizen participation in various phases of the planning process so that the citizen's value inputs will enter into the outcomes of planning decision making.

While centralized administration and comprehensive urban planning will surely continue to exist side by side with measures intended to give citizens more access to decision makers and more influence in plan and public policy determination, it nevertheless seems evident that these new developments provide an important field for investigation. If we assume that increased citizen participation can provide a basis for restructuring interactions between citizens, communities, and local governmental

bodies, we must begin to explore the more specific questions of how much and what kinds of participation are desirable, at what points in the decision making process, and with what effects?

II. Difficulties with the concept of participation

It is clear that the question of citizen participation poses significant challenges for the urban planning process. As Ronald Warren suggests, "Resident participation has changed the entire concept of what the planning process should be." (1969:34) The idea of citizen participation in the planning and delivery of public services brings into sharp focus the issue of "who knows their needs best? the people or the technicians?" or as another author puts it, "is the better decision for the neighborhood that which arises from a factual examination or that which is the product of intergroup participation and pressure?" (Aleshire 1972:434)

Extensive controversy has been engendered on these questions basically because they touch on two crucial, yet often conflicting requisites of democracy--governmental efficiency and responsiveness--and because it is a question which assumes increasing preeminence as the "guidance systems" of society become more technically sophisticated and deference to expertise as the modus operandi in running all levels of government comes increasingly under scrutiny (Benveniste 1972; Brewer 1973). The dilemma here is one of a need for citizen participation concurrent with a need for expertise in the making of plans and planning decisions; it may not be possible to maximize both these value preferences.

The range of opinions expressed by advocates and critics of citizen

participation in urban planning, as well as local government in general, tend to range on a continuum between "elitist" and "populist" conceptions (Aleshirer 1970; Spiegel 1969). Generally speaking, "elitists" tend to distrust participation because they interpret it as the mingling of incompetents with experts in the making of judgments regarding increasingly technical issues in policy choices. "Populists" on the other hand tend to view participation as a self-justifying goal because it provides "power to the people." Neither of these conceptions however, nor the intermediate positions between them, provide an adequate or sufficient basis for deciding when and how much participation should be maximized.

Moreover, citizen participation is not a single, undifferentiated phenomenon. It may take many forms, and consist of a wide variety of approaches which reflect the intentions of citizens' groups and community organizers, planners and administrators, politicians; make up and socio-economic conditions of the community, and many other factors. At one extreme, citizen participation can be limited to mere sanctions of plans and to the acquisition by community councils and organizations of a veneer of respectability and responsibility in the community; at the other extreme, citizen participation may involve the public dictation of plans that enhance the vested interests of pressure groups. As Daniel Moynihan points out in a recent book (1969) on community participation in federal "war on poverty" programs, to even consider the extent to which participation is desirable we must consider the objectives of such participation. In recent articles Burke (1968) and Arnstein (1969) have divided citizen participation up into several categories, based on strategies defined in terms of participation objectives. Clearly, then, participation or non-

participation should not be considered "either-or" propositions. Instead, at issue are difficult questions concerning the varying devices for and degrees of participation in the diverse communities to be found in a large metropolitan area.

Given these complications, it can be seen that it is not possible to objectively consider the question of "which is the best strategy to increase citizen participation in city planning" or to analyze the costs and benefits of various strategies without a clear statement of the values to be maximized. This is the reason why evidence gathered on the subject of the effects of citizen participation have been so inconclusive--the divergent empirical findings have not been clearly related to their value premises. A recent bibliographic essay on participation thus concluded that:

> "A scientific approach to citizen participation is extraordinarily difficult, suffused as it is with normative judgments, value laden preconceptions, lack of objective criteria and standards of measurement, and a host of undifferentiated perspectives from which anyone can draw whatever meaning his predilections desire." (Spiegel 1969:4)

We will therefore try to make clear our own perspective and value preferences before going on to explicate our analytical framework and methodology for carrying out our study.

III. Our perspective

Our consideration of citizen participation is centered on the relationship between area residents (community residents)*, community organizations,

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*Note: we accept the boundaries of the 35 "planning areas" designated by the Planning Dept. as our definition of "communities."

and local governmental bodies such as the City Planning Commission, the Planning Department, City Council, etc. We conceptualize the individual as part of a participatory process whose main focus, for purposes of our analysis, is the community.

We assume that the individual lay citizen is potentially capable of making an informed choice in allocating future resources among competing priorities and competing demands in his community. Following Arnstein (1969) we would define citizen "participation," not in the passive sense of sharing in governmental rewards and benefits, but in the more active sense of exerting influence on officials and on the outputs of official action. Thus greater participation by citizens and groups in a community would mean their greater influence in effecting plans related to their future welfare. We would distinguish genuine participation, which implies real influence, from that which is intended to ratify rather than influence official behavior.

The process of planning can be defined as "proposals of concerted action to achieve goals" (Altshuler 1965:187). An essential element of planning in a democratic society is that goals, and the means of achieving them, must win approval from the citizens. To achieve this, public discussion, and involvement of the public at different stages of the planning process is mandatory.

Plans for communities and for the metropolitan area as a whole are an expression of priorities; they embody particular values and reflect particular interests. Many individuals and groups that are affected by the outcome of plans dealing with broad community issues are not aware that their interests are affected. They also may be unaware of their

ability to participate in the planning process, or what the nature of their participation might be. Although citizens who are affected by such issues may not be identifiable as an interest group or a community organization, they deserve to have their interests articulated and protected.

A process of city planning which allows plans to proceed through various stages towards being actualized and only engages the citizens' participation in a "reactive" way when the consequences of an issue are made manifest represents a danger in that such plans may be unrepresentative of the plurality of interests that actually exists in a community and unrealistic in terms of actual community needs and priorities. A more "proactive" process would involve citizens in proposing their own alternative concepts of appropriate action. A meaningful set of such concepts can only be gathered after a process in which people are stimulated to consider alternatives for their community, and come to understand their consequences.

Also, city planning is considered in our study as a social process, which necessarily entails social relations. (see Bolan 1971; Burke 1968; Kahn 1969 for views of planning as a social process.) Given this conception, it can be suggested that the process of citizen participation, if it is to be effective, must involve a mutual learning process through which professionals and experts, citizens boards and advisory councils, and interest groups, community organizations and individual citizens can jointly involve themselves in a conceptualization of the issues and problems before them, and the possibilities for concerted action can be discovered. This involves a process by which both planners and other

public officials and citizens can each teach and learn from each other.

The goals and benefits in an organizational sense of such an interaction process include: 1) increasing understanding--by citizens of the constraints and even the frustrations of professionals operating in public organizations with which they must deal; and by professionals working within such organizations of their environment, the communities in which they are working; 2) building institutional relationships between various organizations which interact in the city planning process which reflect a more horizontal or geographical basis of accountability, and helping to establish a corresponding "sense of community" with which citizens can identify and over which they can exercise meaningful influence; 3) moving toward a "bottom up" process of planning in which policies, programs and priorities are shaped by the communities affected; in which planning becomes part of the ongoing process of governing the community and not a vertical process that reaches down toward the community in search of participation.

IV. Framework for analysis

It is clear that the ultimate questions we are seeking to answer in our study are in many ways similar to concerns which have dominated previous studies on the subject. That is, what influence does citizen participation presently have on the planning process? how, and in what ways can citizen participation at the community level be raised or maximized? It may also seem that the value we place on citizen participation as a goal is unrealistically high. A note of caution is in order here. We do not assume that the outcome of citizen participation should

involve an "automatic" redistribution of power in favor of the citizen. Political power is not a commodity which can easily be given to those who do not possess it, or given up by those who have it. Neither is it automatically useful to those who lack skills and direction in the effective if citizens are able to acquire the skills to intervene effectively in the decision process. The focus of our study then rests on an examination of citizen participation and officials' responses toward dealing with it as they exist as part of a process which may (or may not) be conducive to the acquisition of certain skills, attitudes and behavior, which in turn may (or may not) ultimately lead to a redistribution of power. Conversely, we do not see the professionals' or officials' role as inevitably one of giving up a defense of his conception of the "public interest" or even necessarily of changing his own professional position. His role may be one of facilitation, confrontation, or mediation, or simply one of providing information. The more interesting question to our analysis is how his role, attitudes and behavior toward his "constituents" influences his ability to interact effectively with them. It is within this framework that our analysis of citizen participation takes place.

We see several important sets of values involved in the planning process and its outcomes which are within the purview of planners and administrators. These include: 1) effectiveness considerations--the degree to which community plans "fit" the needs and desires of present and future residents, and the extent to which such plans actually are realistic in terms of reaching their intended objectives; 2) efficiency considerations--obtaining the most favorable ration of costs (including

information costs, time and personnel involved, etc.) to outputs in the range of choices that are included in the planning and implementation processes; 3) equity considerations--the extent to which plans take all groups and citizens in a given community into account and reflect a just and fair allocation of resources, benefits, and opportunities among the residents; 4) stability considerations--the establishment and maintenance of means for the peaceful accommodation of conflicting interests among parties affected by the plan in a given area.

Clearly, these values are not always mutually compatible and may in certain instances be in opposition to each other when considering a given issue. A continuing concern in managing the planning/implementation process is to reconcile contradictions among them that may occur in practice. We assume that one variable in managing this process that may determine outcomes in terms of these four sets of considerations is the differential pattern of citizen participation. Also we accept the fact that our own study, if it is to be relevant and realistic from the standpoint of public officials involved in the planning process, must take these four basic considerations into account.

From this perspective, citizen participation can contribute to effectiveness, efficiency, and equity by supplying information useful to the planner in the design, implementation, and modification of plans and by increasing the incentive of community groups to cooperate with the planners' efforts in which they themselves have participated. It may contribute to stability by enhancing the other three objectives, by providing a means of changing official decisions, and by forestalling more violent expressions of dissatisfaction.

At this point we can further specify our concerns by breaking down "participation" into several dimensions, about which choices relevant to our four basic considerations must be made:

1) scope of participation--the range of programs and issues concerning the community which can be considered.

2) size and directness--the scale of representation can range from small citizens councils to "town meetings." Participation may involve direct action at public hearings and indirect representation through citizens' committees. How are these activities to be coordinated and which is to take precedence?

3) frequency--this boils down to questions like, "how many meetings are required to approve a plan, and how many more and at what time intervals to consider further modifications of it?"

4) salience--whether participation should be limited to consideration of alternative methods of carrying out plans over time, or whether it involves the setting of substantive priorities determining (within legislated limits) what services are to be provided.

5) initiative aspects--how much participation is to take place within an already established framework which has already been laid down or includes the authority to make new policy decisions and initiate new programs. Also included here is the question of how far along the line in the decision process new initiatives are still to be considered.

Having identified some dimensions of participation, it now becomes necessary for us to inquire into the circumstances affecting the range and extent of participation which is possible and useful in specific situations. At least two sets of variables should be considered here--

"program" variables and "environmental" variables.

In terms of the first, it can be suggested that some type of programs within overall plans are more likely to benefit from citizen participation than others. This will depend upon: a) whether the program requires only an initial approval or rejection, or continuous cooperation from the community; b) whether it involves benefits and costs accruing to the community as a whole or only to certain "clientele" groups within it; c) whether the issue is extremely technical and complex or relatively simple and straightforward and easily grasped by "untrained" citizens; d) whether it is a project which is functionally integrated with a larger (metropolitan or regional) area or whether it is autonomous to the community involved.

Environmental dimensions may also influence the efficacy of participation in planning processes. Favorable environmental conditions include: a) the existence of powerful community organizations dedicated to pursuing a wide range of community interests; b) a history of cooperative activity and communication between community groups and a strong "sense of community;" c) a political climate which is sympathetic to objectives of community groups; d) socioeconomic status levels and resource mobilization potential in the community.

We realize that such a rudimentary framework for exploring citizen participation does not include a comprehensive listing of all possible variables, nor does it provide us with a basis at this time for assurance that operational recommendations will result from these efforts. Nevertheless it provides us with a unified perspective encompassing a set of considerations through which we can enter the system, make sense of the

phenomenon of participation, and observe and participate in field action research on the subject. We feel that at this point, instead of further elaborating this model we have begun to construct, we should begin to find ways of observing actual experiences in and attitudes toward citizen participation within the planning system, in an actual community setting.

V. Methodology

Basic to our approach to this investigation is the notion that research is action--it occurs in the real world and has consequences for the scientific community, the researchers, the subjects of the research, and the general publics. To ignore the impact of research on one or more of these publics is to perhaps deceive, but more important it is to miss an opportunity. The deception is often an expression of one type or another of scientific elitism, a value expression that one public (usually the scientific community) is more than another public (e.g., the population of subjects or the general public.) The opportunity which is too often missed as a consequence of this elitism, is the opportunity to positively effect each of these ignored publics in accord with an open and value specific program which appreciates the contributions of all relevant publics to research and attempts to contribute in return.

We have already elaborated the values we hold in general with respect to community participation as an issue. There are other values which become important when considering the research context. How do we relate to the people within the city planning systems from whom much of our data will be gathered? What do we offer them? What do they gain from

participation? The values which come into force here are primarily borrowed from the field of organization development. We assert a basic humanistic outlook. People working in complex systems are hard pressed to deal with the forces which shape their organizational lives. The participatory, collaborative manner of our interaction with people in the city planning systems will serve as a basis for consulting about organization life and conscious raising about creative alternatives to the traps and pitfalls of life in any complex system.

The flow of the data gathering/consulting interview proceeds as follows:

1) We will try to determine how they conceptualize their role in the city planning process; how do they diagnose the environment in which they operate; and what they consider to be the main blocks to a better planning system for them and for others in the system.

2) We will ask specifically how they foresee community participation occurring in the near future; and how that scenario will impact on their organization life.

3) We will try to get them to build scenarios which they consider more optimal.

4) We will obtain their reaction to the dimensions of scope of participation, size and direction of participation, frequency of participation, salience of participation, and the initiative aspects of participation discussed above.

5) With specific references to community meetings, and consequently, the parts of the city planning systems which deal with these meetings, we will ask what they consider to constitute "adequate notice" to relevant

publics. We anticipate being able to probe into the potential of many alternative media for conveying "adequate notice."

6) We will be available to the participants in the study as organizational consultants to be used as resources for dealing with more general issue reagrding life in complex systems.

From our interaction with people throughout the city planning systems we will compose an overall diagnosis. This will serve as a basis for recommendations concerning hopefully more optimal ways of integrating community participation into the flow of the city planning process. We anticipate being able to make more detailed recommends about achieving "adequate notice" for public meetings.

VI. Specific research plans

The community planning process necessarily extends over long time periods. To obtain the information we need to understand the process and impact it with our limited resources, we have decided to deal with three community plans. First will be the Venice Plan which is in the early stages. The existing plan was approved in 1970. Currently the community advisory committee is being funded. Public hearings on this plan are about a year in the future. Next we will deal with the Palms-Mar Vista Plan. This plan had its public hearings in February, 1974. It was approved by the Planning Commission in July, 1974 and is currently before the Planning Committee of the City Council. The third plan is currently being chosen. We want it to be a plan for which public hearings will be held in the Fall of 1974 so that we can observe this aspect of community participation first hand. It should involve a

community not extremely disimilar from the other two to facilitate some of the comparisons we wish to make.

For each plan we will interview two people associated with the plan from the Community Plan Unit (total of six interviews) and five people from each of the respective community advisory committees (15 interviews). We will request interviews from the three members of the Plan Committee of the City Council, from the City Planner (Mr. Calvin Hamilton), and from the five members of the City Planning Commission. A few more interviews will be requested in accord with the functional issues arising from the third community plan (e.g., if streets are a major issue we will interview in the Traffic Department). We will also conduct interviews of interested people within each community.

None of the interviews are conceived of as representing a random sample of thoughts or opinions. Rather, we are attempting to get a series of perspectives from people with varying organizational backgrounds and roles. We anticipate an average of one hour per interview, but some will obviously take considerably less time than others.

A preliminary report will be circulated to all participants and they will have the opportunity for feedback comments and criticisms before our final report is issued.

VII. Progress to date

Preliminary actions in carrying out our research on this topic have involved: attending public hearings, and meetings of City Planning Commission and City Council; informally interviewing public officials and staff in these governmental bodies, and in the City Planning Dept.; and discussing

these issues with leaders of civic and community organizations. In this "investigative" aspect of our inquiry we have gained some information about the operations of the planning system in Los Angeles and identified several issues which we hope to raise in our further discussions with public officials and citizens' groups.

We have found that most planners and administrators, as well as political figures, agree that citizens should be brought into the urban planning and decision making processes in one way or another. The question is how to accomplish this effectively. Efforts have been made to involve citizens in planning and development issues by publishing and distributing reports and pamphlets, scheduling public hearings, conducting formal and informal surveys and polls, and meeting with citizens' groups.

In particular two significant steps which have been taken in recent years to increase responsiveness of local government and city planners to citizen inputs, and provide routes of access to ensure at least some degree of citizen participation seem to emerge as significant, at least at this stage of our study:

--reorganization of the city planning department along geographic rather than functional lines;

--creation of Citizen's Advisory Committees and a commitment as a "matter of policy" to encourage local participation in community plan hearings and City Planning Commission deliberations. We would like to examine the impact and effects of these changes in studying attitudes within the Planning Dept., CPC, and the other organizations with which they interact in the planning process. Also we will be discussing with

CAC members their perceptions or the effectiveness of these citizens' bodies in their community.

It has been suggested by both citizens and public officials alike that attempts to involve citizens in the planning process even at the level of their own immediate community have not been overly successful. Some factors which have been mentioned to account for this include:

1) A short history of citizen involvement in the planning process. This is the first time a citywide plan has been prepared and both citizens and planners are inexperienced in the process.

2) There is a general lack of community organization and a "sense of community" in planning areas. People in Los Angeles are too spread out, there has been little contact, much less coordination between various citizens organizations concerned with aspects of the planning process.

3) Hearings and meetings have not been adequately publicized and therefore open hearings don't include a truly representative sample of the community interest.

4) It is difficult for citizens to deal with decisions on issues that are so abstract and long term, or technically complicated.

5) Citizens become frustrated in their enthusiasm when they find their suggestions cannot be implemented due to factors such as budgetary restrictions, time dealines, or legal constraints, or when they find themselves overriden or talked down to by "experts."

The Citizen's Advisory Committees have also been a source of controversy. It is suggested by some that these bodies, who are generally appointed by the local councilman, tend to be politcally non-representative

and serve only to reinforce the legitimacy of the existing political leadership to the detriment of potential opposition groups. According to the Community Planning Procedures Manual, such groups (CAC's) are to be "insofar as possible, representative of the entire community" and are to aid in providing community input and participation (sections 80.00, 81.00). Yet a recent report, in examining the activities of these committees in considering preliminary community plans, notes that:

> ".... in some communities, plans were designed and 'approved' without the existence of such a committee. In others, the committees lacked broad and diverse representations of a majority of residents, or held closed sessions limiting the rights of other residents to become involved." (CRCSC Report 1971:11)

The frequency and scope dimensions of participation mentioned above have also been raised as critical issues. It has been suggested that citizen's committees have not been given ..."adequate time, information, funding or technical staff to examine the issues ... the present provision for a 2 month period for citizens to consider and react to the preliminary plans is both unrealistic and inadequate." (CRCSC, ibid)

It can be seen that further investigation into the system is needed, ideally with comparative data from several different communities, before such issues can be resolved. Yet we are encouraged by the fact that our inquiry, which began with a series of fundamental, general questions about raising the level of citizen participation, has begun to be focused on more specific questions such as "what is the most effective way to publicize open hearings in communities?" "What constitutes a representative citizens committee?" "How long a time is needed for citizens to consider their community plan?" Hopefully through the process of developing our own understanding of the "action field" in which we are

exploring, we can continue to identify key problem areas like this in which to concentrate our efforts, and begin to translate individual responses, problems, and aspirations into action options which are both useful and possible in terms of the city planning system.

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Note: this is the complete set of all references I could find on this topic. I put an asterisk around what I thought were a few key articles.

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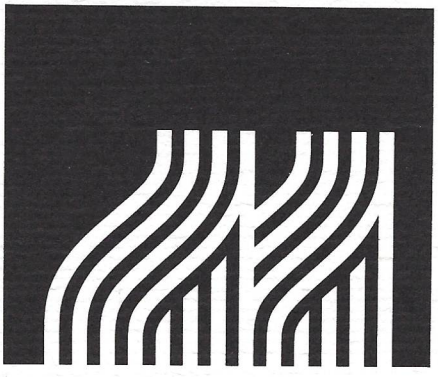
Citizen Involvement in the City Planning Process: A Conceptual Model and Proposal for Action

Group for Action Planning*



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