Issues in Evaluating Neighborhood Change: Economic Development and Community-Building Indicators

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Abstract

This paper reassesses the distinctiveness of the two major approaches to evaluating neighborhood change—socioeconomic structural change and community-building change—through an inner-city neighborhood case study. Specifically, the case study illustrates the complex interrelationship of structural neighborhood change variables such as the creation of jobs and houses to community-building change variables such as the creation of neighborhood identity and vision. The analysis of the interrelationship of these two sets of variables leads to a framework for assessment and understanding of both anticipated and unanticipated outcomes.

Despite a 6-year period of economic growth, most inner-city neighborhoods have witnessed continued deterioration of their infrastructure and quality of life. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Andrew Cuomo, in his 1998 *The State of the Cities* report, states that "Despite recent gains, cities still face the triple threat of concentrated poverty, shrinking populations, and middle-class flight that began two decades ago." Several national institutions, including HUD and national foundations, have targeted considerable financial and human resources to reverse this trend. Some cities report success stories in targeted inner-city neighborhoods. The failures and limited successes have prompted national efforts at evaluating the factors contributing to quality of life change in inner-city neighborhoods.

Contrasting Approaches To Evaluating Neighborhood Change

The urban development literature offers two major approaches to evaluating neighborhood change. The first approach, exemplified by the Urban Institute (1998), has focused on the tracking of structural, neighborhood change variables. Examples include employment rates; business creation; incidence of diseases; concentration of substances in air,

Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research • Volume 5, Number 1 • 2000
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water, and workplace; property values; abandoned structures; income levels; crime statistics; student achievement scores; and participation rates.

The second approach documents and analyzes community building or process variables. Phenomena observed by this approach include community vision and pride, community leadership, intergroup relations, citizen participation, or community information sharing and their significance in revitalizing neighborhoods (National Civic League, 1993, p. 48). The applied anthropological research in general (Gearing, 1988; Singer, 1994) and specifically in Memphis (Hyland and Collins, 1991; Hyland, 1997) over the past two decades has been part of this tradition. The Memphis research on community building has articulated the importance of five interrelated variables in the community-building process: trust, identity, visioning, participation, and connectedness. (Hyland, 1999).

The differences in emphasis have generated a growing literature on the significance and limitations of either approach (Rubin, Fleming, and Innes, 1998). The community-building approach captures the fluidity of change. However, this approach typically fails to provide objective, measurable outcomes that can be used for comparative and policymaking purposes. The structural approach does provide outcomes that are more specific and quantitative such as employment rates and property values. However, the structural approach often fails to capture the fluid and contextual dimension of change, particularly whether and how the neighborhood residents affected this change. Both approaches produce information necessary for building theory and practical applications. The discourse on the benefits and limitations of each approach suggests that a full understanding of neighborhood change requires both an assessment of structural and process indicators as well as an analysis of the interaction of both.

Purpose of the Article

This article examines the work of an interdisciplinary research team, the Memphis Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC), operating within the context of a federally funded inner-city economic development initiative. The initiative, Memphis Enterprise Communities, seeks neighborhood change through resident collaboration. As such, it provides a case study that specifically lends itself to understanding the need to assess the complex interrelationship of structural neighborhood change variables such as the creation of jobs and houses to community-building change variables such as the creation of neighborhood identity and vision. The analysis of the interrelationship of these two sets of variables leads to a framework for assessment and understanding of both anticipated and unanticipated outcomes.

The Policy Context of Applied Research—The Federal HUD Connection

In the context of a major Clinton administration urban development initiative—The Empowerment Zone (EZ)/Enterprise Community (EC)—the city of Memphis received $3 million in 1994 to target three major goals in three inner-city neighborhoods. The goals focused on job training, social service support coordination (through Family Resource Centers located in the Memphis Public School system), and housing construction through Community Development Corporations.

To support and enhance urban development initiatives such as the EZs/ECs, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development created a program aimed at engaging universities in research and technical assistance to inner-city development. The program, COPC, has funded approximately 100 university efforts throughout the United States. In

turn, the COPC program has generated a series of case studies that are generating a set of data, which lends itself to the evaluation of inner-city change.

An interdisciplinary team headed by a political scientist and an anthropologist at the University of Memphis received funding through the COPC program to provide technical assistance and research to support community-based organizations in the city's EC effort. Specifically, the Memphis EC effort called for extensive participation by community-based groups in both planning and execution of EC goals. An EC Advisory Board was established for overall oversight. Neighborhood Advisory Boards were established for each of the three areas.

The Need

Early meetings between the EC Advisory Board and the Memphis COPC directors established six major priorities:

- ■ Neighborhood maps.

- ■ Market gap analysis and surveys.

- ■ Identification of university students from EC areas.

- ■ Recreation opportunities.

- ■ Technical assistance to Community Development Corporations.

- ■ Work with Family Resource Centers in program development.

The first and most important request involved the production of baseline maps of the physical infrastructure in each of the three EC areas. These maps were needed for strategic planning purposes to address the three major EC goals.

Memphis COPC Role

At the outset of the project, the directors of the Memphis COPC identified a research role that actively engaged the major stakeholders in all decisions related to research and technical assistance. Where feasible, community stakeholders were involved in the execution of the research. Chambers (1996) has described this role as research analyst/mediator and other scholars as collaborator (Potapchuk, 1999; Van Willigen, 1993).

In response to the EC Advisory Board request for maps, the COPC directors identified departments and centers within the University that were making maps. They also inventoried their geographic information system (GIS) technological expertise and data-sharing capabilities. The search revealed options from simple production of maps to training in GIS technology and collaboration in developing baseline data. Sawicki and Craig (1996) have pointed out the advantages of involving community-based organizations in the development and use of data through GIS in terms of sustaining neighborhood revitalization efforts. Through planning conferences (Outlaw, 1996) and extensive discussions between the EC board and COPC directors, a joint decision was made to opt for the more interactive approach.

Over the next year the COPC directors piloted a summer GIS training program for inner-city high school students from one of the EC neighborhoods that would produce neighborhood infrastructure maps. The 6-week GIS training program was called "Maps For Success" and produced a variety of maps for the EC Board and target area residents. The following summer the GIS training program was expanded to the other two EC areas and

involved high school students from their respective neighborhoods. This 6-week summer GIS training program was called Memphis Maps (Hyland, Cox, Campbell, Spearman, and Martin, 1998) to connote its expanded focus. The Memphis Maps program was closely planned with the advisory groups from the three EC neighborhoods and received support from numerous city and neighborhood entities. Both GIS training programs provide a vehicle to discuss the development of different kinds of neighborhood change indicators in the context of the Memphis EC initiative that had both economic development and community capacity-building components.

Tracking and Evaluation—Economic Development Outcome Measures

The structural approach to evaluation of the Memphis GIS initiative would be to develop a set of indicators from the three major economic development goals of the EC initiative, notably job training and business development, social support through the Family Resource Centers, and housing production through the Community Development Corporations. Exhibit 1 lists the major outcomes of the Maps to Success and Memphis Maps programs as they contributed to the three EC goals.

Exhibit 1

Memphis EC Economic Development Outcome

Memphis EC Goals	Memphis Maps Outcomes
Job Training and Businesses	24 high school students trained. 3 high school teachers trained. 3 community residents trained. 1 GIS minority business established. Maps used in market gap study.
Coordinated Social Support	Plans for GIS workstations in each FRC. Plans to install a server to link with nonprofits. City agencies and nonprofits participated in GIS graduation ceremony.
Housing and CDCs	Produced neighborhood maps with zoning codes, sociodemographics, vacant lots, abandoned buildings, assets, churches, schools, and businesses. Set up baseline data from the County's Assessors Office for each neighborhood. Maps used in the development of CDCs' housing plan.

Exhibit 1 indicates that the Memphis GIS mapping programs directly affected each of the three major goals of the EC initiative to varying levels of success. For example, the training of students (with performance testing), the creation of a minority business, the creation of GIS workstations in each of the Family Resource Centers, and the production of neighborhood maps for community development corporations (physical and social infrastructure) are tangible products or commitments that can be counted in the revitalization efforts of each of the EC neighborhoods. In addition to identified outcomes in Exhibit 1, it could be argued that Memphis Maps created an information infrastructure that provides a base for the measurement of any subsequent economic development effort in the EC areas.

Exhibit 2

Community-Building Outcomes

Community-Building Components	Memphis Maps Outcomes
Visioning/Planning	Maps used as part of Park Avenue planning study.
	Maps used in Bicentennial Plan (South Memphis).
	Community planning and windshield surveys in North Memphis.
Identity	Maps in heritage curriculum at three EC Schools.
	Maps in neighborhood timeline.
	Assets survey (South Memphis).
	Maps used in resource directory.
	Maps used in history lectures.
	Maps used in neighborhood play.
Participation (within neighborhood)	Inclusion of high school students, principals, teachers and parents.
	Use of neighborhood mentors.
	High school student selected for board position on neighborhood collaborative.
Connectedness (outside neighborhood)	Memphis public school system.
	United Way of Greater Memphis.
	City—Housing & Community Development.
	Local foundations. University—intern placements.
	Local banks.
Trust	University directors/faculty/student membership on neighborhood boards and committees.

Tracking and Evaluation—Community-Building Outcome Measures

A process evaluation of the same Memphis GIS initiative would be to utilize a set of community-building indicators to assess neighborhood change. Drawing upon the previous conceptual framework by Hyland and colleagues (1999) as a framework for evaluation, Exhibit 2 lists visioning/planning, identity, participation (within the neighborhood), connectedness (outside the neighborhood), and trust as community-building outcomes in the assessment of the Memphis Maps initiative.

Several observations can be drawn from Exhibit 2. First, Memphis Maps had a measurable impact on community building and neighborhood change equal to or greater than its impact on economic development in the EC as measured by number of outcomes. For example, Memphis Maps contributed to a growing sense of identity in each of the respective neighborhoods. Teachers, planners, and residents used the maps for a variety of purposes. Uses of student maps included heritage curriculum, the construction of neighborhood timelines, an assets survey, a resource directory, a neighborhood play about community mobilization, locating vacant lots and abandoned structures, and historical discussions. One could argue that all of the above uses contributed to a growing awareness of the positive assets within their neighborhoods and hence a growing sense of identity.

The community-building outcomes are ongoing with no clear time for closure. For example, the maps being used in neighborhood visioning and planning seldom reach a definitive product. As such the measurement is largely relational and contextual rather than finite with clear boundaries. For example, the Memphis Maps were used in three subsequent planning efforts in each of the three EC neighborhoods. Each of these planning efforts yielded processes that were more inclusive in terms of neighborhood and citywide participation. The fact that high school students from each of the respective neighborhoods produced these maps seemed to add credibility and ownership to both the neighborhood residents and the city planners.

Third, the assessment of process outcomes in the "Memphis Maps" initiative supports what Sawicki and Flynn (1996), among others, have argued are the advantages of involving community-based organizations in computer mapping efforts, notably understanding neighborhood change. Using a GIS mapping program driven by collaboration to achieve EC determined goals, the Memphis Maps experience demonstrated that multiple stakeholders could understand neighborhood change. In the case of EC neighborhood participants, they used mapping as a way to plan, implement, and evaluate what is happening in their neighborhoods on those outcomes that they feel are important. In the case of agencies and the university participants, they were able to track change outcome in ways that fit their particular needs.

Analysis: Interrelationship of Economic Development and Capacity-Building Outcomes to Other EC Priority Outcomes and Unanticipated Outcomes

Further analysis of the economic development outcomes and the community-building outcomes points to the apparent interaction between the two. One example illustrates the complex interaction in the Memphis Maps initiative. Trust generated by university membership in numerous community-based boards enabled more agencies and community-based organizations to contribute their resources. It also contributed to their support in the recruitment of committed participants—good students, teachers, and community residents—to participate in the GIS job-training program. Involvement of credible participants contributed to the collection of data used for the production of maps. Community-created data contributed to the use of maps by neighborhood residents in the visioning and planning process. The awareness and acceptance of the mapping process enticed other stakeholders such as teachers to use these maps in curriculum development. The use of maps in classes led to a heightened sense of neighborhood identity. The economic development objectives of job training, coordinated social service delivery, and the production of affordable housing through the use of GIS mapping were all enhanced by the community-building outcomes associated with the enhancement of activities related to identity, visioning, trust, participation, and connectedness.

The analysis of the interrelation of economic development and community capacity-building outcomes in the Memphis Maps initiative can be linked to two additional sets of outcomes. The first is the relationship of the above outcome to the other priorities established by the EC Advisory Board. The participants involved in Memphis Maps affected each of the other five priorities in how those goals were articulated, planned, or achieved. For example, some of the Memphis Maps program participants requested that university interns be used to set up a GIS workstation at the neighborhood community development corporation office and generate a database on property sales in the neighborhood. This database was subsequently linked to residential site development plans. Similarly, the

baseline data generated by the high school students was used as a point of departure for a market gap study and a recreation program design (both efforts involved University personnel). In both examples, a Memphis Maps bridge was established from one community project to another through both the economic development and community capacity-building outcomes. Either set of outcomes analyzed by itself would not be sufficient to establish causality in neighborhood change.

A second category of outcomes generated by the interaction of the economic and community capacity-building outcomes was a set of unanticipated neighborhood change outcomes. Participants in the Memphis Maps program became engaged in a discussion with the United Way of Greater Memphis and the City of Memphis Housing and Community Development Division about an unrelated program—the development of a computer server for nonprofits in inner-city neighborhoods. A serendipitous encounter led to a discussion among residents and agencies about how GIS workstations could be integrated to a computer server and located in the EC Family Resource Centers. Again, the Memphis Maps participants linked a totally separate effort and bridged it back to the EC priorities. Although the computer server and workstations have not materialized yet, the discussion has led to a series of related efforts and the identification of other issues of data sharing and computer networking such as mapping crime statistics.

Summary

Of interest to the issue of evaluation of neighborhood change, this case study documents the complex interrelationship of structure, such as economic development outcomes, and process, such as community-building outcomes. As an example, trust, a result of process, led to the contribution of more resources, a physical outcome, which led to a higher level of participation and connectedness, a process outcome. Understanding of one type of change cannot occur without understanding change in the other. Further assessment of both types of change and their interaction leads to additional understanding of the consequences of the program. Assessing both types of change leads to more complete information about program effects critical to understanding community building. Assessment of their interaction leads to insights about the causal chain producing changes in one or the other type of outcome. Following that causal chain leads to the identification and explanation of unanticipated outcomes inherent in community-building efforts.

Understanding the complex interrelationships of economic development and community-building outcomes opens new opportunities for neighborhood residents as well as agencies and universities. Residents can ask new questions and create new approaches to neighborhood change. The questions generated by the neighborhood residents raise new questions and opportunities to engage agencies and institutions in outreach efforts. Based upon the Memphis Maps initiative, some of these opportunities for the urban university include:

- Training of students in new collaborative projects.
- Identification of new data sources, particularly resident-defined sources.
- New policy questions and issues.
- New program design.
- New proposals.

Author

Dr. Stanley E. Hyland is head of the School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Memphis. As an applied urban anthropologist, he has worked for more than 24 years on community-building projects to develop a knowledge base on the diversity and strengths of neighborhood groups in the Mid-South region. In 2000 he was awarded the Love Community Service Award by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the highest outreach award for persons in higher education in Tennessee, for his substantial and innovative contributions to community building. He is currently working with the Memphis Housing Authority and the Memphis Division of Housing and Community Development to develop a comprehensive plan for neighborhood revitalization in Memphis.

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