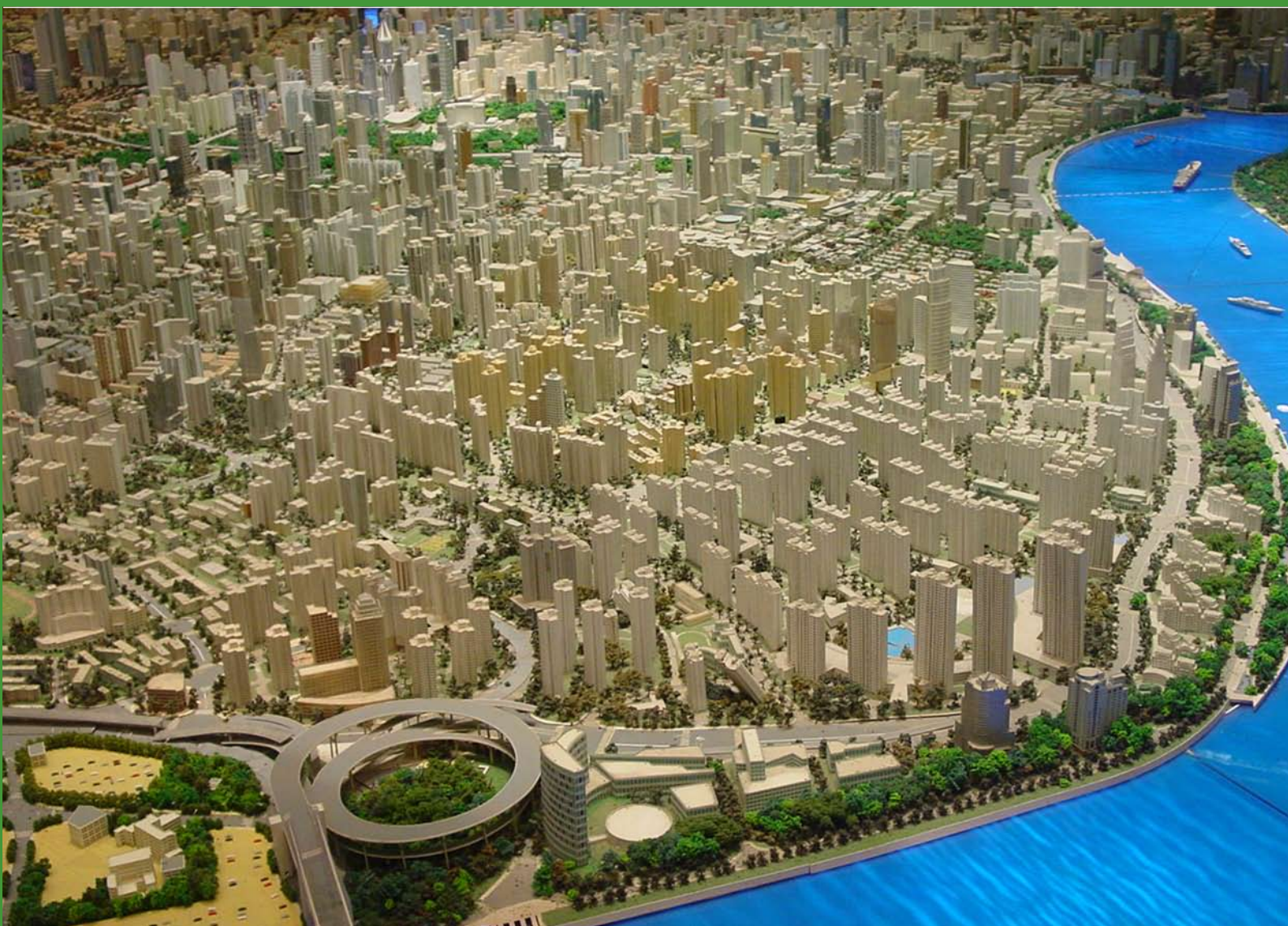


THE HUMAN SETTLEMENTS FINANCING TOOLS  
AND BEST PRACTICES SERIES

# ASSET-BASED APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



# **AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY-BUILDING**

Nairobi, 2008

**UN  HABITAT**

## The Human Settlements Financing Tools and Best Practices Series

An Asset-based Approach to Community Development and Capacity Building

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# FOREWORD



The global housing crisis, especially in the developing world, is getting worse by the day making the right to adequate shelter a quest that is becoming more and more difficult to meet, despite the targets set by the Millennium Development Goals.

Such is the rate of urbanization – the influx of people into towns and cities, and their natural growth – that the world has now reached a point where for the first time now, half the global population lives in towns and cities.

By the year 2050, six billion people – two-thirds of humanity – will be living in towns and cities. And as urban centres grow, the locus of global poverty is moving into towns and cities, especially into the burgeoning informal settlements and slums, of the developing world. In the developing world, this is happening so fast that slums are mushrooming in what is termed *the urbanization of poverty*.

This makes it imperative that we use every means at our disposal to ensure that we at UN-HABITAT, and our partners, keep applying ourselves to Target 11 of the Goals – *to achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020*.

And for this, we need innovative governance, and local thinking and reporting if we are to bring hope to the urban poor. Equally importantly, we need to support our towns and cities, indeed our countries, to adopt pro-poor policies and strategies that will obviate the need for further slum creation.

It is against this background, that the *Human Settlements Financing Tools and Best Practices series* focuses on the development of know-how, knowledge and tools in human settlements financing, from which Member States can learn in delivering affordable housing to the poor.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anna Tibaijuka". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Anna Tibaijuka,  
Executive Director, UN-HABITAT  
Under-Secretary-General of  
the United Nations

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# 1 THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## POVERTY AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Governments invest in the welfare of ‘people’ and ‘places’ by redistributing public resources through selective policies (Winnick, 1966; Arefi, 2003). As they conduct these policies they target people’s needs either directly through subsidies, or indirectly through improved physical conditions for the places where they live.

To date, these selective policies have had mixed results. Direct, ‘people’ policies that target needy individuals regardless of where they live are generally more efficient than (indirect) ‘place’ policies. Over time, however, people-oriented policies institutionalize and spread welfare ‘entitlements’ and a culture of dependency (Mead, 1986). On the other hand, place-oriented policies, which target poor places, are less efficient than ‘people’ policies because they often end up displacing the people for whom the policies were developed in the first place. Yet, compared to direct welfare policies, ‘place’ policies have favorable longer-term effects since they tend to reduce dependency on government resources.

Allocating public funds under a so-called need-based approach to community development requires standards to define and assess community needs. Governments have developed various mechanisms and institutions to identify, prioritize and quantify local needs such as housing, healthcare, education or employment.

Criticisms of need-based community development practices include:

- Equity and efficiency issues; and,
- Perpetuating a culture of poverty, dependency, and patience

Regardless of efficiency (i.e., effective improvement in the well-being of needy individuals) or equity (i.e., only targeting those who need assistance most) goals, these policies mainly highlight communities’ deficiencies, i.e., what they lack rather than what they have.

## THE NEED-BASED APPROACH

Need-based government policies typically focus on what communities lack as opposed to what they have. For decades, governments—both in developed and developing countries—have used “a standard deficits calculations approach” (Peattie, 1983: 229) to quantify community needs (such as an x number of housing units to be built, or a certain amount of retail space, schools, parks, public spaces, etc.). Urban planners, for example, calculate housing deficit as the difference between the necessary number of dwelling units and the number of units produced. “Calculations of ‘deficit’ based on bad data relating to poor categories may be joined with ‘programs’ constituting at best very partial solutions to the existing problems and at worst exacerbating them via slum clearance” (Peattie, 1983: 227).

Similarly, experts quantify the needs for local services, schools, businesses, etc. Since poor communities are defined by these deficits, experts assess their needs and shortcomings as a first step towards breaking their cycle of poverty, dependency and despair and achieving self-sufficiency. In many countries (including the United States) in the 1960s and 1970s, urban renewal, slum clearance projects and 'gentrification' (replacing lower- with middle-income people) exemplified the various paths which declining communities could take toward prosperity. To ensure success, technical assistance is transferred through top-down policies, under the auspices and authority of so-called 'expert knowledge'. To date, the master planning approach, whereby needs are mapped and quantified, remains a useful method of quantifying the needs of distressed communities.

## SHIFTING FROM NEEDS TO ASSETS

Over the last three decades and in a bid to join the bandwagon of innovative solutions to urban problems, policy-makers and residents have explored alternatives to the conventional need-based approaches to community development. Inefficiencies in government policies have been a reflection of continuing debates about 'people-' and 'place-targeting' on the one hand, and ongoing research on community development, capacity-building, empowerment, and knowledge partnerships on the other.

Along these lines, a wide range of community-based practices have come to complement conventional expert-based, top-down government intervention for the purposes of assessing local needs. As a result, conflicts arise between the experts' ways of assessing needs on the one hand, and the way local people (or 'local knowledge') address and define their needs on the other hand. Government regulations determine the ways conflicts between the communities and experts (within

a need-based paradigm) are to be resolved should they arise. As the effectiveness of top-down, need-based procedures was queried and government subsidies reduced against a background of mistrust between people and government, local communities have been forced to find innovative ways of building their own capacities.

This report draws from writings from the two opposing schools of thought about community development; or, to put it in a nutshell, investing in a community's needs, or assets? Those who criticize need-based policies on efficiency and equity grounds suggest exploring worthier alternatives. Those calling for better policy options also seek policies that focus not so much on needs alone, but on assets as well. Like need-based policies, a growing body of literature represents the diverse roots of asset-based community development initiatives. Much of this diversity draws from two debates:

- The critique of the culture of poverty (Lewis, 1966) and marginality (Perlman, 1976), which aimed to generalize the behavioral-cultural traits of the poor; and
- The virtues of viewing the "ghetto as a resource" (Goldsmith, 1979), empowerment (Friedmann, 1996), capacity building (Glickman and Servon, 1998), social capital (Putnam, et al., 1993; Woolcock, 1998), and knowledge partnerships (Hordijk and Baud, 2006).

Community assets include physical capital and infrastructure (buildings, roads, open and public spaces such as parks and plazas); financial and economic capital; and the political and social capital inherent to local leadership and informal social networks. Buildings can be considered assets because investing in them yields future returns on capital, just like investing money in a bank. Risk and uncertainty are associated with asset ownership because financial or land-based properties are subject to loss. Community



assets go beyond bricks and mortar or money, including less tangible phenomena such as social networks and people's attachment to place, or a sense of place, too. This aspect of local assets characterizes them as 'public goods', which should theoretically benefit everyone in a community.

Contrasting the typical need-based "deficit model" (Wynne, 1991; Petts, 2003), an asset-based approach does not seek to quantify needs. Instead, it aims to encourage an attitude favorable to change and capacity-building by cutting across professional boundaries. Some consider this to be a community-design process, based on which "the environment works better if people affected by its changes are actively involved in its creation and management instead of being treated as passive consumers" (Sanoff, 2000: p. x).

This asset-based approach seeks to identify, and capitalize on, the tangible and intangible assets available to a community, rather than on what it lacks (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; Sanoff; 2000; Green and Haines, 2002; Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; Arefi, 2004 a; 2004 b). To policy-makers and neighborhood activists, community assets matter because, as public goods, they benefit residents in different ways (e.g., housing and service delivery). Vibrant communities promote and signal a strong sense of belonging and attachment to place, and in the process re-energize housing markets; whereas weak and depressed communities suffer from weak markets, failed government policies, giving an impression or sense of despair and hopelessness to residents and outsiders alike.

As stated above, need-based anti-poverty policies are premised on quantifying 'deficits' and 'targeting'. People-targeting focuses on the redistribution of resources among the poor, whereas place-targeting concentrates on local regeneration and slum upgrading. UN-HABITAT's slum upgrading initiatives focus on combined place-targeting and asset-building. People-targeting policies involve entitlements (i.e., food stamps, vouchers, handouts or medical insurance), with taxes playing an important role in the redistribution of wealth. Place-targeting or area regeneration require different mechanisms, ranging from slum clearance and upgrading to urban renewal and public housing, along with creating vibrant Business Improvement Districts as well as Enterprise and Empowerment Zones. The downside of place-targeting is that it largely happens at the expense of other localities, which have not received the resources earmarked for possible improvements. This characterizes 'place prosperity' policies as an overall zero-sum game.

**TABLE 1.1 'PEOPLE VS. PLACE-PROSPERITY' AND 'NEED- VS. ASSET-BASED' PUBLIC POLICY OPTIONS**

|  | <b>People</b>  | <b>Place</b>  |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Need (TARGETING)</b>                          | <b>Redistribution</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welfarism</li> <li>• Entitlements (taxes, handouts, housing vouchers, food stamps...)</li> </ul>  | <b>Revitalization</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Housing</li> <li>• "Ghetto as colony"</li> <li>• Urban Renewal</li> <li>• Slum Upgrading</li> <li>• Enterprise Zones</li> </ul>                               |
| <b>Asset (CAPACITY BUILDING/ ASSET BUILDING)</b> | <b>Empowerment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Capital (networking, trust, and reciprocity)</li> <li>• Co-production and development of knowledge and skills (between 'expert knowledge' and 'local knowledge')</li> <li>• Social, political, psychological access to resources</li> </ul> | <b>Partnership</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historic preservation and a sense of place</li> <li>• "Ghetto as a resource"</li> <li>• Community-University and Public-Private Partnerships</li> <li>• CDCs</li> </ul> |

Table 1.1 highlights the philosophical roots of the need-asset distinction. It also provides a conceptual framework for comparing the two schools of thought in public policy against the broader 'people vs. place-prosperity' split. As shown in Table 1.1, four types of policies are conceivable: need-based, people-oriented; need-based, place-oriented; asset-based, people-oriented; and asset-based, place-oriented. Each of these public policy categories or government initiatives seeks to achieve certain moral, social, economic, or physical outcomes. For example, need-based, people-oriented policies typically tend to increase social equity through wealth redistribution among needy individuals. Since these types of policies redistribute wealth among the poor through taxes on the more affluent segments of society, they gain merit on efficiency grounds.

However, place-oriented policies target the poor not solely out of benevolence, but on the realization that revitalizing and improving urban blight would enhance market efficiency, which, in turn, helps the poor as it improves their living conditions. Examples of such policies abound, such as the public housing, urban renewal, and slum clearance projects of the 1950s and 1960s and the Enterprise Zones of the 1990s. However, end-results show that policy-makers' worthy intentions to alleviate poverty have not been enough to achieve long-term capacity-building among communities. As a result, place-oriented policies have produced mixed outcomes

# 2 ELEMENTS OF AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Focusing on needs only exposes communities' shortcomings, while paying attention to assets (including human, physical, social, and political capital) highlights their less tangible dimensions. But why is this point important? Needy communities are expected to exhibit lower stocks of those social networks of trust and reciprocity known as 'social capital'. They are also expected to have limited access to political and financial resources.

As a result, people in distressed communities are perceived as lacking the expertise and skills required to help themselves. They are also perceived as unorganized, entangled in intense internal conflicts, and dependent on government (financial and technical) resources. These assumptions represent the elements of need-based policies based on the communities' individual, associational, and institutional deficits. To help local residents address these shortcomings, community development efforts include three separate tasks:

- Self-help (or self-sufficiency)
- Technical assistance; and
- Conflict resolution (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993)

Self-help emerges from a long-standing tradition which enables residents to mobilize and manage assets to materialize their visions (e.g., building adequate decent housing, creating decent jobs, providing education, enhancing human capital and promoting civic participation and empowerment). Implicit

in the concept of self-help is the fundamental drive for self-preservation and survival, as community leverages, and capitalizes on, individual talents and skills as well as collective assets and resources.

Therefore, self-help:

- Enables residents to mobilize and manage assets
- Capitalizes on individual talents and skills
- Leverages collective assets and resources

Technical assistance shapes the way government and non-governmental resources help people find solutions to their problems. Such assistance includes items such as consulting, housing design, construction, loans and credit to start-up businesses. In addition to gaining access to a wide range of financial or technical resources through consultation and direct transfer of funds, non-monetary measures are also required in distressed communities to enhance self-confidence, reduce the number of conflicts and put an end to the 'blaming-the-victim' mentality' (Will, 1983).

Technical assistance helps in two major ways:

- Transferring financial, organizational and political assistance from external sources to needy communities;
- Boosting self-confidence in marginalized communities.

The experience with conflict resolution suggests that it takes more than participative identification of a community's future objectives to succeed; it also takes an open mind as well as forethought and even a

degree of sacrifice. It often happens that decisions about various issues are debated, conflicts arise within various segments of a community. Resolving potential conflicts through consensus-building is one of the three missions assigned to community development efforts.

Conflict resolution has two major purposes:

- Exploring avenues for conflict resolution within communities, and
- Encouraging consensus on shared interests and visions.

**TABLE 2.1 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: CATEGORIES AND APPROACHES**

| COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH     | SELF-SUFFICIENCY   | TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE   | CONFLICT RESOLUTION   |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <b>NEED-BASED (Deficit Model)</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need assessment</li> <li>• Urban renewal/slum clearance</li> <li>• Gentrification</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert knowledge</li> <li>• Scientific rationality</li> <li>• Top-down based on universal, standardized needs</li> <li>• Master/ Comprehensive Planning</li> <li>• Problem-Solving with Universal Principles</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulation</li> <li>• Professional support</li> <li>• Government</li> <li>• Co-optation</li> </ul>   |
| <b>ASSET-BASED (Dynamic Model)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asset Identification</li> <li>• Mobilization of Resources</li> <li>• Social Capital</li> <li>• Capacity-Building</li> <li>• Social Empowerment</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Knowledge and Expert Knowledge</li> <li>• Bottom-up/ Grassroots</li> <li>• Partnership</li> <li>• Co-production of Knowledge</li> <li>• Technical Empowerment</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretation</li> <li>• Participation</li> <li>• Organization</li> <li>• Community Design</li> <li>• Mutual Learning</li> <li>• Governance</li> <li>• Political Empowerment</li> </ul> |

### ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

While poor communities may feature lower educational achievement and technical skills compared with the more affluent segments of a population, they generally form stronger informal social support networks. This is the

first major difference between a need-based and an asset-based approach to community development, as illustrated in Table 2.1. Local networks essentially serve two major purposes:

- **‘bonding social capital’**: linking individuals who know each other or; and

- **‘bridging social capital’**: linking individuals or organizations to those outside the local community who may not know each other, but may share common interests, or be willing to share economic opportunities.

In a need-based approach to community development self-sufficiency results from a top-down process; by contrast, an asset-based approach is bottom-up and grassroots-based. In a way, ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capitals bind residents to other individuals within and outside their respective communities. In the process, informal social networks become stronger, denser, and thicker through “use” (unlike other forms of capital, which erode through use rather than disuse) and, therefore, reduce the risk of erosion or depletion by “disuse” (Ostrom, 1997).

Identifying assets is a major opportunity to assess a community’s potentials, capabilities, and talents. Only in a next step will capitalizing on these assets become possible. For example, identifying informal local networks such as small business groups, neighborhood watch groups, clubs, etc., could play a critical role in building consensus or resolving conflicts on neighborhood-related matters. Bonding social capital, too, can help mobilize and rally communities around major local decisions (e.g., turning an existing vacant lot into a soccer field or a very small park). This example illustrates two points:

- bonding social capital can help mobilize people behind a shared cause or common concern;
- this process is also an opportunity for a community to identify and take stock of its potential physical resources, such as good locations for attracting specific businesses or services serving not just the community but also a larger area.

Communities could also identify their weaknesses and eyesores, which could be

subsequently eliminated or transformed into strengths and assets. The first type of action is often known as “setting aggravations”, whereas the second type of action is called “setting deprivations.” Of course, further in the future, a community might even have to look for political connections in order to muster the support, since local political leadership often is a condition for local projects to materialize. All these efforts are part of the asset-identification period—be they social, physical, or political.

## EMPOWERMENT

The second row in Table 2.2 shows that asset-based policies emphasize empowerment and capacity building, as opposed to merely targeting local needs. Compared to need-based policies, which intervene in communities for a limited period of time, asset-building efforts promote long-term relationships under the form of partnerships. Long-term partnerships stimulate self-help and self-organization, easing a community’s access to various local and government resources. Conversely, need-based policies result in long-term dependency on government resources. Friedmann (1996: 164) defines empowerment as:

“the self-organization of the poor for collective survival. The goal is to gain greater access to resources essential for livelihood. Although self-organization is fundamental to the achievement of this goal, outside help, especially by the state, is needed in order to obtain satisfactory results on a scale commensurate with the size of the problem.”

Therefore, empowerment has three major components:

- organizing [collectively]
- access to resources
- seeking external help

**TABLE 2.2 EMPOWERMENT AND ITS COMPONENTS**

|               | ORGANIZING  | ACCESS TO RESOURCES   | EXTERNAL HELP   |
|---------------|---|---|---|
| <b>People</b> | <b>Social Capital</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local social networks</li> <li>Establishing contacts with external sources of funding</li> </ul> | <b>Personal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talents, skills</li> <li>Local/Community</li> <li>Neighborhood groups</li> <li>Banks, faith-based, social, regional</li> <li>Government/State</li> </ul> | <b>Technical</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assistance</li> <li>Human capital</li> <li>Political</li> <li>Partnerships</li> </ul> |
| <b>Place</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CDCs</li> <li>Neighborhood or Local Groups</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial</li> <li>Political</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government</li> <li>Private</li> <li>NGOs</li> </ul>   |

Table 2.2 details the elements of empowerment typically found in asset- or capacity-building strategies. Concepts and theories such as social capital, capacity-building and knowledge partnerships pursue these goals of empowerment by focusing on communities’ less tangible yet important attributes. Social capital by itself has a proven capacity to reveal a community’s untapped resources. Policy-making can take advantage of the flexibility and diversity of social capital, keeping in mind that this type of ‘capital’ is more difficult to generate in practice than theory would suggest.

Compared with vibrant communities with strong social networks, distressed neighborhoods seem to hold lower amounts of social capital. Poor communities are physically run-down, socially dysfunctional, and economically and geographically isolated—much along the lines of the typical ‘deficit model’. However, this deficit model of low-income neighborhoods is as obfuscating as it is revealing.

For example, a poor community can have an adequate stock of bonding social capital. This should not necessarily come as a surprise, since this particular type of social capital helps residents to “get by” (i.e., to take care of their day-to-day, immediate family, and personal needs) rather than to “get ahead” (i.e., long-term goals, such as completing college education to find better jobs) (Briggs, 1998). However, such communities find that ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ capital is more difficult to generate, because establishing economic or political linkages and contacts with resources outside the community requires good leadership, among other things. That is why research on capacity-building plays an important role, as it shows communities how to leverage assets or form partnerships with external resources.

In order to mobilize its resources, a community must first take stock of its talents and skills—no matter how modest. In this respect, asset-based and need-based approaches to community development differ in many ways. Need-based schemes look to identify the people or places in need; asset-based strategies

aim to empower residents through collective organization, political access, and control over local resources. Asset-based approaches also foster a sense of place based on the unique features of the locality. The important first step in capacity-building is to recognize a community's talents and capacities, whereas need-based targeting does not require intimate familiarity with local physical, social and political resources. Compared with need-based, targeted approaches to community development, capacity-building requires deeper familiarity with a community's social, political and physical conditions. Governments have often prescribed top-down targeting methods over the site-specific nature of asset-based approaches that reflect the strengths of unique local conditions.

In order to identify community assets, one must do the following:

- Identify any locations with the potential to attract businesses or services
- Identify local liabilities that could be eliminated or transformed
- Identify political connections and support

Unlike the need-based approach to community development (in which technical assistance becomes a top-down process through government fiat and regulation), an asset-based approach combines two seemingly divergent perspectives on knowledge:

- expert knowledge
- local knowledge

Expert knowledge typically handles the community development process in various ways. Through the principles of scientific rationality, experts view community issues as a series of problems in need of solutions. Therefore, they resort to a variety of top-down regulatory policies and plans to solve such problems. Exploring relationships between local and expert knowledge may be becoming more commonplace nowadays,

because of a growing awareness of the drawbacks and flaws associated with each type of knowledge when taken in isolation. For instance, in its adherence to universal scientific principles, expert knowledge tends to overlook local cultural and social conditions which, together with local practice are in the process stereotyped as unreliable, unscientific and obsolete, among other things.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Partnership is another avenue for poor communities to attract external resources. Developing partnerships highlights the political nature of capacity- and asset-building. Local politics involves forming new relationships with capable partners whose economic resources lie outside the local community. Universities and their surrounding communities, for example, develop partnerships for local revitalization purposes. The public and private sectors can develop partnerships, too. Regardless of the type, partnerships promote sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships between two or more parties. For example, local university-community partnership projects aim to enhance the strengths of both. Universities typically have long-term vested interests in their communities. A committed university can tremendously improve the general conditions of the surrounding community. They can participate in place-based projects including housing for their own staff, students and local residents.

Knowledge partnerships represent one way of investing in community assets. These partnerships recognize the drawbacks and limitations of each type of knowledge, and the benefits of combining different types. This is best illustrated by efforts to leverage existing stocks of social and physical capital at the early stages of community development while seeking external funding and establishing linkages to public officials ('linking' social

capital). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOPE VI housing and community development program in the United States contains elements of these knowledge partnerships. The program involves forging partnerships with external agencies, local government, non-profit organizations, and private businesses, and creating incentives for engaging residents in the community development process.

Incentives for developing knowledge partnerships and enhancing the organizational structure of an asset-based community arise from the forces that launch, influence and mediate the process. At times, local knowledge helps rally different constituencies around shared community concerns, such as resisting the displacement of those whose houses will be demolished for new constructions. However, in other cases expert knowledge might take a leadership role for developing partnerships with local knowledge. Either way, pursuing asset-based interventions is worthwhile so long as the shared benefits of a new partnership between local and expert knowledge outweigh any social costs. Such shared benefits include participation in the planning process as well as a recognized right to react to the direction and details of such a process; social costs include any tensions between fractious groups with multiple agendas who fail to reach collective decisions about shared community issues.

No simple model exists for developing knowledge partnerships. Success stories show that long-term partnerships between the two types of knowledge depend on local knowledge willingness to benefit from the experts and vice versa. Therefore, it is important to explore new ways of capitalizing on community assets through partnerships between the two types of knowledge. In such efforts, knowing how to identify, leverage and manage local assets is crucial to success. As will be shown later, identifying and leveraging existing stocks of social and physical capital in an area could take a long time, even where local leadership

and local politics combine efforts to integrate expert and local knowledge. In most cases though, forging partnerships between these two requires mutual trust, a sound sense of purpose and strong leadership.

Due to physical and social isolation from mainstream society, access to government institutions is more restricted for distressed communities than for those better off. An asset-based approach to community development promotes access to existing resources through mutual learning (or co-production of knowledge), or partnerships between local and expert knowledge. Citizen participation and community organizing form the essence of mutual learning, co-production of knowledge and empowerment, while providing grounds for the proper exercise of democratic rights (Friedmann, 1996; Sanoff, 2000).

As discussed previously, the three components of empowerment are the following: organizing; access to resources; and external assistance. These components are all required for long-term capacity building. To survive, disempowered or poor communities need to organize themselves as groups. They must have "access to resources essential for their livelihood" (Friedmann, 1996: 164). Furthermore, they should seek external assistance. Empowerment captures the three components of community development as well. That is, self-help captures the ability to self-organize, while technical assistance and developing partnerships are opportunities for support from outside. On the other hand, conflict resolution facilitates access to resources through local political leaders or funding sources. Among these three components, technical or external assistance is a reminder that poor communities and experts can find common grounds through mutual learning and interaction. As mutual trust develops with interaction, communities welcome external assistance, as long as experts are not condescending or imposing. Technical assistance can become a basis for equal participation, inducing partnerships between



experts and local knowledge.

Equal partnership and cooperation highlight the true nature of participation between experts and non-experts. While expert knowledge subscribes to the principles of scientific rationality and formal training, local knowledge has a complementary role to play as it brings in experience, culture, and contextual rather than universal knowledge. In many countries, whereas experts rely on universal and common principles of rationality, local knowledge heavily depends on interpretation rather than (scientific) analysis, and on specific local practice rather than universal formulas for conflict resolution. Such practice depends not on a reductionist approach to science, but on generations and possibly centuries of experience. For example, in many countries elder, more experienced individuals have the responsibility to resolve conflicts when and if they arise. The wisdom and respect attached to age and experience endow older residents with the authority to settle disputes or conflicts should they crop up.

Short of recognizing and reinforcing such informal cultural and social practice (or what some call the 'cultural grammars of solidarity'), establishing an effective dialogue between experts and non-experts will remain a challenge. Moreover, since capitalizing on local social and political capital calls for partnerships between local and expert knowledge, special mechanisms are required to resolve conflicts between these two types of knowledge.

At Williamsburg, a community in Brooklyn, New York, discrepancies between local and expert knowledge on the possible exposure of residents to pollutants highlighted two different interpretations of one and the same phenomenon (Corburn, 2005). The experts' interpretation ruled out residents' exposure to hazardous substances, while the residents' experience and interpretation proved otherwise. Interaction and mutual learning enabled local knowledge to integrate its experience with

expert knowledge they could trust. In the process, they ultimately demonstrated that theirs was a credible, consistent case, rather than just a string of isolated incidents.

Persistent distrust between experts (be it government agencies or the private sector) and local constituencies has created a gap which has only kept widening over time. Evidence shows that expert knowledge increasingly dominates the decision-making process at the expense of local knowledge. Increasing disregard of expert knowledge for local practice and playing down governance to the benefit of government have combined to promote domination and co-optation as widely accepted ways of eschewing conflict.

# 3 BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

## THREE TYPES OF BARRIERS

Theories and concepts, such as the ‘culture of poverty’ (Lewis, 1966) and ‘marginality’ (Perlman, 1976), highlight the popular misconceptions, stereotypes, and assumed weaknesses associated with poor communities. However, other concepts including social capital, community capacity-building, and knowledgepartnershipemphasizethestrengths and opportunities for asset-building that exist in poor communities. Focusing on strengths and opportunities per se, however, does not automatically put distressed communities in a position to build capacity. Research in the last three decades or so highlighted the problems needy communities face when capitalizing on their assets for sustained growth and capacity-building. Differentiating between community needs and assets goes to the heart of the theory and practice of community development.

What can prevent a community from identifying its assets and capitalizing on them to build capacity in the long term? If they are to overcome barriers to long-term capacity building, community development projects ought to combine the three types of efforts (self-help, technical assistance, and conflict resolution) outlined in the previous chapter. The history of community development and its extensive literature have documented some of the factors that can undermine community building efforts. The road to community revitalization and capacity-building appears to be far from smooth, and therefore it is important to recognize the preconceived notions, or ‘fixes’, that are typically associated with these efforts.

The first type of barriers to long-term community development includes the following:

- Preventing individuals from experiencing personal growth
- Weakened associational linkages among individuals
- Redlining on an institutional level, in the process intensifying physical, social and political isolation from mainstream society, which in turn
  - o Perpetuates economic dependency on external sources of funding
  - o Prevents communities from tapping their own resources and assets

The second type of barriers emerges from misconceptions about distressed communities, as highlighted by theories like ‘marginality’. The third type of barriers arises from a failure to combine expert and local knowledge into the asset-building process. Helping communities to help themselves is only possible when they are given the opportunities they deserve, rather than being viewed as a group of ignorant, ineffective individuals. At times, achieving self-help may seem too much to expect from disenfranchised communities because, at first glance, their stocks of social capital, individual talents and skills seem to be lower than those found in affluent communities. Let us explore three major types of barriers that typically stand in the way of community development and capacity-building:

- Individual, associational, and institutional (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993);

- Marginality (Perlman, 1976); and,
- Knowledge partnership (Schneekloth and Shibley, 1995 and Zanetell et al. 2002)

## INDIVIDUAL, ASSOCIATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

Poor communities suffer from low individual (human capital), associational (i.e., bonding and bridging social capital), and institutional or physical (political and physical capital) capacities. Now, its individual members are the basic assets of any community. Without individuals there is no community. The first type of barrier acts at individual level as it denies self-help; the second type increases dependency on external sources of funding, as well as technical assistance from government or non-government organizations. Dependency on technical assistance in turn suggests associational barriers in a community. Finally, unresolved conflicts and a lack of consensus-building over shared concerns highlight institutional problems in distressed communities.

At an individual level, community investments in human capital reflect residents' educational attainment; the higher a community's educational attainment and specialized set of skills, the higher the likelihood of achieving short- and long-term economic goals. A significant body of literature addresses the growing tension between expert and local knowledge. The problem is that the so-called expert knowledge rarely considers local knowledge (which embodies local traditions, cultural, ethnic, and vernacular practice) as a viable, reliable source of inspiration, information and eventually equal partnership.

Those communities with low stocks of human or individual capital largely depend on expert knowledge for human capital. Tension between these two types of knowledge generally creates problems in the capacity building process. That is, failure to incorporate local knowledge

into expert-based programming often widens the gap between the way experts rationalize a community's future needs and the way local residents view them. Ultimately, paying lip service to local community values and practice seems to have only compounded the rift between experts' prescriptions and the communities' visions. This tension between expert and local knowledge is reflected in the ability and likelihood of a community toward self-help as the basic component of community development; the lower a community's stock of human capital, the less likelihood it will have of achieving self-help.

At another level, individuals establish both formal and informal associations and linkages within and outside the community. The literature on social capital pinpoints the benefits, drawbacks and limitations of such networks for community building. The two distinctive forms of associations include bonding capital (social) and bridging capital (economic). Interestingly, the theory of "marginality", which was in vogue in the 1960s and 1970s, has addressed both these dimensions (the individual and associational barriers to community development).

Poor communities often feature lower amounts of bridging social capital (linking with external institutions) whereas they fare better in establishing community-wide linkages, or bonding social capital. One reason behind this situation is economic marginality, as geographical, social, and economic isolation prevents a community from forming bridging capital. These communities produce higher stocks of bonding capital because it allows them to 'get by' rather than to 'get ahead'. However, as discussed before, both bonding and bridging social capital are necessary for long-term capacity building. Those communities that are weaker in attracting bridging social capital depend more on external technical assistance. Technical assistance enables communities to establish contacts with external experts and sources of funding and capital. Depending on

the local leadership's ties with external sources, technical assistance varies widely, such as attracting external experts who can help the community with grant applications, finding project managers, or securing cash or in-kind donations. This is why bonding capital alone is not enough for capacity building.

The third type of impediment to community development and capacity-building reflects the institutional challenges facing poor communities. Institutions broadly represent local religious, cultural, social, financial, educational, and political organizations. In depressed communities, these types of organizations are isolated and detached from those of mainstream society, and generally less willing or capable of reaching consensus on how to operate, or resolve local ethnic, racial, social, or political conflicts. Stronger local institutions with proper leadership and better external ties would seem to be more effective in conflict resolution. Local institutions and leadership as represented in bonding social capital play a critical role in establishing such links between the community and external political, economic, and financial sources of capital.

## MARGINALITY

Earlier writings on community development examine prevalent misconceptions about so-called marginalized communities. Marginality highlights how needy communities become socially, culturally, economically, politically, and geographically isolated. While to date, the common perception is that marginalized communities are isolated on all those accounts, research carried out in the 1970s proved otherwise. The five prominent 'myths' (Perlman, 1976) associated with marginalized communities are the following:

- Architectural and ecological marginality
- Political marginality
- Economic marginality

- Social marginality
- Cultural marginality

'Marginality' obscures realities about needy communities. As a result, any transition to long-term capacity building for these communities becomes a challenge. Needy communities must overcome these myths and institutionalize capacity building. Two decades after Perlman published a book on 'the Myth of Marginality', Glickman and Servon (1998) identified the five components of community capacity building:

- Resource capacity
- Networking capacity
- Programmatic capacity
- Political capacity
- Organizational capacity

Why is the distinction between 'marginality' and 'capacity-building' important, and have these two divergent perspectives toward distressed communities and capacity-building anything in common? Their shared philosophical roots help us trace the lineage of an asset-based paradigm and differentiate it from its need-based predecessor. The so-called 'myths of marginality' reflect the conventional need-based 'fixes' about poor communities, while the elements of capacity-building highlight an asset-based approach to community development.

Let us examine and trace the linkages between the five elements of marginality and the five components of capacity building against the broader backdrop of the individual, associational, and institutional (and physical) assets listed in Table 3.1. These three types of assets (individual, associational, and institutional) not only capture the dimensions of capacity building (Glickman and Servon, 1998), but also represent the pervasive 'myths' associated with needy communities, including those of an architectural and ecological, social, cultural, political or economic nature

(Perlman, 1976).

Individuals are assets (or talents). These individuals matter during the planning or programmatic stage of capacity building. As previously discussed, communities with low individual or human capital need external technical assistance for (economic) programming purposes. Associational and organizational assets are also important for networking or organizational reasons. The long-term vitality of a community depends on both the bonding and bridging types of social capital. Finally, the institutional and physical assets of a community reflect the potential for resource and political capacity-building. Within this broad framework with three types of community assets, we can now examine the categories of marginality and capacity-building one by one.

**Architectural (and Ecological) Isolation** is a prevalent stereotype about distressed communities. Substandard housing and deficient infrastructure typically characterize disinvested communities. However, an often neglected but related fact about these communities is the role good location or quality housing stock with unique architectural styles can play in the capacity-building process. Indeed, housing and building stock are a major “resource” in any community. A blighted building stock and run-down

housing typically reflect visual decline and disinvestment. However, if blessed with good location, these same negative attributes of blight and neglect can carry the seeds of long-term revival. A good location signals an ability to attract external investment. For example, a location along a major thoroughfare has potential to grow as it can provide access or other services for that location. Resource capacity, therefore, involves a community’s potential for fostering long-term development. Resource capacity-building broadly involves both identifying and capitalizing on what a community has to offer.

Identifying community resources is a collaborative process, which needs patience because it is easier to highlight shortcomings and liabilities than identify potentials and opportunities. Outsiders who, for the first time, navigate through a blighted area can remember those negative features such as vacant parcels, substandard housing, unsafe and unattractive public spaces, and struggling businesses. Local residents, though, are in a better position to detect pockets of hope, social networks of friendship and trust, strong local leadership, and even a strong though not necessarily visible sense of place. Detecting this type of information calls for collaboration, social and political will as well as leadership. Short of these, communities will not necessarily

**TABLE 3.1** RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MARGINALITY AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

| <b>Marginality Category<br/>(Need-based)</b> | <b>Capacity-Building Category<br/>(Asset-based)</b> |
|--|---|
| Architectural and ecological                 | Resource  |
| Social                                       | Networking  |
| Cultural                                     | Organizational                                      |
| Political                                    | Political   |
| Economic                                     | Programmatic  |

come to terms with their problems, at least based on their potential strengths and assets. Some authors have discussed how to take an inventory of the local physical and social assets (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). It is important to recognize that asset-mapping and other similar techniques will not yield any results if not backed by a community's residents and political leadership.

Architectural/ecological isolation and identifying (physical) resources in a community are the two sides of the same coin. However, beyond assets or shortcomings, what can be said about the social conditions of languishing communities? Marginalized communities are perceived as socially isolated and "disorganized." Local organizations play important roles with respect to long-term capacity-building. As they identify, detect and enhance social capital, communities pave the way for capacity-building, which in turn calls for improved networking. Networking involves identifying a community's capabilities to generate informal social ties among people who already know each other (bonding capital), and also between the community and external organizations (bridging capital). Therefore, bonding social capital in poor communities is crucial to residents' daily needs, including lending funds to neighbors, or taking care of their children when parents are at work.

A poor community's existing stock of bonding capital will not attract external funding if its members are perceived as unable to plan. In other words, if they are to build bridging social capital, low-income communities must improve their 'associational' and 'organizational' skills. Cultural marginality, which implies systematic exclusion from opportunities (especially educational) among other things, suggests a pervasive organizational problem in marginalized communities.

The relationship between culture in general and organizational characteristics arises from a simple fact, namely, that culture, at its most basic, reflects the degree to which a community can organize according to its social values and visions. Culture reflects prevalent practice, including the acceptable norms and networks that connect people at various levels. Through their organizational and associational networks, people practice and enforce what they consider as collectively and culturally acceptable. Therefore, enhanced organizational potential becomes a high priority for capacity-building in a poor community. Along with this come fresh opportunities to identify and reinforce business, financial, religious, and organizational capacities at the local level as well as to capitalize on the community's unique cultural legacy.

By the same token, poor communities are characterized by weak political leadership and low citizen participation. They are also detached from, and maybe even reluctant to engage in, political debate. That is why they generally rank low on political capacity or—'linking' social capital—are less able to connect to people in positions of authority at the local, state, or national government levels. Political marginality addresses the very elements required for political capacity-building.

Disinvested communities are often characterized as parasites and drains on the urban economy, as they tend to draw on public resources to improve substandard infrastructure and service delivery. Changing this perception requires programmatic capacity and talents, not just to allocate government resources but also to explore the potential for grants to secure resources from outside the community. Programming broadly reflects a community's capability to plan for its future and to muster the financial and economic resources required to articulate and materialize its collective vision. Obviously, ability to plan is based on the knowledge required to invest in the existing physical, social and institutional resources at

a community's disposal, as well as to identify any untapped potential. Again, conventional wisdom in a need-based perspective is that distressed communities are unable to identify their own resources, let alone plan their future. That is why they ostensibly depend on external experts who, by the virtue of their expertise, can articulate future visions based on an assessment of needs and the availability of resources (physical capital).

## EXPERT VS. LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

A critical divide can be found between the professional and intellectual dimensions of community development. Splitting between a number of specialized functions (e.g., housing, employment and services) with different schools of thought have professionalized and compartmentalized community development efforts. This can restrict collaboration, for example, among planners and sociologists or political scientists over in-depth research into the nexus between communities' physical capital and collective action.

The divide is not just functional, but also of an intellectual or philosophical nature. While some have explored the direct impact of space on social behavior, others argue that space has indirect or secondary effects (Gans, 2002). Calling for "a use-centered" view of space, Gans questions the extent to which 'neighborhood effects studies' tend to correlate the delimited area of a community and its (positive or negative) effects on residents (especially the poor). He views these effects more in terms of the choices users make than the direct impacts of space on social behavior. These debates show that the linkages between space and community, and the ways in which social relations mediate the community development process, have not been adequately explored—particularly from an interdisciplinary perspective.

A different version of this philosophical divide questions 'authority'. Who has the authority to identify and articulate good community development practice: experts or laypersons? A body of literature investigates the divide between expert knowledge and local or lay knowledge. Is this a task for experts (i.e., architects, planners, developers, and city or public officials) with the professional capacity to regulate the built environment, or for the lay-people (i.e., local residents and laypersons in general) whose lived experience puts them in a good position to launch the capacity building process? The answer is not an easy one.

Experts use standards and criteria (e.g., the number of houses built, the number of jobs created, or funds leveraged from local or external sources) to assess community development needs. With regard to pressing issues, non-experts' reactions vary widely from those of the experts, who typically resort to scientific measures and methods. For example, bonding social capital—as discussed—reflects local alliances and shared visions among people who know each other. This type of social network may not seem significant, adequate, or even relevant when it comes to measuring effective community development practice. But when it reflects consensus over, or opposition to, top-down intervention (e.g., urban renewal, or building a new car park for a new retail store in the neighborhood) design and implementation for a common cause, then a social network is a measure of community cohesion or citizen participation—an indicator of effective community building or organizing.

As our urban areas become more ubiquitous, concerns are raised about the extent to which experts should control community development efforts. A cursory glance at the relevant literature helps in two ways. The first one has to do with a general purpose, whereas the second one relates more to the way experts and non-experts view community

development. Research in the physical aspects of community development (e.g., building new housing) has substantially increased in recent years. Much of it has focused, for example, on the way certain physical or visual attributes (i.e., public space, the figure-ground relationship, and land use) contribute to vibrant environments.

For example, experts such as Gordon Cullen have significantly affected urban design education, while others like Amos Rapoport have explored the impact of cultural and community values on the built environment. Other interesting and certainly controversial research in the community development process has familiarized scholars and researchers with newer concepts. Research on social capital in Italy has triggered a new debate on the linkage between social capital, regional development and governance (Putnam et al. 1993). While this particular study gave planners a fresh opportunity to think about the intangible or less tangible aspects of the physical setting in general, and community building in particular, research that links the two concepts of physical and social capital remains scarce.

Apart from general studies on capacity-building, experts and non-experts pursue community development efforts from different angles. Experts, for example, use a set of universal social, environmental, public health and safety criteria to evaluate community needs. They develop and enforce zoning ordinances; enact review guidelines; and standardize the physical aspects of the community (Ben-Joseph, 2005). Non-experts, on the other hand, celebrate community-building and organizing through practical experience and common sense. What some refer to “Everyday Urbanism” (Crawford, 2005) celebrates and captures the importance of everyday practice, idiosyncrasies and interactions between man and environment, which while important, still remains largely unappreciated by experts. Expert-driven community development represents the supremacy of rationality over common sense;

analytical rigor over emotional attachment to place; and science over experience.

Tension between expert and local, vernacular knowledge is one of the major challenges facing asset-building efforts today. The universal, replicable and standardizing attributes of expert knowledge stand in sharp contrast to the context-specific, experience-driven, subjective, informal, even poetic nature of local knowledge. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the significance of each type of knowledge, and the extent to which each can contribute to community development in general, especially with regard to land-use decisions and community-building. Research in community development has not adequately addressed these distinctions and, at least among academics, expert and local knowledge are mutually exclusive. An asset-based approach to community development should explore this issue further. Chapter 2 has discussed the potential for partnership between expert and local knowledge as a reasonable middle ground in an asset-based approach to community development



# 4 CASE STUDIES

## RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA SOURCES

This chapter draws from data collected during the summer of 2005 in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. The primary data consist of 13 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Secondary data and field observation supplement the primary data. All interviews were conducted by the author from June to August 2005 in Boston, as part of a Summer Faculty Fellowship granted by Goody Clancy Architects and Planners. Boston was an appropriate research choice, as the city features some of the largest public housing projects in the country built in the 1940s and 1950s, and conducts pioneering community development initiatives with a fair degree of success.

Interviews and focus groups were held with major informants, including Goody Clancy staff (architects and planners), property managers, developers, social activists, planning and community development educators, as well as local residents with intimate familiarity with the selected case studies. Snowball-sampling was used to identify the informants whose input was crosschecked by various other sources, including monographs and field observation. Secondary data include archives, reports, drawings and graphics made available to the author by Goody Clancy. These documents supplemented the points raised by interviewees. Understanding these factors sheds some light on how and why local and expert knowledge collaborated in asset-building efforts in Boston, rather than compete in pursuit of self-interest.

Focus groups helped identify appropriate projects that met the following selection criteria:

1. Urban scale (comprising at least one city block)
2. Developed through public-private partnership
3. Implemented at least 10 years ago
4. Recognized for design or planning excellence
5. Integrated into surroundings contexts
6. Combined “local” and “expert knowledge” (through ‘charrettes’, community hearings, etc.).

Unliketypical architectural projects, completion of community development efforts takes a long time, for financial and political reasons. The above-mentioned selection criteria proved challenging and too restrictive at first because, as with other architectural and planning firms, Goody Clancy’s non-implemented projects outnumbered those that had been effectively delivered. These restrictions eliminated a large number of potentially interesting projects within and outside Boston right away. They ranged from those other than housing (e.g., educational and academic institutions) to those that had been completed within the last five years. Focusing on projects completed at least 10 years earlier aimed to ensure that enough time had elapsed for post-occupancy evaluation.

Evaluating the capacity-building process based on new projects seemed rather pointless, while examining those completed within the previous

two decades or so made more research sense. Furthermore, while professional recognition of a project is a common measure of excellence in design (if only in the ‘expert knowledge’ world), it remains to be seen whether it is considered just as valuable by those who use it, or any specific community. Indeed, dual recognition by residents (local knowledge) and experts of a particular project could represent the best of both worlds from an asset-based standpoint. Public-private partnerships were thrown in as an additional factor in the selection criteria, as they signaled collaborative efforts between the government and the private sector.

This chapter provides detailed information about these separate yet complementary asset-based aspects of community development. Based on the above-mentioned selection criteria, two projects emerged from the focus group and face-to-face interviews with Goody Clancy staff:

1. Harbor Point (formerly known as Columbia Point) showcases how expert knowledge can affect local knowledge when launching into community development;
2. Tent City illustrates how local knowledge can affect and influence expert knowledge;

Both case studies exemplify effective transformations of low-income housing projects into mixed-income communities (see Figure 4.1). The case studies provide an asset-based framework of collaboration between the community and external experts. Tent City and Harbor Point showcase not just the power of collaboration between expert and local knowledge, but also the conditions required for such initiatives to take place. As stated previously, in an era characterized by the supremacy of expert over local knowledge, it is important to view community development as a comprehensive process. The breadth such comprehensiveness provides will help better recognize and appreciate individual participant contributions.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN BOSTON

Mel King (1981) chronicles the three stages of community development in Boston from the 1950s through the 1980s: the ‘service stage’, the ‘organizing stage’, and the ‘institution building’ stage. The “service stage” of the 1950s and 1960s portrays the dependency—or, as Mead (1986) would call it, the “permissiveness” period of the Black community in Boston. The persistence of ghettos and displacement of the Black urban poor created a sense of complacency toward the culture of deficiency and negative self-image. Long-time residents—especially in the South End of Boston—were forced to move out of their neighborhoods and had no control over where they ended up. Getting the tenants involved in the decision-making and community development process, in addition to homeowners’ own preferences, constituted another dilemma facing the grassroots organizations serving the urban poor. To gain more self-control, tenant organizations helped residents to get involved.

As the “organizing” period of the 1970s succeeded the “service” stage of the previous decades, the populations reacted to a number of issues. These included demolition, land acquisition, and relocation, a sequence that had become all-too familiar as it characterized many urban renewal projects in Boston (e.g., New York Streets and the South End). Finally, institution-building in the 1970s and 1980s enabled residents to institutionalize the integration of local and expert knowledge, as shown in this research. King’s findings aptly illustrate the evolution of this transformation, highlighting the importance of residents’ involvement—especially the underrepresented category of tenants—in the decision-making process. King (1981) shows, for example, that active grassroots leadership played a major role in both organizing the people and serving as role models for urban youths.

## COLUMBIA POINT

Harbor Point (formerly known as Columbia Point) stands as one of the largest-ever public housing projects in New England (see Figure 4.2). As for Columbia Point, it had come to encapsulate everything that could possibly go wrong with a decent place. It was physically, socially, and politically isolated from the mainstream community, and steadily deteriorated for a couple of decades when it became a dumping site for hazardous materials and pollutants. As an unsafe neighborhood, Columbia Point also became notorious for a high concentration of criminals and low-income households, and a bad place for raising families. Of its original 1,500 households, 1,100 were forced to move out (Roessner, 2000). Having experienced a downward spiral of disinvestment and economic, social, and political marginality, Columbia Point was home to a large number of people with modest resources.

Similarly, Tent City housed a number of low-income residents before many row houses were torn down to make room for a new parking lot. Local knowledge reflected multiple stories and 'narratives' about residents' struggles against social segregation and for an improved school district, and more generally their quest for social justice, decent housing and community building. However, for all the desire to create stable neighborhood conditions, other social and political-economic forces exacerbated the situation, particularly in Boston's South End.

The neglected and underserved residents of Columbia Point had been living in a deteriorating neighborhood since the late 1950s and early 1960s. The social and physical isolation of Harbor Point from the rest of Boston, coupled with the government's reluctance to improve people's general living conditions, manifested itself in the deferred maintenance of the existing public housing stock, lack of social services, inadequate police presence, and the prevalence of environmental

hazards. This situation caused massive displacement of long-time residents away from the area. According to a former professor of community development at the University of Massachusetts at Boston (UMass Boston), "the market was literally closed down and the only place people could buy food nearby was a bread truck which also openly sold drugs" [personal interview, 7 July 2005, Forest Hills, MA]. The academic had also witnessed that after a boy severed his finger slamming a door, his parents could not find an ambulance; so they "grabbed the finger; put it on ice took the kid and ran all the way to the hospital" [ibid.].

As a construction site, Columbia Point was also extremely unhealthy and unsafe. According to the former professor:

The first major demolition they did was right next to an elderly people's home and they did not hose it down. There was incredible dust, and an excavation next to the site. There were big gaps in the chain-link fence around this huge excavation. This was an extremely unsafe construction site and during my brief career as an architect (I was a construction supervisor at one point) I had never seen anything like this. A lot of the elderly were finding it very difficult to breathe and were complaining about it; the Housing Authority told them that they could be placed in another home but then could never return to Harbor Point. These are people who had hung on through all this crap for years and years—no ambulance, no police, no fire-station, awful, awful conditions—who had been promised this great place to live and now even during the construction there is basically an attempt to get them out of there. We lost 1,100 units of public housing at Columbia Point... [ibid.]

Regardless of the problems at Columbia Point, most residents—even those who were forced to leave—considered it their home and place (Roessner, 2000). Displacement at Columbia Point occurred both as a result of 'benign

neglect' and other policies.

The displacement of the majority of Columbia Point's residents created new opportunities to engage the population and experts such as developers. This period marked the beginning of the transformation of Columbia Point, during which developers and contractors sought to change the image of the area from one of despair, dependency, violence, poverty, and crime to a stable, gentrified neighborhood. Through this social and physical transformation, expert knowledge, as represented by developers, sought to tap into the significant real estate market the area offered. Today, new, high-end, market-rate housing with various social amenities return a significant profit margin for the developers.

## TENT CITY

The proposed, profitable development of a parking lot in a unique location in Boston (where Tent City is located) would have been beneficial for those who supported the prior demolition of row housing in the South End. In the late 1960s, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) bulldozed a site that consisted of a number of decent, livable row houses in order to build a parking structure for adjacent Copley Place. As a result, more than 100 families were forced to move out (King, 1981). A chain of events shortly thereafter led to major social upheaval in the community. Protesters erected tents on the site of the parking lot overnight and refused to vacate it until their voices were heard by Boston officials. Erecting tents symbolized people's revolt and angst toward the parking project. Today and like Harbor Point, Tent City has come to represent a place which manages not just to materialize residents' aspirations to decent housing, but also to meet the client's initial requirements even after redesign.

These events brought Tent City residents closer together and helped form and extend social

networks in the South End. Erecting tents and holding sit-ins together solidified people's visions of the future of the site, regardless of the attempts BRA and city officials made to tap into the commercial value of the site with a parking lot. Over the course of the next few months, city and BRA officials took this group of residents as a social force to be reckoned with—first through co-optation and then negotiation. King considers a \$10,000 grant from the Episcopal Diocese to the Tent City community to vacate the site "one of [the community's] biggest mistakes" (p. 113). Having accepted the donation, the demonstrators realized that they had given the impression that this was why they had left the site. For a while, conflicts regarding how to spend the money drove a wedge among the people. Once they regained control, they prepared similar protests for other sites from which residents had been evicted. As King discussed, this period marked the beginning of the organizing stage. But it took more than a decade to capitalize on the initial impetus for capacity-building which Tent City had created. Today, Tent City is a stable, mixed-income housing complex with a great deal of promise in a busy part of Boston.

## ANALYSIS AND EMERGENT THEMES

An analysis of the case studies highlighted the three successive stages of any asset-based approach to community development:

- Identifying local assets
- Leveraging local assets
- Managing local assets

## IDENTIFYING ASSETS

Identifying local assets (i.e., physical, social, and political) is the first stage of any asset-based community development process. These assets typically comprise the community's

unique physical characteristics such as infrastructure (e.g., roads), natural and man-made features (e.g., parks and public spaces as well as “setting deprivations” and “setting aggravations”), social and economic linkages within and outside the community, as well as political leadership. Setting deprivation and aggravation (Banerjee and Baer, 1984) capture the elements or things residents generally want to see but are deprived of, as well as those they prefer to see removed from their neighborhood, respectively. Identifying social and political assets is every bit as important as identifying those of a physical nature. Unlike physical assets and infrastructure, local social assets consist predominantly of the ways in which neighborhood residents think about themselves, their strengths, potentials and shared future. Therefore, the second stage of any asset-based community development process focuses on how such identified local assets can best be leveraged. The third stage focuses on controlling and managing resources over time.

Physical, social and political circumstances have contributed to the ways in which Harbor Point and Tent City were redeveloped. This chapter discusses these conditions. Tent City’s excellent location at the heart of Boston and Harbor Point’s unique geography, access to the transportation network (freeways, trains and buses), breathtaking views of Boston Harbor and proximity to an array of socio-cultural amenities (including UMass Boston and the Kennedy Library) illustrate the rich stocks of physical assets identified in both locations. Exceptional views of Boston Harbor exemplified ‘setting deprivations’ when Columbia Point was around in the 1950s. The redevelopment project reflected residents’ desire to take advantage of good views toward the ocean, as opposed to keeping the original, depressing views of high-rise towers blocking such views. The redesign of the entire complex corrected this deficiency and opened up the streets leading to the

ocean (see Figure 4.3). ‘Setting aggravation’ was similarly addressed during the redesign of Columbia Point. Removing or eliminating the elements that added to the hostility and unfriendliness of the area included dumping sites for hazardous materials and public safety. In their deliberations, both expert and local knowledge carefully discussed these issues, making sure that the redevelopment plan addressed them effectively.

Furthermore, both localities were endowed with abundant stocks of bonding social capital. This in turn created incentives to entice external funding sources and technical expertise into prospective partnerships. Any sustainable community development effort requires taking stock of such assets early on in the process. Interaction between residents and external experts played an important role in identifying not just these assets but also the ways in which future capital investments were made. Success at that stage also highly depended on the ways in which the experts and local residents shared their views and knowledge during the community development process. The importance of (knowledge) partnerships—especially during the initial phases of the process—is not just an academic view, but also an important practical consideration. The following quote supports this view:

Tenants are a real asset, particularly in the early days of these developments. There were so many skeptics, particularly in the bureaucracies, the finance agencies, government. “This thing can’t work.” They had a hard time believing the mixed income [development] with the minority people—but you would pick your low-income [people]. Now you are telling us that mixed-income and low-income [people] are going to be your partners! So, they were afraid of it—leery of it. But the fact that they were our partners made it happen because they could get the political forces to support, where we as private developers could not. All of a sudden, these tenants were going to see

Governor Mike Dukakis to plead the case and say, “Look, we want this.” Then it becomes a different element that this development wants to make some money. All of a sudden, there’s a completely new dimension and one where they can very easily say ‘no’ to developers. It’s very hard for them politically to say ‘no’ to residents. So they became a real asset and they still are all the time [Personal interview with Harbor Point developer, July 2005, Boston].

## LEVERAGING ASSETS

During the second stage, experts and local residents explored ways of capitalizing on the existing stocks of physical and social capital identified in the previous stage. Once physical and social assets are identified, then comes the time for leveraging them. As discussed earlier, bonding social capital alone is not enough to help residents ‘get ahead’. For this it is crucial to explore options for bridging capital, or to find ways of securing funds from sources outside the community.

However, in both Harbor Point and Tent City bonding capital (or ‘getting by’) facilitated the process of bridging social capital and eventually helped them toward linking social capital (Woolcock, 1998). In both cases, linkages between bonding and bridging capital played a crucial role in understanding the success of an asset-based approach. Throughout the asset identification period, expert knowledge (the developer, architects, planners, city and state officials) and local knowledge (residents and tenants) continued to communicate with each other. In order to achieve equal partnership in this joint venture, they set up priorities, values and goals, and identified what each party could bring to the table.

In Harbor Point, the project developer consulted with the tenants on design matters and accompanied them to the King’s Lynne housing project, which he had completed earlier, to muster support for his plans

for Harbor Point. At the same time, the developer and tenants sought external funding for the project. Following a series of lengthy negotiations, the tenants consulted their own architect regarding the developer’s proposed plan. The developer touted the idea of a mixed-income neighborhood where low-income and market-rate people could live side by side. Even though negotiations about the diverse nature of the proposed plan lasted a long time, external agencies (including the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (MHFA), Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) and Urban Initiatives) finally granted funds.

Two separate events, or sets of activities, marked the second stage of the asset-based process at Harbor Point. First, the developer played a catalytic role in engaging the local residents throughout the asset-building process. He also took a leadership role in identifying and capitalizing on the resources, talents, and knowledge which local residents could offer. Thanks to his efforts, local knowledge influenced the street layout, internal planning and design of building types, the position of building entrances, and also the distribution of building density on the site (i.e., which areas of the site better fit low-, medium- or high-rise buildings). See Figures 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7. Second, when Goody Clancy architects proposed to extend the new roads in order better to integrate the site into the surrounding context, residents expressed concerns about security and requested design change. Even though the architect in charge of the project disagreed with this idea, eventually, the required changes were made and the project area became fenced off from the street for the sake of security.

The interior layout of the residential units is another example of the way local knowledge affected the design process. Site planning and the architectural design of Harbor Point were influenced by the fact that if two single people had to share a unit, their bedrooms were laid out at either ends of the unit instead of

being clustered in the same zone. This factor brought Goody Clancy architects to redesign their original unit plans. For example:

A lot of apartments were shared by two single people who just pooled their resources. Instead of standard apartments with living room, dining room, and kitchen here and bedrooms down the hall, maybe we wanted a living room, not the kitchen in the middle and bedroom and bath on either side, so that unrelated people can live somewhat separately and meet in the middle [personal interview with Goody Clancy, 28 June 2005, Boston].

Harbor Point's chief architect remembers another example of residents' influence over townhouse design:

One of the things that made public housing so terrible was that you had apartment buildings with children and the shared entry halls were hard to maintain. But you also couldn't keep the shared entry door blocked because kids were running in and out all day. They had no keys so they propped the door open and unsavory types would get in and do deals and things... Any family with kids needs a three-bedroom apartment and a front door that leads directly outside. Every building at Harbor Point—even a seven-story building—has the biggest apartments and they all have direct doors outside, so that no family had to live above the first floors and every family had private direct entry to the outside [ibid.].

Second, UMass Boston has been working on a HUD -sponsored Community Outreach Partnerships Centers (COPC) grant to promote partnerships between Harbor Point and the University. Despite an ongoing effort for more than a decade or so, a sense of mistrust persists between the community and the University. This distrust has precedent, when expert knowledge dominated local knowledge and therefore the decisions made in the community. The decision of the new University Chancellor and other people in

power to build new dormitories in 2001 without consulting the local community is a case in point. When the community expressed outrage at the decision, the plan was put on hold. Apart from the University, other sources of expert knowledge sought to dominate local knowledge at Harbor Point, most of all when it came to turn Harbor Point into a marketable development.

The former UMass Boston professor remembers that at some point, the developer CMJ decided that "the tenants needed to be trained in order to live with market-rate people." A long-time Harbor Point resident objected, saying: "I don't need to be trained to live. I can live next door to anybody" [personal interview, 7 July 2005, Forest Hills]. Many residents found the idea of adjusting their behavior to that of market-rate people insulting. Aside from the question of differing life styles and cultural practices, an important question for all parties involved in a community is: What would make this a vibrant community? Bringing retail shops, creating ways that the 'peninsula' would not be so isolated, and really meet the needs of the ordinary people living there? According to an associate professor at UMass, Boston:

That hasn't really happened, and so we thought that for a charrette really to work we need to equalize the knowledge and power, and that one of the things the University could do is to provide workshops and training so that regular people can learn what they need to do to write up a report that can allow them to dialogue with the people who make the decisions [personal interview, 4 August 2005, Boston].

This clearly shows how challenging it can be to combine the visions of both expert and local knowledge with a view to making joint decisions. The main goal for the University was to help community members understand their needs and be able to identify their assets. According to the UMass Boston associate professor:

Whether it is a land-use report or a needs assessment of a certain type, or how to carry out a certain type of research, if we could hold workshops that allowed people to get those skills then they could come to the table as partners. We need to train people to make their own decisions but there is certain knowledge that they may not have and that we can share. It is not like we're going to do it for you. We're going to give you the tool so that you can do it yourself and you can identify; you can take any of the areas that you identify that we all identified were important, and really put forth a plan that will enable you to advocate for what you want and be listened to, because you can understand the other side and you are putting it in ways that are very viable. And we are hoping that some of this would be a mixed group, too, so that we find that people from different institutions have common themes [Personal interview, 4 August 2005, Boston].

However, good intentions are not always enough, nor are efforts to level the playing field and share knowledge for the purposes of building a genuine community. For example, two months after the University and the community received the above-mentioned COPC grant in 2003, the Columbia Point Community Partnership was disbanded and did not survive financially. According to the same interviewee:

They just didn't have a great model for fundraising. The director was working for her PhD and looking at these types of organizations and the way they raise funds; she also looked at the group around the medical center area and what they were doing, and looked at the model in [nearby.] Fenway, too. At the time, the chancellor of the University was not really supportive of this organization, and felt that we [the University] were giving so much to the community with what all the faculty and staff did. Why should we also give money? That attitude doesn't win friends. It doesn't inspire confidence and it is not a good way to deal

with the community. So it got to a point where people in the organizations started to feel that the University wasn't committed, while at the University they thought the community/University partnership wasn't committed to it. So we had to take a few steps back [ibid.].

The UMass Boston College of Public and Community Service launched a service learning project at Harbor Point in 1996-1997. The University and Harbor Point held focus groups of different constituencies including parents of young children, the elderly and the disabled, tenants, market-rate residents and youths at Harbor Point. From these focus groups a laundry list of needs and wishes emerged. Tenants were specifically suspicious of the University. Strategy workshops followed focus groups. The community was divided along age, race, class, ethnic and income lines.

Two items emerged from these meetings: (i) a directory of all services that were available at the University and Harbor Point; (ii) a report called 'Building Community'. The report acknowledged that providing services was not enough for the University. The University saw its role as helping the community build capacity and advocate for itself. One of the outcomes of this report was an organization known as the Columbia Point Community Partnerships (CPCP, which received contributions from almost all local organizations. One of its first missions was to find ways of building a community and what would bring local residents and experts together. According to the same faculty member at UMass who was involved in the service learning project, "they had a beautification committee, and the garden and artwork came out of that." An academic even offered a course called "The Healthy Initiative Collaborative Community University Partnership." This associate professor acknowledges that the CPCP:

really created a meaningful place and started to share knowledge; they began to recognize that there are not two types of knowledge



and that they are both valuable, and we all could learn from each other and we can also create something bigger than either of us can do alone, and we need each other and that this would be a much better place together [ibid.]..

In Tent City too, local social activists and experts, along with many South End residents, made concerted efforts to interact with each other for the benefit of the community. A local social activist participating in the Tent City project stressed the importance of a set of “fundamental principles” [personal interview, 19, July 2005, Boston] in the formation of Tent City. These 20-25 principles indicate that not only the residents recognized and capitalized on their social assets at the time, but they also used them to other ends. These principles ensured the physical and social compatibility of the redevelopment plan with the existing fabric of the community. Physically, the fundamental principles based on which Tent City was planned prescribed four-story row housing, to maintain the rhythm and a sense of belonging with the rest of the neighborhood. Higher densities were also considered in keeping with neighborhood and transportation facilities that faced a major road (see Figure 4.8).

The social compatibility components derived from the principle that the new development “shall reflect the income mix of the neighborhood at the time, which of course was much more mixed than it is today where there are more higher-income people than there used to be in the South End of Boston” [personal interview, 19 July 2005, Boston]. The social compatibility principles ensured that the neighborhood maintains its fair mix of income groups (25 per cent low, 50 per cent moderate and 25 per cent market-rate). On top of this, both sets of physical and social compatibility principles sought to safeguard the residents against “market plans which put all the high-income units on the top floors and all the low- income units on the bottom

floors” [ibid.]. The decision was to have a mix of incomes throughout the development for all sizes of units in all parts of the building.

These interactions between experts and local people eventually improved the original design of the interior, as well as the exterior spaces of buildings and public spaces around them (see Figures 4.9 and 4.10). The distribution of housing types in different floors, the layout and plan of the public spaces, exits and entrances to buildings, children’s playgrounds (see Figure 4.11), and even the way certain construction materials and details were eventually used, all illustrate how knowledge partnership produced favorable results, as opposed to conventional top-down, expert knowledge approaches to community development. The demand for blending in with the South End and the Back Bay architecture stands as another example of this, resulting in the spatial clustering of high-rise units along Dartmouth Avenue and the low-rise units along the South End.

These design improvements largely reflected the practical experience of the original tenants and residents, which positively affected the decisions expert knowledge made. Current dominant practice typically ignores such positive and meaningful knowledge partnerships in the community development process. To the contrary, Goody Clancy architects acknowledged that local residents and their cultural and social practice significantly and positively affected and humanized the site planning and building layouts at Tent City and Harbor Point. As a result, in both locations local and expert knowledge played a pivotal role in leveraging domestic and external resources, and energizing the community development process. Had it not been for the partnership between expert and local knowledge, plans would not have been executed the way they were in both projects. Having said this, incorporating expert and local knowledge into the capacity building process does not end with identifying and

leveraging local assets. As an important part of this approach, expert and local knowledge launched into a dialogue which in turn, paved the way for long-term capacity-building.

## MANAGING ASSEST

Once expert and local knowledge identified local assets and leveraged them with those available from outside, they examined various management strategies to ensure ongoing and long-term revival. The planning and implementation of a mixed-income community, which later became a model for Urban Renewal projects during the 1970s and 1980s, was not easy. Particularly, as an area with a history of public housing failure, Harbor Point was not an ideal place for a new community development experiment. The institutional memories of Columbia Point and the social-political stigma associated with its negative image loomed large from the beginning. That is why the effective management of a new project with a new name had much to do with its subsequent success.

Management encompasses three components: financial, political, and property. Financial management focuses on marketing affordable housing and allocating at least 25 per cent of the housing stock to market-rate residents. Political management refers to residents' connections to people or agencies in positions of authority, such as the local housing authority, the City Council, members of Congress, etc. Finally, property management handles the hiring of professional companies who manage properties, and oversees enforcement of the regulations approved by the task force or the board.

To summarize:

- Financial management: marketing affordable housing and allocating 25 per cent or more of the housing stock to market-rate housing
- Political management: examining residents' connections to people or agencies in positions of authority

Property management: hiring professionals who manage properties, and overseeing enforcement of regulations approved by the task force

Property management plays an important role in the financial success of both Harbor Point and Tent City. "The biggest issue surrounding the day-to-day operation of a property like Tent City is the balance of market-rate units with low-income units" [personal interview with Tent City property manager, 2005 Boston]. The premise is that market-rate residents would subsidize those with lower incomes, since the basic rationale was to prevent another "low-income ghetto" [personal interview with Goody Clancy staff, 2005]. Tent City's chief architect argues that the initial idea behind the design was "trying to duplicate what one time the South End was" [personal interview with Goody Clancy architects, 14 July 2005, Boston]:

It was a mix of income types. They wanted to mix race and income. It was always viewed as being a healthier neighborhood if we could bring together upper- and lower-income people. Just talk about some of the problems. Lower-income people suffered from drug problems: drug dealing, drug habits. There was none of that at Tent City. The management would have to throw them out. Upper-income people aren't going to stand for drug dealers around them and won't put up with them. So this mix really helped to defuse the problem. Of the things that really made this work, one is location—prime location, because you had no difficulty attracting market-rate people

[*ibid.*].

As discussed earlier, Tent City's prime location in the City of Boston is a major physical and economic asset for its residents. Because of this, Tent City "draws high desirability in terms of market potential," according to its property manager. The second element of success at Tent City, according to a Goody Clancy architect, is good management. But what does good management consist of at Tent City? According to Goody Clancy architects:

They have the sort of management that can crack down on any potential problems right away, and it's been so successful. We've been working on upgrading some things in the buildings. They wanted to make them even nicer to continue to attract high market rates. They have changed the mix now. They have enough money. They are going to fix things up. We did the whole front patio entrance there, put more lights and plants, nicer materials; and we went and redid the whole play area and now they are going to work on the lighting in the street [*ibid.*].

The Tent City property manager believes that since the market-rate element at Tent City is in a minority, it becomes an issue because the development "relies dramatically on the income generated from the market segment in order to sustain itself." The Tent City property manager goes on to say that

Since the market rate [segment of residents] is only 25 per cent of the property and the affordable aspects are 75 per cent, it is an enormous strain to keep those market units marketable. The only thing that keeps them successfully marketable is the location [personal interview with property manager, Tent City, 29 June 2005, Boston].

Due to -socio-economic disparities:

There is resentment among the low- and moderate-income folks towards the 'market' element. They frequently don't understand the

financial relationships that the market segment has in terms of supporting the property. But we need to keep the property up to a certain level of marketability—although the aesthetics of the property are less important to the low- and moderate-income folks than social programming would be. So there is a common plague here, that there is not enough social programming and that comes at the expense of keeping the property looking so nice [personal interview with Tent City property manager, 29 June 2005, Boston].

Similar marketing concerns were noticed in the financial management of Harbor Point as well. For example, as the former UMass Boston professor recalls:

A single mother who moved back to Harbor Point said: I had the same housing unit as my next-door neighbor, but I couldn't afford ballet lessons, the bicycle, the roller skate. When the tenant organization changed its class composition, they [the Tenants' Task Force] voted in all these rules that you can't have a barbecue out in the public spaces, you can't hang your clothes outside, you cannot sit on the steps, you can't fix your car on the street. She [the single mother] said these are basically the ways we socialize: we can't afford to go out to fancy restaurants, so we have a barbecue. Fixing cars on the streets is a way people socialize. Also, you know everybody is out. I don't own a dryer, so I need to hang my clothes outside, etc. As a result, she moved out into a very much inferior unit, in a development with a higher crime rate [personal interview, 7 July 2005, Forest Hills].

These statements clearly show that creating mixed-income communities transcends concerns about pleading for certain types of architecture for people with different visual tastes and preferences. People's lifestyles and cultural practices vary widely—especially along ethnic and socio-economic lines. Therefore, standardizing a certain type of social behavior or norm might backfire if handled

inappropriately. It could also intensify social gaps and divisions among different income groups. According to the developer of Harbor Point:

One of the amazing things is, the people who we rented to initially were not people from Boston because these knew about Columbia Point and didn't want any part of it as it was a notoriously bad place. So we were renting mainly to newcomers to the city; some were just out of graduate school, one had just taken a bio-medical job there, and all they knew was: the ocean's there, right down the street, and with great looking buildings this must be a nice place to live. Probably 95 per cent of our other residents were minorities—Black and Hispanic—part of the original public housing residents. We've made a concerted effort to get market-rate minorities and we were successful at that. We would go up and recruit from large companies. We were interested in market-rate people and particularly minorities. We wanted to mix the income levels with minorities... We were very successful at attracting a lot of market-rate and minority tenants through special outreach for that market... [This] almost became a marketing asset, whereas up in Lynne it was negative when people would find out it was mixed-income housing. But all of a sudden, these people thought it was kind of neat that they were in a mixed-income development and it was the first one in the nation. Depending on who you were showing around there, the marketing people would sometimes bring that up and use it as a selling point. But you'd always have those who just couldn't handle it [Personal interview with Harbor Point developer, July 2005, Boston].

If community assets are not identified, shared, and respected by residents, other issues might arise as well. For example, according to the Tent City property manager, due to financial constraints, town houses (3-4 bedroom units) do not pay their own heat and hot water, whereas low- and moderate-income residents have to pay their own heat and hot water.

Consequently, "a disproportionate amount of the burden of utility costs is borne by the low- and moderate-income folks because they are the ones that occupy the larger units, and there is a constant complaint about that. "They can't afford the heat bills in winter" [Personal interview, 2005]. Furthermore, according to the Tent City property manager, "there is not a lot of interaction between the 25 per cent of market-rate and the low- and moderate-income population." Due to the resentment between these groups of residents, issues are constantly brought to the attention of the property manager, who is sometimes accused of "favoring the 'market' residents" [personal interview with Tent City property manager, 29 June 2005, Boston]. The property manager categorically denies any favoritism, arguing that

The low- and moderate-income residents have leases that protect them better than 'market' residents. We tolerate less from 'market' residents in terms of lease violations, because their leases are much stricter; they protect the landlord and are much easier to work through housing courts. By contrast, we must be much more careful when preparing and moving forward with a housing case against low- and moderate-income tenants because they are much harder to prosecute [Personal interview with Tent City property manager, 29 June 2005, Boston].

Consequently, managing assets helps capacity-building to sustain over time. During this stage, the stakeholders at Tent City and Harbor Point specifically focused on three types of management: financial, political, and property. Besides securing funding from the MHFA, BRA, UDAG, etc., they set up governing boards to monitor possible eviction cases and administer the codes of decorum for the low-, moderate-income and market-rate residents. As they did so, they established and enhanced relationships with people in positions of power and authority, or what has been referred to as the 'linking social capital'

earlier in this report.

Managing resources captures the mechanisms Harbor Point and Tent City developed to safeguard against the uncertainty that is typically associated with most redevelopment projects. Uncertainties affect various decisions, including the types of people who opt to live there as well as the idiosyncrasies of the marketplace, property management and maintenance costs, and even the breakdown of low-, middle-income and market rate units. An effective aspect of property management at Tent City and Harbor Point was the establishment of specific guidelines for various purposes by both local knowledge (i.e., selected local residents) and expert knowledge (i.e., developers, the housing authority and other professionals). These local task forces still operate in both places as the only official entities, making various decisions with regard to social, economic, operational and financial matters on behalf of residents. This integration between local and expert knowledge shows how they can be reconciled, short of which an asset-based approach to community development would probably seem quite illusive and vague. Interviews with property managers, developers and architects/planners clarified the important role property management played in community development in both Tent City and Harbor Point.

# 5 CONCLUSION

The discourse on asset-based practices is rooted in concepts such as empowerment, community capacity-building, partnerships, and public goods. The first part of this report discussed the relationships between empowerment and partnerships with capacity-building and asset-building. The importance of public goods in these debates, however, derives from the role of assets in the promotion of community identity and shared vision. A community's awareness of its assets matters because the collective management and benefits of those assets affect residents' welfare one way or another. Unlike public goods with positive externalities, a community's liabilities, or 'public bads', adversely affect residents' well-being.

From an economic perspective, the point is to explore ways of internalizing the positive externalities or the public goods available to a community in order to capitalize on those. For example, a community's well-organized, busy downtown or business district can be considered a public good on account of its safe, vibrant businesses. Therefore, if that downtown or business district has a good reputation, locally, in the region, or across the entire city for that matter, it will have positive effects on local residents and businesses. A well-functioning housing market in a neighborhood can also be viewed as a public good, as it positively affects homeowners in that area. Conversely, a deteriorating, declining neighborhood adversely affects homeowners.

Steady decline eventually causes homeowners not only to lose money when their properties continue to devalue, but also, at least for some, to choose, or be forced, to move out

of the neighborhood. In both cases, one of two things could eventually happen: benign neglect, or government intervention. In the former case, government tends to pursue a hands-off policy and wait to see whether residents do something about their houses or the lackluster business district, through changes in their collective attitude. Residents could, for example, decide collectively to clean up and spruce up the area, improve its dilapidated condition and enhance its external appeal. If conditions improve, then the government may step in with subsidies or fresh capital investment in housing, or allocations of other types of resources. Government intervention in a local housing market, either single-handedly or in collaboration with the private sector, could help improve the situation with a proper assessment of needs and related capital investment.

If a government opts for benign neglect, then relying on asset-based approaches to community development becomes crucial for residents—indeed, this may be one of the few options they have to change conditions in their neighborhood. Asset-based capacity building owes some of its preponderance to the fact that it motivates members of a community to identify, leverage, and manage their assets. The positive aspect of benign neglect is that it enables the government to observe communities and see whether they act to identify, and build on, their own assets without waiting for public authorities to step in. The conventional SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis popularized by planners and policy-makers does not entirely capture asset-building.

External experts (e.g., planners and architects) typically carry out such analyses without much consultation with local residents. However, as this report shows, residents and external experts launched a collaborative asset-identification exercise in both Harbor Point and Tent City.

This is an important point for two reasons. As they launched into asset identification and management, residents realized what their localities meant to them. In the case of Harbor Point, the entire “Island” transformed from a public ‘bad’ to a public good when the residents finally took control of their assets and destinies. In the words of Mel King, the people who erected tents at Tent City and the 400 families who remained at Harbor Point did not let outsiders “define” them. Instead, they broke out of the cycle of poverty as they decided to organize with the help of sympathetic external (‘expert’) developers. This is an important point to keep in mind in the debates surrounding asset-based approaches to capacity-building and community development. This stage also transcends the first, “service stage” in the community development process in Boston (King, 1981).

Direct government intervention may not manage to eliminate or redress housing market failures, or protect local residents from forced displacement. Furthermore, direct government intervention can have unintended negative consequences, including disruption of existing community assets (e.g., bonding social capital). Fortunately, in both Harbor Point and Tent City, the existing bonding social capital was neither depleted nor eroded. The residents were able to identify and then tap into their assets with help from external experts. This corresponds to Mel King’s second, or “organizing”, stage of community development in Boston,

Had it not been for the difficulties residents initially faced, social capital might have been wiped out and the asset identification and leveraging stages would probably not have happened the way they did. During the third, asset-management, stage, residents and experts institutionalized and managed their achievements under the form of task forces, in the process gaining control over their resources and talents. This corresponds to Mel King’s third, “institution building” stage of community development in Boston . Therefore, it is critical for local residents to have the determination, will and connections to external sources of assistance if they are properly to identify, leverage and manage their assets as part of the community capacity-building process.

## DISCUSSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

The conclusion so far points to a number of major issues that deserve attention when it comes to reflecting over asset-based practices. Perhaps the best way to illustrate these major issues is to compare and contrast them with conventional, need-based approaches. We need to know, for example: 1) the differences of emphasis on the various issues between need-based and asset-based approaches; 2) the different outcomes each paradigm is likely to produce; 3) the types of relationships each school-of-thought brings about; 4) finally, we need to have some ideas about the evolutionary stages or stages of completion for each type of approach.

## EMPHASES

This report illustrates the major differences in emphasis between need- and asset-based paradigms. Need-based approaches are mainly top-down. The idea is that one party or entity—such as the government—undertakes the task of assessing or quantifying people’s needs. Experts typically quantify such broadly-defined needs (e.g., housing and healthcare facilities). Conversely, asset-based approaches emphasize relationships (e.g., partnerships). These relationships vary widely in scope. Some communities enjoy abundant stocks of bonding social capital. This type of relationship tells us something about the kinds of ties people maintain with each other within a community, and how realistic or unrealistic it would be for them to reach consensus on their vision for the future. In cases where communities are split along racial, ethnic or economic lines, the amount of bonding social capital might not suffice to elicit shared future visions. It is critical that before anything else, communities that want to build new assets or capacities resolve conflicts over future scenarios and reach consensus. If, on the other hand, communities feature strong local bonds or social ties, they can articulate their goals more clearly and with the least degree of conflict.

Forming partnerships between local and expert knowledge, for example, runs certain risks due to lack of trust and uncertainties. In both Tent City and Harbor Point, an atmosphere of mistrust and conflict between experts and local residents hampered efforts to initiate dialogue. Ultimately, the two communities forged partnerships for different purposes. At Harbor Point, local and expert knowledge discussed how to address issues such as safety, public spaces, building entrances and even the design and layout of each building type. These and other issues emerged from long deliberations between residents and experts, shows how asset-building can address topics that were important for both experts and locals. This process included, among other things,

removing the physical or visual elements that gave rise to negative perceptions about both communities on the one hand, and adding elements that made them inviting and safe on the other.

Reducing hostility and the uninviting nature of the area took a number of simple but profoundly steps in both Harbor Point and Tent City. At Harbor Point, residents insisted on the removal of the depressing building forms and street pattern, which entirely ignored proximity to and views of Boston Harbor. Emphasis on positive items took the form of a new design, where streets opened up perspectives on the ocean, together with more extensive public spaces and more green areas. Similarly, at Tent City, discussions between local and expert knowledge included the spatial distribution of the low-, moderate-income, and market-rate units as well as landscaping, and even the public perception of using certain types of construction materials such as brick. Bricks reminded residents of the profound social stigma associated with public housing. These are some of the issues that residents emphasized or de-emphasized in their interactions with experts.

## OUTCOMES

Another major distinction between need- and asset-based methods involves their expected outcomes. To the extent that need-based approaches rely on allocation of government resources among needy communities, they create long-term dependencies. This is a general observation and does not imply that all need-based systems inherently carry such negative effects. But more often than not, this is the case. While broadly speaking, need-based approaches create dependencies on government resources, asset-based methods focus on capacity-building and self-help. Such approaches help identify communities’ strengths rather than their needs or weaknesses. Once these strengths are



identified, communities find ways to capitalize on them in order to build new capacities.

In Harbor Point, a developer who had intimate familiarity with the locality took a leadership role in order to secure a number of outcomes. At Tent City, however, residents formed grassroots alliances against their forced displacement and the construction of a parking lot near a shopping center. Local social leaders and social activists played a major role, channeling opposition for the sake of a common cause. In both cases, the alliances effectively generated bridging and linking capital. In the next step both explored financial, economic, and political management mechanisms. Each of these outcomes derived from the previous stage and paved the way for the next step.

No planned outcome will happen automatically; nor will it happen in a vacuum. Each outcome along the way needs careful programming and certain internal or external conditions. The fact that about 400 households at Harbor Point refused to relocate attests to the types of conditions they faced in the first place. Similar conditions prevailed at Tent City, where residents erected tents and camped out on the site of the proposed parking lot. Ultimately, solidarity paid off and forced city officials to rescind that plan. Within each project area, the presence of, access to, or capitalizing on, certain assets (e.g., physical capital) served as a catalyst for achieving other outcomes.

The difference between the two cases lies in the fact that at Harbor Point, “external influence” served as the catalyst for leveraging local and external resources, whereas at Tent City the internal struggle became the mobilizing force responsible for community development. The external influence at Harbor Point emerged from the political and financial clout of a local developer, who convinced residents of the viability of a mixed-income community. Short of securing access to resources and power, high degrees of social solidarity (i.e., bonding

capital) are not enough to “shift the rules of the game in their (residents’) favor”—especially in poor and low-income communities (Narayan, 1999). In this particular case, it took a developer’s resources to transform bonding social capital into the bridging capital that played a catalytic role in the achievement of a range of desired outcomes.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Short of establishing relationships between people and institutions, narrowing social gaps and achieving economic objectives will be impossible (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). Indeed, these relationships are those that connect needy communities to the economic mainstream—something that for years, Harbor Point was largely deprived of. The history of Columbia Point clearly chronicles its physical and social exclusion in the past half century (Roessner, 2000). Now, to establish relationships, we need to rethink the logic behind the need- and asset-based approaches.

Need-based approaches form vertical linkages or relationships between the parties involved. For example, the relationship between the government and a typical needy community is vertical or top-down. That is, all financial resources are funneled down to the needy community through proper national, state, or local channels, or government fiat. Of course, the bureaucratic and administrative systems in place facilitate different means of communications between government agencies and the target communities. But within this hierarchical administrative system and through proper channels, public resources are allocated and directed to needy communities based on their ‘share of the pie’. For example, the funding required to build x number of housing units is first estimated and then channeled to the target communities.

The relationship between the elements of an asset-based approach to community development is horizontal. Asset-based approaches enhance and replicate network relationships. As illustrated in this report, network relationships vary widely. Bonding capital, bridging capital and linking capital exemplify three types of network relationships in an asset-based regime. Each of these types of network signals something very specific about a community. For example, the presence of bridging capital is an indication that a particular community has the potential to establish relationships with external funding sources. This can be construed as a sign that such a community is not as isolated as low-income groups typically can be. The presence of linking social capital, on the other hand, suggests the existence of strong or active leadership in a community. Networks matter if a community is to be in a position to capitalize on its existing political leadership, or can help build capacity.

The effort to build fresh trust between experts and local knowledge at Tent City and Harbor Point is a case in point. This effort resulted in mutual learning in both places. Mutual learning refers to the efforts made by community residents and external experts to set realistic expectations, relying on each other's strengths and based on equal partnership rather than dominance. As the case studies showed, building a mixed-income community from the ground up is not easy and requires time, energy and effort. With regard to Harbor Point, for example, an emeritus professor from UMass Boston believes that:

Given all that history and given what had happened in people's living memories, I think the idea that somehow you can then create this wonderful mixed-income community between people who have been damaged and people who just want a nice place to live by the water—that is really a tough one. I think that is very difficult to do. I wonder what an architect can do in the middle of all this.

Because what you need is the political battle, organizing the battles that need to be fought [personal interview 7 July 2005, Forest Hills].

## EVOLUTIONARY STAGES

The fourth major distinction between need-based and asset-based approaches stems from their respective stages of evolution or completion. While the former approach assesses and quantifies needs, the latter starts with identifying communities' strengths. Need assessment stems from a deficit model. Once quantified, necessary resources (i.e., funding or technical assistance) can be calculated. Planning, programming and allocation of economic and technical resources ends with implementation, which itself can last a long time depending on project scale.

Asset-based practices are different from the need-based approaches in that they place more emphasis on identifying and harnessing local resources. Identifying local resources (physical, social, and political) becomes more prominent and critical where residents are keener to rely on their own resources than to depend on external help. The next step is for a community to leverage the resources it has identified. At this stage, bridging and linking capital will help combine these with those that might be available outside the community. Successful bridging and linking capital operations often require some sort of catalyst.

Since capitalizing on identified assets is a bottom-up and grassroots process, in many cases it can take longer than comparable, need-based projects to evolve. Asset-based projects are not linear, and unlike need-based projects with government support and backing, they require nurturing and networking. In order for network relationships to survive and grow, they need continuous attention, support and active involvement—no matter how small or modest.

What matters is that the parties involved trust each other and remain active in pursuit of their goals, in the process strengthening rather than weakening or depleting their networks. Staying involved would allow individuals to reciprocate with mutual trust. This is a major distinction between the two approaches. Leveraging resources provides a context for all parties involved—both inside as well as outside the community—to do their best to secure funding, achieve small but feasible goals toward asset-building. Admittedly, building trust, reciprocating, and developing partnerships (between local and expert knowledge) for the sake of diversified funding sources would require strong management.

Therefore, it falls on management to ensure proper allocation of resources and make the decisions required to reach the set goals. As illustrated in this report, both Harbor Point and Tent City developed task forces comprised of local knowledge as well as external expertise. Management has broad legal, financial, economic, technical, and social/cultural dimensions. Each of these has a crucial impact on effective asset-building. Had it not been for appropriate management practices, Harbor Point and Tent City would probably have lost or squandered the new capacities they had developed over time. For example, Tent City formed a task force which not only oversees the selection of tenants, but also ensures the percentage of different types of income groups who make up the mixed-income community the development aspires to be. Table 5.1 illustrates the points discussed above.

**TABLE 5.1 MAJOR ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH NEED- AND ASSET-BASED METHODS**

|                            | <b>Assets</b>              | <b>Needs</b>            |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Emphasis</b>            | Partnerships               | Quantifying needs       |
| <b>Outcome</b>             | Capacity building          | Dependency              |
| <b>Relationship</b>        | Horizontal (Networking)    | Vertical (Hierarchical) |
| <b>Evolutionary Stages</b> | Identify, Leverage, Manage | Plan, Transfer funds,   |

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# FIGURES

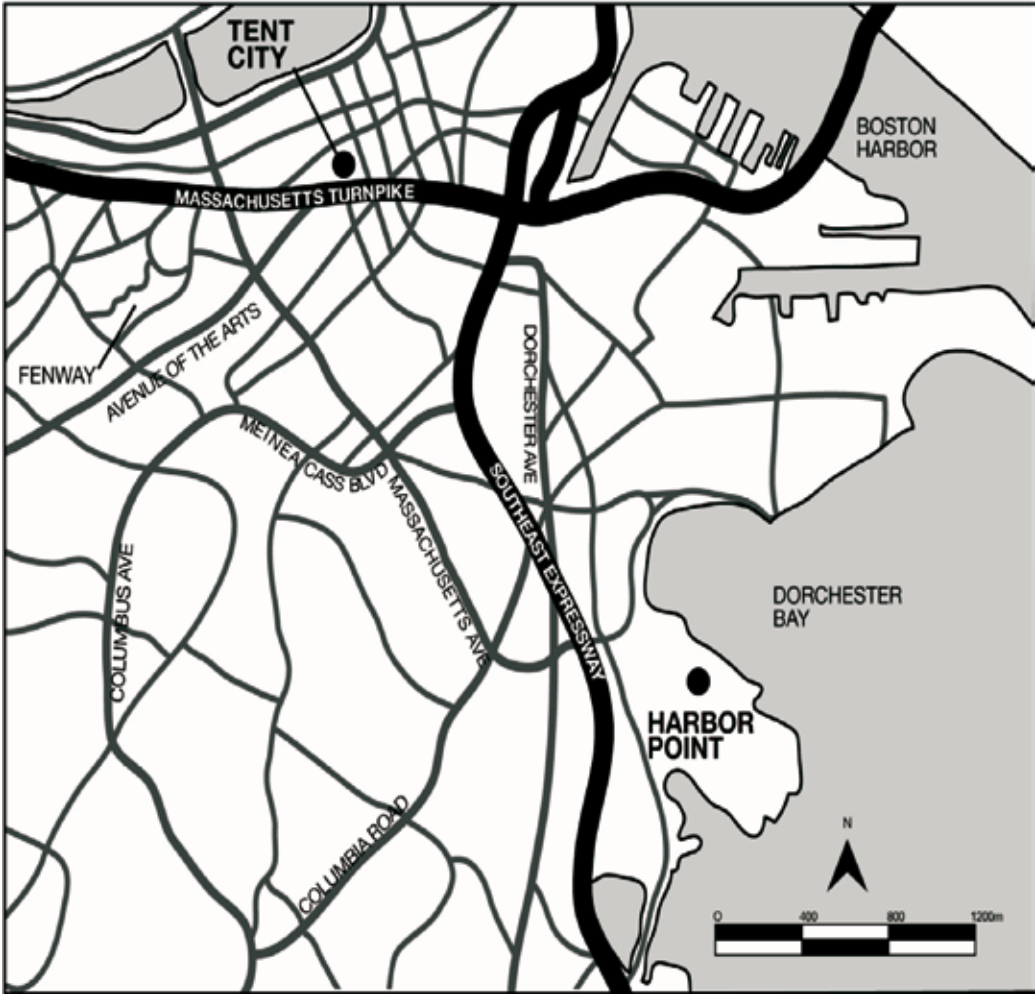


Figure 4.1. Locations of Harbor Point and Tent City, Boston  
Source: Author



Figure 4.2. The layout of public housing at Columbia Point  
Source: Caminos *et al.*





Figure 4.3. An aerial view of Harbor Point, Boston  
Source: Goody Clancy Associates



Figure 4.4. A view of mid-rise apartment blocks at Harbor Point  
Source: Author



Figure 4.5. A view of mid-rise apartment blocks at Harbor Point  
Source: Author

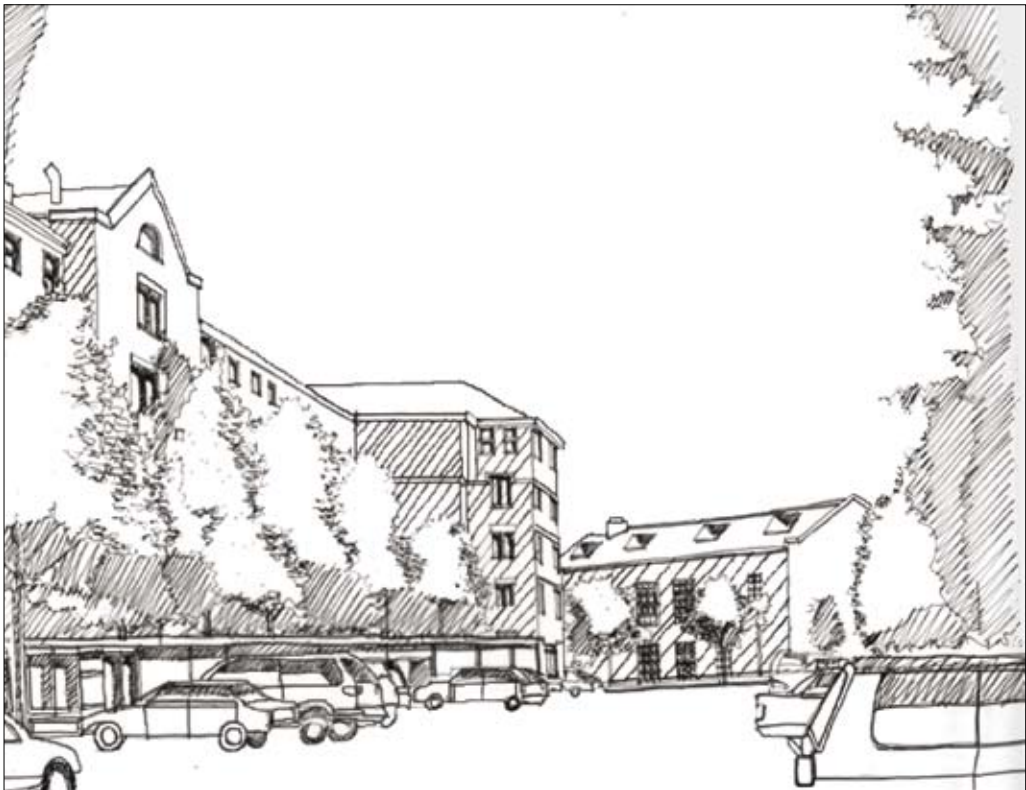


Figure 4.6. A view of Harbor Point  
Source: Author



Figure 4.7. A view of Harbor Point  
Source: Author



Figure 4.8. High-rise apartment block, Tent City  
Source: Author

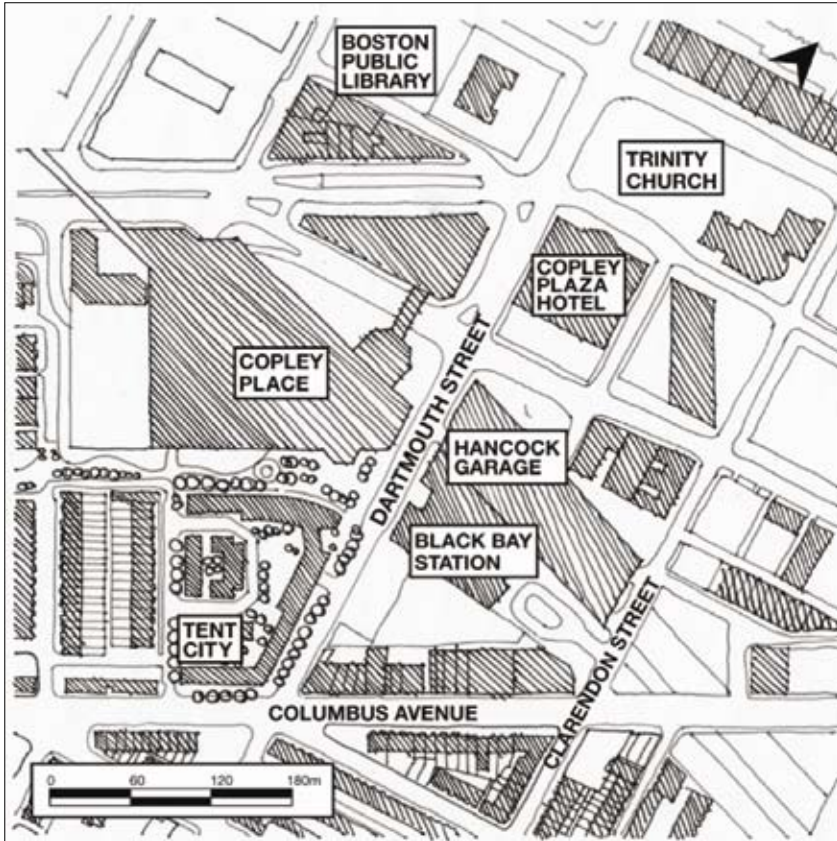


Figure 4.9. Location of Tent City, Boston

Source: Author

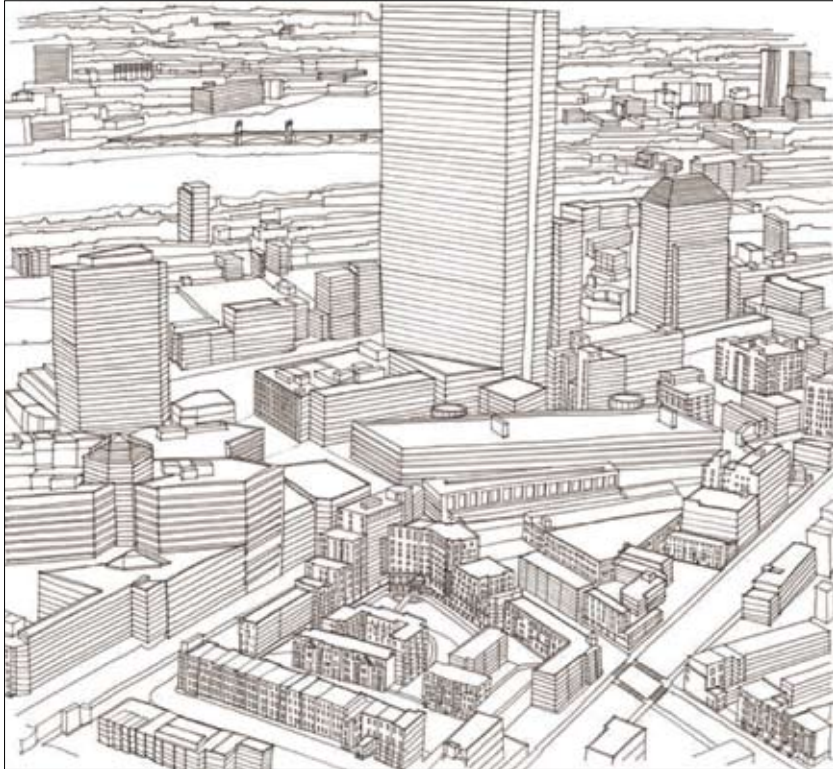


Figure 4.10. An aerial view of Tent City, Boston  
Source: Author





Figure 4.11. A view of an interior courtyard, Tent City  
Source: Author

This report explores the roots, merits, and applications of an asset-based approach to community development. Over the last decade or so, debates have developed around the importance of asset-building in community development and organizing, as well as over grassroots public policies that emphasize capacity-building, social capital, and empowerment.

This report consists of five parts. Part one traces the origins of the debates surrounding conventional and alternative approaches to community development, against the broader backdrops of 'need vs. asset' and 'people vs. place' distinctions. Part two outlines the distinct perspectives of these two schools of thought on community development. Part three explores the barriers to asset-based approaches to community development. Part four examines two case studies in Boston, USA, which illustrate the application of an asset-based approach to community development and housing development. Part five discusses the conclusion and lessons learned.

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