

**The Participation of Older Adults
in the Design of the Built Environment**

by

Jason Granger

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF CITY PLANNING

Department of City Planning
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg

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But why? And one fellow in the back of the room raised his hand and said, "It's simple. We don't want to be left behind."

Well that became the cornerstone of our design attitude on that building, and we would never have been able to defend that without having heard it from not ourselves, and not within the architecture community, not from professional design critics, but from a real person.

- Interviewee

Abstract

Society is aging at an unprecedented rate. This study responds to this demographic trend in relation to environmental design processes and practice. Today, and in the future, design and planning practitioners must strive for environments that are both suitable and appropriate for a growing older adult population and recognize the importance of including older adults in participatory design processes. However, in the past, older adults have generally been marginalized and excluded from many decisions that affect their lives. The decision-making processes in the field of environmental design, whether urban design and planning, landscape architecture, architecture, or interior design, is no exception.

This study explores the opportunity for older adults to contribute to the design of the built environment in a meaningful way by empowering them in the decision-making process while at the same time creating more livable and meaningful environments. Through a theoretical analysis, literature review, and interview research, this study approaches this issue from a practitioner point of view and aims to evaluate this emerging but limited practice and learn how to advance this concept in the future.

The analysis, research findings, and recommendations developed from this study provide tools and suggestions for advocating and furthering this practice in the future for older adults, design practitioners, and those with an interest in the field of environments for older adults.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This paper provides opportunities: an opportunity for planners, designers, and builders to recognize an area of growing concern in regard to the built environment; an opportunity for the older adult population to demand suitable and incredible places in which to live and thrive; an opportunity for all of society to recognize the change in demographics in the near future and what we can do today.

The planning profession is often plagued with the task of rectifying a running list of problems and issues to be resolved and mediated. Whether dealing with environmental issues, property concerns, conflict between individuals, disputes between entire communities, or the continual debate over trying to figure out the best way to address these issues, the practice of planning could be perceived as a perpetually problem-based profession. This can lead to an unfortunate and non-productive stance within the profession that with every problem solved, another will appear, and at times resulting in a stalemate caused by perpetual criticism and uncertainty.

Though it cannot be naively ignored that problems do exist in both the issues planning addresses and in the processes used to solve them, it must also be recognized that there are innovative and creative solutions and processes being explored. This paper is about recognizing a particular area within planning and

design practice that has had considerable impact - participatory design. This does not mean, however, that it is not without room for improvement. But in general, the approach in this discussion and research is positive and action-oriented. It is about learning from mistakes, while duly recognizing successes.

The intention of this project is to explore the need and potential for the participation of older adults in the planning and design of the built environment. Though issues concerning housing requirements, models, and guidelines are extremely important in regard to the older adult population, these are not the emphasis for this project. Instead, the focus is to build a case for the inclusion of older adults in creating better environments and providing tools and insights for planning and design practitioners working in the areas of environments and older adults.

Historically, the older adult population has been marginalized and left out of decision-making regarding many aspects of their lives. Theoretical developments within communicative action and insurgent planning have advocated for ways in which to integrate the voices and knowledge of individuals and populations that have for too long been overlooked. As well, the developments within placemaking and a focus on creating suitable and incredible design solutions that incorporate a contextural response speak to the importance of spaces that are appropriate and meaningful for users. Participatory planning and design practices provide an opportunity through which older adults' opinions, ideas, and concerns

regarding their environments can be voiced, resulting in environments that are more suitable to their needs and creating a greater feeling of ownership of the environment and the decisions leading to its development.

Problem Statement

With the increase in the proportion of the population over the age of 65 in the coming years, environmental issues specific to this population will be a growing concern. Further, the cohort that will be entering older adulthood over the next 30 years, the baby boom generation, have historically had a strong influence on society. Due primarily to its disproportionately large size, the baby boom generation has set trends and economic activities since its emergence. The influence of the baby boom generation will continue to dominate future decisions.

Considering the relationship between environmental fit and the aging process, discussed in Chapter 3, it is critical that environments are suitable and appropriate to accommodate successful aging. This is of particular concern today and in the near future as the older adult proportion of the population dramatically increases.

Participation in planning and design has provided an opportunity for particular populations to gain a voice in influencing the quality of their environments. Older adults have been one population in particular with which participatory design

methods have been explored to create more appropriate environments to suit their needs. However, the involvement of older adult populations in planning and design processes has been limited. As Sanoff states, although there is a growing body of environment-behaviour literature regarding aging and environment, “the elderly, a rich resource of knowledge and experience, have often been excluded from the design process” (Sanoff, 2000, 208). Further, the few projects that have included older adults are not well documented. Without fully understanding the intentions, successes, challenges, results, and lessons learned from these past projects, practitioners will not have the tools or mechanisms to properly evaluate, replicate, or adjust participatory processes with older adults in the future, and theoretical developments will be unnecessarily limited.

Objectives

Though participatory planning and design with older adults has been practiced to a limited extent over the past number of years, there is a lack of literature and information available documenting the experiences and lessons learned from these projects. This study intends to explore this topic in detail and address this void.

Participatory design processes are generally chosen over traditional, ‘expert’-based methods of design for two main reasons: to increase the suitability and appropriateness of the design for the user, and to engage and empower the user

population. The objective of this study is to evaluate the ability of past participatory processes with older adults to accomplish these goals.

The key questions guiding this project include:

- 1) How did past projects that incorporated older adults in the design process define participation and involve older adults?
- 2) How do practitioners view the costs and benefits of the participatory process?
- 3) How do practitioners evaluate a participatory project?
- 4) What makes participatory processes with older adults unique?
- 5) How do practitioners feel that the participatory process increased the suitability and appropriateness of the environments for older adults?
- 6) How do practitioners feel that the participants were empowered through this process?
- 7) How might participatory processes improve and expand in the future considering the anticipated increase in the proportion of the older adult population? Who is responsible?

Significance of the Study

Although this study is firmly situated within planning literature and theory, the significance extends throughout the environmental disciplines. The principles explored are not bound to planning, but provide insight to interior design, architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design. Collaboration among these disciplines will be critical in addressing future environmental, social, and spatial issues regarding older adults through design. Interdisciplinary partnerships and sharing of ideas can surely facilitate better practice within each field and in cross-disciplinary initiatives.

This study is also significant to planning and design practice in the coming decades. With the dramatic increase in the aging of the population, new and unique situations may arise that demand age-sensitive and contextual solutions. It is inevitable that planners and designers today and in the future will be working more and more with older adults populations in their work. Now is the time to be learning how this can be accomplished in a way that is effective and beneficial to as many interests as possible.

Over the last number of years, planners, designers, community development workers, and those in the field of gerontology have increased awareness surrounding the need to address population aging and its affect on housing, community design, and service delivery. Research and practice in concepts

including aging in place, elder friendly communities, population health, healthy communities, active adult communities, naturally occurring retirement communities, and new urbanism strive to make connections between environmental design and the aging population. Within the scale of housing, recent trends including assisted living, continuum of care communities, and intergenerational campuses are currently redefining how and where older adults live and engage within their communities.

The World Health Organization recently announced a study to explore what constitutes a community that adequately supports older adults. The Age-Friendly Cities Project will explore the participation of older adults in all aspects of the community, access to activities and services to promote health and well-being, and access to support to maintain their lifestyle and independence (Province of Manitoba, 2006). In Canada, two cities have been chosen as sites for this international study, Saanich, British Columbia and Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. This study will provide insight into the creation of communities that support older adults. The inclusion of participatory design in all levels of environmental design would definitely assist in this goal.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, the term 'design' is used to describe all environmental design disciplines and it may equally apply to practice within

interior design, architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, or planning. According to The Canadian Oxford Dictionary, design is “the art of planning and creating something in accordance with appropriate functional and aesthetic criteria” (The Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 1998). Although this study uses the term ‘design’, some authors choose to use the term ‘architecture’ generically to describe design related activity. The term ‘architecture’ is only used to describe design when the original author is being cited, and should be viewed in the context of design practice in general.

As well, the term ‘older adult’ has in recent years been the term of choice to describe those 55 or 65 years of age and older, depending on the definition. The term ‘older adult’ is used in this document, and the terms ‘elderly’ and ‘senior’ are only used within citations by another author. Further, the document uses the Canadian spelling for ‘aging’. The British spelling of ‘ageing’ is only used in the bibliographical references.

It must also be clear that this study provides a view of the practice of participation with older adults to date and is limited to this context. The issues discussed and explored are reflective of present conditions and today’s practice. Further, the design projects explored through this study are relative to a particular environment and general level of competency among participants. In the future, research and advancements in the field will allow for the opportunity to explore processes adapted to participants still left on the margins with varying levels of

ability and competence. As well, improved processes and increased frequency of this practice will gradually increase the suitability and appropriateness of environments for older adults, create environments that are more empowering, and incrementally change the relationship between individual competence and environment.

Finally, this project focuses on the participation of a specific population, that of older adults. Too easily and too often, this population is assumed to be a homogeneous group with similar likes, dislikes, interests, and histories. However, as Wheeler states, “the only characteristic shared by all of those in the elderly population is having lived at least 65 years” (Wheeler, 1996, 4). The older adult population is just as diverse as other age groups. As Wheeler explains, “there remains a wide range of physical, social, economic, and psychological differences among this group’s members, and the needs created by these differences continue to change over time” (Wheeler, 1996, 4). Kunkel expresses a similar view, stating:

The focus today is on understanding the diversity of experiences in later life and the numerous factors that shape that experience. Older people have varied wants, needs, and expectations, live in a broad range of circumstances, experience different challenges, and are not any more homogenous than any other segment of society – in fact, older adults mirror the increasing diversity of the Canadian population (CMHC, 2005, 3).

This is specifically an issue when pertaining to participatory design and including multiple interests. As Barnes states:

Older people comprise a group which encompasses considerable diversity: of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, health status, need for assistance with personal and domestic care, class, political persuasion, work and life experience, experience of collective action. Attempts to allocate people to single identity categories as a basis from which to constitute specific 'publics' for the purpose of public participation are hugely problematic (Barnes, 2005, 257).

Therefore, although the older adult population may be referred to in this study within a rather broad brush-stroke, this in no way implies that this group is homogeneous or static.

Limitations

This study explores the issue of participatory design from a practitioner's point of view; specifically, participatory design related to the creation of environments intended for older adults. A limitation in this study is that the analysis is restricted to the perspective of design practitioners and does not extend to gathering the experiences of participants and older adults. The reason for focusing on the perspectives of the practitioners stemmed primarily from a paucity of research and literature in this area. There is ample information regarding the needs of older adults, guidelines related to the built environment, and on participatory processes in general. There is even research available documenting participatory projects that have included older adults, though much of it has been done only recently (Hartman, 2002, Sanoff, 2000, Demerbilek and Demirkan, 1998). Where little research exists is in the perspectives of design practitioners, particularly in

regard to their views on participatory design, what makes this process unique for older adults, why they engage in this practice, and how they view the potential for this practice in the future. The practitioners' point of view is particularly important as they hold the power in deciding whether or not a participatory approach will be used in a design process, and how the participation process will be incorporated into the project. In order to advance the practice of participatory design, in regard to both frequency of use and in order to improve its efficacy, the perspectives, experiences, and reflections of practitioners must be shared with others.

Chapter 2: The Link Between Planning Theory and Participatory Design

Preamble

The exploration and discussion regarding the participation of older adults and the design of the built environment links directly to three bodies of knowledge within current planning theory: insurgent planning, collaborative design, and placemaking. The following section explores the perspectives and rationales of these theoretical developments and their connection to participatory design practice.

Insurgent Planning

Insurgent planning is based on the concept of working *with* and *for* marginalized and disenfranchised populations to create a culture of inclusion and that provides a stronger voice to historically subjugated individuals and groups (Sandercock, 2003; 1998). This perspective on planning thought and practice is embedded within, and requires an acknowledgment of, the politics of difference, a belief in inclusive democracy, and an understanding of social justice issues related to disempowered communities (Sandercock, 2003, 47).

The goal of insurgent planning practices is to build communities, stronger communities created through a culture of inclusion. According to Sandercock, this requires “a process of opening up to and creating space for other people” (Sandercock, 1998, 158). This is accomplished through developing a “genuine acceptance of, connection with, and respect and space for the cultural *Other*, and the possibility of working together on matters of common destiny, the possibility of a togetherness in difference” (Sandercock, 2003, 2). This perspective is critical for the inclusion of older adults to successfully accommodate for the ever-increasing need for suitable and appropriate environments.

A distinction must be made between *insurgent* planning and *advocacy* planning. The premise of advocacy planning, as proposed by Davidoff, encourages professionals to work for a disenfranchised group requiring assistance in representation so to provide them with a voice in the decision-making process (Davidoff, 1965, 333). Though it could be argued that this would in fact be partially the role for the design or planning professional in participatory processes with older adults, the scope of participatory design does not end at this point. The users, or older adults in the case of this study, themselves must take a more active role in claiming a place and a voice in decisions that affect their environments. They must be the ones activity engaged in design processes and making professionals work not only *for* them but also *with* them. Insurgency connotes the essence of rising up against an established authority and the way things have always been done. It must also be the responsibility of older adults,

in partnership with their advocates, to work together to reframe *how* decisions are made and *who* is making the decisions regarding their environments.

The objectives and practices within insurgent planning are not easily established or accomplished as they generally “challenge the very definition of what constitutes planning” (Sandercock, 2003, 38). However, in order to achieve a more inclusive, democratic, and just way to approach planning issues, it is a goal that we must work towards.

Collaborative Planning

Insurgent planning theory provides the framework for *why* participatory practices should be included in design practice, however, it is theory based within collaborative planning that gives insight into *how* these processes with older adults can be actualized.

Participatory design practices are embedded within the concept of collaborative planning. This approach to planning is based in the concept of communicative rationality and the emancipatory knowledge created through dialogue that engages differing interests pertaining to a specific issue (Innes and Booher, 1999, 418). According to its proponents (Forester, 1999; Innes and Booher, 1999, Healey, 1997), increased collective dialogue among various interests and stakeholders can result in more effective and democratic decision-making

processes. The desired outcome is inclusionary planning built upon the development of understanding and trust towards increased social, intellectual and political capital (Healey, 1997, 311-312).

Communicative action is embedded primarily in the development of three traditions, represented in the works of the following authors: Habermas, Foucault, and Giddens:

- 1) *Habermas* - *Sought to resurrect the unfinished project of modernity, questioning the dominance of instrumental rationality in everyday life, and sought instead to re-emphasize other ways of knowing and thinking, and build upon modernism, not necessarily abandon it altogether.*
- 2) *Foucault* - *Investigated language and its meaning and potentially dominant nature in hiding existing power relations.*
- 3) *Giddens* - *Examined ways in which we interrelate through webs of social relations as well as ways in which we can coexist in society (Allmendinger, 2002, 183-184).*

Collaborative planning proposes an alternative to the rational scientific model of decision-making. The shortcomings of the rational approach, according to Habermas, can be overcome by incorporating new forms of understanding, new epistemologies, and new ways of knowing. Although the principles of the modernist project are not completely abolished, Habermas argues that the rational method must be augmented with an understanding that there are other ways of incorporating knowledge into decision-making, including through action (Innes, 1995, 186).

As much as the modernist approach is still valued as being useful in communicative action, it is not ignored that instrumental rationality “has ‘crowded-out’ other ways of thinking and knowing and distorted power relations in society” (Allmendinger, 2002, 184). Communicative action seeks to rectify this by viewing planning as an interactive and communicative activity (Innes, 1995, 184). Communicative rationality “breaks down the dominance of scientific objectivism and builds instead a different kind of objectivity based on agreement between individuals reached through free and open discourse” (Allmendinger, 2002, 184). Participatory design is also based on these very principles.

Communicative action acknowledges and embraces the idea that there are many types of knowledge that can inform decision-making, not just formal analytic reports and quantitative measures (Innes, 1998, 53). In communicative action, qualitative and interpretive data is considered as legitimate as logical deductive analysis (Innes, 1995, 184). Habermas stresses the importance of tapping into the knowledge of the *lifeworld*, the realm of personal relationships and interactions through shared knowledge and coordinated social action, instead of relying on the *system*, the capitalist economy and bureaucratic administration that operates through power and interest. The *system*, according to Habermas, restricts the scope for communicative action. According to Habermas, planners need to hear the communities’ practical knowledge from their own *lifeworlds* (Allmendinger, 2002, 203).

Collaborative planning depends on dialogue as a means to engage varying interests and stakeholders in developing a mutually agreed upon solution. A significant critique of collaborative planning, however, is its rather naïve perspective in regard to the relationship between dialogue and power. Critics of collaborative practice question whether or not equitable dialogue towards consensus is even possible considering potentially significant power imbalances between individuals or entire populations. As Fischler points out, "the dimension of consensuality cannot, by itself, suffice to capture the multi-faceted discursive and non-discursive practices that make up social interaction" (Fischler, 2000, 360). Foucault attests that the inseparability of power and knowledge precludes all possibility of 'neutral' relations between individuals (Foucault, 1980).

According to Foucault, although precautions can be taken to make power relations less damaging and rigid, power issues can never truly be eliminated or ignored (Fischler, 2000, 360). Though a dialogic process such as participatory design may not work in every situation, it does provide the opportunity for information exchange and communication towards understanding other forms of knowledge. This is required for effective participatory design processes, and is particularly important in projects with marginalized populations such as older adults.

To date, much of the information and collective knowledge regarding environments for older adults has focused on design guidelines, quantitative standards, and long lists of environmental conditions for special needs.

Unfortunately, these are the only tools many planners and designers are able to access in creating environments for older adults. However, this information is located *outside* of the everyday experiences of older adults. Collaborative planning provides a framework for an alternative design process that can *include* older adults within the creation of their environments.

Placemaking

This study is also about creating places; places that are most suitable for the users, places that have meaning, places that allow people to live to their fullest potential. The approach of placemaking, as proposed by Schneekloth and Shibley, is “the creation, renovation, and maintenance of our shared physical world through the marriage of expert professional knowledges with knowledges of place” (Schneekloth *et al.*, 2003, 28). The knowledges of place are embedded in both the *material*, the physical world, and the *imaginal*, the meanings and stories associated with the material. As Sandercock states, “our lives and struggles, and those of our ancestors, are written into places, houses, neighbourhoods, cities, investing them with meaning and significance” (Sandercock, 1998, 208). Schneekloth and Shibley see the place-based variables of material and imaginal as inseparable (Schneekloth *et al.*, 2003, 40). Placemaking proposes that the changes in the imaginal world must precede, or at least accompany, changes to the material world. This is only possible through the development and commitment to principles including dialogue between

professional knowledges and situational knowledges, negotiation, reflective practice, continuous adjustment, ongoing revision, and critical questioning (Schneekloth *et al.*, 2003, 40). Alterations in the material world then shape new interpretations of the imaginal world. As Schneekloth *et al.* state:

It is about transforming the collective imagination of the inhabitants about where their 'home' begins and ends, what places and stories constitute that home, what it means to live here, and what just be done to make it better. This means constructing a narrative about the origins, experiences, and meanings (Schneekloth et al., 2003, 40).

Schneekloth and Shibley also argue that it is crucial to include people in the development of spaces and places as “we live in a culture that has lost its ability to make places because we denigrate the work that maintains our daily live and value only extraordinary acts of building, an activity that we delegate to experts” (Schneekloth and Shibley, 2000, 130). Though they do not intend to diminish the role of design practitioners, they believe that these professions must be mindful of the way in which the design professions have disabled the very people and places they serve and must work to bridge the gap that has developed (Schneekloth and Shibley, 2000, 130). Practitioners must include other knowledges in the nurturing of place and the creation of space. As Allen and Feldman state:

Rather than indulge ourselves in the view that the public is uninformed and in need of proper ideas, as architects we must embrace a collaborative role in placemaking - an exchange of knowledge between the professional and the public. Acknowledging and respecting the existence and importance of local forms of knowledge and knowledge practices in building decisions will

enhance the discipline of architecture by broadening the knowledge base of design (Allen and Feldman, 2000, 129).

Participatory Design

Participatory design processes are an effective means through which to incorporate the attributes of all three of these theoretical approaches in planning. The philosophy, methodologies, and techniques of participatory design practice seek to include all interests and stakeholders and advocate for the inclusion of marginalized voices (insurgent planning), attempt to engage all involved in a dialogue that includes many forms of knowledge (collaborative planning), and give value to the intricacies and nuances of place, its people, and its story (placemaking).

Theorists and practitioners have debated the benefits and challenges of designing the built environment using citizen participation since the 1960s. The following section provides an analysis of the participation movement through its definition, clarifies practices which are not participation, explores the two cultures within participation, outlines the benefits of participation, and details the dilemmas and criticisms.

Defining Participation

The concept of participation is difficult to define and pin-down in today's planning and design practice. Noted as being the "the flavour of the day" (McLaverly, 2002, 185) and the "trendiest notion in American urbanism" (Sullivan, 2005, 15), the term *participation* is used frequently to describe an immense range of methods and practices. As Kumar states, "participation means different things to different people" (Kumar, 2002, 23). Sullivan echoes this sentiment, stating that there is a dramatic upswing in collaborative and participatory practice, however the problem is that the actual practice is extremely uneven (Sullivan, 2005, 15). The main reason for the difficulty in defining the term is due primarily to its widespread use as an adjective to describe a project or process. Further, participation is also used interchangeably, rightly or mistakenly, with terms such as co-design, collaborative design, citizen involvement, and others. It may be argued that its use, and potential misuse, has placed *participation* it in the category of jargon. As Jones *et al.* state, "participation has become a buzzword, but little thought has been given to what the word actually means" (Jones *et al.*, 2005, xiii).

The loose use of the term *participation* is problematic. As Till states, "participation as an unchallenged generic term disguises the fact that in all participatory processes there are degrees of involvement ranging from token participation to full control of the process by citizen participants" (Till, 2005, 25). To date, the

“lack of agreement over its use arises because the term in itself does not specify the degree of use control, over what it is, and when it takes place” (Reis, 2000, 2).

Difficult to adequately define, Reis contests that, “a review of the concept indicates that participation on its own is an open concept, meaning different things and different types and degrees of user involvement” (Reis, 2000, 2). This interpretation does allow for some flexibility, but does not necessary assist in clarifying the term. If anything, this flexibility only allows the term to become even more broadly defined and used.

Graham Towers provides a succinct, though arguably vague, definition of participation in design as “the involvement of the people affected by development in making decisions about their own environment” (Towers, 1995, 157). This is similar to Alexander’s definition of participation as, “any process by which the users of an environment help to shape it” (Alexander *et al.*, 1975, 39). Cohen and Uphoff’s definition of participation is similar to that of Towers and Alexander, maintaining that “participation includes the people’s involvement in the entire decision-making process” including implementation, mutual sharing of benefits, and involvement in evaluation” (Kumar, 2002, 23-24).

Admitting that there are many perspectives of what constitutes participation in design, Jones *et al.* do attempt to narrow the definition of participation in design

by stating, "at the level of the lowest common denominator...participation can be defined as the involvement of the user at some stage in the design process" (Jones *et al.*, 2005, xiii). However, even this definition is open to interpretation. Considering the loose way in which the word *participation* is used, whether in concept or practice, there is no definite agreement on its meaning or parameters. However, a concrete definition may never be clear, as "the way participation is defined largely depends upon the context and background in which participation is applied" (Kumar, 2002, 23).

Normative statements and opinions in relation to the need for and techniques of participation dominate the literature (Reis, 2000, 2). What is missing is discussion regarding when participation should take place, who should be involved, and how. There is void in the area of research pertaining specifically to evaluating and critically analyzing the use of participation. As Sanoff states,

Standards by which participation should be measured are conspicuous by their absence. There is little consistency in the way participation is perceived, in the way participation programs are developed, in the way participation programs are carried out, and in the way participation evaluations are performed. Therefore it is difficult to know what works and what doesn't, and opportunities to learn from the experiences of others have been severely limited (Sanoff, 1992, 57).

Participation: What It Is Not

Though there may be various definitions of what participation is specifically, and it is difficult to definitively list what is included within its scope, it is extremely important to clarify what participation is not. There are a number of practices within the spheres of design and planning that claim to be *participation* or *participatory* but that do not have the qualities or characteristics required for true participation.

Dating back to the 1970s, Weber separated a number of well-intended but non-collaborative practices and perspectives that do not satisfy the objectives of true participation. These approaches include:

- 1) *Do-Gooder Participation* - A philanthropic approach developed out of social guilt but that does not engage the population 'served'.
- 2) *Enabling Participation* - When designers interpret user needs from data gathered through one-way communication (i.e. questionnaires).
- 3) *Conflict-Management Participation* - Participation used simply to mitigate conflict and get a majority 'buy-in' or 'go-ahead' without discussion or consideration of the views of the minority (Weber, 1974, iii).

Weber argues that all three of these approaches are defined by the designers, the 'experts', and not by the participating client or user. Weber instead advocates for a participatory process that offers something to both the users and the designers, and that this can only be achieved through *dialogue*, or communicative action. If not, the process only pays lip service to the involved participants (Weber, 1974, iii). Participation based on these approaches is more

a useful political manipulation used to mitigate public criticism than a method of discovery and mutual learning (Weber, 1974, iv).

Another practice that is often described as participation is public information programs. According to Creighton, these initiatives are not participation as they are basically a means of getting the word out to the public through a one-way communication process (Creighton, 2005, 8-9). Public information is generally a decide-announce-defend process that does not involve the public in the decision-making process or engage in any useful dialogue that may shape or change a decision. Unfortunately, the reality for many of these situations is that the decision has already been made.

The above approaches to decision-making that are often accidentally or deliberately described as 'participation' often stem from policy directives requiring some form of community input without intending to actually engage users, or may simply result from poorly crafted participatory processes. At their best, the most these processes can result in is a procedural hoop through which decision-makers jump through, but without the public input having any impact on the decision and no chance for collaborative problem solving.

Two Cultures: Users and Providers

In the past, most individuals were involved in the creation and occupation of their own environments. To have a home meant that one had to engage in the design, building, and maintenance of that environment. However, in modern society, the roles of those engaged in the environment are divided into *users* and *providers*. Experts now control the design, building, and maintenance of our environments. According to Weber, participation attempts to break down the division between users and providers as it “encourages participants in applying their collective problem solving potentials which have been lying dormant ever since decision-making was assumed by experts” (Weber, 1975, x)

Defined simply, “users are the individuals or groups with a presumed right to use that facility” (Kernohan *et al.* 1992, 7). This may include the occupants, visitors, or owners of a particular environment. The providers of a space are “individuals or groups with a close connection to a building or other facility, but within a presumptive right of use to that facility” and are engaged in an environment in a transitory way, generally through business (Kernohan *et al.*, 1992, 9). The providers of a space may include the makers (designers, suppliers, builders), traders (investors, developers, real estate agents, property advisers), landlords and lessees, and maintainers (managers, cleaners, contractors).

Though engaged with interests in the same environment, the users and providers form two distinct cultures; one based on demand (users) and the other based on supply (providers) (Kernohan *et al.*, 1992, 11). They have differing roles, values, goals, expectations, and investment in relation to a particular environment.

This could potentially create a conflict – “a conflict of interests and values that, left unresolved, virtually ensures a mismatch between what is needed and what is provided” (Kernohan *et al.*, 1992, 15). However, the problem is not that these two cultures are different. The problem exists when these two cultures are not aware that they are unique and that they need to work collaboratively in order to better understand each other and create the best environment possible to suit the needs of both.

In order for effective communication between the two cultures to exist, each culture needs to acknowledge their own character and their relationship with one another. Anna Holmes presents a model for cultural learning that can be applied to various definitions or cultures, including the cultures of users and providers. This model gives insight into different stages in the relationship between two cultures and how that relationship and resulting communication can be enriched.

<i>Stage 1</i>	<i>Unawareness</i>	<i>Little factual knowledge about own group; unaware of presence of other cultural group (i.e. users and providers).</i>
	<i>Transition 1</i>	<i>Someone opens our eyes to what is</i>

happening. This is usually spurred by an event of strong import – an impact.

Stage 2	Beginning	<i>Cultural group or individual is at a state of awareness that its culture dominates (or is subordinate). Among dominant culture, may be accompanied by denial of responsibility for the actions of people from the same culture who have gone before. People in weaker culture become aware that they are less powerful, but have potential for power.</i>
	Transition 2	<i>Know self: primary identity with own group or self.</i>
Stage 3	Conscious	<i>Consciously and constantly aware of cultural differences; decisions to learn about others' culture. May result in a sense of excitement, plus denial, rejection, sadness, feeling of powerlessness, anger, or pain.</i>
	Transition 3	<i>Learn to value cultural diversity; recognize that all cultures have some ways of doing things that need to be changed, some which are worth valuing.</i>
Stage 4	Consolidated	<i>Committed to working towards a better understanding among various groups, and methods for achieving this are actively sought. Know other language. People who reach this stage may find themselves in a quandary – should they work to strengthen their own culture, and the other(s)?</i>
	Transition 4	<i>Primary identification with humankind, rather than own culture.</i>
Stage 5	Transcendent	<i>Awareness and sensitivity that have grown out of ability to seek and reflect on lessons from cross-cultural experience (Holmes, 1989).</i>

Participatory design processes can assist in bringing together these two cultures and integrating the knowledge they both hold. These two bases of knowledge are not the same. The knowledge of users is experiential, informal, and subjective. The knowledge of providers, though a generalization, is rooted within education and training, and is more formal and pragmatic. Kernohan *et al.* believe that integration can only be accomplished through dialogue and working towards a better, a consolidated, or a transcendent, understanding of one another; participation (Kernohan *et al.*, 1992, 138).

The Debate Over Participatory Design

Although participatory design practice has developed significantly since the 1960s, the practice is still viewed with skepticism by some design practitioners and those in the building industry. As Reis states, "it is apparent that opinions vary, some favouring and others discouraging user participation" (Reis, 2000, 3). The irony is that very few people will actually state that they are against participation in general. As Sherry Arnstein stated in 1969, no one is against participation *in principle* as it is viewed as a cornerstone of democracy; objections emerge with the practical details (Arnstein, 1969). To date, the discussion on participation has been "a one-sided commentary, largely exhorting the participatory process or deploring designer elitism" (Crewe, 2001, 439). The following explores a number of the reasons that support participation in planning and design as well as its many criticisms.

Benefits of Participatory Design

At the root of participatory design is the desire to create more appropriate environments. According to Crewe, "the more designers value the input of citizens, the more appropriate their designs will be for the user concerned" (Crewe, 2001, 439). Advocates for participation argue that the main reason for lack of user satisfaction is the absence of user participation in the process and all decisions being controlled by planning and design experts (Reis, 2000, 1-2). The Pruitt Igoe housing project in St. Louis and the Killingworth in northeast England are but two examples of political, social, economic, and design failures of the modernist, rational paradigm (Reis, 2000, 51). Participation provides a way to move beyond modernist concepts of design to include current planning approaches of collaboration and deliberation. The following details the benefits and arguments supporting participatory design, including the incorporation of other knowledges, increasing user control and ownership, saving of time of resources, and providing a voice to marginalized individuals and populations.

Inclusion of Other Knowledges

The incorporation of users in a participatory process provides insight and knowledge about the requirements of an environment that would not be available if users were not included. At its root, participatory design challenges the usually accepted concepts of expertise, design process, and design goals and is based

on the belief that the people who will be the ultimate users of an environment actually know more about the particular problem than the designers (Community Design Workshop, 1975, 4). Participatory design does not depend on the traditional design process that relies solely on the expertise of design practitioners. Instead, participatory design requires the collective knowledge of all involved, providers and users, to develop the best possible solution. There is no one expert group, but instead a collection of knowledges that are valued and shared by many.

There are two advantages to including the sharing of knowledge from different perspectives. First, the inclusion of other forms of knowledge can generate information that is critical in the creation of environments that work both physically and operationally. Second, participation allows for new and innovative opportunities to arise from the dialogue between people with different, and potentially opposing, interests and values through negotiation and finding a solution that is mutually acceptable (Kernohan *et al.*, 1992, 5).

This is not an easy task. It goes against the grain of the predominant modernist, expert-based paradigm. As Schneekloth and Shibley state, shifting architecture beyond the expert-based culture would require us to love, or at least tolerate, complexity and contradiction, while denying architectural expertise its privileged status in the discourse of environment making (Schneekloth and Shibley, 2000, 130). However, this is no reason to ignore the potential and possibility of

including other forms of knowledge. Participation does not propose to eliminate the role of expert culture, but instead expand the scope of design to include many knowledges, all of which work together to create a design that is more relevant and responsible. By opening the dialogue to “multiple and contradictory forms of knowledge, we are truly engaged in democratic action” (Schneekloth and Shibley, 200. 138).

Some view the exclusion of other forms of knowledge in the design process as being negligent and ignoring that which is possible in design. Allen and Feldman believe in a reflexive architectural practice that recognizes the importance of the occupants’ knowledge. They argue that “the exclusion of the tacit and empirical knowledge that citizen-users can offer regarding the built environment often results in important design decisions being relegated to disciplinary and institutionally driven expert hands outside of democratic control” (Allen and Feldman, 2000, 128). The danger in this is that many of the critical capacities and potential of the design professions are not actualized, resulting in mundane, ordinary, and unsuitable environments.

The use of standards, precedents, and guidelines in the design process is a crucial part of the process. The field of design depends on that which has been learned and documented from past experience, research, and precedents, both in terms of successes and failures. This collective cumulative knowledge is what Alexander terms *pattern language*. Alexander *et al.* do admit that this wealth of

information is helpful in the design process, but unless other knowledges are incorporated, the design cannot take into account the subtle needs and specific requirements of a user group (Alexander *et al.*, 1975, 44-45).

Increased User Control and Ownership

Another benefit of participatory design is that it can instill a sense of control and ownership within the involved participants. As Towers states, this is critical and “it is important to give people more influence in the design of their homes” (Towers, 2005, 175).

The rationale for participation provided by Alexander *et al.* is very basic. Alexander *et al.* believe that participation is inherently good and brings people together, involving them in their world and creating a feeling between people the world around them. There are two reasons for why this is good. The first reason is because it gives people control. Alexander *et al.* believe that “people need the chance to make active decisions about the environment” and that this is a human need; the need to create and the need to control (Alexander *et al.*, 1975, 40). The second reason is because people want a sense of ownership and a chance to identify with the part of the environment with which they live and work (Alexander *et al.*, 1975, 41). Control and ownership cannot be separated. As Alexander *et al.* state, “it is virtually impossible to get a building which is well adapted to these needs (control and ownership) if the people who are the actual users do not

design it" (Alexander et al., 1975, 43). Participatory design allows for dialogue and, as Schneekloth and Shibley state, "with this exchange comes reciprocal learning, the power to act, and the potential for populations to take control over their circumstances of place in their lives (Schneekloth and Shibley, 2000, 131).

Saves Time and Resources

Though contrary to the belief of some practitioners who do not practice participatory design, a number of professionals attest that participatory practice does save time and resources in the long run. However, often the upfront stages of a design project are cut short of their participatory potential that can assist in building relationships, gathering information, and creating a design based on mutual agreement. As Chait and Seip claim:

There is an inevitable tension between streamlining a project and democratizing the planning and decision-making process. Invariably, those directing the effort abbreviated the time allocated to building relationships and engaging in dialogue. Mutual learning, so crucial to this work, is cut short, and professional elites and narrow local interests often dominate (Chait and Seip, 1999, 38).

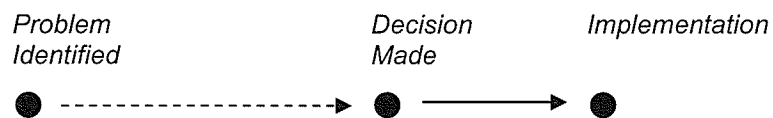
'Streamlining' the process in the interest of time and money can potentially be more costly in the end. Creighton believes that participation actually minimizes cost and delay in the end by creating a better quality outcome, not alienating involved interests, and increasing the potential for unneeded controversy and delays (Creighton, 2005, 19). Creighton provides the following illustration to provide a generalized comparison of unilateral processes versus participation.

Figure 1 - Comparison of Length of Time: Unilateral Decisions Versus Public Participation
Source - Creighton, 2005, 18.

***Unilateral Decision
(Traditional Design
Practice)***



Participation



The scope and perspective of time and costs within a project have to be expanded beyond the limits of simply the start date to the last day of construction. When more accurately costing a project and factoring in the lifespan of the environment, the suitability of the design, and the potential problems that may arise from not involving users, participation may save much time and money in the end. As Towers states, "more appropriate, democratic solutions are more likely to stand the test of time" (Towers, 2005, 178).

Provides a Voice to Those on the Margins

Through the incorporation of other forms of knowledge and providing the opportunity for control and ownership, participation enables the possibility to give a voice to populations that are not often heard or even asked. Participation can

give a voice to those often left at the margins, those who are often overlooked, and those who are too often excluded from decision-making in their lives.

Participation in the design process allows for peoples' needs and values to be taken into consideration. Through this, as Sanoff states, participation can be "a means to protecting the interests of groups of people as well as of individuals, because it satisfies their needs which are very often totally or partially ignored by organizations, institutions, bureaucracies, and the 'expert' planners and designers" (Sanoff, 1992, 55-56). Providing people with a voice in design and decision-making not only improves the plans and decisions but can also engage a hidden or marginalized population or group of people.

Putnam echoes this opinion, stating that participation can enhance social capital, bring together people from groups which might otherwise be excluded, and help to produce a more inclusive society and a greater sense of community and community self-confidence (Putnam, 1993). In short, participation can assist in preventing a large gap between the 'governed' and the 'governors'" (Putnam, 1993). As Rousseau argues, this situation is "desirable because no one is able to express the views of another" (McLaverty, 2002, 185). This concept is particularly important when considered as a way to increase the visibility and voice of historically marginalized populations, such as older adults. As Crewe states, "including users, particularly of disenfranchised populations, is one way to bring attention and note to their needs" (Crewe, 2001, 439). Without participation, design processes remain within the modernist paradigm in which people are

removed from decision-making. According to Jones *et al.*, this is not an optimal condition as “experts bring with them their own value systems that are often at odds with those of the users” and “creating a gap between the world as built and the world as needed and desired” (Jones *et al.* 2005, xiv).

Dilemmas of Participatory Design

Though the arguments to include participation in design provide a solid rationale for this process, there are a number of criticism and concerns regarding procedural and logistical details. As Fowles states, “for many, [participatory design] remains a Utopian vision, and there are those who still argue against opening up the design process to all those affected by, or who have an interest in, the problem” (Fowles, 2000, 113). Some of the dilemmas participatory design faces include a lack of empirical evidence to prove its efficacy, the accidental and deliberate practice of pseudo-participation, perceived lack of time and money, questions about the quality of work, level of public interest, poor communication in practice, issues in regard to the handling of power, and, in some cases, the inability to involve the future users of an environment. Taking into account this long list of issues still needing to be addressed to achieve a broader acceptance of participatory design, as Till states, “we should not be so surprised about this apparent gap between the ideals and reality of participation” (Till, 2005, 24).

Lack of Evidence to Support User Satisfaction

A lack of evidence to prove that participatory design successfully achieves its desired results has been cited as one of the main criticisms of participatory design. Although there is ample literature about participatory projects and processes, as Reis states, “there seems to be a lack of empirical evidence to sustain arguments with which advocate user participation in design as a necessary condition to overcome user dissatisfaction” (Reis, 2000, 3). Further, according to Reis, no systematic studies have been done to identify factors users wish to control during a participatory process, comparisons of the resulting feelings between users who experienced participation and those who did not, nor studies that support claims of greater satisfaction in schemes that used participation (Reis, 2000).

Problems with Pseudo-Participation

Poorly designed and executed participation may best be described as *pseudo-participation*. Carole Pateman defines pseudo-participation as techniques used to persuade people to accept decisions that have already been made, or put more directly, creating a *feeling* of participation (Till, 2005, 27).

Pseudo-participation is participation deliberately injected into a process or project simply to increase public acceptability, push through a predetermined outcome,

or to bring a degree of worthiness to the process without really transforming it (Till, 2005, 27). The goals of these 'participatory' processes are not to actually involve users, engage participants, or use the information gathered. The objective is generally outside of the participants' interest altogether. McLaverty notes that public participation is often viewed as something that managers of public organizations should promote, and be seen to be promoting, and as a result, is seen as desirable or necessary without any real connection to more philosophical debates (McLaverty, 2002, 195). Perceived in this way, public participation is often viewed as "simply a tool to be used by management to meet their objectives" (McLaverty, 2002, 195), or just "another box among many to tick in order to get approval and funding" (Jones *et al.*, 2005, xiii).

The practice of pseudo-participation harms the reputation and credibility of projects that do engage in valuable participatory processes. These ill crafted, whether accidentally or deliberately, processes taint the validity of successful projects and only give further ammunition for those who do not support participatory design.

Increased Time and Resources

Time and money are always important factors in any design or planning process. This is especially true in the debate over participatory design. It is argued that the incorporation of a participatory process requires a potentially unnecessary

spending of time and resources. As Crewe notes, “time for practitioners to do [participation] is an issue” (Crewe, 2001, 439). Oakley *et al.* expand on this issue, listing a number of criticisms pertaining to participation and its effect on the temporal and monetary factors of a project:

- 1) *May lead to a delayed start and slow progress in the initial stages of the fieldwork, thereby delaying the achievement of physical as well as financial targets.*
- 2) *An increased requirement of material as well as human resources as we have to move along the path decided by the local people or communities.*
- 3) *As it is a process, once it is initiated the process has to be allowed to take its own course and hence may not move along the expected lines.*
- 4) *Increased expectations due to the involvement of the local people may not always be realized (Oakley et al. 1991).*

This is duly contradicted by a number of professionals who believe the opposite to be true. As previously explained, many believe that when taking into account the full costing of a project, the investment of time and money in the initial stages through participation actually saves time and money in the end. However, these factors are still a major stumbling block for many practitioners.

Suspicion Regarding the Quality of the Design

Another area in which little research has been conducted is in the area of how design and planning professionals view the quality of the work developed through a participatory process. As Crewe states, “despite the greater prominence of citizen participation in urban design in recent years and the accumulation of case

studies and literature on the subject, there has been little empirical research that questions how design professionals view the quality of design work done within citizen input” (Crewe, 2001, 437). This is an issue that should not be overlooked as it may determine the acceptance of participatory design processes by practitioners in the future. Sociologist Margali Safatti Larson believes that in design practice “the aesthetics of design creates its own disciplinary legitimacy which not only gives designers a privileged position in the field, but has an elite standing which is further aggrandized by the charismatic ideology of art” (Larson, 1993, 17). Related to this argument is the belief that teams cannot design, and that design is solely an individual activity (Sanoff, 1992, 72). Further, aside from design process, some practitioners hold the belief that the designer is abdicating their responsibilities and expertise through participatory practice (Fowles, 2000, 113). Though this may be a protectionist view, if practitioners believe that design integrity is being sacrificed due to the participatory process, it may not be included for that very reason. Crewe agrees with Larson in that if designers view the quality of participatory design as weak, then they may be less likely to use it as a process (Crewe, 2001, 437).

Lack of Public Interest

Another criticism often used to deter participation is skepticism about whether or not people actually want to be involved in a participatory design project. As Reis states, there is no conclusive empirical evidence about the users’ wish to

participate, nor is there evidence citing when exactly participation should take place (Reis, 2000, 3). In order to address this issue appropriately, Reis believes that there needs to be future research pertaining to the following questions:

- 1) *Do users wish to participate?*
- 2) *When do users wish to participate?*
- 3) *What factors do users wish to control during participation?*
- 4) *What are users' feelings about participation?*
- 5) *What are users' feelings about the housing environment?* (Reis, 2000, 3).

This kind of research is needed in order to fully explore the opinions of users and to critically analyze the efficacy of and potential for participatory design in the future.

Communication Obstacles

The success of a participatory design project depends largely on the quality of the communication between users and practitioners. If communication is not effective, transparent, or clear, the participatory process risks losing its inherent benefits as it may simply default to being dominated by experts who initiate communication on their own terms (Till, 2005, 28). As Carmona *et al.* state, "communication may be adversely affected by 'gaps' in the connection" and that it is important for practitioners to appreciate where such communication gaps may arise and to be aware of how to deal with them (Carmona *et al.*, 2003, 264). Some of the gaps acknowledged by Carmona *et al.* include:

- 1) *The Professional - Layperson Gap* – knowledge of the world (professional – pictorial, objective, physical) (layperson – personal, subjective).
- 2) *The Designer - Non-Designer Gap* – knowledge of interpreting drawings, vocabulary, and act of designing.
- 3) *The Reality - Representation gap* – knowledge of graphical representation of the world.
- 4) *The Powerful - Powerless gap* – knowledge of power and empowerment.
- 5) *The Designer - User Gap* – knowledge of needs and values (Carmona et al. 2003, 265-267).

Power Issues

Engaging in a participatory process requires extensive sharing of information and knowledge. Inequitable distribution of information and knowledge can lead to an imbalance of real or perceived power between individuals and groups. This can occur between the practitioners and participants, or between participants themselves.

The issue of power difference within a participatory process has been acknowledged since the early developments of participatory design. Dating back to the mid-1970s, Weber notes that participation cannot avoid the fact that design practitioners will always hold more information about design than the public participants. As Weber points out, “designers not only control the criteria for the selection of those parts of reality [in relation to the project] which are to be represented, but also define the process of selection and representation” (Weber, 1975, viii). More recently, Schneekoth and Shibley address this issue

acknowledging that “experts’ discourses are vested in a closed system of power and privilege” (Schneekloth and Shibley, 2000, 138). This is difficult to rectify even if it is acknowledged. As Weber continues, “Even when trying to be impartial, designers cannot help manipulate information which is biased by their perceptions of reality and which may not be shared by their clients and users” (Weber, 1975, viii).

The issue of power does not only exist between the practitioners and the participants. The dilemma of power imbalance can also exist within the participant group between individuals or groups. Those with the ability to raise their voice above others, or persist with a specific agenda, can dominate and potentially disrupt the environment of mutual sharing and collaboration that is created in a participatory process (Weber, 1975, x).

Lack of Available Users

Another criticism of participatory design processes is that in some cases the future users may not be available or known at the time of the participatory process. Further, in some situations it may be years between the initial participatory process with participants to when the environment is occupied.

One approach suggested for situations when users cannot be readily identified is to simply design for a more general population. However, this often leads to

practitioners depending on standards, guidelines, idealized stereotypes, and disassociated committees that may not necessarily reflect the preferences or complaints of the end users (Sanoff, 1992, 73). Sanoff warns that, "since people have such different needs, attempts to create a single standardized 'ideal' environment works to everyone's disadvantage" (Sanoff, 1992, 74). Alexander *et al.* argue that to have any form of representation from that population, even if they are not the exact users, will still result in a more suitable design than if they were not included at all (Alexander *et al.*, 1975, 47-48).

What Makes Good Participatory Design

The definitions of participation outlined in the beginning of this chapter provide the basic understanding that participation is the involvement of users in the design process. These definitions are extremely broad and do not give direction towards what constitutes valuable and effective participation. The following principles for effective and valuable participation are derived from the experiences of both academics and practitioners. These factors provide the basis of a positive experience for both participants and practitioners and result in a final process and product that is mutually accepted and appropriate. These factors include dialogue, potential for mutual learning, inclusion of all stakeholders, having clear goals and objectives, engagement of participants throughout the design process, openness and transparency throughout, and using a common language.

Dialogue

Effective participation requires dialogue. This is perhaps the most important factor in participation. Dialogue is the cornerstone to effective participation and its quality will determine the success of other participation objectives. As Sanoff states, to maximize learning “the process should be clear, communicable, and open...it should encourage dialogue, debate, and collaboration” (Sanoff, 1992, 56). Creighton agrees stating that participation needs to be a “two-way communication and interaction, with the goal of better decisions” (Creighton, 2005, 7).

Weber’s definition of participation in design is “a process which has to engage the client or user in the inception, generation, and development of a product” (Weber, 1974, vi). However, his definition does not stop at engagement. Participation requires more than a one-way information exchange. Weber strongly believes that participation must be “a dialogue about shared interests which accepts conflict and divergence of opinion and welcomes public arguments and debate in order to externalize knowledge by proponents and opponents” (Weber, 1974, vi). It is through dialogue that the interests, values, and conflicts can be openly discussed and included in the decision-making process. Weber does admit that the information exchanged in one-way communication may be valuable to an extent, but that only dialogue and two-way communication provides the means for the direct transaction and confrontation necessary for

reciprocity and mutual obligation (Weber, 1975, vi). Therefore, according to Weber, participation is a “dialogue about shared interests which accommodates thinking, feeling, empathy, and judgment...a discourse which accepts conflict and divergence about a problem and reach consensus” (Weber, 1975, vi).

Schneekloth and Shibley promote this kind of practice through ‘dialogic practice’. This approach to practice assumes that knowledge is socially constructed through dialogue within relationships and that knowledge is not an abstraction, something that is ‘out there’, but is generated and confirmed within networks of relationships in dialectic between concrete and abstract knowing (Schneekloth and Shibley, 1990). Only through dialogue can there be a flow from collaboration leading to reflection and negotiation and resulting in action (Kernohan *et al.*, 1992, 145-48)

Mutual Learning

The goal of mutual learning is instrumental to a successful participatory process. As Weber states, “participation in design denies that anyone has sole expertise” (Weber, 1975, vi). This means that both users and providers have much to offer and much to learn from one another in creating the best possible design solution. Through participation, not only should the practitioners learn about the hopes, likes, and dislikes of the participants, so too should the process allow the participants to learn more about environment design process and principles.

Each individual should be learning through increased awareness of the design problem and solution (Sanoff, 1992, 56).

Incorporation of All Possible Stakeholders

In order to produce the most valuable collective learning and dialogue, all possible stakeholders of a project must be included. In most situations it is impossible to have every user and stakeholder involved. However, every effort must be made to include as many interests as possible so that no one is left out and potentially crucial input is not overlooked.

Involving all possible stakeholders also means including experts with specialized knowledge related to the project. There may be aspects of the project that will require extensive knowledge in a particular area. However, this must be balanced with the inclusion of the users of the environment. As Creighton warns, experts are able to provide assistance along a particular dimension, but various perspectives from users and other stakeholders are also required to engage in the dialogue and sharing of ideas needed to create an appropriate design (Creighton, 2005, 16). The decisions made in a participatory process are multi-faceted, complex, and include numerous values and perspectives. Because of this, the decisions in a participatory process are not just technical ones requiring only expert advice, but instead demand the input of all interests so to include,

debate, and balance all of the values and perspectives. This requires the breadth of discussion only possible with all stakeholders involved, experts and users.

Clear Goals and Objectives

A well-crafted participatory process requires goals and objectives. Without these in place, the participatory process may not be successful for either the participants or design practitioners. As Sanoff states, “one of the stumbling blocks to an effective participation program is the difficulty associated with the articulation of participation goals and objectives” (Sanoff, 1992, 58). Without goals and objectives clarified at the beginning of a project, the resulting design may not be appropriate for the users as it is this early articulation that forms the basis of choosing participation methods and process (Sanoff, 1992, 58).

The identification of goals and objectives is not only important at the planning of the participatory process, but must be considered throughout every stage of the project. Rowles suggests that each meeting have both realized and tangible objectives and outputs to ensure that the process is as productive and meaningful as possible for all involved (Rowles, 2000, 113). Without goals and objectives in place, Sanoff warns that participants may have different expectations of what the process should achieve, leading to a time-consuming activity that may be inefficient, irrational, and non-productive (Sanoff, 1992, 59).

Engagement Throughout Process

The optimal situation for a participatory process is to have participants engaged in the various stages of the design process including the design phase, the construction phase, and/or in the maintenance of the project after completion.

Though each design process is unique and may vary or change, Sanoff lists a few of the optional stages through which to engage participants:

- 1) *Pre-programming*
- 2) *Programming – preparing and compiling*
- 3) *Preliminary design*
- 4) *Design review*
- 5) *Design developments*
- 6) *Working documents – bidding and letting the contract*
- 7) *Construction meeting and reports*
- 8) *Post-occupancy evaluation of both program and design decisions* (Sanoff, 1992, 63)

A criticism of some participatory processes by Regnier and Pynoos is that “information is generally sought at one point early in the design process, rather than on a more interactive and ongoing basis as design decisions are actually made” (Regnier and Pynoos, 1987, 153). They also state that “unless the process includes a post-occupancy evaluation from the actual users of the facility, little can be learned about how the building met residents’ needs, where it missed the mark, and what should be done to correct any problems” (Regnier and Pynoos, 1987, 153).

Openness and Transparency

Another factor that is required for effective participation is acknowledgement by the practitioners and designers that they cannot enter into the process as value-free, neutral interpreters of information. Designers must be conscious and transparent about the knowledge they bring to the process and use that to the best advantage to the process. As Weber states, “designers, despite their intentions, cannot clean themselves of their training and experience” and “unless they acknowledge their role as instigators, generators of doubt, arguments, and opinions – in short, ‘agitators’ – they are misrepresenting themselves, while imposing their own points of view” (Weber, 1975, v).

At all times throughout the process, practitioners must be sure that the participatory practice is open and transparent. This means making sure that participants know what is expected of them, know how information will be gathered, how the information will be used, and know that the information and process documentation is available to participants (Fowles, 2000, 113).

Increasing the transparency of the process will increase participants’ sense of ownership of the process and encourage continued input and participation (Fowles, 2000, 113).

Common Language

A common criticism of participatory processes is that designers and practitioners do not have the same level of knowledge about design and do not have common language with which to discuss space and place. With various levels of knowledge and ability to articulate ones concerns and aspirations in regard to design, Weber stresses that it is the role of the designer to use a common language in the process that relies less on specialized knowledge of design and is much more direct (Weber, 1975, vii). To make the discussion more *direct* means openly debating the pros and cons, stimulating doubt, exposing criticisms, including controversial issues, revealing arguments, and exposing consequences and implications of decisions (Weber, 1975, vii). Using a common language based on these principles will not exclude those without a design background and will more fully engage participants in the issues specific to the creation of place instead of focusing solely on the spatial details.

Conclusion

The debate over the definition, benefits, and shortcomings of participatory design is an ever-changing and unfinished project. Though much progress has been achieved in the past few decades since its emergence, there are still many unanswered and unexplored questions regarding participatory design. Further, the list of principles for good practice provided does not necessarily guarantee a

successful participatory process or design product. However, they do provide a guide to increasing the likelihood of an effective and productive process. In the end, the success of a participatory process can only be judged in terms of the degree to which it satisfies the needs of the users and its responsive to their values and preferred lifestyles, and this cannot be determined until after the environment is finally occupied.

The following chapter explores the potential of how participatory design can play a role in the creation of environments for older adults. This is developed through a discussion on the aging of society, the relationship between aging and environment, the potential of participation as a means of empowerment, and a proposal for participatory design as a transformative practice that can create more suitable environments for older adults while increasing their role in decisions that directly affect their lives.

Chapter 3: Aging, Environment, and Empowerment

Preamble

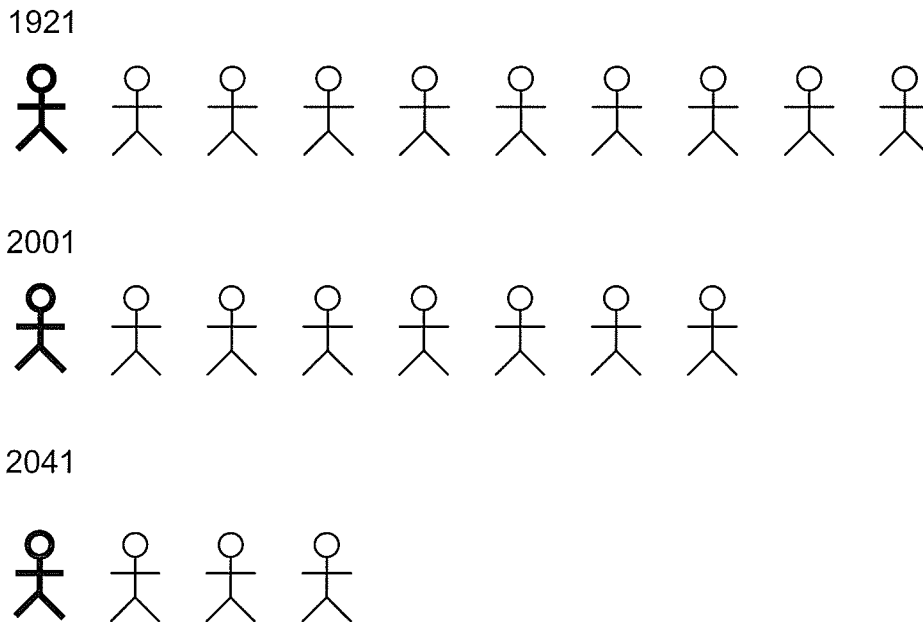
The following explores four main bodies of knowledge related to the participation of older adults in the design of the built environment: the aging of society, the relationship between aging and environment, empowerment and older adults, and a proposal for transformative participatory design practice. A detailed exploration of each of these areas is required to capture a full understanding of the current context and future need for participatory design with older adults.

An Aging Society

Societies of Western, developed countries are experiencing a significant aging of their populations. In Canada, this is attributed to two main factors; first, the gradual decrease in fertility rates since a peak during a period from the 1940s to the 1960s (the baby boom in Canada from 1947-1966), and second, the increase in life expectancy due to advances in medicine and healthier lifestyles (Health Canada, 2002, 4). In 2005, Canada's population was younger than most other G8 countries. However, this will change in 2011 when the first of the baby boom generation reach the age of 65 (Statistics Canada, 2005, 65). Today, older adults constitute the fastest growing segment of the population in Canada (Health Canada, 2002, 3). To illustrate, the proportion of those 65 years of age and older

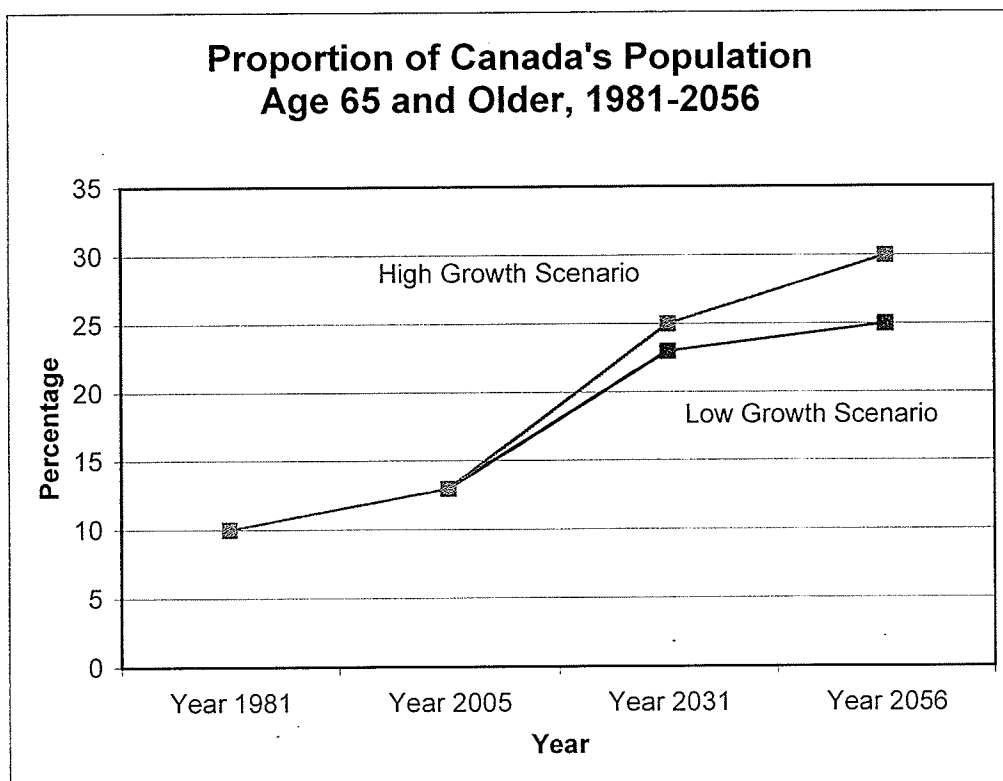
in 1921 was one in twenty. Due to increased longevity throughout the century, the proportion of older adults in 2001 was one in eight. In the future, with further increases in longevity coupled with the aging of the baby boom cohort, the proportion of the population age 65 and older is expected to reach one in four Canadians by 2041 (Health Canada, 2002, 3). These proportions are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Proportion of the Canadian Population 65 Years of Age and Older
Source - Health Canada, 2002, 3.



Projecting populations requires the consideration of a number of variables including the base population, fertility rate, mortality rate, international immigration, and emigration. Manipulating these variables over time gives a number of different of growth scenarios as shown in Figure 3 (Statistics Canada, 2005, 46).

Figure 3 - Proportion of Canada's Population Age 65 and Older, 1981-2056
Source - Statistics Canada, 2005, 24.



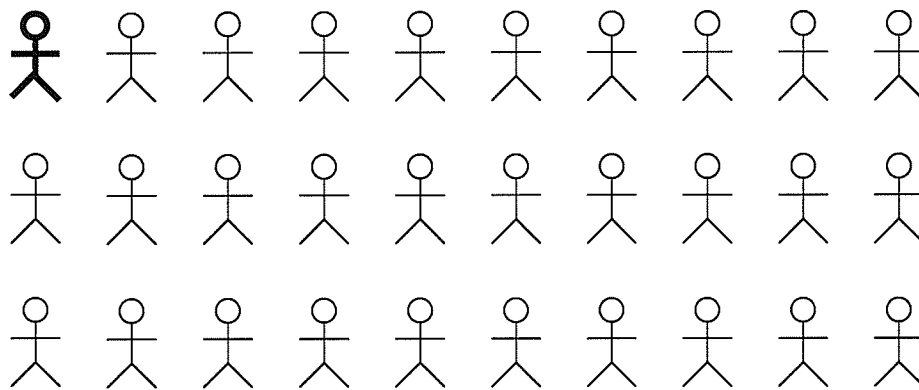
Regardless of a low or high growth scenario, the aging of the Canadian population is inevitable. Based on these population predictions, the proportion of the older adult population will nearly double over the next 25 years. In all growth scenarios, the year 2015 will mark the first time in Canadian history when the number of older adults in Canada will exceed the number children (youth ages 0 to 14) (Statistics Canada, 2005, 46).

Even more striking is that the proportion of the very old (persons age 80 and over) will increase even more dramatically. In 2005, this cohort represented 3.5% of the total population. This will increase to between 6.1% to 6.5% in 2031, and

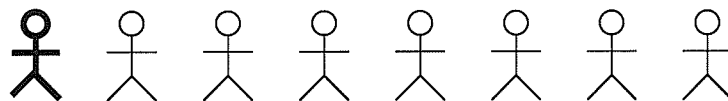
growing as the baby-boomers reach 80 to 9.3% to 10.8% in 2056 (Statistics Canada, 2005, 51). Health Canada provides similar statistics, stating that in 2005 one in every thirty Canadians was aged 80 and over, and that in 2056 that proportion will increase to one in eight, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4 - Proportion of the Canadian Population Age 80 and Older
Source - Health Canada, 2002, 3.

2005



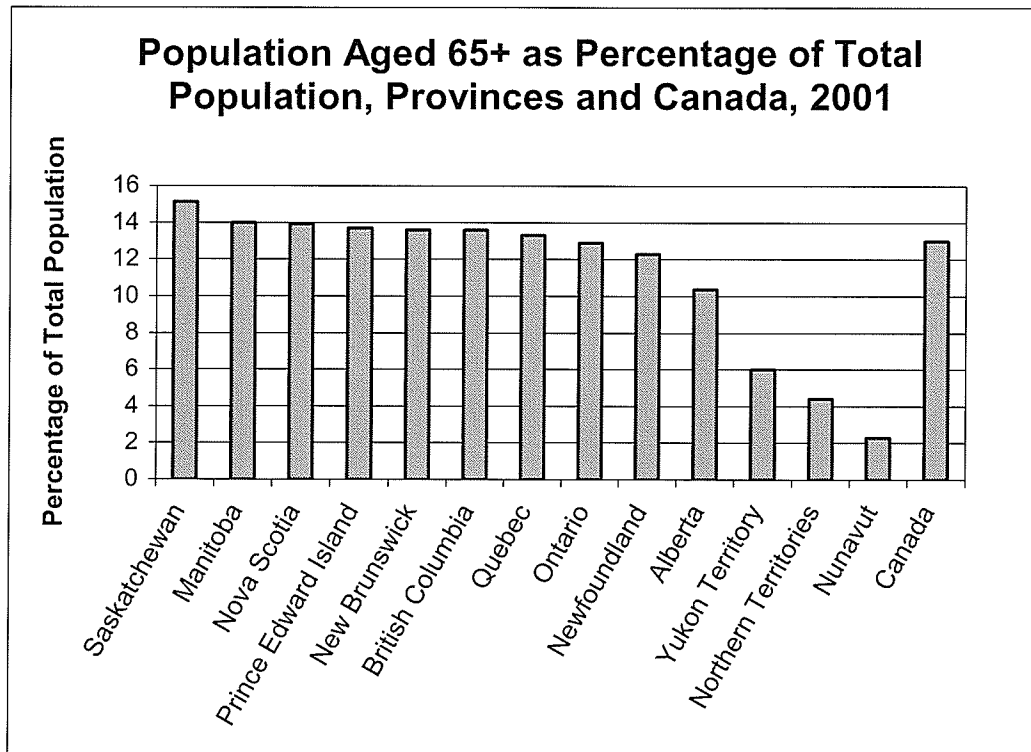
2056



Manitoba should be paying specific attention to these figures as the province ranks second in the percentage of the population aged 65 and over. In 2001, 14% of Manitoba's population was age 65 and older, compared to a national

average for Canada of 13%. The following graph compares the provinces and territories to the national average.

Figure 5 - Population Aged 65+ as Percentage of Total Population, Provinces and Canada, 2001
Source - Statistics Canada, 2001.



Though these figures present an incredible change in the structure of society, it does not necessarily warrant the panic associated with the apocalyptic views of aging that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s (Gee and Gutman, 2000). It is far more likely that things will change in a more incremental manner. However, though there is no need for panic, there should be an urgency in preparing for how we will respond to the changes in the coming decades. Based on these statistics, now is the time to prepare for the aging of our society tomorrow.

Including older adults in the decision-making in regard to their environments will be increasingly important with changes related to an aging society, including housing needs, ability, and suitability. This extends beyond housing design to include community and urban design. As Salvesen and Hervey state, “the built environment is a largely ignored facet of the aging experience that affects quality of life” (Salvesen and Hervey, 2005, 84).

Aging and Environment

This section addresses the issues surrounding the aging process and people’s relationship with the environment. Throughout a lifetime, an individual’s interaction with the environment constantly changes and adapts. With aging, the body experiences changes in mobility, sensory functions, and perception, and these processes manifest in different ways. The socio-environmental theory of aging and the theory of person-environmental fit assists in understanding unique experiences of aging within an environmental context.

Environmental Gerontology

The field of environmental gerontology specializes in the analysis of the relationship between older adults and their physical and social environments. The relationships between individuals and their physical world and social context change throughout a lifetime. That which may be considered an environmental

challenge at one point in life may not be as challenging at another point in life, and vice versa.

Changes in physical, social, and individual variables are particularly significant in the lives of older adults. As Choi states, with age, people experience declines in their functional abilities (sensory, psychomotor, etc.) and become both more dependent on their environments and more susceptible to various negative outcomes if environments are inappropriate (Choi, 1996, 340). Research in environmental gerontology focuses on how the process of aging affects the relationship between individuals and their environment.

Socio-Environmental Theory of Aging

The socio-environmental theory, as proposed by Daniel J. Gubrium, uses a symbolic interactionist perspective to analyze individuals and their environments, which is at its core, that aging is a product of the everyday interactions of individuals as they move through their lives (Auger and Tedford-Little, 2002, 51 and 63). Gubrium suggests that successful aging is the result of the inter-relationship between an individual's social and physical worlds (Gubrium, 1973).

Socio-environmental theory places significant importance on the environment as a key determinant of successful aging. As Auger and Tedford-Little state, "from the perspective of socio-environmental theory, where an older person lives,

whether or not it is appropriate and accessible to older persons and their needs, has much to say about whether or not an individual can age successfully” (Auger and Tedford-Little, 2002, 64). With such importance placed on the physical environment, planning and design professionals must ensure that environments assist in facilitating successful aging of the older adult population.

Person-Environment Fit

At a most rudimentary level, the ability of a person to function within an environment is determined by an individual's *person-environment fit*, or *person-environment congruence*. As defined by Townshend, person-environment fit is, “an individual's ability and preferences in relation to the factors and variables of an environment”, and “fuses the psychology of the individual with the physical, social, and organizational environments of housing, neighbourhoods, and communities” (Townshend, 2002, 376).

This relationship between an individual and their environment is particularly important as, “the attainment of person-environment congruence has been shown to be an important determinant of intrapsychic well-being – a concept that is linked to self-esteem and, hence, to self-actualization” (Townshend, 2002, 376). Therefore, the goal of design and planning professionals should be to increase the fit or congruence between all individuals and their environments.

Difficulty in personal function occurs when there is a lack of fit, or incongruence, between the person and their environment. As Kahana *et al.* state,

It is the discrepancy between personal preference and environmental supplies that may create additional problems beyond those resulting from characteristics of the environment alone or of personal preferences. Furthermore, lack of person-environment congruence is conceptualized as an important source of chronic stress that is likely to elicit adverse health and mental health (Kahana et al., 2003, 435).

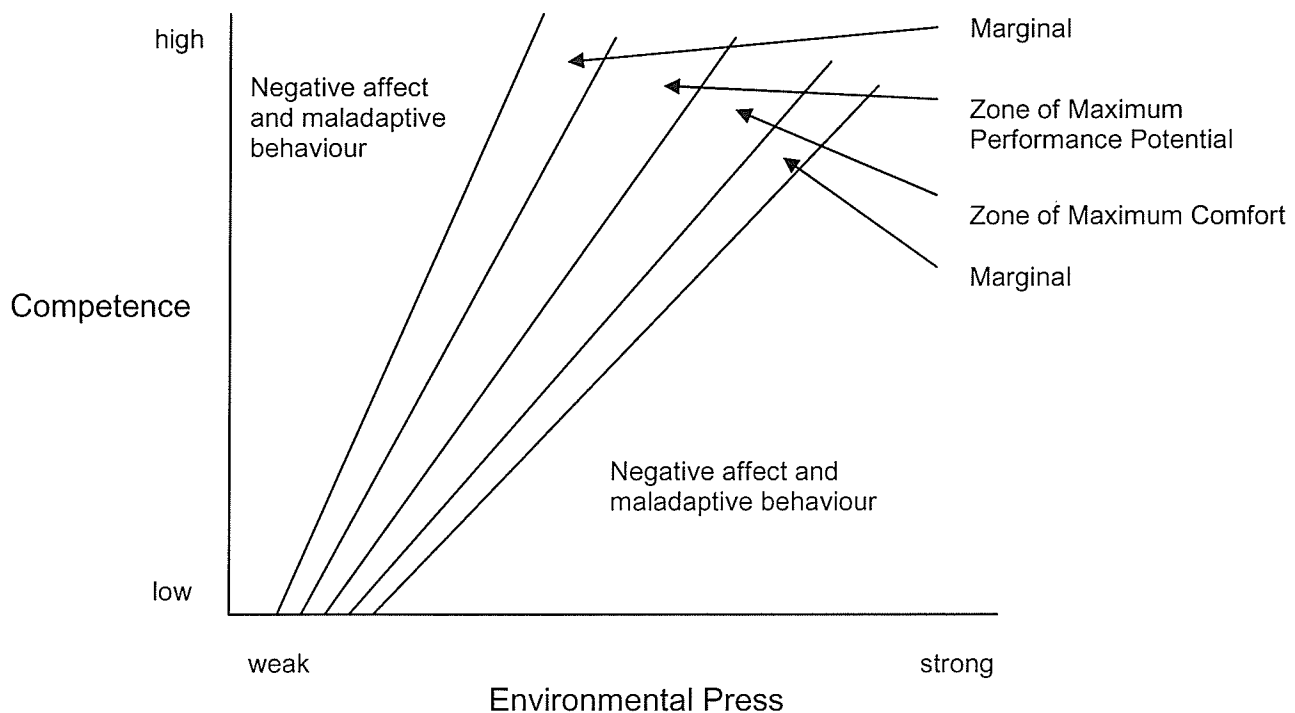
Considering this statement, the ramifications are considerable when person-environment fit is not satisfied for an individual, community, or entire population.

A number of theories regarding aging and environment have developed from the concept of person-environment fit. Lawton advanced the field considerably in the 1960s with his environmental press paradigm and its applications to empirical research and building design (Kendig, 2003, 611). Lawton's research reached a high-water mark with Lawton and Nahemow's ecological model of aging and their competence-environmental press model in 1973 (Kroust and Wethington, 2003, 6).

In this model, environmental press, or the demand of the environmental situation, is charted on the x-axis, with the individual's competence level on the y-axis (Figure 6). As an individual's competence changes throughout life, whether due to aging or physical disability, their relationship with their environment changes. However, if an individual's competence decreases significantly, there is chance

that they will fall out of the *Zone of Maximum Performance Potential* or the *Zone of Maximum Comfort*. This poses a threat to the individual's level of independence. In the past, an individual's competence was viewed as the only dynamic and changing factor. However, today the environment is considered just as malleable and can accommodate a wide range of abilities. With adjustments made to the environmental conditions, a person with low competence may again fall within the *Zone of Maximum Performance Potential* or the *Zone of Maximum Comfort* and regain independence. This relationship between individual competence and environmental press is fluid and continually changing. With adaptations made to the environment, an individual can be maintained within the *Zone of Maximum Performance Potential* or the *Zone of Maximum Comfort* for a longer possible time.

Figure 6 - Lawton and Nahemow's Competence-Environmental Press Model
 Source - Lawton, 1998, 3.



The concept of environmental fit is of particular significance to the older adult population as there is greater incidence of disability. Of older adults living in private households in Canada, 49.7% of older adults aged 65 and over report living with a disability. The definition of disability used in this statistic includes those living with difficulty hearing, seeing, communicating, walking, climbing stairs, bending, learning, doing similar activities, or having a condition that inhibits activities at home or elsewhere (CMHC, 2005, 3).

The proportion of older adults who live in private households reporting a disability not surprisingly increases with age. This is not to say that disability is a necessary given in old age. However, as Towers notes, "it has long been recognized that many people do become incapacitated in various ways as they advance into old age and that their homes need to be designed to meet these changing needs" (Towers, 2005, 101). In the CMHC study reported in Table 1 it was found that of older adults 75 years of age and older, 63.7% reported some form of disability. This compares significantly to 39.6% of older adults age 65-74 who reported a disability. The proportion of older adults living with a disability in private households is markedly higher than in the non-older adult population with 11.2% reporting living with a disability.

Table 1 - Canadian Population Reporting Disability by Age
 Source - Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2005, 3.

	65+	65-74	75+	Non-Older Adults	Total Population
Population Reporting Disability	49.7%	39.6%	63.7%	11.2%	15.9%

Conclusion

Understanding the concepts within environmental gerontology, including the socio-environmental theory of aging and the theory of environmental fit, is crucial to adequately address issues pertaining to aging and the environment. These theories confirm that there is potential for the built environment to help maximize the control older people have over their surroundings and increase the potential for environmental fit. Aging does not have to be a sentence to increasingly challenging environments. The environment must be viewed as a factor that is malleable and that can be modified or designed to meet the needs of individuals. Participatory design practices and processes can serve to assist in the creation of more appropriate environmental for older adults.

The theories pertaining to aging and environment mentioned in this section represent a body of knowledge based primarily within an empirical and rational-based approach to aging and environment. Though important, this alone does not fully represent, nor adequately address, issues pertaining to older adults and the environment. The following section provides recent theoretical developments in critical gerontology and the concept of empowerment. This perspective of the aging process is viewed within a more political, humanist, experiential, and subjective framework that lead to suggestions and methods on *how* environments can be improved for older adults while increasing the ability of older adults to make decisions that directly affect their lives.

Empowerment of Older Adults Through Participation

The participation of older adults in the design of the built environment has the potential to achieve two goals: the creation of more suitable and appropriate environments, and the ability to engage older adults in an empowering process. However, as Cavanagh points out, the opinion of the elderly themselves related to design is never or rarely considered (Cavanagh, 1996). The following explores theoretical explanations for why older adults are marginalized in society and explores the potential of participatory design to include older adults in decisions related to their environment.

Defining Empowerment

Empowerment is a term used to describe and define a wide range of principles and practices. Heumann *et al.* attempt to narrow down and succinctly define empowerment in general as, “efforts aimed at both giving power to individuals, or removing obstacles that people may face in attempting to make decisions for themselves” (Heumann *et al.*, 2001, xi). However, not all approaches to empowerment are equal. Within this definition there are a number of interpretations and perspectives to empowerment, including better informing people, encouraging people to ‘voice’ their perspectives and desires, expanding choices and options, to meaning greater participation in, and control over, the decisions in their lives (Heumann *et al.*, 2001, 4).

Heumann *et al.* suggest a continuum of social values concerning older adults adopted from the work of Moody and adapted by Hofland for the context of older adult involvement in decision-making regarding their environment. This continuum includes the following principles: rejection; social service; participation; and self-actualization.

Rejection

- *Repression, segregation, or neglect.*
- *Mandatory requirements at certain ages (i.e. retirement).*
- *Segregated communities (retirement villages, continuing care communities).*
- *Given the demographics of aging societies in most countries today, there are few places left which can maintain an attitude of rejection.*

Social Service

- *Recognition of the needs of older adults by government is present, but is based on an interpretation of 'neediness' for which they cannot be responsible.*
- *'Expert-based'.*
- *Based on 'provision' – others deciding what older adults need.*
- *Evident in most industrialized countries today.*
- *Lack of potentially empowering methods for service delivery by valuing dependence over autonomy, compliance over individual preference, and youth over lived experience.*
- *Older adults unquestioningly accept a 'professional's' opinion of what is right for them. Both older adults themselves and providers do not yet expect that an equal partnership in health or social services is normal or desirable. Both expect that older adults will relinquish control to the experts.*

Participation

- *Built on the assumption in some degree of being active in, and perhaps accountable for, one's own care is important and valuable.*
- *Underlying this stage is a broader view of the dignity, social integration, and self-determination of older adults.*

- *Potential for growth and consistent and meaningful engagement in social life are the underlying values and articulated goals of government and citizens.*
- *Practitioners need ability of self-reflection.*

Self-Actualization

- *Individuals do gain a truer sense of power over one's own life.*
- *A focus on spiritual values and the potential for growth.*
- *The ultimate goal here is for a society to evolve to a stage where the 'giving' or 'taking' over power between people becomes obsolete because society recognizes the individual worth and value of each individual and allows them to develop their own potential based on their particular set of values (Moody, 1976; Hofland 1990).*

At the Margins

According to researchers and theorists in social gerontology, attitudes towards the elderly stem from a society that places great significance on work and paid employment. In the past, social status was associated with processes of marginalization hinging on major social cleavages such as class, race, and gender. However, today segregation is rooted within a society that additionally uses work to create status-based dimensions of difference, identity, and social participation (Irwin, 1999, 691). In this structure, *work* connotes productivity, contribution, and societal reciprocity. Consequently, elderly people experience a decline of not only income, but also of power and status upon exiting the labour force (Irwin, 1999, 700). As Irwin states, "participation in paid employment is fundamental to social identity and prestige, and those not so engaged are seen to be marginalized in a variety of ways" (Irwin, 1999, 698).

Related to the status associated with productivity is the ideology of individualism, a concept that only increases the marginalization of those not in the 'productive' sphere (Hockey and James, 1993). Society makes it clear that independence is highly valued while dependence is increasingly problematic (Irwin, 1999, 698). The hypocrisy of this situation is that society creates the very dependency that it so quickly devalues. Hockey and James point out that, "economic dependency created through compulsory schooling, compulsory retirement, and inflexible working practices produces forms of social marginality or isolation which become recognized as 'social problems'" (Hockey and James, 1993, 155-156). Both work-based division attitudes and the focus on individualism are the symptoms of a society Moody and Hofland would classify as *Rejection*.

Resulting from this divisive societal construct based on work and individualism is the formation of two groups of people, the *independent* and the *dependent*. As Hazan suggests:

The aged and non-aged constitute two distinct population groups. The former are represented as an amorphous body distinct from, and alien to, society. This observation can be seen in the many areas of their lives. They have been faulted in the economic sphere as being 'non-productive'; in health services as 'overburdening the system'; in capitalizing resources and leaving the young without sufficient assets. Defensively, both age groups pull away from each other, and in the process withdraw their meaningful networks from each other, substituting narrower meaning structures and imposing these upon institutions that will maintain the gap (forced retirement, retirement-home policies, etc.) (Hazan, 1994, 18).

Irwin reflects a similar sentiment, stating that, “processes of aging, historical change, and the ordering of life course divisions in work all appear as centrifugal forces which peripheralize older people, distancing them from centers of power and of knowledge” (Irwin, 1999, 693). However, though employment status and individualism may be a significant factor in the marginalization of older adults, it is not the sole reason. Changes in ability, body image, and eroticism are but a few examples of the many other measures through which society places a value on its citizens.

The outcomes of ageism and marginalization of the elderly by society include “isolation from the community, inadequate housing and income, unnecessary institutionalization, untreated medical and physical illnesses, and suicide” (Ragan and Bowen, 2001, 511). The elderly have become vulnerable, occupying increasingly limited social roles with restricted access to social goods (Schindler, 1999, 165).

Rosenau states that post-modernist thought has placed substantive focus on the margins, the excluded, and those who have no control over their lives. New perspectives aim to “speak for those who have never been subject (active human) but who are rather so often assumed to be objects” (Rosenau, 1992, 173). The writing of Sandercock reflects similar sentiment on including those in the margins, the borderlands, and the edges of mainstream society (Sandercock, 2003, 1998). As Irwin states, “a central concern of many theorists of later life has

been to elucidate the processes which shape the marginalization and relative disadvantage of older people in contemporary society” (Irwin, 1999, 691-715). Current theoretical perspectives in critical gerontology address the origins of older adult marginalization, and how this trend can potentially be reversed.

Critical Gerontology

The view today of the aging process is not one of battling the ‘negative’ effects of aging, but instead examining what elicits such opinions. Critical gerontology focuses on, as Jan Baars describes, “a collection of questions, problems, and analyses that have been excluded by the established mainstream” (Baars, 1991, 220). As described by Chris Phillipson and Alan Walker, critical gerontology strives for, “a more value committed approach to social gerontology – a commitment not just to understand the social construction of aging, but to change it” (Phillipson and Walker, 1987, 12). Critical gerontology supplements the study of the biological and psychological aspects of aging which, for all its contributions, reveals little about the social construction of aging in a broader socio-political context (Minkler, 1996, 470).

Critical gerontology is interested in three main areas of inquiry:

- a) *The political economy, structural pressures, and constraints affecting older people, through divisions such as class, gender, and ethnicity.*

- b) *Concern regarding the absence of meaning in the lives of older people, and the sense of doubt and uncertainty which is seen to pervade their daily routines and relationships.*
- c) *A focus upon the issue of empowerment, whether through the transformation of society (i.e. the redistribution of wealth and income), or the development of new rituals and symbols to facilitate changes through the life course (Phillipson, 1996, 359-60).*

From these main lines of inquiry, the field of critical gerontology has developed along two main paths, one concerned with broad political and economic issues, and the other challenging the technical and instrumental orientation of academic gerontology (Phillipson, 1996, 365).

Political Economy Perspective

The political economy approach in critical gerontology is interested in an understanding of the process of aging through broad structural terms and considers how political and economic contexts and factors such as race, class, and gender interact to shape and determine the experience of aging, understanding aging in structural rather than individual terms (Martinson and Minkler, 2006, 320). Carroll Estes explains this approach as the following:

It starts with the proposition that the status and resources of the elderly, and even the trajectory of the aging process itself, are conditioned by one's location in the social structure and the economic and social factors that affect it (Estes, 1982).

This framework provides a view with which to better understand old age as an issue evident in societies characterized by major inequalities in the distribution of

power, income, and property (Minkler, 1996, 470). Focus is diverted from the individual who is 'aging poorly' in a 'just society', and directed to the 'unjust society' that does not allow for an individual to 'age well'.

The political economy stream of critical gerontology provides a multidisciplinary perspective through which to examine such themes as the social creation of the dependent status of the elderly, and the management of that dependency through public policies and health and social services (Minkler, 1996, 469-470). It also recognizes that the social constructs created by society define an individual's trajectory in late life stages and points out the many ways in which politics, not age, determines how old age is defined by society.

Humanistic Perspective

The second approach within critical gerontology is that of the humanistic perspective, which attempts to put a human face, body, and spirit on growing old (Minkler, 1996, 468-470). This mode of inquiry emerged from a humanistic orientation and critiques the more technical and instrumental orientation of academic gerontology. Research on aging in the past has been dependent on empirical evidence, scientific knowledge, and managerial efficiency, draining the last stage of life of all meaning, and having no grasp of the larger political or existential significance of aging (Minkler, 1996, 470). Humanistic gerontology focuses on larger questions of meaning, or lack of meaning, in the lives of older people, and explores what makes a 'good life' in old age, and how a society can

support multiple, alternative visions of old age (Minkler, 1996, 470-471). Post-modern in orientation, humanistic gerontology examines the 'multiplicity of lifestyles' and emphasizes a fluid rather than categorical movement through life. It attempts to blur 'life stages' so that the very concept becomes somewhat artificial and irrelevant (Minkler, 1996, 471). Wilson argues that, "no boundary can be relevant for all older people all the time", so therefore "multiple and fluid identities and boundaries are essential" (Wilson, 2001, 477 and 485). At its core, humanistic gerontology "is concerned with valuing persons in the full range of their capacity as sentient beings", not segmenting their lives into chronological categories for empirical analysis (Kitwood, 1990, 225). Theorists such as Gubrium, Fahey and Holstein, and Cohler and Kaminsky attest that humanistic gerontology is about "listening to the voices and life stories of the old" and reacting "to the overwhelming rationalization of everyday life...to go beyond the [over-rationalized] languages of scientific discourse to the actual voices of experience" (Phillipson, 1996, 364). The humanistic perspective of critical gerontology is consistent with the insurgent planning principles of Sandercock in acknowledging and incorporating diversity and other ways of knowing.

Minkler argues that both approaches in critical gerontology confront the issue of the empowerment and disempowerment of older adults – "in the first instance, through the structural constraints in which aging takes place, and in the second, by casting into sharper relief questions...about the loss of a sense of place and of meaning for the old in our societies" (Minkler, 1996, 471). Minkler continues

stating that, "in a sense, then, empowerment may be the unifying concept bringing together diverse conceptualizations within critical gerontology, and the vehicle through which it may make its most significant contribution (Minkler, 1996, 471). Phillipson and Walker suggest that the task for critical gerontology is to furnish both theoretical and policy perspectives in gerontology to create more equitable environments through which empowerment is possible (Phillipson and Walker, 1987, 11).

Critical gerontology has opened up an optimistic future for older adults, questioning not only the position of the elderly in society, but also the way in which issues related to the elderly are understood. Gerontology has evolved dramatically from its origins within biology and psychology. The perspectives and issues addressed in gerontology today are essential for the discipline to reach its full potential. Bond and Coleman predict that gerontology will grow into a more truly liberating subject, "less concerned with charting decline and predicting outcomes and more with outlining possibilities" (Bond and Coleman, 1993, 339).

Empowerment and Older Adults

The elderly population is in need of appropriate environmental conditions, yet they are confronted with a building industry that is not responsive in a society that has disempowered and placed them in the margins. Changes need to be made to rectify this situation because the cohorts of older adults over the next thirty

years are not only going to be proportionately larger than in the past, but will also be quite different in regard to character. The future older adult population will be the baby boomers, a generation not used to sitting on the sidelines looking in. This generation will not likely accept ageism in their older age because of their previous success as a group with instituting policy changes and influencing consumer and popular culture (Ragan and Bowen, 2001, 511).

The contribution of older adults in environmental design is not only an issue of principle or ethics, but will be demanded by older adults in the future. As Schindler points out, "with the growth of the elderly population, the theme of empowerment and its actual negotiation will emerge as an issue of great importance" (Schindler, 1999, 165).

Changes are gradually taking place, as seen in the developments within critical gerontology. Both the political economy and the humanistic perspectives of aging address issues of empowerment, "whether through societal transformations in the redistribution of wealth and income or through the creation of new rituals and other means to facilitate transitions to and through later life" (Minkler, 1996, 471). However, Minkler suggests that the issue of the elderly and empowerment must examine the feminist literature on changing 'power over' to 'power with' and 'power to' (Minkler, 1996, 472). As Minkler explains:

If gerontologists are serious about reframing old notions of 'power over' to embrace feminist concerns with 'power to' and 'power with', then the elderly themselves must be afforded a much greater role in

deciding both the project agenda and the steps for achieving it. This is critical, in part simply to ensure that the issues addressed are the ones that really matter (Minkler, 1996, 474).

Schneekloth and Shibley share Minkler's view. They advocate for a postmodern discourse that breaks power down into multiple modes; "power over, power to control, power with, power for, power to act, and power to share, that is, to empower" (Schneekloth and Shibley, 2000, 138).

Empowerment is not possible when others continually and authoritatively define the needs of marginalized people (Minkler, 1996, 476-7). A shift has to occur in society from the stages Moody and Hofland term *Rejection* and *Social Service* towards achieving *Participation* and *Self-Actualization*. Schindler and others advocate for the use of postmodern approaches in addressing marginalized populations and empowerment, approaches which increase the opportunity for growth, mastery, and ability to exercise self-determination, significance, and meaning (Schindler, 1999, 165, 175). Collaborative and participatory practices with older adults in design have the potential to accomplish these outcomes.

Empowerment also demands recognition that all older adults do not experience the aging process in the same way. Generalist views of the elderly as a homogeneous group are detrimental to the goal of empowerment. As stated by Minkler, "a real commitment to empowerment would mean recognizing and reinforcing the essential meaning of old age which transcends the state of our

bodies and involves the right to flourish and grow in whatever ways are possible” (Minkler, 1996, 473).

It is questionable, however, whether true empowerment of marginalized groups can ever be achieved. Critics are cynical that “behind the euphemisms of community participation and empowerment lay the realities of power, control, and ownership” (Minkler, 1996, 476). Distinctions of power exist between professionals and older adults, whether they are health care workers, bureaucracies, or academics. As noted by Minkler, “even when older people are encouraged to set their own goals, they are, in reality, often asked to do so ‘within the context of pre-existing goals’ that outside experts have determined to be important” (Minkler, 1996, 476). This means that a real commitment to the empowerment of older adults demands more than incorporating the empowerment rhetoric that simply attempts to blur hierarchical distinctions (Minkler, 1996, 476-477). The elderly must be able to play a far greater role in determining the policies and programs that affect their lives (Minkler, 1996, 476-7). Redefining roles in order to reduce the power differential and allow for more effective and lasting forms of empowerment is essential for success. For Foucault, it is discourse through which power is constantly expressed and that shapes the amount of control in people’s experiences (Carter and Everitt, 1998, 87). An evaluation of appropriate discourses that can eliminate, or at least reduce, the variable of power between the ‘expert’ and ‘user’ is key to the reversal of ‘power over’ to ‘power to’ and ‘power with’. Social action as a form of

discourse may provide answers, challenging the issue of power, and guiding the participation of the elderly in the design process.

Empowerment Through Participatory Design

The involvement of older adults in design practice would not only increase their power in decision-making processes, but would also increase design professionals' knowledge and understanding of the aging process and increase the quality, suitability, and 'fit' of the built environment. Involving users serves to prevent the inappropriate and inexcusable situation of person-environment 'misfit'. The elderly populations' contribution in housing design processes should be encouraged to prevent this situation. As Demerbilek and Demirkan state, user participation is essential "to avoid complicating the lives of elderly people by imposing on them inadequate housing" (Demerbilek and Demirkan, 1998, 161).

Participatory design and communicative action may be key in providing a discourse that can both empower the elderly *and* provide for more appropriate environments. Participatory processes question past paradigms of decision-making in design, opting for a model that includes many stakeholders to reach a common goal. The process of participatory design intends to build emancipatory knowledge through communication and inclusion of multiple interests.

However, not all participatory processes provide equal benefit in regard to empowerment. As mentioned previously, people define participation in many different ways. Successfully attaining the goal of individual or community empowerment through participation is dependent on how participation is approached and practiced. Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969) provides a scale of participatory processes ranging from non-participatory and non-empowering processes to engaging and valuable participation that can result in participants truly having control and ownership over decisions and gaining empowerment. Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Rocha uses the terms *mediated empowerment* and *socio-political empowerment* to distinguish between two very different participatory practices that have very different empowering capabilities (Rocha, 1997, 36-37). *Mediated empowerment* denotes the process of empowerment that is generally mediated by an expert or professional (Rocha, 1997, 36). The goal of this level of participation is merely to elicit the knowledge and information necessary for a decision to be made by experts. Though information is exchanged, and some decisions are made by participants, this style of participation is often used to involve the user primarily to gain project buy-in and to extract information needed for professionals to proceed with the project design. In mediated empowerment, issues related to unequal status and power are not adequately addressed or considered, and rarely does empowerment prove to be an outcome (Rocha, 1997, 37).

Instead, Rocha advocates for *socio-political empowerment*. This approach to participation, according to Rocha, focuses on *transformative populism*, in which the empowerment and development of the people are considered first and foremost, and the resulting product is viewed as secondary (Rocha, 1997, 37). Socio-political empowerment is “developmental in nature in that it places theoretical importance on stages of growth through knowledge acquisition and collaborative social action” (Rocha, 1997, 37).

Rocha believes that empowerment is not something that another person can simply give or offer, but instead is an individual experience through which a person acknowledges their situation and claims a role. According to Rocha, this can only take place if the participatory process provides an opportunity for participants to recognize their social, political, and economic conditions. In order to complete the process of empowerment, the participant must be able to reflect upon their relationship to power structures and take collective action to remedy their situation (Rocha, 1997, 38). Rocha believes that participatory processes have this capability. She does admit that this form of participation requires more time, commitment, and financial resources, however, this investment is required if empowerment truly is an objective of the process (Rocha, 1997, 39).

Carter and Everitt also advocate the necessity of reflection in participatory processes (Carter and Everitt, 1998, 84). Self-reflection is crucial to this process, providing the opportunity for questioning the origin and expected outcomes of

each step. Reflective thinking, evaluation, and deliberation develop and capture new meanings through a practice that is continuously scrutinized in ways that are dialogical and dynamic (Forester, 1999; Carter and Everitt 1998; Schon, 1983). Questioning, activity, and product are not seen as separate entities, but as one holistic process towards a desired goal. As Carter and Everitt state, each gathers meaning from its relationship to the other within the particular practice and context (Carter and Everitt, 1998, 87). In a participatory process for an older adult community centre that included older adults, Bergeron observed that, “as participants saw their own ideas included they became more and more sympathetic and supportive of the ideas of their fellow participants” (Bergeron, 2005). This cumulative learning from one another served to enrich both the process experience, and arguably the final product.

Both participatory design and communicative action emphasize the incorporation of dialogue as essential to working towards solution. In a study that examined two projects working with older adults – a health promotion and an arts program – Carter and Everitt examined the concept of conversation as an approach to practice. The study had three significant findings:

- 1) *Practice should pay attention to processes involving conversation and interaction for the benefit of practitioners and older people alike.*
- 2) *Activities were simultaneously vehicles for generating talk and also allowing older people to experience themselves in new ways (cognitively, creatively, etc.).*
- 3) *The value attached to ‘products’ of practice must evolve from democratic practices. It is important to resist the tendency, and increasingly the requirement, for the product to override and constrain process (Carter and Everitt, 1998, 96).*

Iris Marion Young advocates for openness to various forms of communication in order for deliberative democracy to be 'internally inclusive' (Barnes, 2005, 250). Young argues for a need to encompass forms of communication that go beyond rational argument to including emotional, passionate, and expressive communication, and narrative or storytelling. Allowing deliberative practice to embrace and encourage these forms of communication provides for an enriched discussion that includes the subjective experience and socio-historical contexts (Barnes, 2005, 250).

Transformative Participation

The elderly must become more involved in the process of planning and design, moving from methods of mere 'consultation' that have been employed in the past. As Woudhuysen states, besides responding to questionnaires and attending focus groups, the elderly should also work in teams with designers, entering early and directly into the design process and "get them designing with us" (Woudhuysen, 1993, 46).

As previously stated, participation is not only a way in which practitioners are able to create more suitable and appropriate environments for users, but participation can also serve to increase social capital through the inclusion of marginalized populations. As McLaverty states, participation should be of developmental benefit to all participants, more so than just a consultative

exercise in which participants gain nothing and only the seeker of information gains (McLaverty, 2002, 187). Kumar reflects on the potential of participant empowerment, stating:

Participation is therefore being increasingly viewed as the process of empowering the local people. The focus is on transfer of power and change in the power structure. Thus, interactive participation and participation through self-mobilization are critical for participation to become a process of empowering the people so that they gain more control over their own resources and lives.
(Kumar, 2002, 26).

However, exactly how to accomplish this is not clear in the literature on participation. Jeremy Till proposes the concept *transformative participation*, drawn from the ideas of John Friedmann, to frame the empowering potential of participation. Transformative participation “acknowledges the imbalances of power and knowledge, but at the same time works with these imbalances in a way that transforms the expectations and futures of the participants” (Till, 2005, 27). Transformative participation does not require the designer and the citizen to assume they have equal power or equal knowledge. As Till states, transformative participation cannot simply be achieved through the disavowal of expert knowledge or by making designer’s knowledge more accountable by making it more transparent (Till, 2005, 31). This proved to not work in early attempts at participatory design (Till, 2005, 31). Kernohan *et al.* concur with Till, stating that “participation itself need not necessarily imply a democratic process” and that the inseparability between power and knowledge precludes the potential of neutral relations between designers and clients (Kernohan *et al.*, 1992, 144). Instead, Till

states that a move towards “transformative participation demands a reformulation of expert knowledge and the way it may be enacted” (Till, 2005, 31).

Till provides key suggestions to increase the potential of transformative practice in participation. These include:

- 1) *Incorporating new ways of knowing:*
 - a. *Moving from a model of trying to know ‘how’ or know ‘that’, to a knowing ‘from within’, or a ‘developmental’ knowledge that adjusts to socio-cultural surroundings and context and the needs of the user.*
 - b. *Moving to more of an activist role, working on behalf of, and as, a dweller.*
 - c. *Viewing the practitioner as expert-citizen as well as a citizen-expert.*

- 2) *Incorporating negotiation and conversation:*
 - a. *The process becomes two-way and expansive through both ‘speaking’ and ‘hearing’ and involving connection between a communicator and an audience.*
 - b. *Negotiation allows participation to transcend pragmatics. If negotiation dies, the hope for splendid inhabitation does and most likely someone else other than dwellers will take over.*
 - c. *Negotiation of hope – a potentially contested but ultimately positive process, both alert to the realities and positing a better future.*
 - d. *Replacing the normative metaphor of design as the search for a solution with the idea of design as ‘sense-making’. Sense-making is not simply a matter of instrumental problem-solving, it is a matter of altering, respecting, acknowledging, and shaping people’s lived worlds.*
 - e. *Use of conversation and storytelling.*

- 3) *Making Best Sense*
 - a. *Best sense aims at not an absolute best but a partial best and offers a more realistic orientation about the good, but also allows us to best understand and make sense of the actions of others.*

- b. *Best sense means that:*
 - i. *No one perfect solution exists.*
 - ii. *Others are involved in the process, it is not the work of the lone intellect.*
 - iii. *The very contingency of architectural practice.*
- c. *Allows for the acceptance of difference rather than the imposition of a false equality, even if this might grate with accepted liberal norms of participation, in which the search for a solution acceptable to all is paramount.*
- d. *Allows for participation that moves beyond the token involvement of users towards a more transformative model. In order for this to happen, architects need to accept changes to the standard methods and values of practice, and in particular to see that the issues that participation brings to the fore present not a threat but an opportunity, leading to a more empowering form of architecture (Till, 2005, 27-41).*

These recommendations for transformative participation provide a framework to reconsider the practice of participatory design. Till does admit that this concept will not resolve all issues related to participation. As he states, “this notion of transformative participation is too cozy: it suggests idealized conditions of mutual cooperation, uncontested knowledge bases, open communication, and eventual consensus”, and Till recognizes that in reality such ideals do not exist (Till, 2005, 34). However, it does contribute to the advancement of participatory practice and attempts to incrementally resolve issues including communication gaps and power imbalances.

However, transformative participation does provide an opportunity to explore the potential this practice can have on participants and the quality of environments. The practitioner has the capability to have an enormous impact in the lives of participants if they so choose to engage in this practice. As Fowles states:

The implications of incorporating participation reach beyond changes in the structure of the design process and the methods of construction, to altering the conventional relationship between the expert and the user. The architect also becomes the facilitator of change within the participants themselves in terms of personal and community transformation towards empowerment and ownership (Fowles, 2000, 102).

This impact on participants may reach far beyond the goal of creating suitable, appropriate, and innovative environments. Participation may be able to reach out and heal through its transformative possibilities.

There is another important aspect of a participatory worldview. It is not so much about the search for truth and knowledge as it is about healing. And above all, healing the alienation, the split that characterizes modern experience...to heal means to make whole. We can only understand our world as a whole if we are part of it. As soon as we attempt to stand outside, we divide and separate. Making whole necessarily implies participation...[and] in a participatory worldview, meaning and mystery are restored to human experience (Reason, 1998, 42-43).

This kind of practice requires a visionary approach to design, planning, and participatory design in order to create the places and spaces in which people can thrive. This entails addressing the institutionalization of participation and processes that seek only to satisfy mandated requirements. These practices, according to Francis, only further defend exclusionary and conservative principles (Francis, 1999, 61). As Francis states:

Proactive professionals can be distinguished from their traditional counterparts by their visionary approach and their commitment to a participatory process through which the community can modify or enlarge the vision. Proactive professionals use skills in risk-taking, negotiation, and entrepreneurial enterprise, base their thoughts and actions on strong social and environmental values, employ

advocacy as part of their approach and are skilful in implementation to make sure their vision is realized (Francis, 1999, 61-64).

This requires a shift in design practice from an exclusively client serving culture that fulfills preconceived notions of space and place to one of vision-making. Francis challenges all practitioners to reevaluate their role and relationship with and for clients and the public, question traditional design and planning practices, and discover design possibilities through visionary, risky, and transformative approaches.

Participation of Older Adults

The participation of older adults in design processes provides an incredible opportunity for the creation of environments that are appropriate and suitable to their needs while at the same time empowering this population so often excluded from decisions that affect their lives. It is only through a participatory process that the knowledge of this population can be accessed, a feeling of control and ownership be claimed, and a voice be given to a population in the margins. Further, as the population ages in the coming years with the aging of the baby boom generation, the need for environments that allow for the best quality of life possible for older adults will increase dramatically.

In a study on user satisfaction of housing options for older Canadians, CMHC noted in the recommendations that “older people want to have a say in the

choices and features of their living environments and they can contribute valuable input” (CMHC, 2001, 5). Hartman agrees with this stating, “the elderly have important and useful things to say to those involved in producing and designing housing for them” (Hartman, 2002, 171). However, Hartman does note that new techniques, policies, and mechanisms must be devised to structure and encourage their participation.

Conclusion

Critical gerontology has successfully brought attention to how older adults are viewed both by themselves and others through the political economy and humanistic perspectives. These analyses allow for a more critical examination of older adulthood in order to explain and rectify the marginalization of older adults in society.

The participation of older adults in design processes provides an opportunity through which older adults can actively engage in decisions that affect their lives and offers the potential for empowerment. The proposal for transformative participation is a framework for such a process and directly links with current theoretical developments in planning including increasing the insurgent potential of older adults, developing collaborative modes of communication, and emphasizing place-based decision-making.

The following sections explore the perceptions, opinions, and views of design practitioners who have engaged in participatory practice with older adults. The intention of the interviews and analysis was to gain a better understanding of how participatory practice has been incorporated in design processes in the past, and more fully understand how practitioners' philosophies and actions compare to the literature on the topic and transformative participation principles. A list of recommendations for future practice and research were developed and are presented following the analysis.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Preamble

A qualitative approach to research was used to address the key questions and objectives of this study. Design practitioners were contacted to share their experiences of working in a participatory process with older adults through a semi-structured interview. Details regarding the use of a qualitative approach, the methodology, interviewee selection, and analysis are described in the following section.

Qualitative Approach

This study follows an interpretive approach to qualitative research. This is effective in exploring people's beliefs, views, experiences, interpretations, and understandings from the data collected (Mason, 2002, 56). As Blaikie states, the goal of the interpretive approach is to understand perceptions, or what he terms the 'insider view' (Blaikie, 2000, 115). This approach to qualitative research is most appropriate for this study considering that the intent of the project is to explore design practitioners' individual and collective understandings, reasoning processes, and social norms regarding participatory design practice with older adults (Mason, 2002, 56). Critical to this study was to find out why practitioners

believe participatory design with older adults is important, and how they perceive the practice should be approached in the future.

Methodology

The research methodology chosen for this project was the qualitative interview, also referred to as in-depth, semi-structured, or loosely structured interview (Mason, 2002, 62). The interview method was selected as it effectively captures people's understandings, experiences, and perceptions (Mason, 2002, 63). This method of interviewing allows for casual, open, and comfortable dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee.

The University of Manitoba Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board approved the research study and methodology (see Appendix A).

Interviewee Selection

Interviewees were selected based on the criteria that they had been directly involved in a participatory design project with older adults, that they played a key role in the development and execution of the process, and that they themselves are design practitioners – defined broadly to include planners, landscape architects, architects, and interior designers.

As the practice of participatory design with older adults has not been extensively practiced to date, it was difficult at first to find practitioners who had been involved in this kind of activity. The criteria for interviewee selection in the study had to be broad due to the limited number of practitioners that have involved older adults in design projects. As the focus of the study is on the *process* not the *product* of participation with older adults, the scale or function of the design project did not require limits. The inclusion of a variety of scales and functions allowed for a realistic sample of projects that have involved older adults in the past and environments that will continue to be required in the future.

A first round of potential interviewees was identified through the literature review and an Internet search. From this list, six practitioners were confirmed for interviews. Further interview leads were suggested by contacts from the preliminary interviews. Another three interviews were conducted from the list of recommended practitioners. A total of nine interviews were conducted with practitioners who had been involved in a participatory process with older adults.

Interviews

Once an interview date and time was scheduled with an interviewee, a consent form (see Appendix B) and letter (see Appendix C) detailing the focus of the interview was faxed to the interviewee. The interviews were recorded on tape over a telephone microphone for the purposes of transcription. The questions for

the semi-structured interviews are listed in Appendix D. The interviews ranged in duration from one-hour to one-hour and forty-five minutes.

The interview guide provided a thorough exploration of the issues related to participation with older adults based upon the literature review. The questions were extremely detailed in order to capture the many topics and issues explored in the study. However, the interviewees did not answer each question equally. In some instances, the interview questions required probing when a response required further development or addressed a new or unexpected issue. In other cases, questions had to be repeated or reframed if the interviewee did not adequately address the topic. This was only an issue pertaining to some questions for only a small number of interviewees. Therefore, the inability to answer a question was most likely due to a lack of knowledge in that particular area on the part of the interviewee, not due to the ineffectiveness of those particular questions. These issues are further explored in the analysis and research findings in Chapter 5.

Analysis

Consistent with the qualitative approach of the study, the analysis of the interviews was conducted through both literal and interpretive methods (Mason, 2002, 149). A literal analysis of the data requires examining the content, structure, style, the words and language used, the sequence of interactions, and

the form of the dialogue. An interpretive approach to analysis requires the researcher to construct or document their own version of the meaning and representation of the data and that can be inferred (Mason, 2002, 149). Remaining open to these forms of data analysis enriched the research findings and recommendations. Considering that the content of the interview questions ranged from basic information inquiries to seeking complex and subjective opinions, it was necessary to record the literal details as well as interpret the situations and context of the responses. The analysis formulated major themes, made connections between similar perspectives, and highlighted unique experiences.

Both cross-sectional analysis and contextual processes of analysis were incorporated to provide insight into the synthesis and recommendations. Cross sectional analysis involves devising a consistent system for indexing the whole data set according to a set of common principles and measures (Mason, 2002, 150). In this study, selected interview questions were used as measures to answer key research questions, particularly surrounding the issues of empowerment and transformative participation. This was extremely useful in spotting trends, patterns, similarities, and differences within the approaches of design practitioners. However, the analysis could not be limited to this form of data interpretation. A contextual analysis was also conducted. This approach requires recognizing the discrete parts, cases, or contexts, whether it is for specific details or from a holistic point of view, and does not require viewing the

data set through the same lens as in cross-sectional analysis (Mason, 2002, 165). This was important in understanding the interviewees' views towards participation and its potential.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Research Findings

Preamble

The following section provides insights into the analysis and findings from the interviews with practitioners. The main objective of this study is to describe practitioners' experiences working with older adults in participatory processes and shed light into this needed practice. The analysis was conducted so as to contribute to and reflect on the key questions of the study:

- 1) How did past projects that incorporated older adults in the design process define participation and involve older adults?
- 2) How do practitioners view the costs and benefits of the participatory process?
- 3) How do practitioners evaluate a participatory project?
- 4) What makes participatory processes with older adults unique?
- 5) How do practitioners feel that the participatory process increased the suitability and appropriateness of the environments for older adults?
- 6) How do practitioners feel that the participants were empowered through this process?
- 7) How might participatory processes improve and expand in the future considering the anticipated increase in the proportion of the older adult population? Who is responsible?

The data was analyzed through both cross-sectional and contextual approaches. From the analysis, a number of themes were discovered. The themes are grouped into three larger categories.

- 1) Current Participatory Design Practice with Older Adults
- 2) Practitioner Perspective on Participatory Design with Older Adults
- 3) Future of Participatory Design with Older Adults

Data Analysis

Current Participatory Design Practice with Older Adults

Type of Project

All of the practitioners interviewed were directly involved in the development and implementation of a participatory process with older adults. Most respondents were involved in the projects at a managerial level, including partners of firms, principals, and project managers. The projects that the practitioners were involved with range in scale and function. They include:

- Large-scale continuing care retirement community
- Group home
- Collective dwelling
- Assisted living facility
- Community centres
- Neighbourhood and housing visioning project

Participatory Techniques

Within these design projects, a variety of different participatory techniques were incorporated. By far the most prevalent technique used was small group discussion. Nearly all interviewees mentioned that small group discussions were used and are a preferred method. A number of practitioners mentioned the effectiveness of this technique in allowing for constructive dialogue and productive discussions that resulted in mutual learning. Smaller group settings allow for more thorough discussion and are better in developing a relationship built on mutual learning and trust.

Another technique commonly used in participatory processes was three-dimensional modeling. A number of interviewees noted modeling as an instrumental technique. According to the respondents, the predominant reason why modeling is so useful is that it communicates spatial relationships far better than two-dimensional drawings or verbal description.

That's the only way people can at least begin to visualize what things can look like (I 4).

We would almost always have a study model of the site of simply the existing conditions because most people cannot visualize...They can't understand drawings, it's got to be in 3-D or it's a fake (I 9).

The modeling techniques mentioned by interviewees was not limited to the presentation of a final representative model for participants to simply view. A number of interviewees used modeling as a working tool to both construct and

understand space. Computer modeling was also mentioned by a number of the interviewees as an effective tool to represent three-dimensional space.

The charette was also mentioned in the list of techniques used by a few of the interviewees. Interviewees noted the effectiveness and efficiency of this method. However, one of the participants mentioned that he hates the use of the term 'charette' because no one, aside from those in the design profession, knows what it means.

I don't like the word "charette" because nobody knows what it means except architects, and it's terrible if you have to define what it means... You know, people understand a "community workshop", but once you talk about "charette" then you have to define it and people don't understand why, and it's really crazy (I 4).

The respondent prefers to use of the term "community design workshop" as it better describes the actual activity and who is actually involved. This speaks to the importance of clarity and eliminating design jargon when working with participants.

A number of traditional or conventional participatory techniques were mentioned including surveys, interviews, focus groups, large group meetings, observation, visioning, community hearings, and preferencing. However, there were also a number of creative and innovative participatory techniques incorporated into the processes of some practitioners including collage, collective poetry, an art exhibition, a mural, video, and a lecture and discussion series.

Most of the techniques used during the processes were included so to provoke dialogue and debate. Practitioners were very much interested in the concept of mutual learning and the sharing of ideas between all stakeholders. Techniques such as small group discussions and charettes proved successful in achieving this objective, as did more creative methods such as the collective poetry and the mural. The inclusion of techniques that told a story about the experiences of participants was equally important to some practitioners. This included the use of sketches into storyboards and the art-based techniques. The only instances of using more passive and strictly information gathering techniques such as a survey or closed-ended interview were at the very beginning of projects to establish the context or spark interest in a community.

Participant Involvement

Many theorists on participatory design speak to the importance of engaging users from the very inception of the project. From discussions with practitioners who have led participatory processes, this ideal situation was not common. In the projects the interviewees were involved with, the practitioners were brought into the project once a brief, whether loose or well developed, had already been created by the client, generally a housing organization or a municipal government. It may be rare that participants are able to take part in these very first developmental stages as a project requires some parameters and definition before the designers are even hired. This was the situation for most of the

interviewees, and is a dilemma in participatory design and engaging a user group from the inception of a project. Even if the design team hired for the job chooses to use a participatory process, the client instigating the project may not consider this option or even know it is possible.

In the experiences of the interviewees, there was a wide range of participant involvement throughout the process. For the most part, once the clients hired the designers, the practitioners actively sought user involvement.

Well with this particular project the seniors were very, very much involved in the design process from the very, very beginning (I 1).

[Participants were involved] right at the beginning (I 4).

This includes heavy participant involvement in the pre-schematic and schematic phases of the project. It is in these stages when most of the participatory techniques were used to promote dialogue and make decisions.

Only a small number of the projects continued with participant involvement into the construction document, contract, and building drawing stages.

Definitely in the schematic design stage they were involved in every phase of that, and then a little bit less, but they were still involved in the design development and construction documents, and then in construction administration (I 1).

However, some interviewees do not even consider participant involvement past the schematic design phase.

The participatory part of it really dwindles at that [construction document phase] point because there's no need to. Most of the things are already fixed and all we're doing is putting together the technical information to get the building built (I 2).

Obviously they're not going to be participating in construction documents (I 6).

They were certainly not involved in owner/architect contract and owner/general contractor construction contract. They were certainly not involved during construction. They were certainly not involved in bidding. They are not involved in late value engineering...It's too complicated...Otherwise the process is absurdly long and impossible and unrealistic...I'd say ideally one might say, "Oh sure they should be involved all the way through". Realistically it's impossible. No one could afford it...As strongly as I can believe in participatory design, I do not believe in "Let's all jump in this together and keep sketching all the way to the end". It's stupid. It's ridiculous (I 9).

These practitioners were very clear and emphatic about not including participation during these stages. Judging from their responses, they see little value in including users at all in construction drawing and document stages and seem closed to the possibility of mutual learning extending to these phases.

Two interviewees did clarify that they generally don't involve participants in construction documents, but that they are not opposed to a last minute change if necessary.

Certainly the hope is that the process to that point has adequately addressed the interest involved. That's not to say that minor changes might not occur, but when you're in construction documents that is not the point in which you start reprogramming (I 6).

Not as much [involved in construction documents] because as a rule we're trying to say, "You make a decision then you stay there"

because it's [too difficult] to back up – unless there was an idea that came up, and said, "You know, I don't think that's really correct", and then we'd take a look at it...Our ears are never closed (I 7).

As well, even if participants were not included fully in these final stages, in many cases they were at least informed about where the project was at in relation to the timeline and what to anticipate in the next phase.

However, there may be benefits in including participants through to the end of a project. For projects that did include participants throughout, participants became increasingly interested as the project neared completion.

We would have tours to see progress as it went into construction. I think that's where more of the interest [was] – they were anticipating the completion of a project and so we would actually arrange events or situations where we could go out and take a look and this is this in a certain stage and things like that (I 7).

They expected tours through the construction site, obviously chaperoned, and on days where it was safe to do so (I 8).

One interviewee regrets not involving participants more throughout the entire process, acknowledging that there is still a lot to be learned for the participants and the design team.

I think from every process you learn something new and on this process I would probably continue to keep them more informed in the middle phases where we're actually doing the documentation, and I would do more field visits with them (I 1).

It should be noted that the two projects that did involve user participation extensively through to the end of the process had heavy involvement from

the municipal government regarding participatory process. It was not clear from these two interviews specifically whether participation throughout the entire process was a mandated policy or the choice of the design team.

Stakeholders Involved

The participants for most of the projects discussed in the interviews included a combination of the following stakeholders: older adult users, advisory committees, the design team, contractors, administrators, community residents, politicians, specialists, media, and municipal officials. If the project could not access the actual users, the design team would have a representative group identified by the client.

The inability in some instances to involve the actual users was mentioned by a number of interviewees as a major challenge of engaging in a participatory process. This occurs in projects in which the future users have not yet been identified. In these cases, the practitioner established a representative group. This was interpreted by some practitioners as one of the realities of participatory design and one of the challenges particular to working with an older adult population for collective dwellings.

We do find it difficult in newer buildings to find the end user, but we certainly can go to other facilities, other buildings, and other apartments and find people who are willing to help us out with things and lessons learned (I 2).

Most of our projects are such that there's not a community as such in advance of the execution of the project who are going to be the residents...so to have the luxury of sitting down with the person who is going to be living in Unit 101 is more often than not something we don't have (I 6).

A number of interviewees mentioned that it is crucial that every effort is made to include all stakeholders and that no one is excluded. If people are left out of the process, feel disenfranchised, or have an opposing view, it only leads to delaying the project.

You just cannot afford to buy any kind of contention which is not part of the process...It spills itself out in terms of cost escalations (I 6).

The announcements were all open primarily because we didn't want any other voices coming in later and saying that they were excluded. In other words, even people that didn't agree, we asked them to attend (I 7).

Judging from these responses, it is questionable whether or not practitioners want to include all possible stakeholders due to their philosophical belief and in order to increase the suitability of the design, or if it is simply to appease all interests and avoid costly delays due to conflict.

Only one interviewee mentioned that there could be extraneous circumstances in which a particular interest may not be invited to participate.

To be honest, I would say that if it's already known that a local home owners group or name of a group is predisposed to be negative, then they might not be invited because it could be intimidating for the seniors to find themselves in the midst of an antagonistic meeting, and we don't want them to hold back (I 9).

However, one interviewee argued against this view, as it may be advantageous to have opponents present.

You're going to get people responding who have a negative response. So this allows you to best address the very people that you want on board. The people who may, for whatever reasons, good or bad, form an initial negative response are the best people to educate to and bring along, hopefully in a positive manner, with the process. Because experience has shown that they tend to ultimately be the strongest proponents when you're...going to the city or going to the appropriate agencies (I 6).

Another theme within the processes of those interviewed was the inclusion of specialists or experts as participants. These included professionals from gerontology, health care, and construction. This is contrary to the participatory principle of reducing the dependency on experts and accessing the knowledge of the user. However, some of the interviewees claimed that though this is true, it is also important to include those with specialized knowledge. They believe that participation is not necessarily about excluding expertise from the process, but instead recognizing a broader definition of what expertise includes and ensuring that all required knowledges are involved.

Practitioner Perspective on Participatory Design with Older Adults

Defining Participation

Some practitioners had a difficult time providing a succinct definition of *participation*.

That is a total loaded question...I don't know how to answer it in two minutes (I 5).

Lord knows how many definitions that might carry (I 6).

This is not surprising considering the wide range of definitions listed in the literature and the wide range of practices that claim to be participatory as mentioned in Chapter 2. Perhaps due to the broad interpretation of participation, some interviewees did not even answer the question at first. Instead, some interviewees jumped into describing their process and not their personal definition or perspective. The reason for this may be due to an inability to clearly articulate something that people practice but cannot necessarily express why or how. This is problematic considering that if providing a definition is difficult then the participatory process itself may be equally as elusive and mysterious to communicate to clients and participants.

However, from the definitions that were provided, there was relative similarity between the literature and the respondents' perspective of what participation encompasses.

I think it's getting the users involved in the design process from the very beginning, and getting their input, and that the design team can understand...their hopes and objectives (I 1).

Participatory design has to do with including as many viewpoints as possible, in particular the end user (I 2).

So my view of participatory/community design is involving people who are affected by design decisions (I 4).

Participatory design is an opportunity that allows all the various stakeholders in a project to become involved in the design process. That's very general (I 5).

For a number of interviewees, the perspective on participation could not be simply answered in a short statement. It required a connection to their worldview or philosophical standpoint.

The term participation, to me it's embedded in what I see as a notion of citizenship. So it evokes for me the value and the necessity for involving what I refer to as stakeholders in any design process (I 3).

[My definition] starts with a kind of a political science discussion of the difference between a represented democracy and a participatory democracy. We live in...a represented democracy where we elect people to represent our viewpoint. Now typically that's a kind of winning and losing situation because quite often 49% of the population loses. A participatory democracy is very different. It's one where people who are affected by decisions are directly involved in the process of making those decisions (I 4).

Some interviewees were quick to distinguish their approach to participation in comparison to other design practitioners in general.

From what I know...most often architects are concerned about getting the building designed, getting it together, getting it out on a schedule, and could view the participation of senior adults as just another layer that really isn't necessary perhaps...I think that perhaps we're a bit different in that we don't see that as a needless layer, but we see it as an important layer in terms of getting people involved and making our design better (I 2).

However, for the most part there was general uncertainty from many respondents as to how their practice is different from that of other practitioners.

I suppose that it could (I 1).

Well, I'm not sure I can speak too well in that regard (I 6).

It doesn't differ greatly (I 8).

Many of these same interviewees did continue to elaborate on how their practice may differ from that of other firms. However, many did not know for sure that their practice was dramatically unique. This may be due to reasons of their practice not actually differing that much, or may simply be due to a lack of knowledge of work other practitioners are engaged in due to little cross-practitioner communication.

Even when comparing themselves to other practitioners who do practice participatory design, the interviewees clarified that not all participatory design is equal. The level of participant involvement and duration of that involvement is what many cited as the distinction between their practice and the approach other designers choose.

I think that for me having [made] sure there is involvement is what I would consider participatory design, where for others would feel that just in the beginning when you're just doing the schematic design or concept design – “that's where we need their input” - and then walk away and finish it up...In reality there's so many changes that could be occurring all the way through all the way to construction administration...That's how we see it, where I know that other firms walk away and finish it up themselves (I 1).

I would say that ours is non-commercial, whereas architects working for a private developer who do the so-called focus groups. I think have an agenda, spoken or unspoken, that is likely to be different from ours. I think they're looking for the short-term assurance of marketability (I 9).

Rationale for Participation

The primary reason that the interviewed practitioners engaged in a participatory design process was out of a personal position towards design process. These were not processes that were new or unique to them. Their entire practice is based within a broader position towards participation.

For me it's a philosophical issue that the end user needs to be heard, and when they're certainly available it's critical that we listen to them, take their knowledge and wishes and desires and incorporate them into our knowledge to create a building that's specific for them (I 2).

I include participatory processes in every design, in all the design work that I do...That is basically, on my part, a political position, the work that I've done in my entire career has been to empower people through design decision-making processes (I 5).

Well we do it every time. We never do it without it (I 9).

Though the general theme emerged that their use of participation stemmed from a personal position about design, some interviewees did admit that participation was included due to a client's request or a city policy or regulation. In these situations the client or local government sought the design team out specifically because of their experience in participatory design.

The Value of Listening

A common theme in the data was that listening is the most crucial factor in participatory processes. One interviewee provided his definition of participation with one word, "Listening" (I 9).

Listening is probably the most difficult, but yet the most important, part of any participatory design. You must speak clearly, you must have every intent[ion] of conveying your information in a very direct, understandable way, but even more so, listening becomes the key to success. You have to be able to clearly, in turn, hear what people are saying and find out what the intent is that they're saying, and if you aren't quite understanding what you're hearing, it's very important to question, examine and follow-up to have a very clear understanding that what you're listening to is accurate and correct (I 2).

And this is probably one of the most critical aspects of any kind of participatory process, and that's the listening part, and I think as a society we're really not very good at listening. So people have to be trained to listen (I 4).

However, as one interview pointed out, listening is important, but the design team is in control of what is being asked and must take this responsibility seriously.

There's nothing to listen to unless you ask good questions. So when you ask them and you begin to get some answers, balancing listening and questioning involves fashioning follow-up questions and probing, and trying to get the complexion of the answer (I 9).

The balance of speaking and listening requires continual monitoring through all stages of the design, for both the practitioner and the participants.

You've always got to be listening. But again, as far as speaking goes, it's whether you're speaking for yourself or trying to

communicate and articulate what perhaps [they] cannot – at least what you interpret properly – the participant interest (I 6).

Understanding Another Point of View

Another key theme that emerged from the interviews is an explanation by interviewees of exactly what design practitioners should be listening for.

Practitioners emphasized that designers need to look beyond the long list of spatial requests, and truly understand the values, needs, histories, and desires of the participants. This requires understanding their point of view and respecting their knowledge and expertise.

The other factor that's important is a recognition that everybody who is affected by design decisions has an expertise that's equal to but different than that of the architect. You know, old people are expert at being old... So it's important to recognize that in any kind of participatory process, first of all, everybody in the process has to be involved equally, and everybody has an expertise that's important and different... They know more about their life and their problems than architects will ever know, so it's really an important source of information... So if we're designing for a particular group of people then it's important to know who they are, what their preferences are and what their beliefs are (I 4).

One interviewee acknowledged that designers have to enter the process with humility and respect for the participants. Designers have a lot to offer to the process, but practitioners must realize that they are only one piece of the equation. It is simply not possible to think that one person can know everything that there is to know.

You know it's really difficult if you're 25, 30, or 35 to understand what it's like when you're 75, 80, and 85 (I 4).

We as designers can't approach the community as knights on white horses because, first of all, we're not (I 6).

Clarification of Roles and Expectations

An important aspect of participatory design is the clarification of roles and expectations of the involved participants. When answering questions regarding how practitioners informed participants about roles and expectations, a number of interviewees instead explained the roles of the design team instead of the participants. This may be due to the fact that some of the practitioners simply did not clarify roles and expectations with participants.

Only a few practitioners did clarify the roles and expectations of participants at the onset of the project. Much of this was in the format of introductions and establishing the framework for the project.

It was explained that they would be involved in a month-to-month process where we'd be walking through the development of the plans and the project specifics where we look for their opinions and feedback. We specifically outlined that we would make the design process as understandable as possible and that would be reflected in documents and exhibits that we would show them, and that in that we would get feedback from them looking for specific items and then come back in a following meeting and discuss those with our follow-up incorporation...They were expected to be full participants in that we hoped and desired that they would be fully involved in a process where many people were at a table talking collectively and that they would be encouraged to give their opinion on whatever phase of the work that we were talking about, and that they could both give their own personal opinion and what they know as the broad opinion of the community (I 2).

Establishing roles and expectations by the design team at the beginning of the process was crucial in building trust and an environment of mutual learning. As one interviewee stated, it is also important to set realistic goals of what to expect.

They should not expect that the end result is going to be Utopia but is very likely going to be a whole lot better than if we did not conduct this session (I 9).

In one of the projects it was the clients and participants who actively established the roles and expectations for all involved. This may be a rare circumstance, but indicates that clients and participants can take empowering steps before even entering into the participatory process.

In this instance the leadership group came to us with a request to play very specific roles, which were to be complete active participants in this entire process, so that they defined their own roles (I 5).

Information Generation and Ownership

All of the interviewees stressed the importance of ensuring that participants were fully aware of how information would be generated throughout the process and how the design team would use it.

We always talked about how information that we received would assist in guiding where we would go on the design process (I 7).

Meeting notes are written by the architect and available to anybody. There's always something to take home. So whatever the people do they take home (I 9).

The ownership of the information collected varied depending on the project. In some of the projects, the ownership of the information remained with the design team or the client. However, a few of the projects shared the rights and ownership of the collected data with the participant group, or even set up a situation in which the participants had full ownership in the end.

Ultimate ownership would be really a collective ownership by everyone (I 2).

The information would be theirs (I 5).

The issue of ownership in one case was accompanied by a transmittal with a disclaimer about how the information would be used and who owns it. However, one interviewee strongly discourages such practice as it is too formal and not required.

No. There's no contract as to who owns the information, and I think that's important. I think as soon as you get into something like ownership it suggests attorneys and legal qualities and everybody's mind shuts off. Everybody becomes greedy to own it and become famous. Bad...really, really bad (I 9).

Perspective on Purpose of Participatory Design

Participatory design is not only about gathering information to inform the design, but it also requires interpreting the perspective of the users to best find a solution. The interviewees acknowledged a balance both goals as being valuable in the process.

Dialogue and times of open discussion are the best ways to capture the perspective of the user. Information generation can come from a simply one-way consultative process, but to understand the individual and collective perspectives of participants, a two-way conversation is required.

We didn't kid ourselves that we weren't also trying to educate people along the way. It involved things like in communicating results of research, and also communicating research that we were doing kind of behind the scenes looking at the demographics of the community and looking at housing needs, and disseminating information audiences about the lack of affordable housing, for example. Then the second element, I think that finding out the perspective of the user is really critical. That's really more where participation comes in, I think. Again, it's as much trying to create a learning community as to feed perspectives and to one point to make a decision, because if we had found that as people also heard the perspectives of others it changed their own positions, or helped them, in a sense, accept different perspectives, and buy in to solutions because they no longer felt that their own perspective was the only one. So in other words, in a good participation process everybody learns (I 3).

Though both information generation and understanding the perspectives of the users were valued as important, two respondents indicated that the perspective of the user does have greater value in the process. For one interviewee, understanding the perspective of the user group guided a specific project for a Japanese-American community. Without dialogue pertaining to their worldview and perspective on how they live day-to-day, it would have been impossible to design an appropriate environment based on simply asking about spatial requirements.

Similarly, design is both about solving a problem in spatial form and making sense of the conditions requested by the users. Interviewees stated that participatory design is really about fusing these two principles together.

I think that they were re-examining their ideas about what housing for the elderly was going to be, plus they certainly fixed on certain bits and pieces of solutions (I 5).

However, some practitioners believed that sense-making approach outweighs a problem-solving perspective, primarily at the beginning of the process.

Particularly in the earlier phases the idea was to achieve some better understanding of the experiences and the use of people and sensitivities and practical realities without any particular solution in mind, other than the general one of creating a better place for people to grow old (I 3).

Leaning more on the [sense-making], but more on taking in the views and desires and then coming back and as professionals, coming up with the best solutions and then taking that back for dialogue (I 8).

Addressing Power

Power can be an obstacle to the reciprocal relationship between designers and participants as practitioners are in their field of specialty and participants may not know exactly how they can play a role.

A number of practitioners cited examples of how they ensure power does not reside solely in the hands of the designers.

I think for us it was just diving deeper into what it was that they didn't like so that they could express themselves a little bit more about what the issues were, so it was more of us trying to really focus in so that there wasn't a power struggle, so we didn't say, "Well we like it and you don't like it, so what do we do?". So it's really trying to come to a mutual understanding and then come to a decision after that (I 1).

I think it's attitudinal. If the crowd senses that the architect is not out for him/herself to become famous the issue doesn't even arise. But if they sense that they're being used then the issue arises and it's bad (I 9).

These opinions are consistent with the theory and literature on participatory design as a collaborative building endeavor. However, one practitioner does not deny that designers hold the balance of power in participatory processes.

Well, no matter, the design team has a certain amount of advantage. As much as we wanted to try to keep our role as neutral as possible, certain times – it's a term I always call "mental gymnastics?" where that you can take and bring people around and that is possibly one of the things that we have used in certain times in order to keep the design moving in a certain direction rather than always backing up or whatever. So the design team does have a lot of power in what happens (I 7).

This is contrary to principles of participatory design practice that promote equal and shared power. However, this may be a more realistic perspective with which to view power in participatory design settings, reflecting Foucault's ideas that power issues cannot be eliminated, but can only be acknowledged and mitigated.

The issue of power also relates back to establishing what the roles and expectations are for all involved individuals. Failing to clarify this at the onset

can lead to unrealistic or unknown expectations, resulting in real or perceived power imbalance.

Power between participants is another issue, one that the interviewees identified as being the responsibility of the practitioners to address.

I think it was more how do you facilitate at that point and how do you address it...so it was kind of taking control of the project at the time and just kind of being able to facilitate so that everybody was equally heard (I 1).

As long as we gave voice to those that were fairly reserved and quiet, they did get more confidence to speak up a little bit more, and were able to express themselves (I 7).

I think it's addressed silently. If somebody is perceived by us architects or the non-profit client as dominating a meeting we do our best to level the playing field and encourage people who are not speaking up to speak up. We limit the input of someone who maybe assumingly attempting to speak for the crowd, and say so as courteously, appreciative of the person who is perhaps cornering the field, but making it clear that we want to hear from everyone across the board, and "so please let's give so-and-so a chance to speak", and turn to that person and let them just patiently listen to them until they open up. So it's really a lot of discretion involved and you have to be careful not to alienate the person who is trying to dominate. You don't want to start making an us-and-them situation or the party's over. It's got to be a non-competitive atmosphere (I 9).

These issues must be addressed at the time. Though it is important to respectfully recognize the concern of the individual who dominates, it cannot be allowed to fester, slow, or derail the process. This entails that the practitioners claim power to take control of the situation. It may be argued that this creates

further power imbalance. However, some practitioners believe that this is needed to move the process forward.

In most cases there are certain individuals that will be very outspoken and certain individuals that are very aggressive and speak louder than anyone else. We're aware of that but we also know that there are probably more than one like that. Our process, right or wrong, we did use it in order to keep moving in a certain direction (I 7).

Arguably, the practitioners that feel it is their responsibility to address this issue affirm that they have the balance of power and have the authority to direct the process. This is one of the dilemmas of participatory design; deciding who has the power to direct the pace of the process.

Decision-Making

A major criticism of participatory design is that with many people involved in the decision-making, a collaborative process would not only be time consuming, but it would also be difficult to move a process forward due to differing opinions.

The interviewees did not perceive group decision-making to be an issue in their respective projects. For a number of projects, it was not difficult to decide on how to proceed.

I think in most cases we've always arrived at consensus...When you have twenty-five there and each having their own opinion, the thing is as long as you've talked about it and they were able to express themselves, they generally came to consensus (I 7).

On the whole in my experience we had ultimately pretty good consensus (I 6).

Whether or not the process actually proceeded with true 'consensus' is not known. From the responses from other interviewees, consensus may be better defined as 'no major opposition'.

Generally, in nearly all cases, general consent was arrived at. I would say that in the process in their having faith and certainly reliance on our abilities in what they had hired us for to do the job (I 2).

From this study it is not clear if true consensus in participatory design is possible or not. The term 'consensus' was used by a number of interviewees repeatedly, but it is questionable if the processes were truly consensus-based. One interviewee used the term consensus continually to describe the process, yet this interviewee's perspective on the purposes and reasons for participation was not consistent with the principles of consensus-based decision-making. The interviewee alluded to concepts of participant buy-in and restricting the subjectivity in decision-making. The use of the term 'consensus' in this situation was either accidentally misunderstood to mean 'no major opposition', or deliberately used to foil a process that had no real intention of achieving consensus.

The difficult process of collaborative decision-making for many interviewees was not viewed as a challenge or obstacle, but instead as a factor that is simply part of the process. There is a certain acceptance of the complexity and contradiction

that is inherent in group processes. This is generally viewed as an advantage to participatory design in that it solidifies the group and ensures that all angles are addressed when approaching a final design.

Conflict is not seen, in my view, as a problem, it's seen as a natural occurrence...Well, earlier I mentioned that I start every project with the notion that there's valued differences. There's always conflict. We accept that (I 4).

The participation is not just, "I want to get my thing in there", but it's almost like we're going through the thinking process to really get a comfortable and a right solution to everything that they had been talking about. I think that's the most exciting part of the whole thing, and basically we're sitting there listening and we become sort of a guide, but not necessarily the final say (I 7).

This does not mean that there are not some roadblocks and stalemates that occur. A number of interviewees explained that these positions must be addressed in a respectful manner.

They might not be completely satisfied but they understand the reason why they had to go along with it. We never left anybody out there hanging and just being mad because his point of was not taken, but basically we took the time to always talk to him and get him to move toward [agreement] (I 7).

We do not assume that people we're talking to who object to the creation of this new housing are necessarily bad people, and wrong and selfish. We always give them the benefit of the doubt and recognize that, you know what, they might be right in their criticism. They are often wrong, but they are sometimes right, and it's very easy to forget that (I 9).

However, from the experience of practitioners, most believe that there are times that roadblocks have to be removed in order to move the project forward and keep on schedule. The argument presented by some interviewees is that the

process is for the most part collaborative and consensus-based, but the momentum cannot be broken or derailed. At times it is up to the practitioners to take the lead for the sake of the project and group cohesion. In other words, consensus is best, but in certain scenarios, it is not required.

I wouldn't say that consensus was required to move the project forward. It wasn't grassroots in that sense or like a Quaker session where people have to agree before you go to the next step (I 3).

Consensus was definitely not required. We're trying to collect information, attitudes, opinions, and conflicts (I 9).

The perspective of these practitioners towards conflict and decision-making seemed to be the most clear of all interviewees. In general, the opinion of practitioners that touted that their approach sought true consensus throughout the process was not supported by their responses in regard to other aspects of participatory design. The explanations provided by some of these interviewees were rather vague without an obvious connection to the principles of participation . However, the respondents that did not claim that their processes were necessarily consensus-based or without problems generally had a much more thorough understanding of the philosophy and principles of participation and user engagement.

The Role of the Designer

How practitioners perceive their role in a participatory process is important to understanding their perspective on why participatory design should be practiced.

The general theme that emerged is that practitioners defined themselves as both facilitators and activists. They see a need for a balance between these two roles throughout the entire process.

I guess I want to say more activist in that we were bringing honest critiques to the table and then facilitators in that during the session with the community and the group we were facilitating that process. But we have the knowledge and the expertise...So I think there's a little bit of a mixture of both, but I wouldn't say we're just facilitators. I think that we were a little bit of both (I 1).

Certainly you've got to consider it a combination of both, and that depends upon what stage of the process you're in (I 6).

I think it's principally facilitators, but they are activists in that they wouldn't be doing this work if they didn't have a commitment to social justice. In that sense they might come across as activists promoting an understanding of the needs of the future residents (I 9).

However, this was not the perspective shared by all. A small number of interviewees described their role primarily as activists. As such, they felt that they were involved in the process to push an agenda forward; to create a great place for the users, but also to ensure that users are given a voice and that action is based on their input. This required practitioners to enter the process with overt personal viewpoints and values. They did not approach the project with a value-neutral standpoint.

I would describe myself as an activist and definitely not a facilitator...To me I see a facilitator as someone who does not insert their opinion or ideas into the process. I don't believe that that is an appropriate model of participatory design. I bring certain expertise to the table that I want to share. I don't want to impose it on anybody, but I share it with the people that I work with (I 5).

Only one participant was not comfortable with adhering to the activist role. The interviewee believes that the role of practitioners is to seek the opinions of the users that are pertinent to the design, but not necessarily to attempt to go any further than that.

I would say facilitators. I think in the case of facilitating, based on our professional knowledge and our abilities, we're facilitating with that information and making the people who are coming to the table to work with us and adding their perspective to it in order to come up with an idea as opposed to being radical or indeed changing something (I 2).

Empowering Potential of Participatory Practice

The goal of any participatory design process is to create the best possible design solution. However, there is also the potential that participatory process can empower the involved participants. Overwhelmingly, the interviewees said that participatory design is about a balance of both of these objectives.

At these workshops we try to balance both of them out and making sure that they feel that they're the ones making the final decisions but us giving them the right direction and the right information to be able to guide and empower them (I 1).

I think definitely a combination of both. I think it's gathering information [that] helps us with the design, but [it is] empowering as well. I often appreciate the fact that we're getting input and we're able to work back and forth with people and to describe what we know from our knowledge as well as take their knowledge and mesh it together so that indeed they are empowered to get a building that is their building (I 2).

I would say a balance of both. I've talked a lot about the importance of gathering information and perspectives as a way to inform the

design process, but one of our goals was empowering older adults to be able to contribute to the life of the community (I 3).

Though interviewees admitted that the goal of participation should take into account the gathering of information as well as the empowering potential, there was no clear articulation of how empowerment was actually considered in the process.

I think that [empowerment] came along the way. I don't think that we went into it thinking that. I think that that just developed in a part of each workshop and in working with them, but I don't think we went in there thinking that we're going to empower them. I think that just kind of goes with the flow of the project (I 1).

To me it's just inherent in design. It's so much a part of what design is about that you really can't take it away from the process (I 2).

Yeah. Some of this is just sort of given. It's just an integral part of our process and I take it for granted maybe. But we always know that we will arrive at the best solution quicker by including the end users and empowering them to be a part of the process (I 8).

Not consciously (I 9).

Exactly how respondents employed empowering strategies in the process was never adequately explained. This leads to the questions of whether or not empowerment can be an objective of participatory design if it is not known how to incorporate it into a project or how to measure it in the end.

Like the term participation, there are many definitions of empowerment. A number of the interpretations of empowerment provided by interviewees closely relate to the definitions provided for participation with factors such as inclusion

and involvement cited as key variables. It is unclear if interviewees necessarily note a distinction between the concepts of *participation* and *empowerment*. Some of the definitions provided for empowerment were nearly identical to definitions for participation. For some practitioners, simply the involvement and interest of participants was confused as being indicators of empowerment. Their interpretations of whether or not the participants were empowered were basically related to attendance and positive response.

[Participants were empowered] more so at some times obviously when they were more involved in it they did feel empowered, but then they probably sensed less empowerment during the design development or the construction document phase where they were less a part of it and then towards the end more so because they were seeing the building come up... So it went through its different phases of highs and lows (I 1).

They would also show up. They would come to every meeting. They were very serious and diligent, very respectful, and also very excited about being involved (I 2).

I think a lot of them expressed it by coming out and talking about it and almost being the sales person for the development itself (I 7).

Definitely. They'd be there at the meeting, and the meeting itself made them visible and they could focus on the fact that something was going to happen and that somebody outside of their community was interested enough to assist in it happening (I 9).

However, in some cases, when elaborating further on the topic of empowerment, interviewees' definitions included the common factors of new knowledge learned by participants, knowing that you have truly been heard, and understanding that input will result in action.

I think it's giving the tools to be able to come up with a design that they're all happy with and educating them and helping them understand the design process and how things work. Just by educating them and giving them the knowledge that helps to empower them to be able to make decisions that are right for them (I 1).

So I guess it involves, first of all, a sense that you have been heard and not necessarily that somebody agrees with you or that they're going to do what you say, but that what you have said has been heard and acknowledged and reported upon (I 3).

Empowerment is that they become a part of it and they are the ones that really make the decisions and really create the program that we have to follow to become a final project (I 7).

I think they felt they had made a difference and that they counted, and that everything they said counted (I 9).

There were some examples of participant actions that can be correlated with their increased level of knowledge, their comfort with the information, and the ability to act. In a couple of projects the participants became very knowledgeable about the design and took an active role in later phases. In one instance, the participants themselves presented the project before the city council.

In one case we didn't even have to get up to give the presentation [to city council] because the community members gave it (I 6).

In another project, the practitioners only developed the program for the design and the participants then took the information compiled and later worked with an architectural firm to build the project, outlining their requests and requirements and directing the process.

All of them worked with the architects and they wouldn't accept a lot of things the architects were trying to give them because by the

time they entered the process they had a much better idea of what they wanted (I 5).

In yet another project the participants were not satisfied with financial limitations on the project that did not permit them to have a particular design detail. The participants wanted river stone columns that the budget just would not allow. However, this did not stop the participants.

And they said, "We'll raise the money for you", and that's what they did. So it's interesting because they really were a part of it. They're putting their money where their mouth is. They went out and raised the funds for the river stone for the columns (I 7).

Whether or not the power that these participants embraced was a direct result of the participatory process is not known, nor was it the focus of this study. What it does indicate, however, is that the participants truly gained enough of an understanding and knowledge of the design and building process that they could take an active role in making their ideas and requests a reality.

Directly related to the issue of empowerment is ownership. In fact, one of the interviewees prefers to use the term 'ownership' instead of 'empowerment'.

Well I don't use that word [empowerment]. I try to avoid a lot of these kinds of clichés which everybody interprets differently, like sustainability and community design. We don't really talk about power, we really talk about ownership, which I think is a lot more important for most people than power, especially in public buildings (I 4).

A sense of ownership of the project was exhibited by participants in a number the projects.

I think the end result ended up being more satisfying to more people and it did not become an 'I' situation. It became a 'we' situation. In every process we've gone through like that it's always been like that where there was a pride of ownership and there was also a better amount of care (I 7).

In many of the projects that we've done a couple of things are interesting. One is a sense of ownership. People take care of the buildings, there's no vandalism, morale is high, and that's probably one of the strongest advantages, particularly in institution buildings where vandalism is fairly common (I 4).

Participation with Older Adults

The responses from the interviews indicated that the definition of participation for older adults did not differ dramatically from respondents' interpretation of participation in general.

I'm not sure that it does (differ from a general definition) (I 3).

It's the same (I 5).

The process in general doesn't differ (I 8).

The approach is the same (I 9).

For the most part, the process and communication strategies are relatively the same. However, there are some factors particular to an older adult participant group that should be considered.

A couple of interviewees noted that participants were very eager to share their ideas. The amount that these groups had to share became problematic in keeping the process focused and on time.

I'll be frank and blunt here, seniors love to talk, they really enjoy being involved in the process, and you have to keep them focused (I 2).

As a matter of fact, in some instances, they were so well organized that there were so many elderly people that showed up for analyzing the best use of the site that we had to run other workshops because the elderly people dominated the entire discussion and the focus of what should be provided (I 4).

However, the solution to this may require only altering the participatory methods to best suit a situation rather than rethinking the entire approach to the participatory process.

I think it just means that there are certain kinds of methods that may work effectively and certain ones that don't (I 4).

The methods might be a little bit different because older adults tend to take much more time with their responses, not that it takes them more time to give a response, but they are less brief in their responses. So we have to figure out a way to keep it moving more quickly and we never have to do that with younger people (I 5).

It was also noted by one respondent that the participants were frustrated with the long time-lines from the beginning of the project to the end of construction.

They just seemed to have a sense of urgency of wanting to see that this is done, and not running out of time. They'd always say that, "I'm going to be dead before this building's done". So there was more of a sense of urgency and just keeping them really informed. They really wanted to be in the know and I think the more that they wanted to be part of it...that was sort of their daily event (I 1).

A number of practitioners recognized the importance of acknowledging issues related to aging, sensory perception, and environmental behaviour including changes in sight and safety issues. It is important that these factors are not overlooked. Some practitioners chose to include specialists, service agencies, and experts in the field of aging in the process to access this information.

It was very important to involve people in, if you will, the provider community who served older adults as part of the participatory process, for example, the Agency on Aging and the Meals on Wheels Program, the mental health centre, the local housing department. The desire to include older adults certainly caused us to think about that secondary group of people that serve older adults (I 3).

The addition of a gerontology specialist added a level of expertise in dealing with more the physical needs of the seniors.

A number of interviewees provided advice on the scale of design projects that are best suited to participatory practice with older adults. Some interviewees warned that if the scale is too large (i.e. community scale), people cannot relate to how it affects their lives specifically.

From my experience, a smaller housing or community project seems to work best...Its [the large-scale that is] a bit overwhelming (I 1).

The problem with large-scale projects is the technical complexity that kind of doesn't allow a lot of people to participate because of their lack of knowledge...It doesn't mean there aren't urban problems [that participation cannot assist in addressing], but it means that you take those large-scale problems and kind of subdivide them into small problems so that local people have the knowledge and confidence to be involved (I 4).

I think housing developments [are more suitable for participation] because they have a much more specific and much more articulated subject (I 6).

When you say an entire planned community, I think that goes beyond them. In other words, I think they deal primarily with what they themselves would actually use and participate and be familiar with...If you draw it out into a large complex it gets more confusing and more difficult...they'll have opinions about it but they're not going to have a direct involvement of really what happens (I 7).

However, this belief was not consistent. Some practitioners believe that participation is possible and valuable at whatever scale.

I guess I wouldn't discriminate against any of them. I think older adults can be a really valuable source of information about microenvironments...On the other hand they can be good sources of information about broader scale issues regarding the general character of an environment. So I don't know that I would make a distinction (I 3).

I think they should be involved in everything (I 5).

That's kind of difficult because I see a participatory process as beneficial no matter what the scale (I 8).

Project Evaluation

Many of the projects that interviewees were involved in followed with an evaluation of the participatory process. However, in general, the respondents did not provide a clear methodology or process of evaluation.

I would say [our evaluation was] not [done] very well, and not in a very systematic way...We did not enter into the process with very clear, specific participatory, measurable outcomes in mind (I 3).

Not in any formal way (I 4).

I can't say that we went through a really precise critique and evaluation in each case (I 6).

The evaluation process that was used in a number of projects was an informal reflection of how the process went, and what could be improved for the future. Changes to the process were based on trial and error and incremental adjustment. As well, the evaluations were primarily based solely on the perspective of the practitioners and did not take into account the experiences of the participants.

[We did an evaluation] just for our office, in-house, we do a debrief of how the project went overall and that's some of the discussions that we have (I 1).

It was very quickly looking at the time it took, the involvement, and I'd say some of the divergent forces, if you will, that were involved, and if you want to know one of the complications that came out of the process (I 2).

Finally, two practitioners did not evaluate their process at all.

I don't know if we've ever evaluated process. I think just taking apart on how we did everything, I think we always sort of build on one project after another and how one worked and where they were if we had difficulties communicating and how we would change that (I 7).

No [we did not evaluate the process], I think we just felt so good about it, and it had worked that we just repeat it, build upon it and refine it as we go. Maybe it is intuitively (I 9).

In only two projects were participants involved in the evaluation. One project administered questionnaires to participants following the process, and in another

project the practitioners hired a researcher to conduct interviews, however, that individual was not part of the participatory process.

There is a huge gap in the literature pertaining to the experiences of participants in participatory design processes. More information is required regarding participant experiences not only to improve and refine processes, but also to prove to skeptics of participatory design that it is of benefit to users. Not evaluating processes at the end of a project is a missed opportunity both for advocacy and for professional development.

Though very few practitioners engaged in an evaluation of the process, most did take part in an evaluation of the final built environment. This was primarily through post-occupancy evaluation.

We did. We did it via visiting, talking with the board, getting their feedback, I talk with the executive director frequently, and also observe the end user – the people who are living there (I 2).

We did have a post-occupancy meeting with our clients a year later (I 8).

Yes. We did a post-occupancy evaluation was a formal sitting down with some representative residents walking around the whole place with cameras and with a manager and the maintenance person and finding (I 9).

The prevalence of product evaluation over process evaluation may simply be explained as a systemic fact that post-occupancy evaluations are a well-established practice. The development of process evaluation tools has not

received the same kind of application or attention to refinement. It may also indicate the tendency in the design profession, whether consciously or inadvertently, to focus on the product over the process.

Suitability of Final Design

All of the interviewees noted that they felt that the final design was more appropriate and suitable for the older adult population specifically due to their participation in the process.

I think that the successes were that they had some things that they had in mind, and we kind of had an idea of what we would like to have seen, and kind of blending the two together and getting our ideas and their ideas together, and came up with a really nice solution (I 1).

Well, quite typically people say they can see their ideas in the solution and that's probably the most important (I 4).

The physical design – some of the major design features that came out of participating with the older adults (I 8).

This information may have been available to practitioners through the post-occupancy evaluations conducted for the final designed environment. However, the still missing piece is the connection to the process. Research must be conducted to connect the evaluation of the final design with an evaluation of the process.

Costs and Benefits of Participatory Design

When factoring the costs of time and money required for a participatory process, there were divergent opinions in regard to whether participatory design costs more or whether it actually saves time and money in the end. A number of practitioners believe that it saves time and money to include a participatory process.

When you have a participatory process you get all the information very quickly in a very short period of time so that you're not only saving time but in effect you're saving money. So that's an enormous benefit (I 4).

For the professional side I would say that you're going to save time and end up with a better product (I 8).

However, other respondents admitted that there are increased costs of time and money required to successfully complete a participatory process.

The costs were actually pretty substantial (I 3).

Regardless of interviewees perception of time and money costs, most believed it is definitely worth the investment.

I think it's important for architects and designers in particular to get over, if you will, the fact that it does take some time. It takes time, but it doesn't take a lot of time, and it's very valuable time (I 2).

For the most part, interviewees believed that the benefit of participation is that it yields a better end product. In particular, it results in a better product from the viewpoint of the participants and users.

You do end up with a much better project; something that the seniors are proud and they are going to enjoy in the future...I mean for the community, for the city and for the seniors, I think, overall it's a much better project (I 1).

In terms of benefit, I think it is the user group really being satisfied with what the end result was (I 7).

The benefits, I think, are a greater pride in the end result for the city, the community, and for the users, and for the professionals that were involved in the design. It's good all the way around when you have a successful project that everybody is pleased with and felt a part of... From the greater community side, as always, if you're active and have a voice in something you're probably going to be more pleased or gratified by the result (I 8).

A benefit mentioned by many of the interviewees was the fact that participants learned something new during the process.

I think every step was a learning process for them. I mean they had never done this before. They had never designed a building and seen it through the construction phase. So for the most part, I think for all the participants it was something new (I 1).

I think in all cases they learned how we go about design and they see how it's a very fluid, evolving method of getting from point A to point B, and that nothing need be absolute in terms of what needs to be there. Of course you have the basics of structure and the technical stuff that we need to make a building happen, but that they have options and they have ways of customizing or certainly creating environment based on their needs is very empowering, and certainly very enlightening to them (I 2).

In terms of the benefits...as far as I could tell, they became much more savvy consumers and directors of architectural services. And they also found out truly the state of the research which they had no acquaintance with whatsoever, and it's very different than participating and reading it, and then having discussions about it than our just spoon-feeding it to them. They really appreciated that process. They felt that they learned much more (I 5).

The concept of participant learning is directly linked to the empowering potential within a participatory process. The more a population learns about their environment and the factors that shape it, the more they are able to voice their concerns and take action.

Future of Participatory Design with Older Adults

Supporters of Participatory Design with Older Adults

Those who are in support of participatory practice come from a number of sectors. The advocacy for this practice is truly inter-disciplinary. From the design practitioners, clients, developers, building operators, managers, specialists in environment and aging, to local governments, there are a number of sectors that are presently advocating and putting this process in to practice.

Some practitioners believe that it is up to clients and user groups to demand that projects involve a participatory process. They believe that only through demand will other practitioners and developers stop and listen.

I think it ultimately has to come from the user group. They have to make the demands. I think it's not as simple as trying to change the architects, I think it has to come from the elderly people that represent the elderly in the whole process. If they're not going to make the demands, it's not going to happen (I 5).

However, this may be situation of designers passing responsibility on to those who really are not the ones who necessarily have the knowledge about this practice.

Opponents of Participatory Design with Older Adults

Developers were cited most commonly as not wanting to advance the participatory design with older adults, and in general.

If it's a private developer they don't always necessarily want to do it, but some do...I would say it only seems that the defiant or developer that is – like I mentioned earlier, they have something in mind, something that they've already done and built in the past that worked, and if we know we've got a short timeframe, here's the time constricted and costs obviously has something to do with it when they just say, "This is what we're going to do, let's just build it and be done with it", and they don't take the time to work with the users (I 1).

In some cases they [developers] may have in-house experts who examine, study, and look at these things but they're more of the realm of profit-oriented like "We need to just put these buildings up and get them out on the market" (I 2).

Developers, because it's going to cost them. It's going to take more time. They [users] may not always go in a direction they [developers] want to go, and they can't control anything (I 7).

The primary reason cited for why developers insist on working in this way is simply because of time and money. This position is not limited to developers. It could be anyone who stands to make money of fast-paced building processes.

It's people for whom me, me, me is more important than us, us, us (I 9).

The only way that developers may support the use of participatory design processes is if it can fit into their schedule easily. Interviewees did not think that developers would simply be swayed by a theoretical or philosophical argument alone.

It would have to be working with their schedule and just showing that it can be done with their schedule, and getting to be a better project. Just by example, I think, more than anything, to show how other projects have been done and can be done (I 1).

As long as an entity or group can see that it indeed is helping with profit. You know, I hate to boil everything down to money but in some cases it is. Once they realize that there may be a benefit then perhaps that will change. It's very hard to crack that egg, if you will, if there's not a realized financial benefit behind it (I 2).

Probably...with the bottom line profit...if you convince them that if you do a project that is really geared toward the seniors that that also becomes your market (I 7).

One respondent did not have any hope for the support of developers.

In some cases perhaps, but in other cases I'd say unlikely. These tend to be large companies who are primarily dealing with profitability and they just see it as another layer of it not being necessary (I 2).

The design profession itself was acknowledged as its own worst enemy. A number of interviewees stated that many of the design profession create barriers to participatory design.

I think people who are stuck on their own ideas and are enamored of their own ideas, and that might be architects, planners, or maybe developers. I think they might not see the relevance (I 3).

I think there are people who say, "I'm an expert and old people don't know anything about the problem" (I 4).

I mean, I can honestly say that in general the architectural profession on a whole is not oriented to participatory design...I honestly think the architectural profession is sort of ignorant about the process. I think some would be opposed (I 5).

This position was also connected to some public officials who do not see the benefits of participatory design.

As for suggested solutions to win the support of those that oppose this practice, only one interviewee suggested public policy to enforce a standard practice. This was generally not viewed as a best option by another interviewee because it may only create a logistical requirement or hoop to jump through without any control over the quality of the participation. However, as one interviewee noted, requirements may be the only way to force some people to even try participation.

I think they have to experience it once, so they might have to be forced to do...I think it has to be experiential learning otherwise there may be resistance, but that's the best way, I would guess. I think if the client has some experience with community outreach and the architect feels comfortable with the client then the client can guide it and set it up and get it going that pretty soon there's a good chance the architect will get a kick out of it and begin to understand the benefits (I 9).

The solution most interviewees provided was to demonstrate successful projects and mobilize public opinion, project by project, individual by individual, and through the education of future professionals.

In order to gain the support from other practitioners, interviewees had a number of suggestions. Most of the strategies were focused on simply getting the message out regarding the successes of these projects.

I just think seeing the success of the project and the success in how happy the users are or the older adults are in their space, I think seeing that would want to make me do it as well...More best practice documents or seeing more interesting research studies of how that benefits (I 1).

I think it's very important that we as architects, when we gather together, whether it be at a convention or a conference or a group specific for this, share with each other the value of what we get from it (I 2).

Part of the difficulty is that a lot of information that we get about architects comes from the architectural press, which virtually has nothing written about process. It only talks about the building. So there may be numerous people around who are advocates but it's really hard to know who they are if they don't show up at conferences (I 4).

I think publication, educating, reading, and putting things out there in front of them that things can be done, letting the seniors know that they can have a say also (I 7).

However, there are some practitioners who had very little confidence that much will change in the near future.

I just don't know. I have had very little success in convincing most of the practitioners (I 5).

I don't know. I'm not certain. As far as I'm concerned to me it's an ethical issue. How you encourage somebody to address an issue ethically, your guess is as good as mine (I 6).

Actually I don't know what we say would encourage other people to do it (I 7).

Responsibility to Advocate

Nearly all of the respondents believe that it is the design profession that is responsible for advocating for future participatory practice.

I would see design professionals as having a strong responsibility...I guess I would say most of the burden should be on the design professions (I 3).

Well if it's a design project, then quite clearly the designer shares a major responsibility in that area (I 4).

Well if the architect is brave, then the architect is responsible. One of the reasons that architects are licensed, and which is almost uniformly forgotten, is that we're serving the community. We're not only protecting the health and safety and all the other routine basics, but we're supposed to be looking out, not only for our client, but for the community at large. It's rarely remembered or rarely taught (I 9).

Interviewees were quite definitive on this point. Only a small number of other suggestions were provided as to who is responsible. These included the older adults themselves, developers, clients, gerontologists, and citizens in general.

I think kick starting this in terms of convincing people that this is an integral important part of the design process and is a message that we need to get out to everyone and certainly the people who build these buildings demand that it become a part of the design process (I 2).

Some interviewees expressed that local municipal governments have policies related to it, but most followed this by doubting their ability to actually enforce or monitor the quality of the practice. The general sentiment is that it has to stem from a philosophical standpoint of the design professional. Simply forcing a process that a practitioner does not understand or believe it will simply result in faulty processes that have no benefit to the user group.

Included within the design profession itself, interviewees identified the professional associations as responsible for advocating this kind of work. Suggested actions include making it an 'expected practice' (instead of 'best practice') and knowledge requirement, increasing awards and conferences dedicated to the topic, and creating publications specifically related to participatory design.

Design Education

Overwhelmingly, the interviewees believe that design schools are failing in providing an education in participatory design.

Clearly architectural education, planning education is missing the boat...Professional practitioners are very much influenced by what they learn in school and they bring all those bad habits to the office (I 4).

More critically, they are failing to nurture the philosophy of participatory design. It is the reasoning behind the process and not the process itself that needs to be introduced to, and fostered in, students and explored in detail.

The downfall of design education today, according to some interviewees is the focus on the individual designer working in an isolated fashion and having full control over the direction of the project. A number of interviewees stated how this is detrimental to the developing student as this is not how design is practiced.

Design studios focus on individual projects, when in fact you go into an office and that's not the case, it's usually group projects, and architects always complain that graduates don't know how to work together. So there's a lot of baggage that students bring from design education and unfortunately there's very little of it that focuses on the design process. There's a lot of lip service to process but not very much articulation of the methods (I 4).

That's interesting because I recall a lot of times in the academic world the design process as very, sort of, isolated. So maybe in design studios or the design projects maybe have a closer link to some real project or have some sort of interaction with the regulatory agencies somehow...So maybe just a more reality based design projects in the school and not just about design (I 8).

Focus within curriculum and in studio projects should not only develop skills in collaboration and dialogue, but there must also be a focus on designing for places for people not the creation of objects on the landscape.

Yeah, I think there's an attitudinal problem in some schools and that is the difference between formalism that is giving form to buildings and spaces, and the social dimension of "why are we bothering to build at all?" inculcating in the curriculum a sense that the reason that anything is designed is to serve the needs of people and not just as sculptors. You're making places of space for people,

and if you don't understand what makes people tick there's no way that your design is going to work. That's an extreme statement, but fundamentally that's what it's about...The students are enamored with their computers and enamored with being published and the emphasis is not always on developing design solutions that are based on the needs of people (I 9).

Universities also need to acknowledge and support the work of academics and practitioners in this field. Several university based design centres that were developed in the 1970s and 1980s were dropped. The result is academics with an interest in participatory design having to work on the margins of their university with little support, and a student body that does not recognize the practice as relevant or legitimate.

In the 70's and 80's there used to be design centers in the U.S. that were connected to universities. The universities dropped them and now there are maybe a half a dozen universities that still have them but they tend to be more community-based. That was one vehicle. So now it's really up to individual faculty members to promote these ideas. Unfortunately these people tend to be on the fringe of their departments. So they're essentially powerless. If they have nobody to talk to then they leave (I 4).

I think developing an appreciation of those needs as well as the fact that those sectors have a voice, and so programs, whether it's through CDC's or other things in which the design schools can have their students or whomever out there listening to that voice, and I mean listening, not telling, but listening (I 6).

Design schools need to make participatory practice visible and available for students. Academics with a specialty in this field should be supported and recognized for their work.

I'd say that it should be a part of what's taught as part of a design process...I think whatever a school or educational entity is doing in

terms of training people, it should be a part of curriculum that this is one of the steps you need to go through to create a successful design (I 2).

They need to include it in their curriculum (5).

I think they could reward those members of the faculty who create curriculum and teach it with the social dimension in it without it undermining the highest form of design excellence. They have to understand that this doesn't get in the way but helps somebody transcend routine design and reach something that is far superior (I 9).

The interviewees look to the academic institutions to provide leadership and training in this form of design practice. As stated previously, participatory design is not simply a collection of tools and practices that can be tacked on to any project. It is a philosophy, a stance, and a worldview. Developing the skills required for participatory practice is difficult if students are learning a completely different process.

Interpretive Analysis

An interpretive analysis of the interviewees' responses provides insight into the key questions of the study. The following examines the key questions in relation to the interviewee responses and relates the findings to Arnstein's ladder of participation and Till's proposal for transformative participation.

Definition of Participation

The definition of participation by practitioners does not differ dramatically from the literature. For the most part, their definitions and practices are consistent with those advocated by participatory theorists and advocates. However, there is a distinction between practitioners in how they understand the concept of participation. Based on their definitions, methods, and views, there was a division between practitioners who engage in participation as a *set of tools* and those who view participation as a *philosophy*. Those who understand participation as a *set of tools* concentrated primarily on the pragmatic elements of the process and, in general, provided rather short, vague responses to issues surrounding the execution and reasons behind participation. However, the majority of practitioners viewed participation more as a *philosophy* rather than a procedural toolkit. In general, they responded to questions with a larger view of participation based within their own belief system that then relates to their process. The difference between practitioners who view participation as a set of tools and those who see it more as a philosophy may be a result of educational experience, company standpoint, or personal views.

The way in which practitioners understand participation had an affect on how they incorporated older adults in the process. Those who view participation as a *set of tools* generally kept participants at more of a distance throughout the process. They tended to access information from participants when needed, but

did not always engage them to their fullest potential. The practitioners who understand participation as a philosophy were more acutely aware of the benefits of building a trusting relationship based on mutual learning. Based on their responses, these processes more truly reflected the principles of participation.

Costs and Benefits of Participatory Design

A generalization commonly made about participatory design is that it adds additional costs of time and money to a design process. However, most of the respondents believe that participation actually saves time and money in the end. It may be true that it does cost less, however, it may also be that practitioners had factored in broader costs of a design project including the lifespan of the building and user satisfaction. Only one practitioner stated that it actually does cost more to include a participatory process.

Regardless of the opinion on cost, all practitioners stated that the benefits (more suitable design, empowering potential, amount learned by participants during process) of a participatory design process outweigh any of the associated costs (time, money, difficulties during process, frustrations). This is a very altruistic position. However, these opinions cannot be interpreted without considering that these are the views of practitioners who engage in participatory practice, have a similar philosophical viewpoint, and have a specialized understanding of participation. It may also be a position based on justification for their current

practice or belief. This is not to say that the benefits do not outweigh the costs, but it all depends on what is being considered in the equation and how much weight is given to each variable. Unfortunately, it is not known what the true costs and benefits were for each of the projects included in this study in order to find out how this compares to the opinions expressed by the respondents.

A major challenge the field of participatory design faces is convincing those who do not believe in a participatory approach that the benefits do outweigh the costs. . Much more research is needed in the area of cost and benefit evaluations of participatory design.

Evaluation of Participatory Design Projects

Most of the projects that interviewees were involved with incorporated an evaluation of the final designed product through a post-occupancy evaluation. However, very few projects underwent an evaluation of their participatory process. Further, those that did conduct some form of evaluation did not do so in an extensive manner. Most involved either an in-office debriefing session to review the project, or conducted an out-questionnaire with the participants at the end of the process.

The lack of process evaluation is a huge shortcoming in participatory practice and in creates a gap in the literature on the topic. Though journal articles and

practitioners make a convincing argument theoretically and philosophically for participation, there is little evidence that it is of substantial benefit to the users and results in a better product as a direct correlation to the inclusion of participatory processes.

Unique Attributes of Participatory Design with Older Adults

The incorporation of older adult participants in the design projects discussed in the interviews surprisingly did not differ significantly from the ways in which practitioners viewed participation with other populations. Most respondents indicated that the approach is generally the same, with perhaps minor adjustments to participatory techniques used (i.e. visuals that take into account ability in vision) and factors included for discussion (i.e. safety concerns).

Though it is encouraging that practitioners did not seem to be apprehensive about working with older adults, the lack of input in regard to the unique qualities of working with older adults is a missed opportunity. Though older adults cannot be viewed as a homogenous group, there are factors of physical ability, marginalization, and types of design projects that are unique to this population. Not acknowledging this may result in processes that do not fully engage older adults or adequately address their needs.

Suitability and Appropriateness of Resulting Environments

Although a number of practitioners stated that the environments designed for older adults were more appropriated because of the inclusion of participation, there was little evidence provided besides anecdotal accounts or personal opinion. This relates directly to the above argument for need for tools to evaluate participatory processes. Practitioners need to be able to evaluate the suitability of the design beyond a post-occupancy evaluation that simply ensures that the flooring was properly installed. Post-occupancy evaluations must take into account the participatory process so that they can be altered and improved in the future.

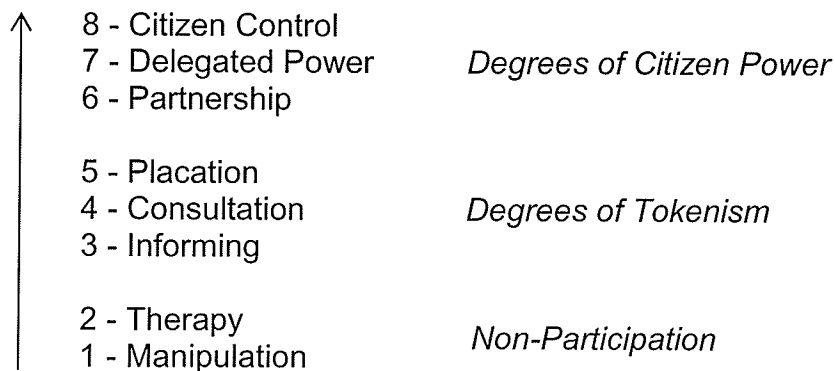
Empowering Potential of Participatory Design

Based on the interviews, most practitioners do believe that participatory design has the potential to empower the involved users. However, defining empowerment and clarifying how it was considered as a factor in the process proved difficult for respondents. Some interviewees did not know how to answer these questions and provided tentative or vague responses. Judging from the responses by a small number of interviewees, it is questionable whether or not they had considered the empowering potential of participation during the development or execution of the process. This was not just the situation when asking about empowerment. In a number of instances when questioned about

process or definition oriented questions, it is not known if the interviewee simply did not understand the question or if were avoiding the question by answering instead with more concrete descriptions of the physical design, standards, or financing. Those that did attempt to provide a response often stated that there was a 'feeling' of empowerment, or a 'feeling' of ownership experienced by participants. These soft claims did not seem rooted in a firm knowledge of whether or not these sentiments were truly experienced by participants. This is primarily due to the fact that, in general, no process evaluations were conducted after the projects were completed.

Through both a cross-sectional and contextural analysis of the responses from interviewees in regard to process, beliefs, and values, the projects were compared to Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (See Figure 7).

Figure 7 - Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation
 Source - Arnstein, 1969, 217.



For the most part, this study concludes that the majority of the projects fit within the realm of *partnership*, in that they enabled users to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders (Arnstein, 1969, 217). A small number of the projects were considered to be at the level of *placation*, a higher level of tokenism that allow users to only advise with power-holders that in the end have the right to decide. One project even dropped below *placation* to what would be considered mere *consultation*, in which users hear and are heard but are not provided the power to influence the decisions in any great way.

It could be argued that participatory design has a greater challenge in reaching the upper rungs of the ladder towards *citizen control* and *delegated power*.

Participatory design by its nature requires the inclusion of experts with specialized knowledge, limiting the extent to which users can direct a project solely on their own. However, it is discouraging to know that participatory design practice today is for the most part only reaching the *partnership* rung of the ladder, and in some cases dropping to lower rungs.

The Prospects of Future Practice

This study indicates that a number of practitioners are currently engaged in participatory design processes with older adults and that there is a demand for this type of design process. However, it is unlikely that the supply of this kind of practice will ever satisfy the future demand. Interviewees state that it is the

responsibility of practitioners to inform and convince others planners and designers about participatory design. It is questionable whether or not those working today will abandon their present mode of traditional practice and move to more participatory processes. The interviewees look to design and planning education to embrace and teach participatory practices to future practitioners. However, as mentioned in the interviews, schools are not adequately introducing students to this form of practice today, and it is doubtful whether or not academia will be able to introduce this practice to enough students to accommodate the impending future demand.

It is questionable why the practitioners interviewed painted such a grim view of the future of participatory design. Perhaps they are correct in their assumptions and forecasts and participatory design with older adults, or in general, will never fully meet its potential. However, this response may also be due to feelings of isolation and disconnection to the 'participatory design world' and its many advocates. What may be required is for the supporters and practitioners of participatory design to speak out and reach out to become visible, first to support one another, and second to advocate to other practitioners and educational institutions.

The Potential of Transformative Participation

The results from the interview analysis were also compared to Jeremy Till's proposal for transformative participation addressed in the literature review. The three main points that Till believes are required for transformative participation are:

- 1) *Incorporating new ways of knowing*
- 2) *Negotiation and conversation*
- 3) *Making best sense* (Till, 2005, 27-41)

Only a small number of interviewees gave indication that these principles are incorporated into their practice. However, it was encouraging that in most cases, respondents did indicate that at least one of these points is adequately addressed. It was unfortunate to realize that a small number of interviewees did not address these issues at all in their response and gave no indication that their practice aspires to these principles. Therefore, if in fact these suggestions proposed by Till do enrich the participatory process to include transformative potential, then this small group of practitioners are not successfully achieving this, though it is questionable if empowerment in these cases was even considered at all as part of the process.

Conclusion

The analysis of the interviews provides a number of interesting and valuable insights into the practice of participatory design with older adults today. Though some findings may be discouraging, when viewed more generally, there is an active community of design practitioners moving participatory design forward and creating environments more suitable for older adults. The following section provides recommendations both to participatory design with older adults and participatory design in general that focus on addressing the current problems and shortcomings.

Chapter 6: Recommendations for Future Practice

The previous chapters have outlined how participatory design can include marginalized populations, the relationship between aging and the environment, issues of power related to aging, and an analysis of how practitioners are currently engaged in participatory practices with older adults. Considering this information, a number of recommendations for future practice and research have been developed. The recommendations have been divided into those specific to the practice of participatory design with older adults and for the further development of participatory design in general.

Recommendations for Participatory Design with Older Adults

Use Experts in Participatory Design with Older Adults

When developing a participatory project, practitioners should not be afraid of asking for the advice of experts. This may seem contrary to participatory principles that advocate reducing the expert-centric aspect of traditional design as explained in Chapter 2. Though it is true that design should not depend only on expert advice alone and should extend to include other forms of knowledge, it is also important to know that participatory design should not be interpreted as anti-expert. Participatory design is about acknowledging and including the

expertise of the many stakeholders involved, including designers, planners, users, clients, interest groups, specialists, and others who are able to contribute valuable information. When engaged with an older adults participant base, experts in the field of gerontology, medicine, social work, and other related fields should be included. The intention of including these experts is not to disregard the importance of user knowledge, but augment it.

Increase Insurgent Potential of Participatory Design with Older Adults

Practitioners engaged in participatory processes with older adults do recognize the insurgent potential of this practice as advocated by Sandercock. Many view themselves as more than just designers and facilitators of a process, but see their role extending to that of activists for the user. However, the potential to use participatory processes in design as a tool for insurgency and empowerment is currently not being used to its fullest potential.

First, design practitioners are not ready for large number of older adults demanding environments that are appropriate to their needs in the coming years as explained in Chapter 3. There are not enough practitioners engaged in this practice to accommodate future need. Second, theorists and practitioners must clarify the objectives and scope of empowerment within participation. In the coming years more older adults will request collaborative processes to create more suitable environments through incorporating their knowledges and

increasing their role in the decision-making process. Practitioners must be equipped with participatory tools that make the best use of this knowledge.

Practitioners Should Not Fear Working with Older Adults

Practitioners involved in participatory design processes should not be afraid to get involved in projects with older adult users. Based on the input from practitioners who have engaged in projects with older adults, the approach to participatory design with older adults does not differ dramatically from processes with other populations. The only aspects that may be different may be the particular methods and techniques that are used. Specific concerns and issues with regard to aging and older adulthood, including the relationship between aging and environment described in Chapter 3, will come forth in the process. As well, the inclusion of specialists with, not instead of, participants will provide substantial information and support.

Develop Participatory Design Processes for Working with Older Adults

Though the previous point suggests that practitioners should not avoid participatory practices with older adults as it is not dramatically different, knowledge and practices surrounding working with older adults is lacking. Much has been written on planning and designing with youth in the last number of years (Barnes, 2006; Frank, 2005; Knowles-Yanez, 2005). This has proved to be

very successful in building awareness and influencing practice. However, with an increasingly aging society, designers and planners must also look to how to work with older adults. Similar to the situation with youth, those who design places for older adults are generally not in that age cohort. More research is required to inform and enhance participatory practice with older adults, and this information must be disseminated to design and planning professionals and students.

Establish a Network for Participatory Design with Older Adults

There is a real opportunity for an interdisciplinary network of designers, planners, community development workers, and those working within gerontology to share their collective experiences and learn from one another. Due to little awareness between design practitioners who practice participatory processes with older adults, designers must have mechanisms through which to communicate on a more regular basis. This will ensure that practitioners are not left feeling that they are the only ones engaged in this practice, and it will encourage the sharing of information and continued refinement of the practice.

As demand increases for environments that suit an older population, design practitioners and planners need to know what has been done, learn from other projects, and have access to those with expertise in the fields of participatory design and issues related to older adults.

Older Adults Need to Request Participatory Design

From the interviews, it is clear that many practitioners practice within a participatory framework out of their own worldview or philosophy. However, it was also evident that many of the projects were initiated out of the desire by a client to engage in a participatory process and that the practitioner was sought out particularly for this reason. Therefore, it is necessary that people know that they can request this form of practice when pursuing a design project.

The older adult population needs to know that this kind of practice is taking place and that it is to their advantage to engage in a participatory process. As Kernohan *et al.* state, “we have come to the conclusion that only users can precipitate the real changes that are needed if there is to be a substantial shift towards articulating users’ needs” (Kernohan *et al.*, 1992, 13). It is up to users to create demand for participatory practice, and the supply will hopefully follow.

Raise the Profile of Participatory Design with Older Adults

There are a number of design practitioners who do participatory work, however, the clients need to know that they exist and seek them out. Following the previous recommendation for older adults needing to request participatory processes, the public is not able to request participatory practice unless they know that it is an option. In order for clients or user groups to demand it, they

must know it exists. The design profession must do a better job of promoting this form of practice through conferences and publications. However, this must not remain exclusively within the scope of the design world. Presentations and writing on participatory design with older adults in the must be promoted to communities within health care, gerontology, community development, large-scale development, and the broader public through mainstream media as the population ages and people will be increasingly interested in what this practice has to offer.

Recommendations for Participatory Design in General

Clarify Expectations Regarding Empowerment in Participatory Design

Though the theory and literature pertaining to participatory design described in Chapter 2 state the importance of participation in empowering the involved users, what is not clear are the specific processes towards, or desired outcomes of, empowerment. The results of this study in regard to empowerment exemplify this problem. Though many practitioners claim that the participants involved were empowered, it was not articulated in a satisfactory manner exactly how practitioners should build in processes to ensure there is empowering potential in a participatory project, or how to properly evaluate empowerment in the end.

Researchers and practitioners in participatory design need to define what empowerment in participatory design is and clarify its goals and objectives. Indicators of success need to be developed in order to gain a better understanding of the variables that create the potential for empowerment in participation and the affect it had on participants. Without this understanding, participation can claim to empower people, but with little evidence to back it up.

Another perspective all together would be to eliminate the term *empowerment* in relation to participatory design. One interviewee stated that they do not use the term 'empowerment'. The respondent prefers the term 'ownership', in that at the end of the process the users feel that they have contributed to something they have a stake in and that they own a part of the decision-making process and the end product. The respondent feels this is a more realistic objective.

The term 'empowerment' itself has arguably moved into the realm of jargon in that it describes so many things that it is describing nothing at all simultaneously. However, the answer does not necessarily entail discrediting empowerment all together. Perhaps the issue can be remedied by changing the focus from 'empowerment' to 'equitable dialogue'. The issue may be that empowerment is too big a word; a word that attempts to solve all problems of power for marginalized populations within one easy step. This may not be a realistic goal for participatory design. As Morgan and Bookman state, power is not something you can simply have or acquire, but comes from a social relationship between

individuals or groups that determines access to, use of, and control over it and is a process aimed at consolidating, maintaining, or changing the nature and distribution of power in a particular cultural context (Morgan and Bookman, 1988, 4). It may be too idealistic to think that a participatory project on its own will embed one person or a larger group with 'new found' power.

Perhaps the focus of participatory design needs to move away from a *goal* of empowerment to a *process* of empowerment, such as in the idea of transformative participation presented by Till. When the spotlight shifts from the *goal* to the *process* it becomes more tangible and concrete to apply to a participatory design project.

Develop the Concept of Transformative Participation

The concept of transformative participation presented by Till may offer insights into the empowering potential of participatory design. Though there is indication from the interviews that some of the principles are presently being acknowledged and practiced, there is still an opportunity for much needed research and idea sharing around transformative participation.

Participatory practice is beginning to incorporate new ways of knowing and using negotiation and conversation as a means of communicating. However, the idea of *making best sense* still requires further development. This involves an

acceptance of complexity and contradiction in the process, not striving for absolutes but instead hoping for partial bests, realizing that consensus may not always be possible, and recognizing that power issues can not be completely eliminated. These principles may be foreign to practitioners rooted within a modernist approach, or even to those on the path towards a postmodern worldview. However, practitioners need to increase their understanding of these concepts and learn how they can work within their practice.

There is definitely room for improvement to move participatory design practice higher up Arnstein's ladder of empowerment, to move more towards Moody and Hofland's concepts of *participation* and *self-actualization*, and to achieve Rocha's idea of *socio-political empowerment*. Till's proposal for transformative participation may be key in achieving these goals, however, much more work needs to be done to clarify how practice can reflect and respond to this approach.

Develop Tools for Evaluating Participatory Design Processes

It has become relatively standard for design practitioners to evaluate the final design through a post-occupancy evaluation. However, tools must also be developed to evaluate the process through which the design was developed. This is important not only to evaluate the success of the participatory methods and techniques used, but as mentioned above, to evaluate the empowering

potential of the process. This information is not only crucial to the design firm in learning how to improve its practice, but is needed in the broader design community to share and build upon successes and avoid potential problems.

Do Not Assume Everyone Wants To Participate

Regardless of the many benefits that participation may have on increasing the suitability of an environment or empowering an individual through shared decision-making, it cannot be assumed that everyone wants to participate. The picture created by the interviewees is one of active and engaged participants. However, practitioners should not jump to the conclusion that all older adults will want to engage in this process if they have the opportunity. This is one of the dilemmas of the current perspective of 'successful aging' advocated by Rowe and Kahn that promotes active, healthy, and engaged older adulthood. Holstein and Minkler warn that this paradigm further marginalizes to those older adults who may simply choose not to participate or who cannot participate for whatever reason (Holstein and Minkler, 2003). Practitioners must remember that all populations are diverse and that even though some may view participatory design as an opportunity, it may not be of interest to others.

Remember Those Who Are Still Left Out

Simply because older adults are included in a participatory process, practitioners must use refined lens with which to critically examine who is included and who is not. Including older adults may successfully attempt to include a marginalized population, as advocated by Sandercock, but practitioners must remember that this group is not homogeneous. There are still many older adults that may not be afforded the ability to engage in a participatory process due to socio-economic or socio-political reasons (Martinson and Minkler, 2006). Every attempt must be made to identify these stakeholders and efforts must be made to include willing individuals in the process.

Develop Realistic Timelines for Participatory Design

Often the evaluation of a participatory project, or the debate over participatory design in general, results the excuses, complaints, or apologies for stopping short of the perfect project due to lack of time. The idealistic situation would be to have an undetermined or flexible timeline to work within. As Weber states, “a design project should...accommodate tolerances for reflection and allowances for random and unpredictable concerns...(as) additional discoveries most often provide further insight into what a new environ ought to or could be” (Weber, 1975, xii). Although it is hard to doubt this view, it is generally not the condition that most practitioners work within. Many interviewees cited the need for

practitioners to know how to incorporate as much participatory activity as possible within the set time constraints.

Practitioners have to be realistic about how participatory processes can be incorporated into the project, taking into account the timeline, budget, and need. Setting unrealistic goals increases the chance of an unsatisfactory result or outcome. This does not mean settling for less, but rather to successfully accomplish that which is reasonably possible.

Enrich Participatory Design Education

Design education needs to take a lead role in the future development of participatory design. Participatory design cannot be viewed as an alternative form of practice to the traditional client-driven model that a practitioner should be expected to simply adopt after graduation. As Francis states,

Today, most schools of architecture, landscape architecture, planning, and urban design are structured around the traditional model of client-driven practice. Few prepare students to be visionary in both thinking and action. This emerging form of practice requires a fundamental change in design education (Francis, 1999, 68).

Interviewees made it clear that participatory design is not simply a tool kit of techniques and methods that can be injected into a design process. Participation is a philosophy and value system that advocates for a more democratic approach to design. This must be encouraged and enriched in students by educational

institutions that adhere to the principles of insurgent practice, collaborative design, and placemaking. Once students learn to practice in the traditional model, it is difficult to shift to other forms of practice.

Planning schools and departments have done a better job at promoting participatory design practices. Other design disciplines, however, have not taken as strong of a stance in promoting and advocating for this form of practice. Other environmental design disciplines need to promote learning about participation through experience in studios and practicum projects and allow students to fully understand the process.

Educational institutions have the ability to dramatically influence environmental design practice in the future by exposing students to other forms of practice and participatory options. It may be unrealistic to think that the traditional model of practice will be replaced by participatory design entirely. However, excluding this very real and now common form of practice from the curriculum delivers the false message to students that participatory design is irrelevant and rare.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction of this document, this study is about opportunities; an opportunity for planners, designers, and builders to recognize an area of growing concern in regard to the built environment; an opportunity for

the older adult population to demand suitable and incredible places in which to live and thrive; and an opportunity for all of society to recognize the coming changes in demographics in the near future and what we can do about it today.

This investigation argues for the need for participation with older adults and highlights lessons learned from projects that have included older adults in the design process. Participatory design with older adults is possible. This study indicates that there are practitioners who are aware of the benefits of participatory practice and are engaging a population that is growing at a rapid rate and that has been left at the margins and excluded from decision-making processes in the past. This is extremely encouraging for the future of the creation of more suitable and appropriate environments for older adults, and in engaging this population in decisions that directly affect their lives.

However, this study also points out some opportunities missed. The participatory processes by practitioners today are unfortunately falling short of their potential. Issues related to the transformative qualities of participation and questions regarding the empowering potential of participatory design require further research and attention.

Participatory design has evolved and developed significantly since it emerged in the 1960s. However, today, design practitioners, planners, and older adults must

seek to continue the project of participatory design and seek ways in which it can be further improved to the benefit of both environmental providers and users.

APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

08 March 2006

TO: Jason Granger (Advisor I. Skelton)
Principal Investigator

FROM: Wayne Taylor, Chair
Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB)

Re: Protocol #J2006:026
"The Participation of Older Adults in the Design of the Built Environment"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement. This approval is valid for one year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:

- if you have funds pending human ethics approval, the auditor requires that you submit a copy of this Approval Certificate to Kathryn Bartmanovich, Research Grants & Contract Services (fax 261-0325), including the Sponsor name, before your account can be opened.
- if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

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are needed to see this picture.

Faculty of Architecture

City Planning
201 Russell Building
84 Curry Place
Winnipeg MB
R3T 2N2
Tel: (204) 474-6578
Fax: (204) 474-7532

The Participation of Older Adults in the Design of the Built Environment Written Consent Form

Researcher: Jason Granger

Advisory Committee: Dr. Ian Skelton (advisor)
Dr. Richard Milgrom
Dr. Verena Menec

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze efforts to include older adults in the design of the built environment, and provide recommendations for future practice.

Procedures

Information regarding this issue will be gathered through open interviews with practitioners who have participated in design processes that have included older adults.

The interview will be recorded for the purposes of transcription.

The interview will take about 1 hour.

Details about the design projects that interviewees were involved with may be included in the study. Information about projects will only be obtained from the interviewee, print media (journals, periodicals, books), and the Internet

Please refer to the Confidentiality section below for more details regarding the storage of data.

Risk

Your participation in this study will not pose a risk to your safety or wellbeing.

Recording of Data

Data gathered in the interview will be recorded through a digital audio recorder and later transcribed.

Confidentiality

The information you provide will be available only to the researcher and the academic advisors involved in the project.

Written documentation and audio recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. This data will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

The reporting of the data in the final report will not include subject names. As well, all information presented in the report will omit any identifying characteristics of the individual and/or the design project with which they were involved.

Feedback

The final report will be made available through the researcher at the request of the participant at the end of the project.

Contact information is available at the end of this consent form.

Credit or Remuneration

There is no credit, remuneration, or compensation for participant involvement in this study.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Student Researcher Jason Granger
 Department of City Planning
 University of Manitoba
 204-475-8215
 jasongranger@canada.com

Professor Dr. Ian Skelton
 Department of City Planning
 Faculty of Architecture
 University of Manitoba
 204-474-6417
 iskelton@cc.umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 204-474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

A copy of the study will be available for your records in October 2006. If you wish to receive a digital copy of the project once it is complete, please contact Jason Granger by phone at _____, or by e-mail at _____.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix C

Letter Accompanying Consent Form

April 2, 2006

Dear Interviewee,

Thank you so much for taking part in this study regarding the participation of older adults in the design of the built environment. This study is being conducted for the thesis of my Master of City Planning from the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Manitoba.

This study aims to gain a better understanding of participation with older adults in design projects from the practitioner's point of view.

The interview will cover the following topics:

- Your definition of participation in design,
- A description of the project with which you were involved,
- A description of the participatory process in the project,
- Your reflections on the participatory process,
- The relationship between participation and empowerment of the participants, and
- Your suggestions for future practice.

Please take time to carefully review the consent form included in this fax/e-mail. It outlines the procedure of the study and interview process in detail.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you again for your participation.

Sincerely,

Jason Granger
204-475-8215
jasongranger@canada.com

General Questions Related to Participation

Please tell me about your role in the development and design of the participatory process with older adults.

How would you define participatory design?

How would you define participatory design with older adults specifically? How does this differ from your general definition of participatory design?

How do you think your definition(s) differs from that of other design practitioners?

What factors impact one's definition of participatory design (geography, scale of project, type of project, type of agency or firm working on the project)?

Question Related to Specific Project and Process

Can you tell me about a project with which you were involved that included older adults in the design process?

Why did you decide to include a participatory process in this project? What influenced your decision?

Who defined the level of participation of older adults in this process (design team, older adults, other)?

What was the definition of participation in this project specifically?

Who was included in the process? Who was not included in the process? Who made these decisions, and how was it decided?

How were roles explained?

How were expectations of all involved explained?

Was it explained as to how information will be generated and who owns it? How?

The concept of power is often an issue in participatory processes. Was this addressed, and how?

- between designer and participants
- between participants

At what specific stages in this design project were older adults involved in the participatory process?

- Please list some of the participatory techniques used.

At what stages in this design project were older adults not involved in the participatory process?

Would you describe the process as information generation (finding out the 'how' or 'what'), or was it about finding out the perspective of the user? Both?

Would you say the process viewed participation as problem-solving towards a solution or sense-making towards understanding and finding out a world view of participants? Both?

Were any details (aspects) in the participatory process specifically added, deleted, or altered because of the inclusion of older adults specifically? Why?

Was the process transparent?

Would you describe the practitioners involved as activists or facilitators?

Can you describe the balance between speaking and listening?

How was difference of opinion or lack of consensus addressed? Was difference accepted, or was consensus required to move the process forward? How was this addressed? Examples?

What did you consider to be the costs and benefits of participatory design?

What was the age range of the participants? Does this reflect the end users of the project?

How many participants involved? Continually? Over-all?

Questions Related to the Evaluation of the Process and Design

What were some of the challenges you faced related to the incorporation of older adult participants in the design process? How do you feel these challenges could be addressed?

What were some of the successes related to the incorporation of older adult participants in the design process?

Did you evaluate the process? How?

Did you evaluate the final product? How?

Do you feel that the final design is more suitable and appropriate for older adults because of the incorporation of the participatory process? How is it more appropriate?

Questions Related to Empowerment Through Participatory Design

Is the goal of participation about:

- gathering information from users?
- empowering the users?
- both – balance?

Is the final result of participation about:

- gathering information from users?
- empowering the users?
- both – balance?

Did you design the project taking into consideration the empowering potential of a participatory process? If so, how? If not, why?

In your opinion, do you feel that the participants felt empowered through this process? If so, how? Examples?

What is your definition of empowerment?

In your opinion, do you feel that the participants learned something new through this process? If so, what? Examples?

Questions Related to Future Practice

If you were involved in a similar project in the future, would you incorporate older adults participants in the design process?

What would you change in the participatory process next time you involved older adults?

What types or scales of projects do you feel are most conducive to participatory design with older adults (i.e. housing developments, community design, community centres, etc.)?

What do you feel would encourage you and other practitioners to engage in a participatory design process?

In general, who are the supporters and advocates of participatory design with older adults? How can they further advocate for the participation of older adults in design processes?

In general, who are opponents to participatory design with older adults? For what reasons do you think they oppose this practice? Do you feel there is a way to win their support? If so, how?

Who do you feel is responsible for encouraging participatory processes with older adults in design projects?

Who do you feel is responsible for advocating for participatory design processes in general (design firms, planning departments, the government, the public, professional associations)? How can they fulfill this responsibility?

How can design and planning schools better equip students for this kind of practice?

Do you have anything else you wish to include?

Do you know of any other practitioners, firms, or projects that have included older adults in the design process?

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