

“Bottom-Up Driven Revitalization”

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## A. Preface:

From government-regulated projects to grass roots projects, I have had experience at both ends of development. These experiences have included working with the regulative planning structure of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and working with a grass roots organization, Soluciones Comunitarias, in Guatemala. As a project architect with James Childs Architects in South Bend, IN, I became accustomed with the formal process of public housing in the United States. As a Social Entrepreneur Corps Fellow, I worked with micro-entrepreneurs in marginalized communities using the micro-consignment model to create bottom-up economic development throughout rural Guatemala. Based on my experience and research on development, I have come to the opinion that a top-down mode is inefficient and not pragmatic; it ultimately only benefits the authorities instituting the project. Conversely, bottom-up development is an empowering process and it creates emotional capital that only further perpetuates the growth of an individual and a community. There must be an intricate mix of the two modes to facilitate the generative, organic growth from the lowest common denominator, as argued by research practitioners such as Salinas, Davis, VanKirk, etc. What type of system can be developed that integrates bottom-up and top-down mechanisms to development in order to create social housing? How can this strategy be used to prevent displacement?

## B. Introduction:

In the field of urban redevelopment and revitalization, there is a lack of research done on bottom-up approaches to urban redevelopment, as most projects

are examples of top-down redevelopment. There are projects that are largely top-down in nature with some bottom-up mechanisms that enable the revitalization project to be successful. The following literature review on community development corporations, generative versus formal development, community based development, and bottom-up approaches to economic development, gives an idea to the common themes in redevelopment.

### C. Literature Review:

#### i. Community Development Corporations:

Community development corporations (CDCs) work through the public arena to gain access to power and resources for the community; they are participatory mechanisms that provide community based groups and emerging minority leaders access to resources outside the community, such as public funding and political power (Weir 1999). CDCs also help to network communities in order to get the most out of formal and informal channels, linking them to exogenous resources that bring in jobs, transportation, and housing (Weir 1999). It is, however, apparent CDCs do not always have the communities' best interests in mind. Stoecker (1997) points out that CDCs are not performing well in rebuilding communities devastated by 'capitalist disinvestment'; rather, CDCs are another tool, following a supply-side economic approach to redevelopment rather than creating the social change needed to support a sustainable community. A constant struggle exists between the communities need for use values and the exogenous forces' want of exchange values. Stoecker (1997) concludes that there is a need for strong community based organizations that empower the community and that CDCs should be removed from

the “community-based mythology” (p. 16). People need to become invested in their communities and allowed to express themselves.

ii. Generative vs. Regulative:

Uzzell (1990) describes generative planning as organic and information based; it is experimental with a constant feedback loop that lends itself to incremental change and adaptability. Conflict occurs between the regulatory structure and informal structure, as formal planning attempts to replace generative planning with power. Uzzell describes formal planning as being coercive in nature; it implements its own agenda on a community without learning from the organic endogenous processes. Within the generative process, the formation of locally generated organizations begins to create a precarious tie to the political realm, but is necessary for the community to gain power to exogenous resources as well as gain influence in policies that affect the development of the community (Uzzell 1990). Examples of this struggle are apparent in the case studies done by Fawaz, Rees, Murphy, and Prince. Fawaz’s case study in Beirut brings together the ideas of informal, generative planning and development of social networks in the light of community based development (Fawaz 2008). Through the implementation of local entrepreneurial developments, a city was born, social networks were established, and community development occurred at an informal, generative level. Through these social networks and the accumulation of social capital, community members and organizations were able to influence the formal sector through informal networks in order to get what their community needed for generative development. It is difficult to create generative planning from outside the community because it

takes a keen awareness of the local information structure and feedback loop, and formal institutes tend to be concerned with their own agendas and operational constraints. According to Uzzell (1990), historically, attempts to formalize the informal sector are futile, but a need persists for informal networks to be created between the formal and informal sectors, which are clearly illustrated in Fawaz's study.

According to Rees and Murphy (1990), economic and political sectors undertake planning in two approaches, top-down and generative. Due to hyper-urbanization, predominantly occurring in the developing world, governments have to intervene to alleviate social problems, but due to constraints, the informal sector is necessary to sustain the explosion of population growth and generative planning becomes the norm. Similar to Rees and Murphy's study, in Prince and Murphy's (1990) case study of Oaxaca, the government used the implementation of affordable housing as a way to win popular support from poor communities as well as in attempt to integrate them into society. The problem with government affordable housing is that it fits their agenda and views, not the needs, desires, and capabilities of the inhabitants (Prince and Murphy 1990). In most cases, these project fail because they are less adaptive than the spontaneous settlements they replace. There is a constant clash between the forces of the informal and formal sector as the formal sector fails to involve communities and learn from these generative processes.

### iii. Community Based Development & Generative Codes:

Similar to the ideas of generative planning and organic settlement formation, as described by Uzzell, Christopher Alexander's 'pattern language' develops a process of generative codes to which the formal sector can develop planning mechanisms that incorporate these organic methods, enabling bottom-up development (Alexander, Hirshen, et al. 1969). The projects in Mexicali, Mexico and Lima, Peru are examples of the successful implementation of the generative theory of redevelopment, planning and design. Alexander's concepts are based around the notion of community participatory design and direct involvement with the project (Alexander, Davis, et al. 1984). This enables the organic growth of the projects, which become incremental experiments. It is also important to allow the users to become personally invested in their habitat. Hassan Fathy further supports the use of community-based design, but focuses on community involvement in construction through the education of craft in the New Gourna Project (Fathy 1973).

The ideas of participatory design and community-based involvement have been continued in the planning ideas of 'new urbanism.' The Environmental Structure Research Group (ESRG) uses the generative codes developed by Alexander in their process of urban design and planning. Members of ESRG, led by Nikos Salingaros at the *Brazilian and Ibo-American Congress on Social Housing 2006*, describe the process of using generative codes in planning in order to create bottom-up growth and development (Salingaros et al. 2006). Following the ideas of John F.C. Turner (1991), they support self-help building practices and suggest it as one of the only ways for social housing to be successful. In addition, they call for the architect and planner to act as the manager of the process and to be an expert in this

new way of thought, propelled by Alexander. Following John F.C. Turner's logic, informal settlements are sophisticated, complex 'organisms' that grow systematically and are capable of adapting (1991). Informal settlements should not be looked at as inherently a bad thing, but something that can be improved upon; Roberto Chavez is a proponent of this concept (Chavez 2011). These settlements could use infrastructure improvements such as those undertaken in the 'Orangi Project,' but there is no top down, one size fits all approach to the development and revitalization of the urban environment (Hasan 2006). Salingaros et al. (2006) propose that the creation of better livable communities needs to be based on a bottom-up processes that allows the settlement to develop organically; they advocate, "...a bottom up social approach with a strictly top-down intermediate administrative level" (p 24). It would be better if the system grew purely organically, from the bottom-up, but given the state of societal forces it is doubtful that this can occur in a healthy manner.

#### iv. Community Based Development: Immigrant Capital:

The revitalization project of Macarthur Park as described by Sandoval (2010) is a hybrid that involved the implementation of a large infrastructure revitalization project and local bottom-up redevelopment mechanisms that created vibrancy in a once blighted urban area. Sandoval (2010) uses the notion of co-evolution and adaptation to explain what occurred between the Mesoamerican endogenous institutions and the city's revitalization institutes. In this case, the social capital that was within the endogenous immigrant population was built up by community based organizations and local micro-enterprises. This capital enabled individuals, who

became political actors, to directly influence the project. The accumulated social capital helped withstand the large infrastructure project of the revitalization institute and protected this population from being pushed out. Clearly the MacArthur Park revitalization project was more successful in empowering the community and using endogenous mechanisms. It is a successful model of combining bottom-up and top-down approaches to redevelopment whether or not it was intended this way, and shows the power of immigrant capital.

#### v. Economic Development:

The ideas of William Easterly in *The White Man's Burden* allude to ways that bottom-up development can occur after a top-down intermediary creates a catalyst through expertise; as the catalyst develops organically, it increases the social, cultural, and economic capital of a community (Easterly 2006). Easterly's ideas have come to fruition in the Grameen Bank, formed by Muhammad Yunis, which creates micro-lending that brings access to credit within marginalized communities (Yunus 2008). The micro-consignment model developed by Greg Van Kirk is another example of bottom-up economic development. These micro-enterprise models help alleviate symptoms of poverty and promote economic growth. They also help communities gain capital to purchase housing or build their own.

#### C. Gaps:

The most successful form of development seems to lie in the generative planning which involves the community in the planning process. Creating a process that intertwines the users in the planning, combining all of the collective knowledge available seems necessary for a successful development project. People know what



they want and what works for them, this is a very important lesson learned from self-help building. Turner, Alexander, and Salingaro's work demonstrates the success of this method. On the other hand, Fathy, who tried to do right by the users, failed to achieve a design that was accepted by them. The New Gournia project was never occupied due primarily to political reasons (Fathy 1973).

The question remains, can a bottom-up approach to urban development be done without an intermediate top-down level? In response to Salingaros et al's approach, one must question whether or not this will still create the sort of clash between formal and informal sectors that Stoecker and Uzzell allude to. In the case of MacArthur Park, it appears that the bottom-up mechanisms were in reaction to the massive revitalization project and possibly would not have existed without it, following the logic of an organic reaction for survival. The use of generative codes in planning in order to create bottom-up development seems promising, but too idealistic. Ultimately most of the work of the ESRG has to be regulated by the government, which requires formalization. Lastly, most cases of successful generative development occur within informal settlements in countries that have fewer regulations on building and development when compared to the United States and Britain. How will this process succeed in heavily regulated and formulated municipalities and economies?

#### D. Hypothesis:

How can bottom-up development be used to revitalize communities within the regulatory forces of governance and combat gentrification? I propose the best way to create bottom up revitalization is to create a process that is the composite of

generative and community based development, implementing methods of bottom-up economic development. Through empowering communities and amplifying their collective resources, gentrification can be mitigated. This will enable the creation of regenerative urban revitalization.

#### E. Research Methods:

To begin to understand the complex relationship of integrated top-down and bottom-up development, I conducted qualitative research, interviewing one organization that acts as a community based development organization and another organization that is a non-governmental organization, promoting economic development as well as community based development. Then, I reviewed select organizations that practice generative and bottom up planning and development. The following summarizes what I discovered. (See appendix for interview questions.)

##### i. Interviews

The first interview that I conducted was with Aaron Perri, the executive director of Downtown South Bend, Inc. (DTSB). “DTSB is a not-for-profit 501C(6) organization dedicated to the continued growth and prosperity of Downtown South Bend in partnership with the city of South Bend, Indiana<sup>1</sup>. DTSB continually works to improve the South Bend community’s quality of life through creative marketing and promotion, coordinated public/private initiatives, effective economic development and business recruitment” (Perri 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> South Bend can best be described as a typical rust belt city that saw its demise after the closing of the automobile factories. Known primarily for the Studebaker Automobile and Notre Dame football, it was once a great and vibrant city that can rise again to greatness.

The greatest benefit that DTSB provides to the community is creating access to resources for small businesses in the downtown area of South Bend. These include four grant programs: façades, interior improvements, events, and retail assistance. The second benefit, which is often intertwined with the first, is fostering community involvement from the greater South Bend area in its initiatives. These resources include, but are not limited to, design services, business advice, and legal advice. Aaron refers to the improvements to the downtown as “improvements that appeal to people through the senses, improvements that look, feel, and sound better; improvements that act as a catalyst for downtown revitalization” (2012).

The “Façade Grant Program” pairs businesses with ‘pro-bono’ design services from University of Notre Dame architecture students and organizations such as Architecture for Humanity, which I had the opportunity to participate in. DTSB has provided a strong linkage between the School of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame and the downtown businesses and the city of South Bend as well as the South Bend Historic Preservation Commission. Various charettes have been facilitated by DTSB to help spur development on multiple sites, one in particular, the ‘Warf Site,’ has significantly benefited from these exercises and is planning to undergo development in the near future. These charettes bring together students, professors, local architects, community members, local business members, and local investors and developers together to brainstorm on ideas to improve South Bend. Aaron refers to it as “leveraging local assets” (2012).

Talking on gentrification as it relates to the development of the ‘Warf Site’ and the ‘East Bank Townhouse Development’ on the old ‘River Rink’ site across the

street, Aaron admits that it is hard to avoid gentrification. Aaron proposes that DTSB can help prevent gentrification or at least ameliorate displacement through intertwining the local community within these projects. "As the 'downtown experts,' DTSB has influence in the city government and can advocate for mixed income projects as well as other methods of integrating the local community in these developments. With the plans in line for the development of the 'East Bank' after the closing of the 'Transpo' building, DTSB will have its work cut out to make sure the best interests of the community are maintained" (Peri 2012). DTSB hopes that its small business initiatives will help create avenues to involve local residents in new enterprises as these areas become developed.

The key of DTSB's mission to revitalize South Bend's downtown is its endeavor to create community cohesion. Through involving as many community members as possible in every initiative, DTSB tries to bring out the expert in each and every one of those involved, helping to facilitate revitalization. DTSB is very successful at bringing together the collective interests and knowledge of the downtown community.

Hands Inc. is another example of using access as a mechanism for bottom-up development. I interviewed Mariana Diaz, Executive Director of Hands Inc., a 501(C)3 non-profit that connects student volunteers to existing organizations in Central America; it is based in Guatemala with a recruitment office in Notre Dame, Indiana. Mariana (2012) considers Hands, "a mixture of top-down and bottom-up mechanisms in the sense that the people involved do not belong to the community being affected." She explains that, "nonetheless, we have also helped local volunteers

get involved with their own communities and have connected them with organizations that have projects in their communities. In addition, some organizations and initiatives were created and/or led by people within the community.”

Hands is primarily focused on forming partnerships with organizations in marginalized communities and connecting them with students and volunteers locally and abroad. The Guatemala office forms partnerships with local organizations and is in charge of carrying due diligence of the organizations, evaluating projects and coordinating the volunteer programs. “[Mariana] has seen a wide emergence of initiatives aimed to support the communities become self-sustainable and promote business entrepreneurship“ (Mariana 2012). Three specific organizations that support self sustaining communities in Guatemala are: ‘Constru Casa,’ ‘Finca Bohemia,’ and ‘Un Techo Para Mi Pais.’ Hands did an intense research of organizations that already had the infrastructure to receive volunteers and formed volunteer programs with them.

At first glance Hands would seem as a purely top-down approach to development, but through providing local organizations with student volunteers they are helping create access to expertise, which plays an important role in bottom-up, generative development. Greg VanKirk (2012) coins the term “you are the relative expert” when referring to social entrepreneurship; this concept is very fitting for the access Hands provides. Furthermore, what you learn from the endogenous population can be just as fruitful as what they learn from you.

ii. Practitioners:

The last two organizations chosen for analysis relate to social housing and slum upgrading. The first being the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), and the other being Assai, an organization of experienced community development professionals, including project managers, engineers, architects and knowledge workers that work with communities and on infrastructure. I have chosen these based on familiarity, David Week of Assai and Tom Kerr of ACHR are colleagues of my thesis advisor, Howard Davis.

The Asian Coalition For Community Action (ACCA) primarily focuses on small community upgrading. “[ACCA’s] core activities are the implementation of 500 small community upgrading projects and 50 larger and more comprehensive housing projects by poor communities, who organize themselves into savings groups and form joint community development funds with their local governments to support these community-planned and community-implemented projects” (Kerr 2011). ACHR works to facilitate linkages between the urban poor and the local government and stakeholders in order to promote bottom-up, people driven change.

ACHR works within the regulative system of governance to act as a bridge linking poor communities to regulatory power. It also acts to connect these communities with the ongoing initiatives and resources through the ACCA. ACHR hopes to demonstrate how their process of development can be scaled up and replicated, showing the success of their practices to the global community. The ACCA Program works to bring focus to the communities, and creates people-driven development and change.

Assai, a development organization in Melbourne, Australia works with

indigenous populations in Australia, bringing a sustainable development approach to communities, and providing local employment and quality housing through bridging resources. “Assai believes in human development: they focus on building capacity, sustainability and local ownership, planning the built environment around people’s needs” (Assai 2011). Assai uses ‘pattern language’ to facilitate generative planning and development. Assai bridges the communities to government in order to help facilitate development and infrastructure projects. Assai works to maintain the capacity and culture of the poor and isolated communities in order to avoid displacement and other forms of potential harm to the communities.

#### F. Analysis:

The overarching theme demonstrates that the strongest form of creating bottom-up development is through bridging communities and regulatory powers. All four organizations demonstrate the power of providing communities with access to resources they would not otherwise have. Through bridging, communities become empowered and are better prepared and able to fight gentrification and displacement. Also, the reactive power of communities to massive development projects, which cause displacement, has been successful in empowering them to coevolve with development, such as the case of MacArthur Park.

DTSB, ACHR, and Assai demonstrate the power of creating cohesion within communities and developing the endogenous resources of those communities. DTSB’s use of charettes for downtown revitalization projects demonstrates the importance of drawing the entire communities’ attention to a development project. Through creating a process of development and being the ‘resident experts,’ these

organizations demonstrate best practices for community development and revitalization, empowering and amplifying the cultural and social capital of communities.

Planners, urban designers, and community developers need to be educated in these processes of bottom-up development that exist as well as the theories of generative planning and development, developed by Uzzell, Salinger, Alexander, Turner, etc.. Once practitioners understand the key concepts of generative planning they can develop and manage a process that enables bottom-up growth to occur in a regulatory system and which prevents gentrification. This is where the top-down expertise is necessary to facilitate generative growth in a healthy manner.

#### G. Conclusion:

The practice and theory of generative planning appear more applicable to informal settlements and social housing in developing countries. Assai demonstrates the success of using Alexander's "Pattern Language" in the process of planning and development. Within the more regulatory structures, such as the United States, it appears much more difficult to implement these theories to social housing, especially within a complex and bureaucratic housing system.

Other firms such as Opticos in Berkeley, CA use form based codes, which are more formalized versions of Alexander's generative codes and are more attune to development practices in the United States. Leon Krier and Andre Duany have been proponents of the use of form-based codes in redevelopment projects in the United States and advocate for them through the Council for New Urbanism. However, the



'new urbanist' project in Seaside, Florida has been critiqued for creating a façade of social good but in reality causing gentrification.

Planners in the United State must learn from their counterparts across the globe in order to realize the benefits of generative and bottom-up approaches to planning and development. Hopefully, through reeducation, we will begin to see changes in the planning practice that will lead to positive changes in our communities and the fall of gentrification as we all rise, from the bottom upward.

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## Appendix:

### Interview Questions:

These questions became more of an outline for conversation. I believe that conversations are the best method for interviews since they allow for the interview to adapt and be flexible. Following a strict set of interview questions can often be too rigid and not provide the needed flexibility to get to the core of what is most important.

Also note, I was not able to interview Habitat for Humanity, Haiti or Architecture for Humanity due to time constraints and unavailability. I plan to interview these organizations while in Haiti, and also will interview David Week at Assai.

To start, could you tell me a little about your organization and the work you do to help develop communities?

Off hand, what percentage of your development strategies that you implement are bottom-up and what percentage are top-down (generative/organic vs. regulative)?

What type of bottom-up strategies do you use in your projects?

How have you developed these strategies? Are they universal, or adapted on an individual basis to each project?

What tools do you use to implement these strategies?

How do you involve the community members in these strategies?

What have been your most effective tools?

Have you seen successful growth through these bottom-up redevelopment strategies?

Can you give me an example of strategies that received a positive response in the communities that you work in? Were these top-down strategies or bottom-up?

Are there any provisions to grant members of the community access to financing, legal advice, or business advice?

Does your organization implement any micro-entrepreneurship models such as micro-finance, micro-consignment, etc?

How have you tried to involve the youth in order to get them to be invested in the community?

Do you try to implement any strategies to retain the community's collective knowledge and creative knowledge; such as getting the youth to remain in the community after receiving education?