

# Revitalising the Calumet: A Model for Urban Regeneration?

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# REVITALISING THE CALUMET: A MODEL FOR URBAN REGENERATION?<sup>1</sup>

Collaborative decision making has become a popular planning tool. Collaborative planning occurs when stakeholder groups, often with widely disparate viewpoints, come together to jointly address and arrive at consensus about complex problems. Proponents argue that seemingly intractable conflicts can be addressed through collaboration, and that complex issues involving the setting of goals and objectives and the allocation of resources can be resolved in ways that can not be done through independent action (Julian 1994).

This paper looks at a specific collaborative process in the United States, the Lake Calumet Ecosystem Partnership (LCEP). LCEP is a collaboration of some thirty stakeholder organisations, including local governments, voluntary organisations, community groups, and academic institutions that have come together to foster efforts to revitalise the Lake Calumet region of southeast Chicago, Illinois. The diverse partners that make up the LCEP have wide ranging interests relating to the historical, cultural, social,

are widely distributed” (Innes and Booher 1999, 412). Planners, it is argued, have turned to collaborative problem solving in recognition of the political nature of planning, and as a way to mediate the interests of powerful groups, while promoting the interests of less powerful groups (Julian 1994). While collaboration and consensus building may produce implementable, mutually beneficial agreements among stakeholders, the most important results may be the production of new relationships, new practices, and new ideas (Innes and Booher 1999).

Drawing on work by Susskind and Cruikshank (1987), Gray (1989), Julian (1995), and Selin and Chavez (1995), Margerum (1999) has identified three phases of the collaborative process. They are:

- The *problem-setting phase*, which includes bringing stakeholders together, obtaining their commitments to work collaboratively and developing a structure to facilitate the collaborative process;
- The *direction-setting phase*, which includes stakeholders working together to identify problems, exchange information, resolve conflicts, determine common goals, achieve consensus, and identify implementation actions; and
- The *implementation phase*, which includes stakeholders establishing a structure for implementation, designing an approach to implementation, implementing actions, and monitoring and measuring outcomes (Margerum 1999).

Margerum states that the motivation to continue beyond the first two phases of collaboration depends on the factors motivating stakeholders to enter into the process in the first place. He cites the desire to resolve conflict and an interest in building consensus as differing motivating factors that can affect outcomes (Margerum 1999).

Formal collaborations are frequently accomplished through the creation and maintenance of partnerships. Partnerships have become a common mechanism for co-ordinating the activities of public agencies, especially when agency missions are overlapping or when several agencies are charged with delivering programs to the same group of people or the same geographic location. Partnerships among public agencies are seen as mechanisms for providing co-ordination of work of a “jungle of interconnected organizations” (Alexander 1993, 328).

Increasingly partnerships are used for bringing disparate entities, such as government officials, representatives from business and industry, and community advocates together for consensus building and joint planning. In the U.S. and Australia partnerships are used in land and watershed management schemes (Innes 1992, Margerum 1999, Paulson 1998). In Britain, partnerships and collaboration are playing an increasingly significant role in a variety of social and area regeneration schemes (DETR 2000).

When citizens or community organisations are involved in collaborations and partnerships, the process can be seen as being a form of citizen participation. But simply including community members in a partnership does not, by itself, insure that there will be meaningful citizen involvement. While Sherry Arnstein’s (1969) classic “ladder of citizen participation” includes a rung called “partnership”, the structure and functioning of a partnership can result in citizens and their organisations performing at any level of Arnstein’s ladder from the lowest rung, manipulation, up to and including the rung of real partnership<sup>2</sup>. Promoting citizen participation in partnerships can be a way for government or others in power to obfuscate community interests

In a recent paper presented to the Association of American Geographers, North (2001) points out that including community in partnerships, especially if unsupported or poorly supported, can lead to a short-cutting of genuine consultation and to little more than therapeutic consultation used to mask real decisions being made elsewhere. Nonetheless, he contends that community actors can succeed in partnerships and can positively affect both





plans for creating a 3,000 acre Calumet Open Space Preserve, building an environmental centre for interpreting the natural and industrial heritage of the area, constructing the largest solar power generating station in the U.S., and building a plant to convert methane gas from existing landfills into electricity.

environmental centre was to be made by last August. As of May, 2001, the decision remains on hold.

Finally, on February 9<sup>th</sup> of this year Jacques Nasser, President and CEO of the Ford Motor Company announced a \$6million gift for the new environmental centre. At the same time the Mayor and Governor announced the formation of a Calumet Sustainable Growth Advisory Committee that will work with the City to find additional private investment to acquire and clean up a site, build the centre and create programming (City of Chicago February 9, 2001). Changes in rhetoric from “sustainable growth” to “sustainable development”, the foregrounding of what are said to be projects previously identified by the Governor and Mayor, and the “downtown” make up of the newly appointed “blue ribbon” committee, leave little doubt who is in charge of development in the region.

The Partnership has also been unsuccessful in promoting its vision for the region to its sponsor, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. In September, 2000 the IDNR rejected all but one of the 11 redevelopment proposals the Partnership had submitted in February, dashing the Partnership’s plans for quick implementation of its agenda. The only funded proposal was a sizeable grant to the City of Chicago for hydrological improvements of the wetlands surrounding Lake Calumet. While the improvements are needed and urgent and are supported by the Partnership, the grant is essentially part of the State’s commitment to the region announced at the June 2000 press conference and not a grant to the Partnership. By rejecting all the other proposals, IDNR left the Partnership members other than the City with no funding for projects they had hoped to undertake.

LCEP has been unable to convince IDNR that the highly urbanised, highly polluted nature of the Calumet region calls for more extensive efforts than the habitat protection and restoration projects the agency apparently is prepared to fund. One of the projects that had been submitted to IDNR was a pollution prevention project, that included a series of “good neighbour” dialogues between community and environmental organisations and local polluting industries. The proposal had been jointly developed by industry and environmental LCEP participants and the full membership had given it a high priority ranking. IDNR, however, rejected it as inappropriate for C-2000 funding. The project has been re-submitted this year with an accompanying statement summarising the Partnership’s commitment to the unique environmental character of the region. An argument is made in the statement that attention to ongoing pollution and its prevention in the area will do more



LCEP plan should focus on the needs of the region, but its rejection of the LCEP proposals suggests it feels that the LCEP vision and the proposed projects are outside of the scope of the C-2000 program.

- Lack of community involvement with groups viewing themselves as representatives of the community rather than being representative of the community; and
- Lack of stakeholder commitment to implementation.

With the exception of the problem of funding, non structural problems either have not affected LCEP or they have been overcome. The structural factors, however, present more serious barriers to success.

There are disparities of power and resources among the Partners, with the City of Chicago overshadowing nearly all other members. The City initially was not a member of the Partnership. Its participation was sought, however, because members realised that little could be accomplished without the City's approval and support.

Getting the City to become a member did nothing to change its position with respect to its power. Along with its political allies, the City can, if and when it chooses, act on its own. That the City is negotiating an economic development agreement with the Ford Motor Company, and that it refuses to fully disclose its plans for the environmental centre shows that whenever it is advantageous, the City will act independent of Partnership.

The C-2000 funding process requires each partnership to establish priorities and to rank proposals in a manner consistent with them. LCEP has struggled with this meeting this requirement but in both of the C-2000 funding rounds it has reached a consensus on priorities.

Whether LCEP truly represents the Calumet community is a subject of ongoing debate. Environmental organisations are represented in numbers beyond their actual influence in the region and community organisations are under-represented. All but a few of the environmental groups are based outside of the community, although their long term interest in preserving Lake Calumet and the surrounding areas qualifies them as stakeholders. There are only a few locally based environmental organisations in the Partnership, notably the Southeast Environmental Task Force.

LCEP is "too white". Much of the area's population is African-American and Latino, but neither group is well represented in LCEP. Members of LCEP are aware of the lack of minority representation and have launched a project to recruit more minority participants.

Commitment to implementation is also a problem. While the City's disregard of the collaborative process when it is inconvenient is the most obvious indication of limited commitment, other organisations are also not fully committed to the collaborative partnership process. Attempts to avoid issues on which the Partners could not arrive at consensus led one long time Calumet area activist to pronounce LCEP a failure and to withdraw from it.

### **CAN THE LCEP EXPERIENCE BE GENERALISED?**

Since February I have been closely observing Community at Heart (CAH), Barton Hill, Bristol. CAH is an organisation created to manage the British government's New Deal for Communities program in Bristol. It is one of 16 "pathfinder" New Deal groups in the UK, all of which are structured as "partnerships".

CAH is set up as a charitable company with the intent of creating a

project funding over a ten year period, and for devising strategies to allow CAH to continue beyond the life of the New Deal program.

The presence of a majority of local residents on the CAH board does not ensure a community controlled process. Some community leaders are concerned that the current board is too passive. They feel that the residents on the board are not acting as leaders, but rather are only responding to proposals that are brought to the board by either the CAH staff or by agencies interested in taking advantage of the New Deal funding.

There are many similarities between LCEP and CAH. Both partnerships consist of representatives of the community, government, and charitable organisations. Both exist as mechanisms for promoting community regeneration. Both have adopted definitions of regeneration that are holistic, seeing renewal as not just physical redevelopment, but social, economic, and cultural development as well.

But there are differences. CAH is a creation of the Central Government. It exists to implement the Government's New Deal Program in Barton Hill. As such it is subject to Government scrutiny and review. LCEP is not part of any

determining the degree to which real community involvement is supported within a partnership. They are:

- *Control* – the degree to which the community really controls the scope and direction of the partnership process;
- *Flexibility* – whether the process can be modified in ways to make it more effective and efficient and to make it responsive to community needs and concerns; and
- *Governance*

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