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ABSTRACT

This paper is designed as a guide to the study of empowerment in the neighborhood movement for historic preservation in New Orleans' French Quarter. For this case study, whose initial focus in on a relatively affluent sector of the population, culture and identity become prominent. However, the review adopts a broader focus to ensure its pertinence to more varied population groups, including those less privileged. Thus, although in the specific case study, initial research indicates the relevance of cultural aspects derived from the emergence of alternative visions of urban life, the discussion of political and economic empowerment remain crucial. (Contains 45 references.) (AA)

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The Dimensions of Empowerment

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John Foley

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The Dimensions of Empowerment

John Foley[1]

Introduction

We find the term empowerment used in many contexts. Advertisers use it to sell computers, politicians offer it as a prize to constituents and communities hope to obtain it. Through such usage, empowerment appears as something given or sold rather than as a social learning process valuable for the advancement of a critical participatory democracy. A reexamination of the significance of the empowerment concept is required. Here I do this through a selective revision of the many ways it is utilized in different areas of research. The alternative development theorists provide economic aspects, the community development and neighborhood movement literature give the political viewpoint, and planning literature adds a procedural dimension. Finally, cultural aspects comprise a particularly important component of empowerment and the new social movement literature is pertinent to the discussion of how groups, through the construction of collective identities, can challenge dominant cultural codes.

Such a redefinition of empowerment indicates that individual and groups need not be totally dominated by global and national processes outside their control. It represents a whole different approach that places emphasis on change from within; "the possibilities for revolution lie in living our utopias in the here and now"(Frazer & Lacy 1993, 119), rather than as derived only

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from say class-based conflict. Thus, while recognizing that collective organizations may be more powerful agents of change, the concept of empowerment places emphasis on the agency of individuals not necessarily incorporated in formally structured organizations.

This discussion is designed as a guide to the study of empowerment in the neighborhood movement for historic preservation in New Orleans' French Quarter. For this case study, whose initial focus is on a relatively affluent sector of the population[1], culture and identity become prominent. However, the review adopts a broader focus to ensure its pertinence to more varied population groups, including those less privileged. Thus, although in the specific case study, initial research indicates the relevance of cultural aspects derived from the emergence of alternative visions of urban life, the discussion of political and economic empowerment remain crucial.

Empowerment and alternative development

The idea that solutions to problems should be found "in the here and now," in which the role of individual agency is vital, forms a central theme basic to the idea of empowerment. Individuals take over their own destinies, creating alternative movements and forms of development. A similar sentiment is expressed by Castells, who near to the end of *City and the Grassroots* asks why the insistence of urban social movements when it is obvious that to achieve substantial transformations it would be necessary to consolidate an international working class movement, create participative democracies and use interactive communication systems. His answer is that "people appear to have no other choice" (Castells 1983, 329). This means not just waiting for some idealized solution but searching for the way in which progressive tendencies can be instrumental for creating the practice of alternative development. For Friedmann (1992), this

idea that people have no other choice is transcended by his emphasis on "people as active subjects of their own history" whose very self-empowerment is at the heart of change (vi).

This he joins (referring to the Third World) to the movement for alternative development, the so called 'third system' which has a three pronged focus on covering basic needs, a rational use of resources with environmental sensitivity, and a working toward an ever greater self reliance of communities. Such development can be equally important in developed countries, providing jobs and internal circulation of social surplus as well as producing profound effects on empowerment (as Body-Gendot, 1993, showed for Muslim women in France). In the U.S., Stoecker (1994) pointed to the way, in the Cedar-Riverside area of Minneapolis, cooperative businesses could employ local community members, generate resources and form the basis for more autonomous production and consumption patterns. Additionally, they attended to specific needs in a collective fashion, for instance, provision of food and health care, which they could develop in extreme cases to cover basic needs (soup kitchens). Progress in these areas would convince people that they have autonomous power, legitimately theirs, allowing them to break the dual domination of the state and the market (Friedmann 1992). Here, not only is the community important but also the individual, the household and the group. This does not negate the vital importance of more large scale organizations but shows that individual empowerment can strongly influence the creation of larger transforming networks.

Castells and Friedmann are also linked in their views of local space. For Castells it provides a protection from state surveillance, a separate space in which to develop values, ideas and projects not conforming to dominant social interests (Castells 1983, 70). Freidmann sees it as being highly significant for people's creative unfolding: "Gaining a secure and permanent foothold

in the friendly and supportive urban neighborhood is the most highly prized social power of all, and households are prepared to make almost any kind of sacrifice to obtain it" (Friedmann 1992, 68). This is the space that permits the flourishing of those very elements which are the means of survival, elements that are, as well, the bedrock of empowerment. That is to say the popular economic organizations sustain informal work not supervised by the state. Here is found the cooperative support within the neighborhood, the community workshops and the seeds of the protest movements motivated by the search for better housing and services. Not only that, it is the territorial base for the development of local government (79). We will see reference to the importance of the local and specific place incorporated repeatedly in the empowerment discussion.

In a discussion that points to more instrumental forms of economic empowerment, Christopher and Hazel Dayton Gunn (1991) use the Marxist category of surplus value to develop arguments related to the way the distribution of *social surplus* can be brought under democratic control and how its use affects the local economy. As such they reiterate the emphasis we have seen in the discussion, that is on aspects of economic distribution and consumption, rather than on the way surplus value is produced in the conflictive relation between capital and labor. They take (p.165), then, a stance which repeats a pragmatic desire to identify forms of change that avoid "endless debating revolutions that are not on the horizon or turning inward in despair of achieving any change." As such, they conceive of community organization and empowerment as the basis for the creation of more democratic communities and ones that can demand a fuller share of surplus value.

They recognize that communities are not able to stand outside the economic and political

system but must compete to enhance their attractiveness to capital. However, in doing so calculating the benefits and costs involved in such policies is necessary. The authors, in a manner similar to Friedmann's, propose that an alternative conception of development should be applied in which longer term calculations of sustainability and quality of life considerations are made. One form of calculation is to look at the way surplus value is distributed locally and how much is retained at the local level to generate further local-based development. The methods that they present for elaborating such calculations represent an important tool for local communities and institutions in the development of arguments that can indicate the varying impacts of different types of investment. Thus 'growth' is not any growth but that in which locally produced social surplus is reinvested locally.

Again emphasis is on the local state, seen as the privileged arena for democratic involvement. A more direct link is possible between the many and varied local initiatives that have the potential to bring social surplus under control as well as encouraging the engagement, education and empowerment of people in communities. This would also allow the development of a range of alternative institutions, the *third sector alternatives* that can be instrumental in the attraction of resources and their recycling within the community together with a more democratic control of decision making. To attract financial resources, they cite the examples of Credit Unions, Community Development Loan Funds and Development Banks as well as pointing out the way resources from foundations and philanthropic organizations can be utilized to foment local development or to finance local services. A concrete example of the way financial institutions can aid local communities is illustrated by Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick (1993). They have shown how the locally controlled Cuban Banks in Miami were able to provide capital

on the basis of personal reputation, something only possible in locally organized communities.

In the case of New Orleans' historic French Quarter, although residents are not poor groups seeking alternative forms of economic development, they are promoting what could be thought of as an alternative vision of development, where preservation of an historic milieu is counterposed to growth policies that increasingly threaten the residential character of the area. They consider the costs and benefits of growth and conclude that the long term benefits of preservation are greater than the short term benefits of mass tourist development. Michael Thomas (1994) sees this conservation idea as a challenge to undisputed right of property-owners to do what they will with their property and so enters into conflict with the basic conditions of a capitalist-run market.

Similarly, the importance of the specific place is fundamental to the resident's sense of identity, and there are concerns that economic development could further displace groups of people who through their diversity and character, contribute to the particular sense of place. The type of economic activities are equally affected as, for instance, "real" art galleries are replaced by gift shops, and services for local residents are supplanted. Residents of the Quarter make it clear that, even though the physical space is vital to the character of the zone, it is the diverse neighborhood that is precious. It is this "friendly and supportive" neighborhood that gives them the "foothold" to develop particular lifestyles where alternative visions of urban living flourish, and they defend it tenaciously.

Participation in decision making processes; examples from urban planning

The previous discussion has made it clear that participation in the decision making process

is an essential feature of people's empowerment. A diversion into the urban planning literature is made here to indicate some of the procedural aspects that this implies and the role that progressive professionals can assume. It is an area where there has been a constant preoccupation with the significance of people's participation. However, participation has multiple meanings and can vary from citizen manipulation to processes leading to citizen control (Arnstein 1969). As such, not all participation can be considered as potentially empowering. However, a number of authors in this field are concerned with the theme of empowerment through the planning process (for example, Healey 1992, 1996, Innes 1996, Forester 1989, 1993, 1994).

For instance, one of the most influential authors in this area, John Forester (1989) exhorts planners to "work on problems with people" (p.4) as a way to reinforce general democratic processes. The key to this empowerment is in the recognition that the day to day work of planners is communicative. Recognizing that data is not neutral, he sees that planners function in the role of "gatekeepers" over information that is not just a technical, but also a political, resource. Given that information is a source of power, it is important that planners understand how relations of power shape the planning process;

> despite the fact that planners have little influence on the structure of ownership and power in this society, they can influence the conditions that render citizens able (and unable) to participate, act, and organize effectively regarding issues that affect their lives ... . A key source of planners' power to exert influence is the control of information. (28)

With these arguments Forester defends "progressive" planning, recognizing structural limitations, but seeing it possible to organize information to counteract ideological domination and misinformation. One means to achieve this is by working toward the correction of needless

distortions of communication even within a situation where "fully open communication" is an unattainable goal.

Innes (1996) extends the consideration of the role of information in communicative policy practice as presented by Forester above. This author again questions the vision of the policy professional's role as offering unbiased analysis to elected officials, leaving decision making to elected officials. This changes the very conception of information as something that is first obtained, scrutinized and then acted upon.

Analysis of information was seen traditionally as a once and for all activity after which decisions would be made. Innes reminds us that information is important in all stages of what can be considered a continuous decision making process. What is more, information represents a particular temporal vision where meaning is collectively constructed. For this reason, participation means contributing to this collective construction throughout the process (in the very definition of problem areas, options for their solution, their evaluation, etc.), not only at the points where policy options are being evaluated or specific policies have already been formulated.

Friend and Hickling (1987) incorporate these principles in a more procedural approach that makes "interactive participation" one of the pivots of a planning method; "strategic choice." For the discussion here, the most important factor is that this method is developed, in all its stages, to take into account that decisions are not made by an 'expert' sitting in front of a desk but collectively by groups including both experts and representatives of the different groups involved. In this "process of communication," decisions are reached though information sharing and negotiation where it becomes necessary to reach compromises between conflicting views. Once recognized that decisions are made in this way, the authors convert this form of interaction into

how decisions should be made and integrate it fully in every point of their method.

From this focus flows a series of orientations that give consistency to the communicative nature of the method. First of all, the technology used in the process should be understandable for all its members. Echoing Innes's concern that the communities should put scientific knowledge to the test of relevance, the authors would see as negative the use of sophisticated technology to justify a certain course of action. They propose the use of "soft systems" (p.89), and their method can be realized without the use of computers, each step being fully justified to the actors involved in the project. Most important, however, is that on this type of method, the dynamic learning processes generated within decision making transcend the mere preoccupation for particular outcomes.

This aspect can generate an interesting discussion in relation to the New Orleans French Quarter, where residents have been protagonists in the formation of an alternative discourse where they promote preservation above development, and diversity above homogeneity. They develop ways of intervening in the policy making process derived from the development of an alternative preservationist discourse. Initially, the hypothesis could be made that residents have become the experts who generate policy as a result of the constant monitoring of the urban development process. Initial evidence suggests that they often bypass the planner in this process policy being determined more through the interaction of residents and politicians.

Political empowerment

It has been difficult in the previous discussion to separate political empowerment from other forms of empowerment, particularly at the level of the local political institutions.

However, some forms of political empowerment can be more clearly delineated. For instance, in Richard Keiser's (1993) article on African-American political empowerment we find one of the few attempts at a definition. For him empowerment is "the process by which a minority group or representatives of that minority group gain greater ability to influence political outcomes in favor of the minority group" (85). This can be measured in terms of capturing important offices, instituting polices important for the group, securing benefits that other groups aspire or promoting the election of candidates sympathetic to their aims. In this case, empowerment is seen as a group process working through the representative democratic system. However, it is a system that can be "rolled back" if political representation is curtailed. The role of the individual empowerment in such an interpretation is not made clear.

Other interpretations are often critical of representative democracy for its lack of participatory opportunity and self-growth. For Freidmann (1992), for example, the people's empowerment/alternative development link is tied to the building of an inclusive democracy, where gender and intergenerational equality is an important goal. In other words, the extremely partial involvement in public life enjoyed by the poorer sectors of the population must be overcome. Their empowerment requires demands for "social justice and a respectful treatment as citizens with equal rights" (133).

Such an idea of inclusive democracy can be linked to the desire for a more direct democratic form of government. Peter Bachrach and Aryeh Botwinick (1992) remind us that traditionally, John Stuart Mill's theory of democratic participation points to the educational value of political participation within the vision of individuals constantly searching for self-empowerment. In fact, criticism of representative democracy derives from its lack of truly

participatory opportunities so reducing the potential for personal growth and self-empowerment (10). Active participation, especially for the "lower classes" is essential for "helping citizens to discover what their real interests are" rather than simply "facilitating passively the expression of *perceived* interests" (11). For these authors, the principal means of political empowerment is through class-based political movements reflecting working class interests. Nonetheless, they recognize the contribution that environmentalists, feminists, neighborhood and civil rights activists make to the struggle, especially when aligned to workers' interests.

In contrast to this normative approach, the neighborhood movement and community development literature examines the concrete processes by which local groups have obtained access to political power. It could be argued that, despite including more affluent groups who could not be thought of as confrontational to capital, they can oppose dominant local interests in a city. There are many examples. Davis (1992) points to the way neighborhood organizations challenged the hegemony of the development elite in Los Angeles; Marston & Towers (1993) illustrate how in Tucson, neighborhood activists have confronted 'growth machine' politics to preserve neighborhood values and desert landscape; Gunn and Gunn (1991) indicate how, in Boulder, residents have put limits on expansion and blocked rezoning of agricultural land for employment-generating activities. Stoecker (1994) describes how groups in Minneapolis could modify redevelopment proposals.

Stoecker, for example, found that urban communities can prevail against capital and, in Cedar-Riverside, community power was used to resist the domination of capital. Here the organized community prevented the imposition of an urban renewal plan for the study area. In its place the community started to control redevelopment. Stoecker shows that although elites

have a privileged access to economic and political power, organized communities can confront these elites and wrest from them modifications in urban policy. Such communities can successfully promote an alternative vision of urban development, avoid displacement of existing residents and secure the kind of development appropriate to their needs, for instance, affordable housing.

This community opposed a "growth machine" whose aims were to facilitate local capital interests linked to urban redevelopment. Stoecker reminds us that the "local state" cannot be seen to act wholly in the interests of capital because it depends for its continued existence on political legitimacy. As such the stability of urban regimes is relative. When confronted with organized resistance, the local state in Minneapolis had to make concessions to the community and it was successful in "pulling City Hall out of the growth machine" (p.114). Consequently, neighborhood activists could exercise their agency, reshaping the political opportunity structure. Eventually, community members were elected to local government office and could exercise a more direct influence. Stoecker (p.166) considers that, in the 1980's, this approached the definition of a "progressive regime" (see Stone 1993) .

Stoecker illustrates the way actors make use of the political opportunity structure to achieve this transition. This concept is significant as it allows a clearer conceptualization of how urban regimes can change. A community's success depends on the capacity of actors to make themselves felt by using the spaces for struggle allowed by a pluralist political system. Thus, the existence of the power structure is not denied, but it is penetrable because its legitimacy depends on its complying with democratic and legal rules. This community, although initially unable to mobilize, later could use the legal and political system plus strategic threats of urban insurgence.

This opportunity structure also involved the exploitation of weaknesses in the growth coalition itself and a changing climate that began to question the suitability of high-rise housing development for families.

In a similar vein, and specifically addressing the situation in New Orleans, Whelan, Young and Lauria (1994), suggest paying more attention to the changing structure of the electoral coalition in the maintenance of regime stability. In this city, an electorally significant group of Black low-income renters monitors strategies for promoting growth and maintain pressure for the provision of public services. They accepted certain growth policies only when they held the promise of job generation. Cook and Lauria (1995), examining a public housing project, in the same city, showed that development interests who see as convenient the transformation of public housing to other types of ownership or occupation, could not ignore pressures from the African-American community. Such studies show that the electoral coalition is significant in changing the course of growth coalition policies.

These examples clearly involve pluralistic bargaining and make use of the system of representational democracy to gain empowerment through access to political decision making.

So this political economy is not a structuralist version where agency is excluded but one which puts emphasis on the way space is "produced" through collective practices (Molotch 1993, 31). This is related theoretically to the concept of structuration in Giddens, that explains how, despite the imposition of a certain structure, agents can act outside these structural constraints and create modifications. Empirically Molotch sees evidence of this agency in the environmental movements that have challenged the concept of unbridled growth (47). Such a challenge to the growth machine could create a substantial realignment of political power and

confront certain growth interests.

What is particularly interesting in the discussion of Logan & Molotch (1987), adding to the structuration idea, is their emphasis on the importance of the variety of processes that occur in the local community which are potentially a source of resistance and identity. They question Castells' (1983) vision of urban social movements that tends to exclude those groups that are not thought to be system challenging[2]. Groups such as "block clubs, neighborhood groups and other associations that have place related use values" (Logan & Molotch, 37) can influence land use outcomes. Again we return to the importance of place: the neighborhood is not just a physical entity but one where both material and nonmaterial rewards contribute to the sense of "community." So residents are linked to place through material and "sentimental" ties. "*Sentiment* is the inadequately articulated sense that a particular place uniquely fulfills a complex set of needs" (20). The importance of these links should not be underestimated and is a potential source of empowerment for communities confronting assaults from interests stressing exchange values.

Added to this Logan & Molotch give attention to the variety of cultural patterns shown in community studies that show that any monolithic interpretation of values would be incorrect. In a way that recalls Castells and Friedmann, they stress the importance of informal support networks, the security derived from shared space, solidarity of ethnic origins and racial identity (as seen in Stack, 1974, Ramsey 1996). Culture is a powerful force that has the potential to achieve change from within, based upon values different to those that are dominant.

This discussion is relevant to New Orleans' French Quarter because sentiment plays a substantial role in the consolidation of dynamic residents groups that defend this very particular

space. It is also interesting that from a political point of view, although these groups are dominated by relatively affluent residents, they do not feel that they are represented politically. A potential conflict of interests occurs between political interests defending growth policies (that, at present are dominated by Black politicians who defend development as a generator of jobs) and preservation interests. This represents and arena where residents' groups can become active in the political domain and are potentially empowered.

In a study of Toronto, Filion (1991) points to the way residents of similar city-center areas share class positions and attitudes so facilitating mobilization potential. In fact it "provides the foremost arena where the gentrifying segment of the new middle class develops its political capacity" and plays an important role in their political empowerment. For gentrifiers it signifies "the forging of political identity." Though their activism is based in, and focussed on, the neighborhood this "may well be one of the few occasions for this class to develop collective capacity" (569).

However, the new middle-class have a "political ambivalence" due to its position between the two main classes - and must aim at maintaining political support: "this class must abide by the same rules guiding political influence as other non-capitalist classes do" (568). This could be very pertinent to the French Quarter, especially with regard to the need to promote collaborative relationships with a broad range of groups, and their consciousness of the need to diminish the conception that historic preservation is only a white elite concern.

New social movements, culture, identity and empowerment

Logan and Moloch, above begin to introduce cultural aspects, as elements of

empowerment, into the discussion. This follows a trend in the social sciences to privilege cultural elements of analysis (Johston and Klandermans 1995, vii; Calhoun 1995, 61), trend reflected in the new social movements literature. This is an area of study that is particularly relevant for the study of empowerment because it brings to prominence the importance of redefining the very terms and forms of understanding involved in the interaction between groups and individuals. No longer is it exclusively a question of how the cake is divided but of what kind of cake is wanted, or perhaps to question even the need for cake. No longer is it a matter of focussing on traditional issues of class, race or gender but of seeing these as part of the broader cultural ground (Melucci 1995, 41; Young and Christos-Rogers 1995, 96).

This returns us to the theme of the central role of information and communication introduced in the discussion regarding communicative planning procedures. In this context, Alberto Melucci sees the very move to the cultural (1994) as characterized by the existence of "systems of high information density." Social conflicts occur not just in relation to access to material sources but increasingly around production and appropriation of resources that are based on information. Opposition is then expressed not through the political system but through challenging the cultural codes and language used in the organization of information. Through such challenges, individuals and groups able to "reappropriate, self-realize, and construct the meaning of what they are and what they do" (102). They can create oppositional systems of meaning that confront the dominant codes through which meanings are constructed.

In other words, the discussion cannot be restricted only to questions of redistribution, of the struggle for more resources - more political representatives, more access to services: For Melucci (1994) many conflicts appear only as:

> the expression of excluded social groups or categories pressing for representation. Here there is no antagonistic dimension to the conflict, there is only pressure to join a system of benefits and rules from which one has been excluded ... it need not necessarily entail antagonism against the logic of the system (107).

In other words, not only is it important to be included in the game but also to have control over the way the rules are set.

Within this context, the new social movement literature makes an important contribution, revindicating the importance of the struggle for individual and group identity. It reiterates that there are other forms of organization that attend to the multiple forms of oppression outside the labor/capital conflict. The women's movement's theme, of the personal being political, encapsulates and demonstrates the significance of linking the personal and the social and opens a whole range of opportunities for pursuing change. Consequent upon such an approach, the new social movement literature (represented, for instance, in the works of Klandermans, 1988, Melucci 1989, Laraña, et al. 1994, Johnston & Klandermans 1995) offers one way of understanding how through collective action, modified cultural codes can be put in place and defended. Through the consolidation of an oppositional culture a base is established for collective efforts aimed at achieving social change in the areas of culture, identity, and everyday life, as well as direct engagement with the state (Taylor and Whittier 1995, 166).

In this description, there is a close relation with the idea of empowerment, particularly in the cultural aspect, for the emphasis on individual identity and the way this identity is achieved. Identity is not something that is pre-given, dictated by some overarching ideology but is defined through collective interaction and mobilization. By concentrating on cultural and symbolic factors, a sense of belonging is built that gives members a feeling of power and allows them to

challenge the dominant system (Johnson et al. 1994, 10). The importance of individual identity is not subsumed to that of the group, rather, "wholly personal traits that although constructed through the interaction of biological inheritance and social life, are internalized and imported to social movement participation as idiosyncratic biographies"(12). The interaction between individuals is what creates a collective identity that transforms what can be thought of as collective grievances, arising from a common sense of injustice and outrage, that act as a force for group formation and solidarity (Johnston 1994, 277).

However, while collective identity remains a central focus, it cannot be separated from wider concerns of the way individual identity is constructed in a given physical domain. A reading of Anthony Giddens (1991) would suggest that even to concentrate on new social movements would be too limited in a situation where "the ethos of self-growth signals major social transitions in late modernity" (209). In specific *milieux* individuals embrace particular *lifestyles* "not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity" (81). This offers a more ample focus that is important for Giddens' insistence that, despite globalizing tendencies that blur time/space referents, mechanisms of self-identity do shape the institution of modernity.

As intimated, the women's movements, along with those seeking sexual, racial and ethnic empowerment through construction of their cultural identities, are prime examples of such processes of individual liberation that may or may not be associated with more formal organizations. Referring to the work of Alma Young and Jyaphia Christos-Rogers (1995), these authors point out that it is not just a question of recognizing sexual and racial discrimination but of understanding the embededness of gender and race in social institutions. Institutions are

organized in an active restructuring of relations of class, race, gender or "difference," linked to everyday life. They push culture to the foreground as a principal site for the study of resistance (96). Poor Black women, in a New Orleans housing project "are resisting by changing the culture within the community: they are 'throwing off' internalized oppression (i.e., creating another way of seeing themselves), and they are struggling with the powers that be to accept the community's definition of itself' (111).

This aspect has also economic repercussions. The culture of people is an asset of tremendous value in a world where difference within an increasingly homogeneous culture comes to be valued. Awareness of cultural values leads to the stimulation of demand for goods and services that can only be provided by that same cultural group. The propagation of the 'afrocentric idea' can be, as Berkerie (1994) points out, the basis for a "sustainable and renewable foundation for production, consumption, and exchange of goods and services" (144). So the construction of identity, based upon an awareness of difference, can foment economic activities that in themselves nourish the "complex oppositional culture." (Taylor and Whittier 1995). This process has been seen clearly in the women's, lesbian and gay movements (Castells 1984, Valentine 1995, Knopp 1989).

Finally, in this discussion it is important to recognize the confluence of the individual and the group throughout. This is important in relation to the idea of Keiser (1993) that group empowerment can be rolled back. The critical concept of individual empowerment implies that these processes are embedded in the individual. The groups may suffer reversals but the individual experience cannot be taken away. They are embedded in the non-visible networks (Laraña 1994), in long standing subcultures (McAdam 1994), or submerged networks (Melucci

1989) from which visible movements are constructed.

For the study of the French Quarter the new social movement literature is particularly relevant for understanding the transforming potential of groups who pursue particular lifestyles. This is especially so when the specific goal of historic preservation is joined to a vision where diversity is a valued asset. Such a vision on the one hand implies a questioning of development interests, especially those associated with the tourist industry, that tends to reduce diversity (causing residential activities to be converted to more remunerative uses). On the other hand, the desire to maintain a specific milieu in which diversity flourishes allows some minorities to find a safe space for the construction of their identities. All this makes one remember the words of Bourdieu (1993, 2), who says of the feminist movement that it cannot be disposed of by labeling it 'middle-class'. This movement of relatively affluent people can be seen in these terms, forming as it does an alternative vision of urban living and questioning the benefits of uncontrolled development.

Notable, also, is the significance of the particular place. The strong affection and attachment felt for a particular place and a particular milieu are the principal factors that draw people together. This is the basis of the formation of a collective identity that is further strengthened by the resentment caused by the inattention to commonly felt problems and the sense that neither the city hall nor the rest of the city's population are sympathetic to preservation goals. It shows how collective efforts, aimed at achieving social change in the areas of culture, identity and everyday life, also involve engagement with the state.

A synthesis

This discussion has indicated only some of the multiple sources of empowerment that can be achieved and how these can be incorporated in empirical research. Empowerment proves to be a broad category that can encompass processes within organized movements, but its particular significance lies in the recognition of the role of individual agency. People are "active subjects of their own history." Another common thread is the relevance of local space, and the local state as a focus for organizing, though the problems to be dealt with are not necessarily spatial. This is linked to the vision of the local state as a particularly relevant domain for the building of direct democratic processes. Environmental sensitivity and a revised conception of development are central issues also. This represents a challenge to the dominant development discourse and gives empowerment an oppositional character, though in some interpretations it has a more procedural orientation (Dreier 1996). However, because of its basic orientation toward change and the questioning of received discourses, empowerment is inextricably related to new social movements and other community and neighborhood mobilizations seeking to challenge dominant values.

While we can think there are limitless possible forms of empowerment, it could be useful to summarize the principal areas that have been discussed. A preliminary classification is proposed in the following manner:

Procedural democratic empowerment: the degree to which the population increasingly participates in the way policies, that affect them, are formulated and put into practice. The effectiveness of such processes would be assessed in relation to the satisfaction of the different groups that are affected, including groups that do not participate actively. A priori criteria are not appropriate but factors relating to the degree to which the community could influence the

problem focus, the options for action and the types of solutions considered are important indicators of the degree to which policy is modified substantially by community involvement (or is unmodified if community interests are met).

Economic empowerment: the degree to which residents begin to control the source of their income. In contrast to the lack of control that casually employed, unskilled and ununionised workers have over the labor process, the aim is to achieve a greater control like that of self-employed persons who dispose of a working capital that protects them, to a certain degree, from the fluctuation of the market. Important here is how the situation of residents has changed and how the union of residents has facilitated this process, for example through the diversion of community spending power to locally owned businesses, by securing community capital or providing services for themselves.

Political empowerment: in the formal levels, the increased capacity to obtain representation by elected office, and the degree of influence over political representatives is important. This becomes even stronger if it is backed by a movement that is capable of organizing, by its own initiatives to defend it interests. A range of attributes can be developed that aid the capacity of the movement and are typically developed through participative processes, for instance communicative skill and lobbying of officials. Ultimately, however political empowerment is linked to direct democracy and the capacity not only to participate but to dictate the terms of which this participation is incorporated.

Spatial and environmental empowerment: how groups obtain the capacity to control the space and the environment in which they live. Again, while the state must maintain its responsibility for the well-being of the population, the community can be empowered not just

by demanding services but by participating in numerous ways in their provision. Recreational, educational, health, security, maintenance, refuse collection and many other services can be increasingly assumed by residents. Such activities need to be seen in the context of how the state finances such services because increasing responsibility, without resources may suggest disempowerment. The degree to which the community control decision making, assumes more skilled tasks, and initiate practices better designed to serve their needs are aspects of great importance.

Cultural empowerment, the prize of diversity: the development and reinforcement of cultural values are a source of strength and solidarity. It is an important indication of alternative forms of production and consumption and is especially valuable for minority groups. The way in which women, groups defending ethnic, racial and sexual identity can develop means to attend to their particular needs is of fundamental interest. However, most important is the reconstruction of the cultural codes or the discourses that shape the very perception of self and society.

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1. Initial considerations presented here refer to intensive research focusses on the neighborhood movement dedicated to preserving the French Quarter. Members of this organization tend to be more affluent. However, the area presents a milieu where other less affluent or marginal groups live, work or use in distinctive ways (such as the homeless or grungies). The vision of some of these other groups will be incorporated into the research in the future. This, again, justifies the establishment the more ample definition of empowerment presented in this paper.

2.Logan & Molotch also speak of how Castells uses a wide definition of urban therefore including movements that they would not include in their narrower definition of 'urban' As such, civil rights movements or welfare rights groups would not be included within their analysis. It could be argued that this narrow definition excludes the possibility of important linkages between these movements and space, such as those pointed out by Castells in relation to civil rights and the spatial context of the 'ghetto'.

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