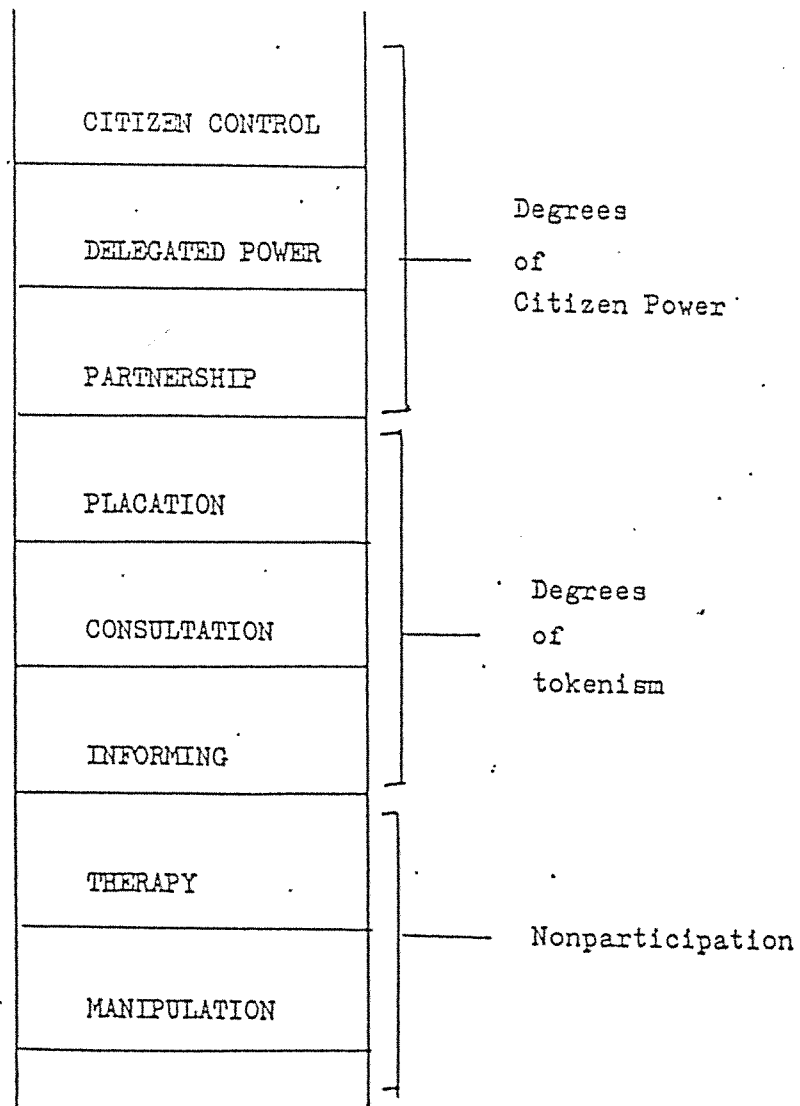


NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL WORK

EXTRACT from the article by Sherry R. Arnstein

"A LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION"

American Institute of Planners Journal July 1969



Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation

TYPES OF PARTICIPATION AND "NONPARTICIPATION"

A typology of eight levels of participation may help in analysis of this confused issue. For illustrative purposes the eight types are arranged in a ladder pattern with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens' power in determining the end product. (See Figure on page 1)

The bottom rungs of the ladder are (1) Manipulation and (2) Therapy. These two rungs describe levels of "non-participation" that have been contrived by some to substitute for genuine participation. Their real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable powerholders to "educate" or "cure" the participants. Rungs 3 and 4 progress to levels of "tokenism" that allow the have-nots to hear and to have a voice: (3) Informing and (4) Consultation. When they are proffered by power-holders as the total extent of participation, citizens may indeed hear and be heard. But under these conditions they lack the power to insure that their views will be heeded by the powerful. When participation is restricted to these levels, there is no followthrough, no "muscle", hence no assurance of changing the status quo. Rung (5) Placation, is simply a higher level tokenism because the groundrules allow have-nots to advise, but retain for the powerholders the continued right to decide.

Further up the ladder are levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision-making clout. Citizens can enter into a (6) Partnership that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional powerholders. At the topmost rungs, (7) Delegated Power and (8) Citizen Control, have-not citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power.

Obviously, the eight-rung ladder is a simplification, but it helps to illustrate the point that so many have missed - that there are significant gradations of citizen participation. Knowing these gradations makes it possible to cut through the hyperbole to understand the increasingly strident demands for participation from the have-nots as well as the gamut of confusing responses from the power holders.

Though the typology uses examples from federal programs such as urban renewal, anti-poverty, and Model Cities; it could just as easily be illustrated in the church, currently facing demands for power from priests and laymen who seek to change its mission; colleges and universities which in some cases have become literal battlegrounds over the issue of student power; or public schools, city halls, and police departments (or big business which is likely to be next on the expanding list of targets). The underlying issues are essentially the same - "nobodies" in several arenas are trying to become "somebodies" with enough power to make the target institutions responsive to their views, aspirations, and needs.

LIMITATIONS OF THE TYPOLOGY

The ladder juxtaposes powerless citizens with the powerful in order to highlight the fundamental divisions between them. In actuality, neither the have-nots nor the powerholders are homogeneous blocs. Each group encompasses a host of divergent points of view, significant cleavages, competing vested interests, and splintered subgroups. The justification for using such simplistic abstractions is that in most cases the have-nots really do perceive

the powerful as a monolithic "system", and powerholders actually do view the have-nots as a sea of "those people", with little comprehension of the class and caste differences among them.

It should be noted that the typology does not include an analysis of the most significant roadblocks to achieving genuine levels of participation. These roadblocks lie on both sides of the simplistic fence. On the powerholders' side, they include racism, paternalism, and resistance to power redistribution. On the have-nots' side, they include inadequacies of the poor community's political socioeconomic infrastructure and knowledge-base, plus difficulties of organizing a representative and accountable citizens' group in the face of futility, alienation, and distrust.

Another caution about the eight separate rungs on the ladder: In the real world of people and programs, there might be 150 rungs with less sharp and "pure" distinctions among them. Furthermore, some of the characteristics used to illustrate each of the eight types might be applicable to other rungs. For example, employment of the have-nots in a program or on a planning staff could occur at any of the eight rungs and could represent either a legitimate or illegitimate characteristic of citizen participation. Depending on their motives, powerholders can hire poor people to coopt them, to placate them, or to utilize the have-nots' special skills and insights. Some mayors, in private, actually boast of their strategy in hiring militant black leaders to muzzle them while destroying their credibility in the black community.

CHARACTERISTICS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

It is in this context of power and powerlessness that the characteristics of the eight rungs are illustrated by examples from current federal social programs.

1. Manipulation

In the name of citizen participation, people are placed on rubberstamp advisory committees or advisory boards for the express purpose of "educating" them or engineering their support. Instead of genuine citizen participation, the bottom rung of the ladder signifies the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by powerholders.

2. Therapy

In some respects group therapy, masked as citizen participation, should be on the lowest rung of the ladder because it is both dishonest and arrogant. Its administrators - mental health experts from social workers to psychiatrists - assume that powerlessness is synonymous with mental illness. On this assumption, under a masquerade of involving citizens in planning, the experts subject the citizens to clinical group therapy. What makes this form of "participation" so invidious is that citizens are engaged in extensive activity, but the focus of it is on curing them of their "pathology" rather than changing the racism and victimization that create their "pathologies".

3. Informing

Informing citizens of their rights, responsibilities, and options can be the most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation. However, too frequently the emphasis is placed on a one-way flow of information - from officials to citizens - with no channel provided for feedback and no power for negotiation. Under these conditions, particularly when information is provided at a late stage in planning, people have little opportunity to influence the program designed "for their benefit". The most frequent tools used for such one-way communication are the news media, pamphlets, posters, and responses to inquiries.

Meetings can also be turned into vehicles for one-way communication by the simple device of providing superficial information, discouraging questions, or giving irrelevant answers.

4. Consultation

Inviting citizens' opinions, like informing them, can be a legitimate step toward their full participation. But consulting them is not combined with other modes of participation, this rung of the ladder is still a sham since it offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account. The most frequent methods used for consulting people are attitude surveys, neighborhood meetings, and public hearings.

When powerholders restrict the input of citizens' ideas solely to this level, participation remains just a window-dressing ritual. People are primarily perceived as statistical abstractions, and participation is measured by how many come to meetings, take brochures home or answer a questionnaire. What citizens achieve in this activity is that they have "participated in participation". And what powerholders achieve is the evidence that they have gone through the required motions involving "those people".

Attitude surveys have become a particular bone of contention in ghetto neighborhoods. Residents are increasingly unhappy about the number of times per week they are surveyed about their problems and hopes. As one woman put it: "Nothing ever happens with those damned questions, except the surveyer gets \$3 an hour and my washing doesn't get done that day." In some communities, residents are so annoyed that they are demanding a fee for research interviews.

5. Placation

It is at this level that citizens begin to have some degree of influence though tokenism is still apparent. An example of placation strategy is to place a few hand-picked "worthy" poor on boards of Community Action Agencies or on public bodies like the board of education, police commission, or housing authority. If they are not accountable to a constituency in the community and if the traditional power elite hold the majority of seats, the have-nots can be easily outvoted and outfoxed. Another example is the Model Cities advisory and planning committees. They allow citizens to advise or plan ad infinitum but retain for powerholders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice. The degree to which citizens are actually placated, of course, depends largely on two factors: the

quality of technical assistance they have in articulating their priorities; and the extent to which the community has been organized to press for those priorities.

6. Partners

At this rung of the ladder, power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and powerholders. They agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through such structures as joint power boards, planning committees and mechanisms for resolving impasses. After the groundrules have been established through some form of give-and-take, they are not subject to unilateral change.

Partnership can work most effectively when there is an organized power-base in the community to which citizen leaders are accountable; when the citizens group has the financial resources to pay its leaders reasonable honoraria for their time-consuming efforts; and when the group has the resources to hire (and fire) its own technicians, lawyers, and community organizers. With these ingredients, citizens have some genuine bargaining influence over the outcome of the plan (as long as both parties find it useful to maintain the partnership). One community leader described it "like coming to city hall with hat on head instead of in hand."

7. Delegated Power

(1) In most cases where power has come to be shared it was taken by the citizens, not given by the city. There is nothing new about that process. Since those who have power normally want to hang on to it, historically it has had to be wrested by the powerless rather than proffered by the powerful.

(2) Negotiations between citizens and public officials can also result in citizens achieving dominant decision-making authority over a particular plan or program. Model city policy boards or CAA delegate agencies on which citizens have a clear majority of seats and genuine specified powers are typical examples. At this level, the ladder has been scaled to the point where citizens hold the significant cards to assure accountability of the program to them. To resolve differences, powerholders need to start the bargaining process rather than respond to pressure from the other end.

(3) Another model of delegated power is separate and parallel groups of citizens and powerholders, with provision for citizen veto if differences of opinion cannot be resolved through negotiation. This is a particularly interesting coexistence model for hostile citizen groups too embittered toward city hall - as a result of past "collaborative efforts" - to engage in joint planning.

(4) Various delegated power arrangements are also emerging in the Community Action Program as a result of demands from the neighborhoods and OEO's most recent instruction guidelines which urged CAAs "to exceed (the) basic requirements" for resident participation. In some cities, CAAs have issued subcontracts to resident dominated groups to plan and/or operate one or more decentralized neighborhood program components like a multipurpose service center or a Headstart program. These contracts usually include an agreed upon line-by-line budget and program specifications. They also usually include a specific statement of the significant powers that have been

delegated, for example: policy-making; hiring and firing; issuing sub-contracts for building, buying, or leasing. (Some of the subcontracts are so broad that they verge on models for citizen control.)

3. Citizen Control

Demands for community controlled schools, black control, and neighborhood control are on the increase. Though no one in the nation has absolute control, it is very important that the rhetoric not be confused with intent. People are simply demanding that degree of power (or control) which guarantees that participants or residents can govern a program or an institution, be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which "outsiders" may change them.

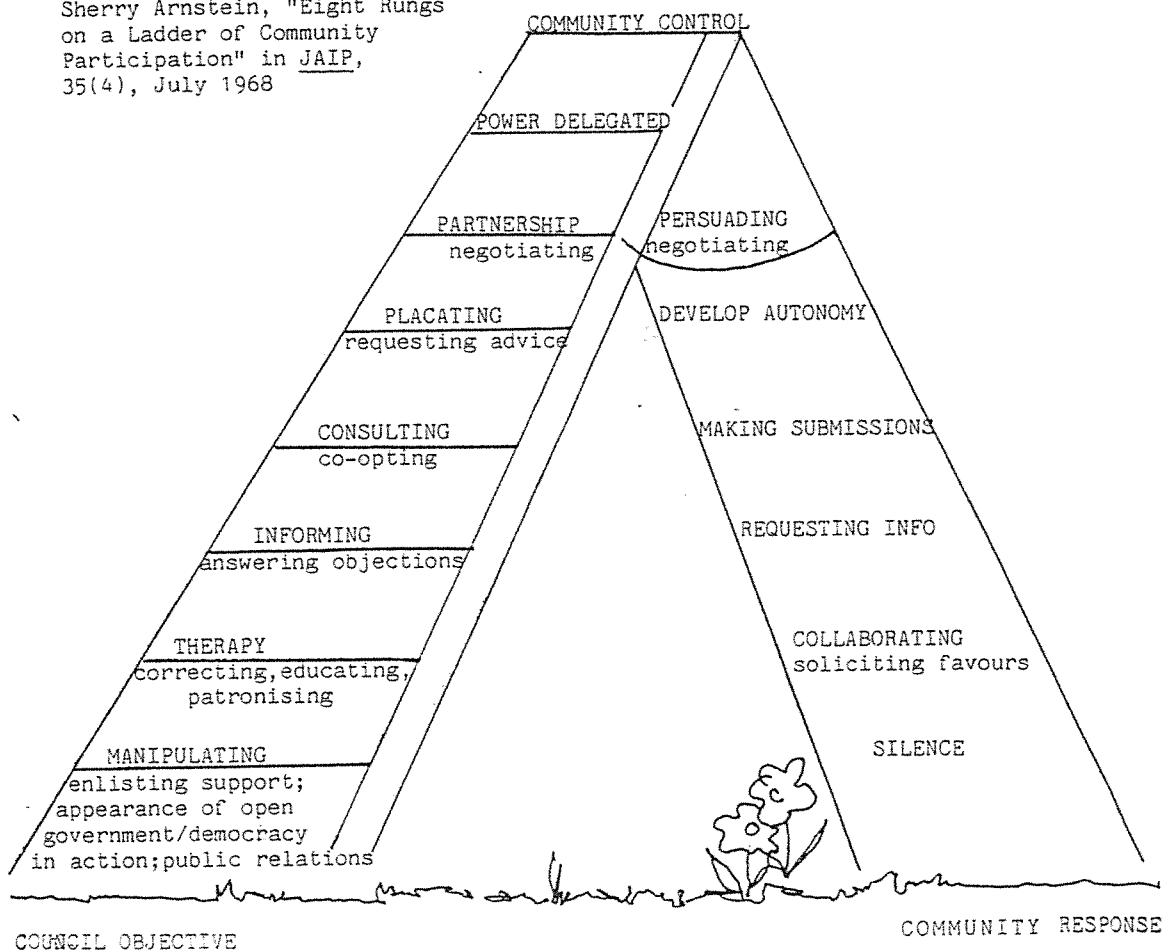
A neighborhood corporation with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds is the model most frequently advocated. A small number of such experimental corporations are already producing goods and/or social services. Several others are reportedly in the development stage, and new models for control will undoubtedly emerge as the have-nots continue to press for greater degrees of power over their lives.

Among the arguments against community control are: it supports separatism; it creates balkanization of public services; it is more costly and less efficient; it enables minority group "hustlers" to be just as opportunistic and disdainful of the have-nots as their white predecessors; it is incompatible with merit systems and professionalism; and ironically enough, it can turn out to be a new Mickey Mouse game for the have-nots by allowing them to gain control but not allowing them sufficient dollar resources to succeed. These arguments are not to be taken lightly. But neither can we take lightly the arguments of embittered advocates of community control - that every other means of trying to end their victimization has failed!

Community Services department may have many functions:

- various levels of promoting community participation (see below)
- social welfare - patching up (e.g., CAB)
- collecting info from community for Council, other bodies
- working for social change in various ways, including community development, advocacy, subterfuge, lobbying, making submissions, doing research
- resource management (may use CD approach but usually doesn't; Manukau does with community houses)

my modification of model by Sherry Arnstein, "Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Community Participation" in JAIP, 35(4), July 1968

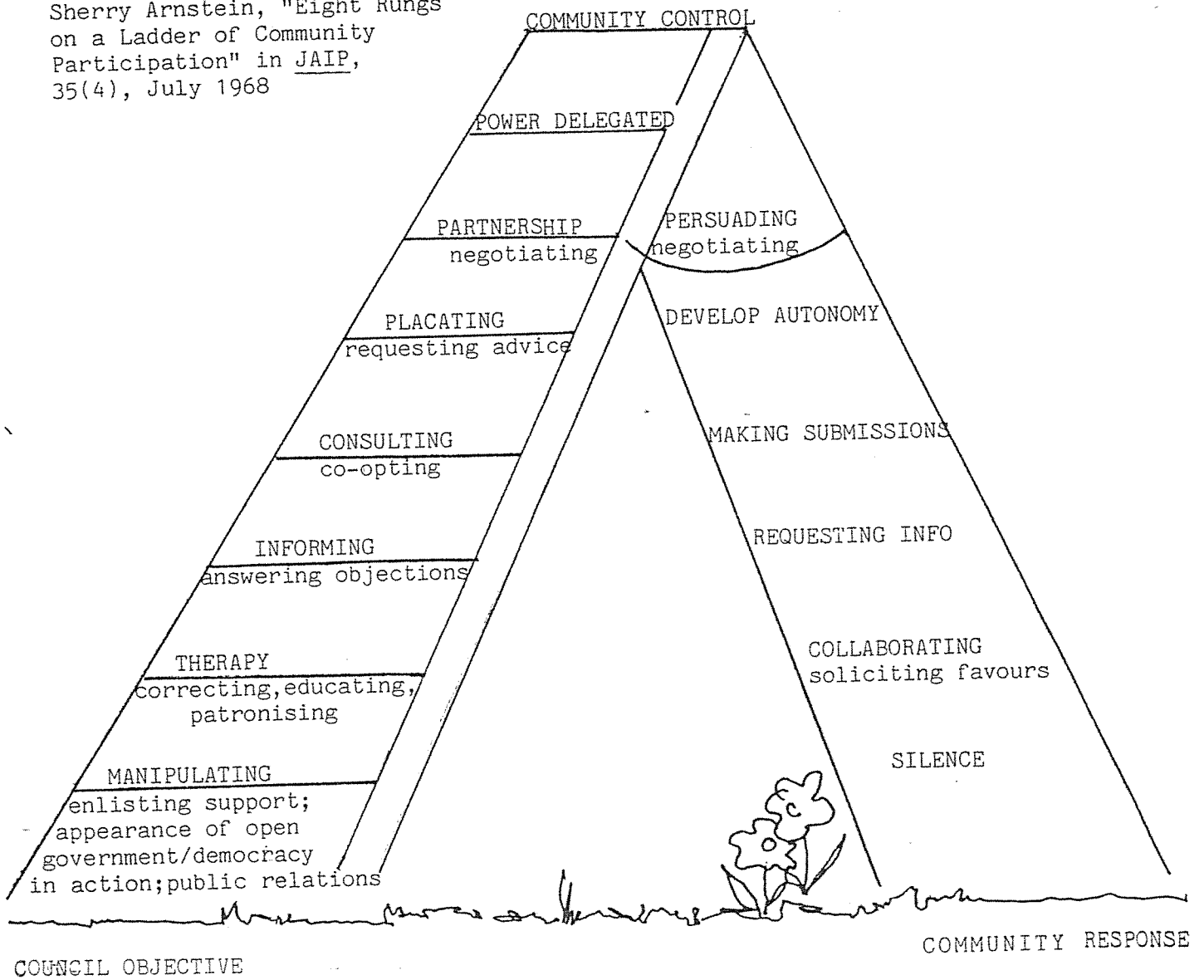


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