Confrontation, collaboration and community benefits: lessons from Canadian and U.S. cities on working together around strategic projects

Introduction

Governments and public institutions throughout Canada and the world build mega-projects – large-scale facilities and infrastructure – to improve transport, health or other services. These projects channel investment into specific locations in the city, often generating new business and real estate development. In some cases, projects focus on redeveloping the urban fabric in tandem with facilities to promote economic and business development. While such projects pursue laudable aims, they also may exacerbate economic and social tensions. Because most mega-projects focus on design and construction of physical infrastructure under tight timeframes, potential social and economic effects on the wider community often are understudied and, crucially, not properly addressed in the project itself. Moreover, they are often pursued in isolation from the communities in which they are immediately located. In so doing, opportunities to use major investments to build sustainable and inclusive communities are missed.

This paper explores how mega-projects can be made to work better for communities by examining citizen-project interactions that resulted in projects with substantial community benefits. What do we learn, as planners, from an examination of community engagement with large-scale urban projects? Drawing on examples from Canada (Montreal and Vancouver) and from the United States (Los Angeles and New Haven), the paper outlines different strategies (cooperation, collaboration, alliances and confrontational tactics) community organisations use to assure that beneficial 'community' elements are included in a project. Material is drawn from interviews conducted by the author with key (predominantly community) participants in these projects as well as policy and academic literature on the projects, where available.

Beneficial projects may take various forms, of which two, broadly, are explored here. In some cases, community benefits have emerged from a consultative process involving city officials, project proponents, and interested citizens; though the dynamics of participation, and the limitations upon it, have been much studied, participatory inputs around mega-projects may have specific characteristics. The second route under discussion is through community benefits agreements (CBAs); as emerging in the North America, CBAs entail developers agreeing to community-defined investments in return for approval of the project by city officials. To the extent possible, the paper focuses on the specific role of citizen participation and social action in the generation of these benefits.

Three themes structure the paper and the analysis of illustrative case studies. First is the question of 'strategy': In what sense is a project 'strategic'? What urban development strategies are employed and with what effects? At a second level is the question of participation: Who is involved? What is the nature of their participation? Can specific outcomes be linked to different forms of engagement? Third is the question of planning: Who is doing the planning in these cases? What new relationships, and new practices, are emerging? The paper thus addresses: the role of large projects in city-building and city-branding efforts; contemporary means of effective citizen engagement with development interests; and the limits and possibilities for collaborative approaches around such projects.

Mega-Projects as Strategic Projects

Mega-projects conform to a model of urban development that many governments favour: high-profile strategic projects with the potential to satisfy immediate aims (e.g. improving services, providing facilities), attract external capital (both in construction and subsequently) and redefine a neighbourhood or the city as a whole. Mega-projects respond to global competition among cities for investments, knowledge workers, tourists and prestige (Olds,

2001; Brenner, 2004). They are high-profile and strategic, linked to infrastructure upgrading, tax base enhancement, or 'imagineering' (UNCHS-Habitat, 2004; Borja and Castells, 1997; Paul, 2004). Mega-projects can vary in scope and scale, from a major library or hospital to multi-faceted interventions aimed at transforming a district (UNCHS-Habitat, 2004). Even where project aims are narrow, there are expectations of positive 'spillover effects' (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003, Storey and Hamilton, 2003), from "new images of the city on the global stage" (Whitson, 2004) to neighbourhood revitalization and gentrification. Mega-projects are sometimes analyzed as a particular variant of 'urban projects' [*le projet urbain],* with analysts assessing the latter in terms of their primary aim: political, operational or architectural (Courcier, 2005). However, the mega-project is interesting in part because it is pursued with rhetoric of positive outcomes at all three level: city building, effective implementation, and aesthetic improvement.

Yet researchers also note that mega-projects are often 'planning disasters' that generate heavy impacts and systemic cost over-runs (Altshuler and Luberoff, 2003, Hall, 1980, Flyvbjerg, 2003), in part due to lack of accountability or public participation (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003). Moreover, while benefits from such projects are likely to accrue at a municipal or regional level, residents in surrounding areas incur many disamenities (Storey and Hamilton, 2003), whether through displacement to accommodate the facilities, increased traffic, noise and air pollution, or a shift to non-residential uses in the area. For all these reasons, the literature identifies mega-projects as a factor increasing spatial and socio-economic polarization in contemporary cities.

These are strategic projects for the cities and developers (whether public of private) but few such projects, at least in North America, are pursued through a strategic planning approach. These are projects which marry the normative aims of government planning with the pragmatic realities of getting large-scale projects implemented. Because they are so costly and complex, they increasingly involve private-public sector partnerships, or major institutional developers (universities, etc.). Even large-scale private projects are likely to benefit from public funding on the basis that the project is important for the character of a neighbourhood and the quality of services. In North America, promoters of these projects rarely, if ever, systematically pursue a strategic planning approach: they often do not fit into wider strategic plans and frameworks at either a municipal or regional level, and generally make no provisions for community assessment. Frequently they are site specific, with the benefits presumed rather than carefully analyzed or subjected to public deliberation.

The inclusion of new actors and development alliances changes the terrain for urban development, but in not always predictable ways. The use of public private partnerships to finance, construct and operate these mega-projects threatens to curtail possibilities for strategic or community-grounded approaches as the locally-grounded, evolving and iterative process of working together is argued to make financial projections – and therefore commitments – difficult [add sources]. The emergence of new institutional developers, hospitals, universities, port authorities etc., also creates both new tensions and opportunities. Looking at one such example, the role of the university has come under scrutiny as many universities have expanded their real estate and urban development activities outside their traditional campus (Perry and Wiewel, 2005; Lederer and Seasons, 2005). University development is pursued first and foremost for the strategic concerns of the university, and while promoting urban transformation and city-building, their investment activities may generate hardships for existing residents (Wiewel and Perry, 2005). The trick is, in some authors' view, to figure out "how the 800-pound gorilla [can] sit with – and not on – its neighbors" (Deitrick and Soska, 2005). The factors that lead institutional developers to come to the table and cooperate with neighbours are many, from past experiences of confrontation or collaboration with local groups and government bodies (Deitrick and Soska, 2005) to an acknowledged sense of civic responsibility within the administration (Holland et al., 2003; Rubin, 1998; Rodin). Yet even when cooperative efforts are pursued, researchers find that

only a small fraction of such partnerships prove mutually beneficial (Nye and Schramm, 1999).

Community engagement around mega-projects

Studies of the politics of mega-project development suggest that project promoters have become more inclined to accommodate community concerns in recent years (Altshuler, 2003). Researchers drawing on urban regime theory speculate that project developers fear that local opposition could lead officials to reject financing, planning permits or other required approvals; as a consequence, measures to address concerns around parking, noise and community facilities are incorporated into plans (Altshuler 2003; Mason, 2006). However, only transport and tourism projects have been studied systematically (Santo, 2004), generating little practical guidance for community groups, public officials or project developers on how to make other types of mega-projects work well in their particular contexts.

In some instances, community-project engagement has gone further than token agreement on mitigation. Plans for mega-hospitals in New Haven (Rhomberg and Simmons, 2005) and East St Louis (Reardon, 2000; Reardon, 1998) a sports-entertainment complex in Los Angeles (Gross et al., 2002; Reich, 2003; Cummings and Volz, 2003) and, at a different scale, the Olympic bid in Vancouver (Mason, 2006) include novel elements to better mesh the project with the needs of vulnerable residents. In these cases, participants indicate that alliances between local groups and unions, civic leaders, officials and/or large institutions were important to the outcomes (Bornstein, 2006), with tactics ranging from confrontational to collaborative. These are the projects that are the focus of further analysis in this paper.

For a cooperative process, literature on multi-stakeholder decision-making and community-university partnerships suggests numerous pitfalls: agreements have foundered due to lack of support from those outside of the process, lack of binding clauses, timetables and financial commitments, drawn-out negotiations and, later, implementation that strains often understaffed and under-resourced community organizations (Baum, 2000; Gilderbloom, 2005; Wiewel, 1998; Innes, 1999, 2004). The challenges of negotiation, collaboration and consensus-building between institutional developers and communities – around power, representation, resources, access to influence, good faith – are well-known (Baum, 2000, Forester, 1989; Fontan et al., 2003). While there is information on collaborative planning, citizen empowerment and civic engagement, this has not been approached within the framework of strategic projects and therefore the specific tensions associated with high-profile, mega-projects are still poorly understood.

The literature on governance provides another perspective on these dynamics. Careful analysis of the various forms through which actors, at different scales (Brenner, 2004), operate in the governance of a city process brings attention to the power that distinct groups have in agenda-setting, policy-formulation, decision-making and action. Just as there are different models of citizen engagement, the different institutional systems that guide, enshrine, contain and enable involvement contribute to different political cultures, and different spaces for negotiation (Healey, 2006). In each city, there are diverse mechanisms and opportunities for citizen input encoded in law and city charters; however, when existing channels are ineffective citizens may opt for other forms of opposition (Latendresse, 2004, 2005; Hamel, 1989; Hamel and Rousseau, 2003). Mega-projects test the limits of established mechanisms of collective decision-making. Studying the planning and implementation can help us to advance our understanding of urban governance and improve it on the ground

Canadian and U.S. community engagement with mega-projects

Several mega-projects are briefly presented here to highlight (a) the different strategies employed around complex and large-scale strategic projects and associated outcomes, (b) the importance of institutional context, and (c) emerging lessons for planners, community groups and developers around routes to projects that better fit into their immediate neighbourhoods while achieving wider strategic aims.

Montreal

Montreal has a long-history of citizen engagement with large scale projects. Protests and opposition, against highway construction, residential redevelopment, and tourism facilities, have in some cases led to re-orientation of the projects towards neighbourhood defined priorities (Fontan et al., 2002, 2004; Hamel, 1989, 1991; Herland, 1992). The focus here is less on projects subject to public protests and instead on those than channelled public input through a formal consultation process. The Old Port of Montreal is a large-scale planning project that local residents were able to influence through the formal public participation process. It serves as an exemplar of patterns of citizen engagement with mega-projects characteristics of earlier periods and extending into the present. Since public participation was confined to particular moments and issues, the project is not an example of collaborative planning, however the Old Port is an excellent illustration of the way public engagement around a strategic urban project evolved over time, highlighting both successes and on-going tensions.

Fig. 1 Montreal's Old Port and Quays

Source: Port Corporation website

The Old Port encompasses 47 hectares situated between the St. Lawrence River and historic Old Montreal. With the opening of the river to boat traffic in the 1970s, activity along the riverfront quays declined significantly. To reverse the downward trend, the federal government created the Association of the Old Port, a quasi-independent agency to manage the port's redesign as a cultural and recreational hub. There were two objectives: to make a profit and to restore the federal government's image in Quebec, which was suffering from both costly planning failures of the 1960s and the rise of the Quebec separatist movement. The project also had to respect the designation of Old Montreal as an historic district.

Public participation in the project occurred in two principal stages. Following announcement of the port's redesign, the Port Association organized a series of public consultations in 1978 and 1979, the first such process for a major project in Montreal. On the basis of initial proposals and consultations several actions were taken. These included: the establishment of the Old Port of Montreal Corporation ('Port Corporation'), a wholly-owned subsidiary of crown corporation Canada Lands, responsible for subsequent development and management of the area; demolition of a grain elevator; renovation of a clock tower; creation of a linear park; and removal of six sets of railway tracks.

The second round of consultations, around the vision and plans for development, were more contentious. Just prior to the consultation, the Port Corporation hired a consortium of international architects to draw up plans for the port. The proposals were to include large scale office, commercial and cultural spaces, waterfront condos and a new metro station. Residents, through the subsequent public hearings, rejected the Port Corporation's initial vision of the area, with a smaller scale framework instead adopted together with 'guiding principles for development' and social responsibility (see Figure 2). The master plan focused on "the re-use of the site by Montrealers through the gradual, considered improvement of its intrinsic assets" (Corporation, 2006, p. 22). In 1989, residents again voiced opposition to the Port Corporation's planning approach, this time on the basis of local (*québécois*) versus international preferences in contracting. The Port Corporation had invited prestigious architectural and design teams from the U.S. and Ontario to design the plans for the Port (the consortiums included the Rouse Corporation responsible for Boston's Quincy Market and Baltimore's waterfront redevelopment). The public and local architects opposed the plan, arguing that it ran counter to the vision and principles articulated in the consultation. The

Port Corporation back-pedaled and hired a local firm. Subsequent public input has largely been directed through city-wide consultation processes, on borough development, the Master Plan for the City of Montreal, the Cultural Development Policy, the Economic Development Strategy, etc.

Figure 2. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
The Corporation's social responsibility is primarily defined by three government objectives, which were reiterated and supported by the guiding principles for development resulting from the public consultations in 1985-86:

- **Improve urban living conditions and public access to the river**
  - *Everyone should have access to the site and be able to circulate freely and easily.*
  - *All development should preserve or highlight the exceptional vistas of the site itself, the river, and the city.*
  - *All development should reflect real collective needs for which the site is particularly appropriate.*
- **Protect and promote Canadian cultural heritage**
  - *The Old Port's significant historical, maritime, and harbour relics should be highlighted.*
- **Contribute to economic development efforts**
  - *The Old Port should encourage and support rather than compete against neighbouring areas.*
  - *Make the Old Port's development a complementary part of the development of greater downtown Montréal area.*
  - *Encourage the participation of the various levels of government in the planning and management of its development.*

Source: Annual report, Corporation of the Old Port of Montreal
http://www.oldportofmontreal.com/pdf/ra_2006_en.pdf

The Old Port is considered a success in many respects. It is a public space accessible to all, with a variety of events available at little or no cost. Cultural Festivals, the Cirque de Soleil, a science centre, and a skating rink co-exist with historical museums and festivals, the Clock Tower, grain silos and the Old Montreal streets and churches that reaffirm the past. Local residents are given permit parking and efforts are being made to maintain cleanliness, an issue where restaurants and bars are densely located to cater to tourists. The public's participation – and the guiding vision, principles and plans for development – are considered key to the success of the project (Courcier, 2005; Wolfe, 2007). According to some analysts, the willingness of federal government representatives to engage with the public allowed for a compromise to be progressively developed among various interest groups and stakeholders (Courcier, 2005). There is clear recognition to the Port's strategic role in the immediate area: the Corporation proclaims "the Plan [2050-2015] provides an international-calibre heritage site with the facilities and infrastructures required to strengthen its positioning and therefore to have a major achievement in terms of urban planning and development along the waterfront."(Corporation, 2006, p. 22).

Nonetheless, there are a variety of concerns relating to the area's development to date and its future prospects. Of key import, the Port Corporation has a role as financial custodian of the land and facilities. Over the past twenty years balancing the books may have been more important than maintaining port uses, historic preservation, or activities compatible with those of adjacent areas. With the rise in tourism, and the area's evident attractive qualities (as a single destination, the science center now has over 500,000 visitors annually, second only to the Montreal Casino (Tourism Montreal, 2004), valorizing the history and past uses of the site may be given lower priority. Indeed, this past year the Port Corporation split its functional organization into two parts, with one vice president and team responsible for the science center and the other responsible for the quays. In this way, the president of the Corporation contends, visions, programming and management appropriate to the two distinct uses can be developed and pursued.

There has also been a move to further privatize and consolidate land-ownership in the area; a variety of federal agencies with scattered facilities will transfer their land to the Canada Lands Company, the crown corporation currently holding the majority of the land. Canada

Lands has an interesting history. It was a key player in other local projects, most notably Benny Farms, an award-winning mixed-use residential redevelopment of veteran's housing that was subject to 20 years of neighbourhood struggle and involvement. It also has been active in a neighbouring harbourfront area, where plans for a postal site have shifted from community uses to private development and back again. Canada Lands' experience in working with activist community organisations may result in maintenance of arenas for public input around the port's development. There are, however, other indications that public input may be sidelined. The federal government's plans for the waterfront's development were based on consultations with diverse government representatives and not with the public at large. City relations with community groups around other mega-projects have not gone universally well: adjacent harbourfront development plans collapsed after protests that the proposal would promote gentrification, condo and commercial development, and, in locating a casino near a poor neighbourhood, accentuate social and economic vulnerability. Proponents labelled local residents as 'spoilers', willing to forego jobs and reinvestment in futile efforts to demand more community benefits. Crucially, the pattern observed in the Old Port's development, of intermittent consultations in public forums on defined topics, still is the dominant approach in to communities and mega-projects in Montreal.[i]

Vancouver

The case of Vancouver, and the Vancouver Agreement, highlights efforts to link social priorities to economic development and city-imagineering efforts. Mega-events, such as Olympic Games, are a specific form of mega-project that, while spatially more dispersed, historically have been associated with displacement of low-income residents, an increased tax burden for the city's population, increased real estate prices, a new image of the city (Whitson, 2004) and few visible social benefits (Eisinger, 2000; Olds, 1998; Hall, 2006). Recent Olympics bids, such as that of Cape Town and Vancouver, have integrated wider social and environmental objectives into the proposal. The Vancouver Agreement emerged in conjunction with the City's bid for the 2010 Olympics and Paralympic Winter games and focused, initially, on Downtown Eastside, the old commercial center of the city.

The Downtown Eastside is an area with a rich architectural and community history that for several decades has been characterized by high rates of poverty, lack of adequate housing and abandonment by business. Social problems include transience and homeless, unemployment (22%), high levels of dependence on social assistance, crime, prostitution, HIV infection, drug addiction and dealing (City of Vancouver, 2007). There are many single-person households, homeless and those dependent on social assistance (40% of total income is from government transfer as compared to 10% for the city as a whole) (City of Vancouver, 2007). High-rates of drug use, and related deaths, prompted city officials to enter into partnerships with other levels of government, community service providers and local businesses to address social problems. The Olympic Bid included a commitment to address these problems, both through the construction of job-creating facilities for the competitions and via targeted policies and interventions to address economic and social vulnerability of the residents. The Downtown Eastside Revitalization Program summarises its role as, "restoring the area to a healthy, safe and liveable neighbourhood for all [by] developing and implementing long-term approaches to community health, community safety, housing, and economic development" (Vancouver DTES).

To date the Agreement has achieved some success (City of Vancouver, 2007). Nearly 70 development projects – of market and affordable housing, mixed use complexes, service facilities and others – have been built or are currently in construction. The historic Woodward Building is under re-development for housing, educational and commercial uses; the project includes 200 social housing units and 536 market housing units, which sold in a single day on the market. Affordable housing will also be developed in Southeast False Creek, the 200-250 housing units to be used as the Athletes' Village; at least one-third of the units will be

designated for low-income households. To avoid displacement associated with the Olympics and urban redevelopment, the city adopted measures to restrict conversion of single occupancy units (e.g. rooming houses and single-room occupancy hotels) to other uses. Unemployment has fallen though median incomes are still less than 30% of the city's average. A program targeting those with 'multiple barriers to employment' has provided 200 people with one-to-one assistance with housing, childcare and counselling. Through this and other programs some 400 people have found work. The Four Pillars program to address drug-related issues has set up telephone referral services for adults and youth, a Supervised Injection Site which includes detox and referral services, and a webpage with information for service providers and the public. There are four new health clinics in the area. Deaths associated with drug or alcohol abuse, HIV/AIDS and suicides have declined since 2000 and there is less visible drug use and dealing on the street. Other measures to reduce crime and increase safety include: undercover operation targeting pawnshops, convenience stores, SRO hotels and pubs; self-defence training for street-based sex workers; and urban design improvements.

Community involvement in establishing the framework for the Vancouver Agreement and in implementation of specific programs suggests that, while public support has been important, the key drivers have been government officials. The 2010 Winter Olympics Bid, with its commitment to community benefits, was subject to a public referendum in 2003, with 64 percent of voters in favour of hosting the Games. The Coalition for Crime Prevention and Drug treatment, with over 60 partners from government, business, social service providers and community organisations, was active in mobilizing support for the initial concept and subsequently raising awareness around drug-related issues.

The language of the city and Vancouver Agreement documents is one of inclusion and a collaborative social development planning process. However, community involvement in the community planning process associated with the Vancouver Agreement has not been extensive. "Community Directions", a coalition of residents and community organisations, was established to "ensure that any initiatives for the neighbourhoods benefit the people who live there," focusing first on the most vulnerable (City of Vancouver, 2000). From available documentation, it is unclear the role this coalition has had in subsequent developments. Coyne and Associates find that lack of community support, organisational capacity and leadership meant the initiative foundered when initial leaders left (Coyne Ltd., 2006); reports of the working committees did, however, feed into the Four Pillars' activities, the SRO policy and other longer-term programming. Mason concludes that despite community participation on taskforces and the consultations around the Integrated Strategic Plan, "the systematic community processes envisaged under the Downtown Eastside Strategy have not been realised" (Mason, 2006). Responsibility was shifted to community development programs within the city government and to the Four Pillars Program (with its focus on drug use and crime reduction). He speculates that this transfer of responsibility "obviated the need for such strategic input" from the community (Mason, 2006).

At the level of neighbourhood specific initiatives, problems of voice, consensus and representation have arisen typical of many participatory efforts. The five neighbourhoods are diverse, and residents have distinct concerns. Tensions among organisation with different constituencies, definitions of key problems and organisational missions have been reflected in some receiving recognition from key government officials while others have called "unrealistic" (Mason, 2006). Bringing in vulnerable groups, especially the Aboriginal population (of which 10% of the city's total live in the Eastside) as well as those with psychosocial difficulties (arising from homelessness, substance abuse, or lack of institutional care), has proven difficult. Some neighbourhood organisations have been able to sustain their initiatives while others have not. People have complained of a lack of overall vision, clarity on the outcomes from participation, and recognition of the distinctive contributions that those with social and economic difficulties might bring to a community process (Coyne,

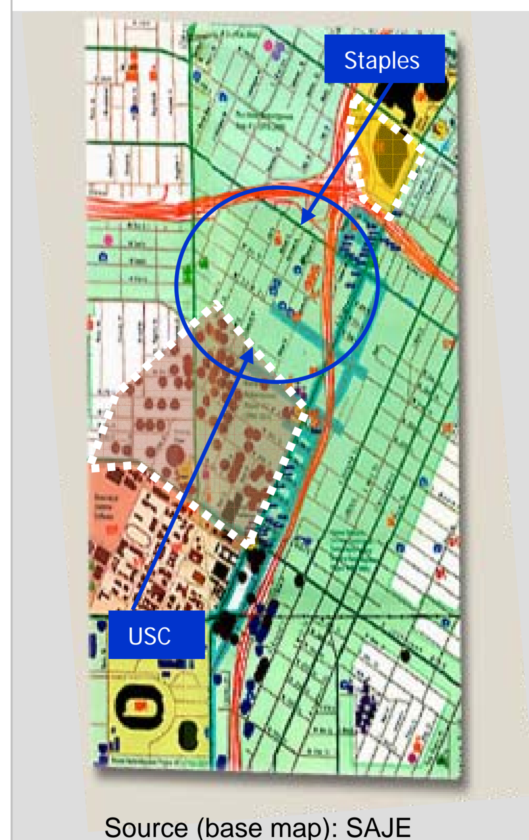
2006). Nonetheless, research into community capacity around the project has found that people are more tolerant, less likely to respond from a pre-set position, and more disposed to cooperate with others (Coyne, 2006).

The Vancouver case represents a very different approach to community participation than that described for Montreal. Area-based planning brought together stakeholders into coalitions around issues and neighbourhoods, some of which were sustained while other faltered. Mega-projects – as a general aim – were explicitly linked to neighbourhood needs, however with an expectation that the 'project' of the Olympic bid had to expand in scope to meet those needs. The Olympic redevelopment process became linked into wider strategic efforts to address poverty, unemployment, disease and poor health, crime and substance abuse. It is an illustration of a way in which diverse interests – in promoting the city 'on the global stage', in serving the interests of local business, in reversing urban decline, and in addressing the problems of those more marginalised and vulnerable – can be brought together in a relatively cooperative manner, moving towards a strategic planning approach, under the leadership of government officials.

Los Angeles & New Haven

Community groups in Los Angeles, New Haven and several other U.S. cities have also used formal channels to influence the design and elements of mega-projects but they have done so using a dramatically different range of tactics and tools. In contrast to the influence through formal channels established by government, community groups in Los Angeles and several other U.S. cities have taken the lead in establishing new alliances, community tactics, and planning practices in response to mega-projects. In these instances, community groups have joined forces with unions, religious organisations, and student, environmental, health and immigrant rights groups to make large-scale projects work for local communities. Alliances with politicians, detailed knowledge of planning processes, strong preparatory research and organizing tactics drawn from union and community activism have allowed for novel agreements to be reached with mega-project promoters.

Fig. 4 Figueroa Corridor under pressure



Source (base map): SAJE

The case of community benefits agreements in Los Angeles has been documented by several researchers and the community organisations themselves (cf. Gross, 2002; Gibbons, 2002).. The impetus for community action was a series of development proposals affecting the downtown Figueroa Corridor neighbourhoods (see Fig. 4). Residents of the central downtown area are overwhelmingly renters (95%) and 'people of colour': 42% Latino, 25% African American and 16% Asian. Incomes are 37% of median income for the city as a whole. There is a high concentration of affordable housing in the area, though much of it is in poor condition. However, demand exceeds supply and even the single resident occupancy hotels (SROs) have closed their waiting lists for rooms. In 2000, over 11,000 low income people were either homeless in the area or residing in SROs, including over 150 families with children on the street and another 200 such families in residential hotels (SAJE, 2002, pp. 5-6) There are few parks, daycare facilities and related

services for young families or the elderly. Downtown jobs are concentrated in the garment sector and services, both characterized by low-wages.

In the 1990s, the Figueroa Corridor – with adjacent highways, the University of Southern California (USC) campus and the Staples sports stadium - was subject to additional pressures. Both USC and the Staples Center (L.A. Arena Company) elaborated expansion plans likely to squeeze the neighbourhood (see Fig. 4). $70 million in public funds were to be funnelled into the projects. The expanded Staples Center, known as the L.A. Sports and Entertainment District, included plans for a 45-story hotel (12000 rooms), a theater for live entertainment, and a plaza with surrounding retail shops, restaurants and nightclubs. Other plans included expanding the adjacent Convention Center (by 250,000 sq. ft.) and constructing two apartment towers (800 units) and a smaller hotel. Developers, who included Philip Anshutz and Rupert Murdoch, had committed to the project as part of a previous agreement with the city, agreeing to bolster the convention center in return for approval of the sports stadium (Romney, 2001). Figueroa Corridor residents feared gentrification and associated residential displacement, a net loss of affordable housing, and increase in traffic and noise, and few direct benefits arising from the 70 million in public dollars.

Community organisations reacted to the plans for the Staples Center. Under the umbrella organisation, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), a coalition of 29 groups was formed and included the community-organisations historically-active in the neighbourhood, unions and union-linked community development organisations, churches and religious organisations, university-based groups, environmental and health activist organisations, and immigrant rights groups. Based on research documenting weak benefits from past projects, existing needs in area, and best practices throughout the country, SAJE formulated a policy framework for action that all the coalition members were willing to support. Coalition members mobilized support at local, city and state levels: they used the media, political contacts, alliances with similar campaigns elsewhere, and focused attention on key decisions necessary for project approval. Coalition members then approached the Arena Land Company with the proposals and let Los Angeles City Councillors know of widespread opposition to the project in the absence of substantial community benefits.

A newspaper writer (Romney, 2001) describes negotiations as “rocky” initially but “the tone changed over time as mutual trust built”. Lead developers and negotiators had experience working with community groups in the past and had as a goal to win “true support and advocacy for the project”, “make the project better and improve benefits for the community”(Romney, 2001) and doing so without “burdening the development or its tenants with costly conditions not required elsewhere”(Romney, 2001).

The resulting Staples Community Benefits Agreement was a formal development agreement, subject to monitoring and to legal redress if terms were not met. It was the first time in the U.S. that such a wide range of community concerns were incorporated into a legally binding document. Among the specific elements were agreements that: new housing units would built as part of development, with a minimum of 20% of units affordable to low income people; half of new employees must be hired through a local training center, with $100,000 in seed funding from the develop for specialized job training; 70% of the estimated 5,500 jobs – both in construction and the resulting development – paid at or above city-stipulated ‘living wage’ rates with community notification of (and possibility of meetings with) upcoming tenant lease agreements; $1 million to be given for parks and recreation facilities within a 1 mile radius; and resident permit parking with parking costs to be paid by developer for 5 years.

The agreement was a milestone for neighbourhood groups working to maximize community benefits from large-scale projects. In the case of Los Angeles, subsequent actions have largely followed the terms of the CBA. Gilda Haas, director of SAJE, writes, “The developer, AEG, has acted with integrity, has lived up to the terms of the agreement, and, in 2005, joined forces with the Coalition to take on another developer that tried to evade the pact” (Haas, 2007). SAJE, working with groups in South Central Los Angeles, recently

successfully campaigned to include community benefits in a $2 billion mega-project, the Grand Avenue Project, and community groups throughout the country – often in conjunction with union activists – are exploring replicability.

One such example is New Haven. The experiences in New Haven built upon those of Los Angeles. A key actor was the Community Organized for Responsible Development (CORD), a labor-linked organization formed in 2004 with the explicit aim of insuring that large scale projects benefited local communities (Rhomberg and Simmons, 2005). When the Yale-New Haven Hospital (YNHH) announced plans for a $350 million state-of-the-art Cancer Center, CORD members conducted door-to-door surveys of 800 residents of the affected neighbourhood, the Hill, to determine the benefits community residents "would like to see from the Hospital" (CCNE, 2006). Proposals, based on responses, were voted on in a public meeting held that same year. Moreover, CORD used the community research to establish a basis for mobilization rooted in detailed understanding of the local residents. Those willing to meet with neighbours were identified and phone trees established. Public hearings and rallies were accompanied by strategic lobbying of key officials at the city and state level. CORD and other members of the community alliance mapped out the sequence of approvals that would be needed for the Cancer Center to go ahead, and made sure that phone calls, e-mails, and public presence were mobilized around these key "leverage" points.

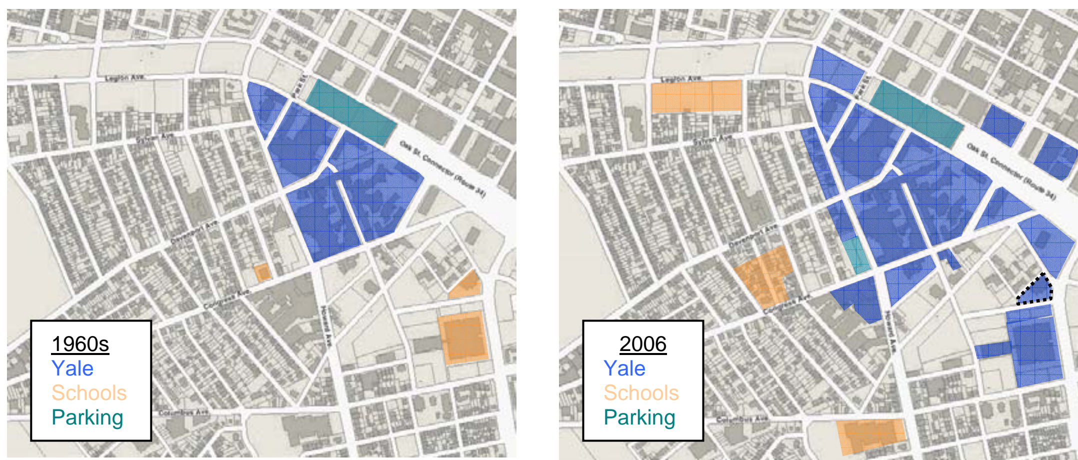


Figure 3. Yale and Development on the Hill

Direct encounters between the community groups and the YNHH were few. Instead it was the New Haven Board of Alderman (the equivalent of a city council) that acted as intermediary, and often through adopted policies and resolutions rather than negotiations. The Board of Alderman passed, for example, a resolution *Encouraging Developers to Enter into Community Benefits Agreements in Order to Enhance the Economic Viability of New Haven* over "vigorous opposition" from Yale and the city's Chamber of Commerce (CCNE, 2006). When Yale went to the City Plan Commission to avoid entering into a CBA, the Commission refused to approve demolition of an existing hospital to make way for the new one in the absence of approval from the Board of Alderman.

CORD and others arrived with a clear platform of demands, based on the research with residents, research conducted on economic and social conditions, and the concerns of participating organisations. Key issues included: the production and maintenance of affordable housing, accessible public health services for local residents, good jobs and rights to organize, resolution of parking, traffic, open space, and other environmental concerns, and support to youth through educational, recreational and other programs. Given the Board of Alderman's lack of support for the hospital project, in March 2006, immediately before the Board meeting to approve or reject the project, the Hospital agreed to negotiate. The resulting Community Benefits Agreement became part of their development agreement with the City of New Haven (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4. New Haven Community Benefits Agreement (selected elements)

Affordable Housing
Replace destroyed housing units
Preserve low-rent apartments
Assist homeowners and first-time buyers

Public Health
Guarantee accessible and affordable hospital treatment for city residents.
End abusive debt-collection practices

Good Jobs
Train local people for hospital jobs
Hire them
Remain neutral if workers want to unionize

Opportunities for Youth
Build recreation and playing-field facilities
Create paid internships at the hospital for high school students

Parking and Traffic
Provide free parking for employees, patients & visitors
Consult with neighborhood residents to determine site of new garage

Environment and Open Public Space
Protect surrounding neighborhood from pollution during construction
Provide open public space equal to size of footprint of new development, use to be determined by the community
Disclose pollution prevention and waste disposal procedures

Source: CORD

The examples of Los Angeles and New Haven thus demonstrate two routes to a similar type of agreement. While both cases requiring concerted efforts on the part of community coalitions – to document local conditions, investigate policy and planning possibilities, and mobilize support – the role of the developer was quite different in the two cases, perhaps a direct result of the existing institutional and political landscape. In New Haven, the developer was Yale, the largest land owner in the city and accustomed to 'calling the shots'; 'town and gown' tensions are likely to have played a part, as did the links between the community development concerns and union organizing among Yale's employees. In Los Angeles, the private development was highly visible, and the benefits of a positive image among the wider community perhaps of much greater importance to the developers.

Indeed, the links between the neighbourhood organisations and the union is particularly interesting. The City of Los Angeles, despite a weak union base from the 1950s to 1980s (Milkman, 2002), experienced a series of organising drives in the 1990s that reinvigorated labour, transformed local politics, and allowed for a strong entry of the unions into a wide range of urban struggles (Milkman, 2002; Hauptmeier and Turner, 2007; Reich, 2003). The 1990 Justice for Janitors campaign mobilized urban Latinos together with other groups, and their success was the basis for what Hauptmeier and Turner (2007) call coalition-based social-unionism that has carried into the present. The 29 groups in the Figueroa Corridor Coalition also had worked together before, supporting the unions in organising efforts at USC.

The link between the unions and neighbourhood organisations can be analyzed at different levels. The unions brought with them specific knowledge of organizing and a capacity for research – rooted in new community-development oriented 'think and do tanks'. Research in California focused for example on the distribution of benefits arising from redevelopment, with analysis of projects in Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose and other cities. Research on wage to ratios and the costs and benefits of living wage ordinances also invigorated public debate and policy formulation. These moves, in part, reflected the union crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, when unions throughout the U.S. lost their historical blue-collar base and needed to re-orient towards the new economy. In some cities, such as Los Angeles, unions (often with support from national organisations) targeted service and immigrant workers. But in many places throughout the country, union organizers began to recognize that calls for public support at the time of strikes were likely to go unheeded unless unions became more relevant to people's daily life. That meant new strategies and forms of engagement with community and neighbourhood quality of life issues (Bornstein, 2006).

Collaboration, co-optation and confrontation: the shifting terrain of mega-project politics

The four illustrative cases presented above suggest that community groups are responding to the rise in strategic city-building projects with a wealth of innovative practices and tactics. Efforts to work collaboratively with developers are most apparent in Vancouver and Los Angeles, though the government plays a distinctly different role in those two cases. However it also important to note that collaboration and confrontation are simply moments in the longer process of challenging conventional approaches to development: in all four cases, community groups had moments of challenging, confronting and organising to battle seemingly entrenched practices and accepted developmental norms; they also had moments when they came to a common forum and reached an agreement around guidelines, principles, terms and actions.

Co-optation is more difficult to assess. Where preparatory work was done to establish what the community wanted from a project, common priorities and an agreement of a policy framework, demands or a platform, questions of co-optation were less likely to arise. The public meeting or convention held in New Haven, for example, provided CORD and its partners with a clear mandate for action and a basis for negotiation. Such common platforms, stretching across geographical neighbourhoods and issue areas, appear not to have been sought in the Canadian cases under study.

To return to the themes of strategy, participation, and planning, these four illustrative cases suggest different patterns, dominant and emerging, in cities through North America, each one of which presents new challenges. Figure 5 crudely outlines a typology of engagement based on leadership of community action (government versus community) and disposition of developers (from highly engaged to highly antagonistic).

Fig. 5 Patterns of community-mega-project engagement

	Government-led	Community-led
Developers as partners	Vancouver	
Developers engaged & at the table	Montreal	Los Angeles
Developers hostile		New Haven

In both Vancouver and Montreal, the rules of engagement, and the spaces for consultation, were established by governmental initiatives. However, in Vancouver the developers were part of the broad consortium linked to the Olympic bid. While subject to public pressure to include social and environmental objectives within the proposal, neighbourhood development issues to be addressed were largely those without negative repercussions for business interests. They were typical concerns that chambers of commerce and business associations share with local government and community groups: reducing crime, economic decline, prostitution, HIV/AIDs, drug addiction and the like. Reuse of sports facilities for affordable housing and agreements to work with government (and government co-funding) to address other housing shortages were part of the package of real estate reinvestments. Strategy then was around solving specific socially-based problems, bringing together different levels (and departments) of government in novel ways. Community groups had no common strategy, no 'bottom line' or proposal to put forward. Efforts by community groups to re-frame debates, and question overall patterns of investment and wealth-generation, were at the local and project-specific level. As a result, some groups – and initiatives – have fared well (drug addiction programs, Chinatown development, SRO conversion prohibitions), while others have not. Planning remains the domain of government, working with community

groups to define issues and to implement selected actions in an area-based or issue-based approach.

In Montreal, in contrast, consultation was structured by the developer who had an interest in resolving conflicts during a period characterized by struggle, thereby establishing a way forward. Community groups and independent residents thus had a space to voice concerns – vocally and vociferously if they wished – about the overall orientation of the project and its role in neighbourhood development. And indeed, though the developer had to backtrack and abandon certain developmental concepts, the broad principles guiding development were shaped significantly by a community vision. Again, there are challenges: moments for engagement were defined and limited; the Port Corporation pursued investments likely to generate returns (though also creating a public space with publicly-accessible events) without addressing major social issues for the city or surrounding areas; and there is no clear venue or process for resolving emerging tensions. Strategy thus was a responsive one, articulating an alternative vision in public meetings in reaction to the proposal generated by the Port Corporation. Participation was open, but in all likelihood not inclusive since there were no efforts made to actively mobilize and inform groups.

In both Canadian cases, the absence of the unions in community development, and the lack of common community-based coalitions, is notable. Perhaps the relative strength of unions in Canada as compared to the U.S. has meant that they have not felt the need to move into alliances with community groups around neighbourhood issues. (Unions and student groups have formed strong alliances around numerous in the past, a possible base for expanding into more spatially-oriented issues.) For Canadian community politics, however, it is not only the lack of coalitions. The lack of strong 'think and do tanks', organisations with research capacity and skills in union organising tactics – as well as Alinsky-style grassroots community planning – most differentiates the Canadian situation from the U.S. examples discussed here.

The U.S. cases demonstrate how community-led initiatives can lead to dramatically different relationships around mega-project development. Careful research with community residents was done in some of the Vancouver neighbourhoods, but in both U.S. examples, research was used to define policy initiatives around which a coalition could agree and act. As a result, mega-project development could be linked wider issues of increased poverty, wage levels and terms, and slum lord practices (in Los Angeles).

Clearly each city has its own history, with own political landscape. What is interesting about all four cases is that community groups are searching to find ways to redefine mega-projects so that can have maximal beneficial local impacts. Whether or not the developers are willing to listen initially, the emergence of alliances between community groups and decision-makers can shift the terrain, encouraging – or even forcing – developers into discussions.

The review of the four illustrative cases suggests that strategic efforts on the part of government and the private sector are being met by concerted community-based efforts to challenge prevailing requirements around development. In some cases, community groups have become involved through existing mechanisms that assure public input, consultation and/or collaboration; city officials and bureaus, mediators, and developers have played a part in negotiating the extent and form of community benefits included in resulting projects. New actors also are being brought into the city-building process, not least of these the unions, which historically have had little involvement with place-based quality of life issues outside of the workplace. As unions have engaged with urban planning issues, they have introduced organising tactics, redefining community-government-developer relationships in often dramatic ways: the consequences extend beyond the city-building efforts and specific elements of the mega-projects to questions of community capacity, collaborative and confrontational relations, and urban politics more generally.

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[i] There are several examples of other approaches. Community groups, a developer and the city housing officials sat together to work out details for the redevelopment of Imperial Tobacco's Factory as housing and one of Montreal's hospitals has formalized an agreement with a coalition of community-based organizations to work together on project elements that can benefit the community.