4.0. Community Architecture In Perspective

Community Architecture[4] can be simply defined as, "architecture carried out with the active participation of the end-users" (Wates, Handbook 184). This alternative approach to the conventional architectural practice of non-participation of users can be traced back to the 1950s self-help community initiatives in the developing countries. In these self-help projects, the professionals joined hands with the people to improve their environment (Wates, Community 164). Community Architecture since then has developed in different forms around the world with a common vision, that is, public participation in decisions affecting their environments and hence their lives. The literature in community participation mostly written in the 1960s and 1970s as discussed in the previous chapter played a vital role in the development of the concept of Community Architecture. This chapter looks at the historic moments in the practical development of Community Architecture in the developed world with examples from the United Kingdom and the United States. The practical evolution of community participation in architecture is equally important to analyze for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in addition to studying its theoretical perspective. This chapter traces the evolution of community participation in architecture, as it has taken various forms in the developed world over the years. Social Architecture and Advocacy Planning in the United States and the

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[4] Charles Knevitt first coined the term Community Architecture in its current context in his article entitled, "Community architect, mark 1 – profile of Rod Hackney". Fred Pooley had previously used the term in his 1973 address as the President of Royal Institute of British Architects, referring to "public-sector provision of architecture for the communities by local authorities" (Wates, Community 32).

Community Architecture Movement in Britain are significant examples of the concept since the inception of the dialogue. This following chapter also presents a historical account of the real life events like the Slum Clearance and Urban Renewal activities in North America and the UK that fostered the concept of community participation in architecture.

4.1. Urban Renewal

Respecting community needs and involvement in decisions concerning their built environment grew out of a reaction to the Urban Renewal measures in both the UK and North America dating back to the 1930s (Couch 29; Greer 13). In the UK, Urban Renewal can be directly linked to the economic boost that the country observed in the post-war period when the attention turned to the improvement of the living conditions in poor neighborhoods (Couch 29). The first Slum Clearance activities initiated by the urban authorities dating back to 1864 in Britain were based on the medical officer's report of the areas that he thought unsanitary and inhabitable (Towers 15). The story was the same in the US, where the Slum Clearance Movement gave birth to the Urban Renewal Policies followed later on (Doxiadis 8). Slum Clearance was an outcome of the Great Depression period during the 1930s when the physically deteriorated neighborhoods became the focus of attention in the US (Greer 13). In Canada during the "dirty thirties" (Chisholm 5) (as the period of depression was nicknamed) attention also turned towards the deplorable living conditions of the poor (Rose iii). With the growth of urban population during the nineteenth century,

America saw a significant increase in the quantity of poor districts with decaying

housing and unhealthy living conditions (Greer 14). In Canada, these deteriorating

living conditions appeared later during the 20th century due to less urban population

density in the 19th century (Baches 4). In fact the population of Canada in 1930s was

divided equally in urban and rural areas (Rose iii). The concentration of urban

population increased significantly by the end of 1950s due to massive immigration

and high birth rate in Post-War Canada, resulting in a shortage of adequate housing

(Rose iii) and an increase in degenerating neighborhoods housing the poor.

These physically deteriorating neighborhoods were seen as breeding grounds

of "poverty, crime, disease, broken families" and given the name of 'slums' (Greer

14). "Slums were seen as threats to the larger society. As the centers of concentration

for criminals and diseased persons, they were 'contagious,' for their effects, were apt

to spill over into the city as a whole" (Greer 14). In US, however, Urban Renewal[5]

projects had additional motive of removing ghettos mostly inhabited by the Black

population (Hamdi, Housing 77).

Housing was seen as the ultimate solution in the removal of slums (Greer 15).

At the same time, the development of the Modern Movement in Architecture led by

architects like Le Corbusier propagated the notion of high-rise buildings employing

industrial construction techniques as the future of urban development, resulting in the

adoption of high-rise buildings as a suitable form of housing the masses (Couch 29,

32). The motto adopted for the removal of these slums was "renewal through

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[5] Urban Renewal in the US was also labeled as "Negro removal" due to its
bias against demolishing mostly Black neighborhoods, Hester 289-90 qtd. in Hamdi,
Housing 77.

destruction!" (Doxiadis 15) and resulted in demolishing existing slums and replacing

them with heavily subsidized high-rise buildings consisting of apartments in US

(Greer 15) or flats in UK (Couch 29). The American National Housing Act of 1949

states,

> the elimination of substandard and other inadequate housing through
>
> the clearance of slums and blighted areas, and the realization as soon
>
> as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living
>
> environment for every American family, thus contributing to the
>
> development and redevelopment of communities. . . . (Doxiadis 8-9)

The anticipation of Slum Clearance and Urban Renewal as solutions to all

social and physical problems of the "blighted areas" failed to live up to their claims

and expectations. It was assumed that the new high-risers would eliminate the future

development of slums and despite their initial costs would pay off in the long run

(Couch 35). Neither happened as it soon became apparent to the governments and

authorities that it was impossible to demolish and develop all the slums, which were

growing faster than ever (Greer 18). In addition to this, the management and

maintenance costs of these high-rise buildings was much higher than traditional

houses, the lack of which resulted in a new sets of alarming problems with the

livability of these buildings (Couch 35).

Probably one of the main side effects of the Urban Renewal measures that

gave birth to the concept of Community Architecture was the disruption of social

networks and communities that existed in the slums prior to their demolition. People

were expected to move to new locations and leave behind the social ties that took years to develop in the promise for a better future. The policy makers and authorities made these decisions for them, without taking their consent on the matter. Jane Jacobs in her book, <u>The Death and Life of Great American Cities</u>, refers to this paternalistic approach of the policy makers towards slums as unrealistic and superficial (271). The redevelopment proposals put forth by the city authorities often aim for maximum disruption and change in the existing neighborhood dynamics and employ cursory means of executing these proposals. Jacobs explains that the government authorities should respect that the slum dwellers are aware of their interests and need to be facilitated rather than patronized (Jacobs 271). She points out that these uninformed decisions can lead to more problems than solving anything. When addressing the problem of overcrowding in slums, Jacobs observed that the clearance of existing neighborhoods forced the people, who could not be accommodated in the new lower density projects, to increase the congestion someplace else in the cities (Jacobs 207). Also in most cases, the new housing was also unaffordable for the displaced low-income families that ended up losing their original neighborhoods for the worse by again moving to another slum that they could only afford (Towers 15). However, when all the promises of these so-called developments seemed far from coming true, there started an agitation on part of the people, fighting to save their homes and neighborhoods from the fate of destruction. These residents belonging to the bottom of the society with the help of visionaries, theorists and professionals were able to plant the seed of the concept of community participation in the decision-making process.

4.2. Advocacy Planning

The first significant step as a result of the 1960s debate on community participation in planning and decision-making was the concept of Advocacy Planning in the US. Paul Davidoff, an Urban Planning professor, first introduced this concept in an article published in the November 1965 issue of the <u>Journal of the American Institute of Planners</u>, entitled "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning" (Blecher 3,10). Davidoff in his article, called for democracy in the planning profession, where voices of all interest groups are heard and the role of the planner is that of an advocate for these interest groups.

> The recommendation that city planners represent and plead the plans of many interest groups is founded upon the need to establish an effective urban democracy, one in which citizens maybe able to play an active role in the process of deciding public policy. (qtd. in Campbell 211)

This call for change was based on the common practice of "unitary plan(ning)" approach where a single government agency is responsible for preparing comprehensive plans for all community members (Campbell 212). Davidoff argues that this single-minded planning approach is in direct conflict with the interests of all groups or individuals affected by the final plans, resulting in uninformed and misrepresented decisions. Examples of the limitations of "unitary" approach in planning were the Urban Renewal measures which failed to include the affected communities in decisions that were supposed to benefit them (Campbell 214).

Davidoff presents the idea of pluralism and advocacy in planning as an alternative approach where the preparation of plans no longer remains the duty of city planning agencies but can be developed by other interest groups or individuals with the help of planners (Campbell 216). He believes that advocacy and pluralism in planning is a good thing and works in favor of everyone involved, including governments and communities. It provides alternative solutions to the same problem resulting in a variety of ideas to choose from and it takes burden off of the planning agencies and their planners to produce alternative designs (Campbell 213). The resulting process is more democratic, unbiased and representative of all the concerned interest groups. Davidoff compares the role of the advocacy planner with that of a lawyer, cross-examining the 'opposition plans', advocating the interests of the group he or she is representing and educating the interest groups of their rights and in the technical language for their understanding (Campbell 214-215).

Fig. 4.1. Advocacy Planning, cartoon from Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller, 2002: 104.

Paul Davidoff stressed on the urgency of representing low-income families in particular by planners under the banner of Advocacy Planning (Campbell 215). He argued that the underprivileged group of the society was in dire need of professional assistance to advocate their rights and protect their interests. This article stirred a new wave of participatory planning in the US, with planners providing their services to poor communities in order to improve their living conditions. The first practical example of the concept of Advocacy Planning was the establishment of Architects Renewal Committee in Harlem or ARCH in October 1964 in New York City (Blecher 24). ARCH started its operations in April 1965 and consisted of a team of architects and planners providing their architectural and planning services to the inhabitants of Harlem in New York in order to improve their living conditions (Blecher 25). Their activities were initially limited to that of "advocate technician, community organizer, and community spokesman" which were further extended in 1966 to providing "community information and training services, advocacy planning, the development of neighborhood corporations, and activities and education for the development of new career roles for poor in urban environmental related professions" (Blecher 25). In this way, the role of an advocate planner was not only that of a protector of the rights of the community but also that of a teacher and an educator.

4.3. Community Architecture

Parallel to the Advocacy Planning movement in the United States, the community groups in the United Kingdom launched community action in the 1960s

and 1970s as a reaction to the government's policy of relocation and redevelopment

projects, resulting in property speculation (Wates, Community 27). The project that

laid the foundation of the "Community Architecture Movement" in Britain was the

Black Road Area Improvement Project in Macclesfield, Cheshire, under the able

leadership of Rod Hackney, the first community architect in Britain (Wates,

Community 72) in 1974 (Wates, Community 165). Hackney was a resident of a

decaying neighborhood at the Black Road, which had been slated for demolition as

part of the standard local council practice at that time (Wates, Community 70). Rod

Hackney speaks of this renewal plan of his neighborhood in a letter published in the

Macclesfield Express,

> These properties, including my own of 222 Black Road, dating back to
>
> between 1812 and 1815. . . are scheduled for demolition in the name of
>
> so-called progress, only to be replaced at some later date with new
>
> characterless buildings with an expected life normally less than those
>
> that they will have replaced. (Hackney 56)

Rod Hackney organized and worked with the neighborhood residents and

achieved not only to save and restore the buildings but did so by respecting the

individual needs of the people (Wates, Community 73). With the support of the

residents of his neighborhood, Hackney launched a full action campaign against the

local council's decision and together they formed the Black Road Area Residents'

Asssociation (Hackney 55). He wrote letters to the council, articles in the newspapers

and prepared a detailed report on the existing conditions of the buildings in the

neighborhood. His professional standing as an architect enabled him to take on the task of questioning the council's decisions that other residents of the neighborhood fully supported but feared doing and to answer the council's proposal with his own respecting the community needs for the improvement of the neighborhood on self-help basis (Hackney 56-66). Hackney achieved another major feat by attracting the attention of Prince Charles in 1984, which gave the needed boost and Royal patronage to the Community Architecture Movement in Britain.

Community Architecture is based on a democratic system of decision-making that advocates the inclusion of community members in issues concerning their built environment. It has already been witnessed in the past that heteronomous and paternalistic approaches of the governments and professionals have failed to provide satisfactory solutions to the housing problem. Community Architecture on the other hand has shown in many cases that involving people in their own projects can yield several

Box 7. Roderick Peter Hackney

Rod Hackney was born in 1942 in Liverpool, England and he graduated in architecture from the University of Manchester in 1967. He worked in several countries, including Canada (Montreal), Libya (Tripoli) and Denmark (Copenhagen) before returning to the United Kingdom in 1972 to start his private practice at Macclesfield, Cheshire. This is where he became involved in saving his neighborhood at Black Road from destruction with the help of local residents and formed the basis of the Community Architecture Movement in the UK. He completed his doctoral dissertation in 1979 on the works of Arne Jacobsen with whom he had also worked in Denmark. He was the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects from 1987-9 and Union Internationale des Architectes from 1988-91. Hackney has been involved in many Community Architecture projects in the UK and many countries around the world and currently resides in the UK ("Grove").

Photo from Rod Hackney, 1990.

social and economic benefits that are not possible in the conventional approach.

To sum it all, Community Architecture has provided alternative design and development approaches in the form of the following three priorities (Towers 84). The first of these priorities is to save what already exists within a neighborhood, based on the community's wishes. There should be a minimum destruction of community networks, both in rehabilitation or new construction. The second priority demands that the community members be included in the design process of both the rehabilitation and new construction. It is an established fact that the end-users are most familiar with their needs and requirements, which is also directly related to the success of a project. Based on the same observation, Community Architecture lastly acknowledges the involvement of the community members in the decision-making and management of the community-based projects (Towers 84).

The precedents set forth by these examples from the developed world have helped acknowledge the concept of Community Architecture as an efficient means for achieving meaningful development, which is being replicated in projects all over the world. Since the final case study project of this research is located in Montréal, the next chapter will look closely at the history of community participation in planning and architecture in the city in order to set the stage for the final chapters.