Deliberative Democracy and Empowerment:
An Analysis of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation's Tenant Participation
System

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Toronto Community Housing Corporation's Tenant Participation System and Empowerment

Executive Summary

This paper attempts to analyze the relationship between deliberative democracy and whether programs that employ its principles at its core can evoke feelings of empowerment within its participants. Through utilizing the Toronto Community Housing Corporation's (TCHC) Tenant Participation System as an example of a deliberative democratic discussion, the question of study becomes whether tenants who participate in these initiatives can truly become empowered. This paper will focus centrally on TCHC's participatory budgeting program, which is one of the various tenant engagement initiatives in the Tenant Participation System. To assist in understanding the various levels of empowerment that could be achieved by a participant, an empowerment continuum was developed. Deliberative democracy is consistent with the empowerment levels found at the higher ends of the continuum and it is only through reaching these levels of empowerment can a participant truly be and feel empowered. Interviews with residents of TCHC were conducted and the findings generally support this argument. Tenants felt that empowerment was derived from decision-making that was controlled by them and this is consistent with the principles of deliberative democracy. Ultimately, deliberative democracy has the potential to better the communities it serves, but that is only if tenants are making the actual decisions and not administrators.

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Chapter 1: Introducing Social Housing

    I.   <u>Introduction</u>

Historically, policy making within local governmental entities has largely been influenced by those agents that worked from within the government itself, but also and more important, by elites with power. In recent years there has been a shift away from this hierarchal form of policy making, as local governments seek alternative ways to incorporate citizens into the decision-making process. This shift is evident in the revitalization process that is occurring within social housing communities in Toronto, but also in other areas of the world. This is mainly due to the growing understanding that in order to build a positive community the members of that community should be integrated into the tangible and intangible developmental process of these communities.

An issue of current research interest is how organizations are reconstructing themselves to adapt to these contemporary ideals and values by incorporating perspectives from community members. More important, traditional methods of service delivery are being questioned and new methods are being introduced in an effort to uplift the morale of the residents of social housing. This encouragement of citizen participation is at the foundation of the political theory of deliberative democracy.

Deliberative democracy essentially provides the foundation for inclusive ideals and processes for tenant participation, such as the tenant electoral process and more important, participatory budgeting within Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC). Deliberative democracy is a form of democracy that relies on deliberations including the public as the central means of establishing policies and decisions. Deliberative democracy essentially empowers those involved in the process, which ultimately benefits both the citizens and the local governments involved. Deliberative

democracy is directly related to tenant participation, as it ultimately aims to increase performance levels by encouraging a holistic approach in dealing with decision-making. By involving all stake-holders through in decision-making through deliberation, the expectation is that residents will essentially feel empowered, as they are taking part in decisions that affect the communities they live in.

This research paper examines the question of whether the implementation of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation's tenant participatory initiatives has succeeded in empowering TCHC housing residents. The focus of this paper is the analysis of the relationship between deliberative democracy and empowerment in TCHC, with the expectation that deliberative democracy – if executed appropriately – has the potential to produce the empowerment. In investigating this relationship, the paper begins by examining the definition of deliberative democracy, its criticisms and how deliberative democracy relates to the various levels of empowerment. I also discuss the creation of participatory budgeting in its original contexts, as this is an integral milestone in the deliberative democratic movement. The TCHC participatory budgeting model is examined in detail, as it is a recent example of a participatory governing endeavour. In an effort to provide greater context to the issues within the social housing sector, the background the TCHC and also the history of social housing itself, particularly the tenant participation movement will be discussed as well.

II.   Background

The TCHC was established by the City of Toronto in 2002, as a result of the combination of services provided by the Toronto Housing Company and the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Corporation. The TCHC is the largest social housing provider within Canada and the second largest in North America. Toronto Housing provides homes for

low to moderate-income tenants who come from diverse backgrounds, such as newly-landed immigrants, refugees, seniors, visible minorities and people with both physical and mental disabilities. TCHC provides housing for approximately 164,000 tenants and oversees 58, 500 households[1]. The funding for TCHC is approximately half from subsidies from the City of Toronto and the other half is comprised of operational and rental subsidies. Below is a more descriptive diagram of the breakdown of where the funding for TCHC comes from.
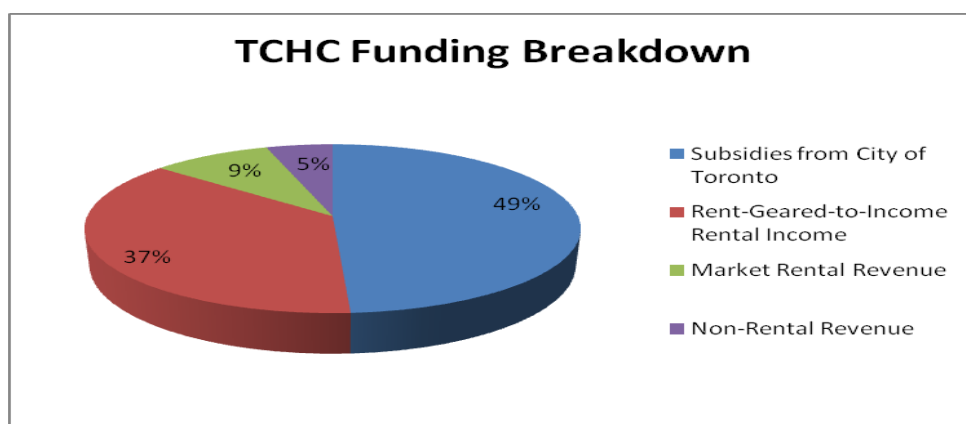
Figure 1.1

III.   Importance of Tenant Participation within Social Housing Communities

        Social housing communities are stigmatized due to their geographic location and the perceived crime that is prominent in such areas. In addition to this, they also face numerous disadvantages that are caused by various uncontrollable socio-economic circumstances. This has held negative consequences for residents, contributing to their negative perception of their own area, ultimately leaving them feeling oppressed and confined in their own living spaces. The negativity that the community perpetuates in turn impacts family morale, since parents already stressed by socio-economic conditions also have to be concerned about the welfare of their children and the quality of life they

[1] Toronto Housing Website – About Us Section

will experience[2]. As well, this impacts young people, who tend to be the causalities of these deteriorating circumstances[3].

In turn this negatively affects the way that people who live in these communities feel about the governing bodies that ultimately have control over their communities and livelihoods. This contributes to a disconnection in the flow of communication between TCHC and community members. Through launching various initiatives such as, neighbourhood councils, tenant elections, youth advocacy councils and participatory budgeting, TCHC provides opportunities for community members to feel as though they can work towards bettering the services they are receiving and also a chance to increase the overall quality of their livelihoods. Through all these programs the TCHC is attempting to give greater autonomy to tenants, which will allow them to feel empowered in the decision-making processes that essentially influence their daily lives. The TCHC is attempting to erode the communication barrier between them and their clients, but also is trying to instil a sense of communal pride. In this sense, residents are not just the objects of decision-making is tested on, but rather they are part of the problem-solving process and the development of solutions.

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[2] The Boston Consulting Group, pg 6
[3] The Impact of Mentoring on Academic Achievement of At-risk Youth, pg 228

Chapter 2: History of Social Housing

I.   History of Social Housing in Canada

In order to understand why social housing communities are in the current state they are in today, but more importantly why tenant engagement systems are so integral within these communities, one must examine and thoroughly understand the history of social housing. The responsibility of social housing in Canada first started out after the Second World War. Municipal governments were instructed to provide the zoning regulations and lands to federal and provincial governments that would allow them to construct housing that was relatively cheap for those families of soldiers who required it[4]. In 1963 the federal government created a program that included funding from the provincial government to establish subsidized housing rental units for low-income families. In particular, provincial special bodies, such as the Ontario Housing Corporation (OHC), were created for each province to oversee the maintenance of these housing units under an agreement with the federal government[5]. In the 1970s this program was replaced by a more decentralized communal-inspired program that would incorporate non-profit organizations to run these housing communities. Co-operatives were also established around this time which entailed the participation of residents in addressing the needs of the community. There is much more non-profit housing in comparison to co-operatives, where the former currently makes up 83% of the social housing in Ontario and the latter only 17%[6].

In the mid-1980s the Ontario government actively participated in building new social housing communities to be run by these non-profit organizations, but this growth spurt of social housing began to slow down. By the end of 1993 the federal government

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[4] Canada's Dual Housing Policy, pg 1
[5] Canada's Dual Housing Policy, pg 1
[6] Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association Website - (about us section)

announced that it would no longer provide funding towards building new social housing

communities. After the newly elected Harris government, which was founded upon a

neoliberal platform, the province of Ontario in 1995 cancelled their provincially funded

housing program. Although they did provide limited funding for supportive housing the

social housing agenda was severely affected by the cuts this government made[7]. This

was a strategic move made by the Harris government, which was trying to move away

from the post-war welfare state that over the years had grown to be a strong aspect of

Canadian society – this was labelled the 'common-sense revolution.'[8] The federal

government in essence supported this movement, as they took another step to retract

their involvement within the social housing field. In 1996 they announced that they would

transfer federally-run social housing programs to the provincial/territorial level[9]. This

announcement effectively removed the federal government entirely from the social

housing agenda during the 1990s. Attempting to follow the steps of the federal

government, during the late 1990s the Ontario provincial government began offloading

social housing responsibilities to municipal bodies and organizations. This is a key

aspect of the neoliberal agenda under the conservative Harris government, which was in

greater favour of privatizing the housing market rather than creating new social housing

communities[10]. The Ontario provincial government was facing increasing criticism for

their lack of involvement in the social housing agenda from residents of Ontario and also

from the agencies responsible for maintaining these communities. Their downloading of

responsibilities to the municipal sector was not looked highly upon by the opposition,

who argued that they were attempting to avoid critical duties[11]. To remove provincial

responsibility from the social housing agenda the provincial government created a piece

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[7] Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association Website - (about us section)
[8] Neoliberalism, Contingency and Urban Policy: The Case of Social Housing in Ontario, pg 515
[9] Canada's Dual Housing Policy, pg 4
[10] Neoliberalism, Contingency and Urban Policy: The Case of Social Housing in Ontario, pg 515
[11] Neoliberalism, Contingency and Urban Policy: The Case of Social Housing in Ontario, pg 516

of legislation that would legally define who was responsible for the overseeing of social housing issues. The downloading process of social housing duties became formally recognized through the passage of the *Social Housing Reform Act* (2000)[12]. This legislation identified municipalities as being responsible for the maintenance of social housing programs. Also what is important to note here is that this legislation was seen as a step in favour of the neoliberal agenda under the Harris government, which advocated it as a system that would provide more autonomy to service providers. Ironically, many non-profit organizational service providers found that this new legislation was more restrictive and complicated[13]. Instead of creating more autonomy, this legislation in a way created more reliance on municipalities and on other organizations, which ultimately undermined neoliberal ideals and the Harris' government's plans. Prior to this legislation, administration and funding were generally believed to be the responsibility of the provincial government, but after this act came into effect such duties were transferred to municipal level managers, and funding also came from the municipal tax base[14].

Following this Act the federal government received a lot of criticism about their non-involvement in social housing and the problems attached to it. Shortly after the SHRA legislation passed, the federal government announced their involvement back into the social housing agenda by means of a multi-million dollar funding plan for a new initiative called the Affordable Housing Program (APH). This new program would be implemented by provincial bodies that would then also provide some funding towards this initiative; the rest of the funding would come from municipalities[15]. Although the regulation of social housing communities is still maintained at the municipal level, the

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[12] Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association Website - (Social Housing Reform Act section)
[13] Neoliberalism, Contingency and Urban Policy: The Case of Social Housing in Ontario, pg 519
[14] Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association Website - (Social Housing Reform Act section)
[15] Timeline: History of Social Housing in Ontario – ONPHA website

federal and Ontario provincial governments both continue to be involved in the social

housing agenda. Currently social housing only makes up a small portion of the total

Canadian housing market share, sitting at about 6%[16]. Both tiers of government have

pledged hundreds of millions, as recently as 2009, to the sustainability and successful

growth of these communities. This commitment of funding demonstrates the importance

that such communities pose for the future growth of the Canadian economy[17].

II.   The History of Tenant Participation

Tenant participation within the TCHC is a relatively new phenomenon, which only

began to sprout in the early 2000s. Unfortunately there is not much information available

in regards to tenant participation in Canada, but it seems that tenant participation within

social housing is definitely not new in the UK. Due to similar governing styles, the UK's

tenant participation history would be useful in providing a theoretical understanding of

the growth of tenant participation. Tenant participation in the UK within the social

housing sector started to develop around the 1970s, but such movements were not

welcomed whole-heartedly by some councillors and politicians who believed that such

matters should be left to those who were knowledgeable in the field[18]. In the UK, tenant

associations, the most common form of tenant participation, first emerged in response to

communities that generally did not want social housing units in their communities. In

their beginnings they were much more radical, as they would organize rent-strikes if their

negotiations were not accepted[19]. Contemporary tenant associations have become

much more strategic in an attempt to work both from the outside (negotiating, acting

similar to trade unions) and the inside (sending representatives to speak to individual

[16] Neoliberalism, Contingency and Urban Policy: The Case of Social Housing in Ontario, pg 514
[17] Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association Website - (Timeline – History of Social Housing in Ontario)
[18] Tenant Participation and Social Housing in the UK: Applying a Theoretical Model, pg 575
[19] Tenant Participation and Social Housing in the UK: Applying a Theoretical Model, pg 575

landlords)[20]. There have been a number of legislative policies enacted by the UK

government to encourage tenant participation, notably the creation of the Priority Estates

Project (PEP) established in 1979 and the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)

in the 1980s[21]. Although such policies were formally recognized by legislation, the

evidence prior to 1997 illustrates that these policies were about sustaining the belief that

governmental bodies were concerned about tenant participation, when in actuality they

were not. The policies passed during this time acted more as a guideline, rather than an

enforcing set of rules for housing management, so in effect these policies really had little

value in regards to changing existing practices[22]. This changed with the election of the

Blair government in 1997. This government was focused on promoting the voices of

residents and increasing their participation within the social housing sector[23]. The Blair

government developed the Tenant Participation Compact (TPCs) in England, which

provided the basic framework that would link tenants with local authorities. This notable

and influential policy created local agreements or compacts that were developed with the

participation of both tenants and local housing authorities[24]. The discussions

surrounding these compacts are grounded in theories of deliberative democracy, as the

compacts are created out of an open and inclusive environment of all. The residents and

the local housing authorities are treated equally here and that is what makes the TPCs

so important to the growth of the practice of tenant participation. Such policies set forth

the foundation for the growth of tenant participation within the social housing sector in

the UK and also set the standard for other countries, such as Canada to follow.

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[20] Tenant Participation and Social Housing in the UK: Applying a Theoretical Model, pg 575
[21] Approaches to Tenant Participation in the English Local Authority Sector, pg 210
[22] Tenant Participation and Social Housing in the UK: Applying a Theoretical Model, pg 576
[23] Approaches to Tenant Participation in the English Local Authority Sector, pg 210
[24] Approaches to Tenant Participation in the English Local Authority Sector, pg 210

Chapter 3: Theory of Deliberative Democracy and Empowerment

I.   <u>Theory of Deliberative Democracy</u>

Deliberative democracy is a term that was coined in the 1980s and arose from the growing citizen participation movements that occurred in the past. It gained momentum through proving to be a useful tool in addressing controversial issues among political agents. Over time it became clear that this method of deliberation could actually prove to be more fair and just than traditional democratic procedures[25]. Deliberative democracy describes a governing process that differed from normal democratic processes. This form of democracy places a focus on the act of deliberating governmental decision-making with not only elites directly involved in the decision-making process, but rather incorporating the collective judgement of the citizens these decisions are affecting[26]. This approach reinforces the notion that decisions should be deliberated through healthy discussions, rather than a simple majority-voting process. More importantly, this approach allows decision-making to be more reflective of the greater society that such decisions will influence. Since deliberative democracy's emphasis is not on voting, this can encourage otherwise "inactive" members of the public to partake in policy discussion, as through this model everyone's voice carries the same weight. Many theorists have expanded on this idea, arguing that the best policy decisions are derived from when democracy works with and in favour of the public[27]. This is achieved through informing the public of the political atmosphere surrounding them and also informing them of their responsibilities as citizens and the powers that they can enact. The ultimate goal of deliberative democracy is the attempt, through

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[25] Urban Sprawl, Smart Growth, and Deliberative Democracy, pg 1855
[26] Addressing the Citizenship and Democratic Deficits: The Potential of Deliberative Democracy for Public Administration, pg 384
[27] The Philosophy and Methods of Deliberative Democracy: Implications for Public Policy and Marketing, pg 31

discussion, to find the balance of what constitutes the common good that the public would be satisfied with. The idea is that through discussion people can move away from their own self-interests and engage with others to reach a decision that will be beneficial to all[28]. When applying deliberative democracy to public discussions of specific issues certain conditions should be ensured in order to facilitate a truly inclusive atmosphere. Although different theorists may phrase these principles differently, it can be generally understood that these principles ultimately define a deliberative democratic discussion:

- **Legitimacy of the Decision:** whatever the decision that is reached it should not be undermined by any competing political view. The decision should be understood as fully legitimate[29].

- **Respect:** There will be differing opinions and they should all be treated as equal in value[30].

- **Open Environment:** all discussions should be treated like an open forum, where anyone with an interest in the issue should be welcomed to participate, regardless of socio-economic status, age, gender etc. Citizens involved in this discussion should be free to express themselves, as there is no specific point of authority involved within these environments.[31]

- **Understandable Arguments:** although everyone is entitled to their own opinion, arguments given should be backed up with evidence that the average citizen can reasonably comprehend

In addition to these core elements that constitute the basis for a deliberative democratic discussion, one point should be emphasized: the discussion should at all times have the citizenry agenda at its foundation. Deliberative democracy can be extended to an

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[28] The Philosophy and Methods of Deliberative Democracy: Implications for Public Policy and Marketing, pg 32
[29] Urban Sprawl, Smart Growth, and Deliberative Democracy, pg 1854
[30] Urban Sprawl, Smart Growth, and Deliberative Democracy, pg 1854
[31] Urban Sprawl, Smart Growth, and Deliberative Democracy, pg 1854

empowerment framework, whereby those who participate in a deliberative democratic environment can be empowered by the process itself.

II.   Critiques of Deliberative Democracy

Deliberative democracy is an effective way to engage citizens in local politics, but there are many critics who have highlighted faults within the practice of this theory. These criticisms can be grouped into five theoretical perspectives: strong rational-choice, strong egalitarian, social-capital, cultural difference and expertise[32]. It would be inefficient to discuss all five critiques, as not all the critiques apply to the deliberative democratic model being used within the TCHC. So for the purpose of this paper only the strong egalitarian and expertise perspectives will be discussed.

The strong egalitarian perspective believes that the inequalities in society, especially those rooted in class, race and gender ultimately hinder the deliberative democratic process. As a result, the argument claims that this makes it impossible for deliberative democracy to act on the principles it is founded upon. This theory holds the view that deliberative democratic forums can be achieved, but only if society first substantially equalizes the resources that all citizens can utilize in the political process[33]. Without this redistribution of resources, plans to decentralize policymaking will only benefit the elites[34]. This argument is based on assumptions and fails to account for opposing evidence. The strong egalitarian argument would support the idea that levels of participation are much higher in advantaged areas with access to resources compared to a disadvantaged community with restricted access to resources. Ironically though, there are reports that not only contradict this finding, but also reports that

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[32] Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy, pg 100
[33] Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy, pg 108
[34] Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy, pg 108

actually find a reverse relationship between the two variables[35]. These reports have found that poor neighbourhoods actually have a higher rate of success within their problem-solving plans, in comparison to middle or upper class neighbourhoods. Although this data is limited, it is still a strong illustration that social status does not necessarily completely obstruct the implementation of deliberative democracy. There is no argument that social status and inequalities are related and that if such barriers were removed the deliberative democratic process would be more effective and fair. This is a fair and justified argument, but deliberative democratic discussions can still be implemented in disadvantaged communities and provide empowerment and a fulfilling experience to residents. The perfect illustration of this would be the participatory budgeting example within the TCHC that will be discussed later in this paper. This particular model demonstrates that disadvantaged communities have an equal chance of reaping the benefits that deliberative democracy offers and ultimately discredits this theory's overarching argument.

The second critique to be discussed is the expertise perspective. This perspective is one of the more popular views and it argues that the average citizen does not have the required special knowledge to make well informed political decisions[36]. This theory even goes as far as to say that this lack of experience and knowledge of participants could actually work against a neighbourhood that attempts to employ these initiatives. The idea is that negative consequences could occur if citizens' deliberations are given greater weight in the decision-making process. The importance of an expert's perspective is unquestionable, but the deliberative democratic environment is one that works better with citizens who hold views free from the bounds of professional orthodox

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[35] Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy, pg 119
[36] Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy, pg 128

practices[37]. Deliberative democracy is more beneficial when views are diverse and are inclusive of non-professionals as well. This helps in ensuring that deliberations are representative of all individuals and perspectives. Also educational and information training sessions have been offered within certain studies and have been generally successful in creating more knowledgeable citizens[38]. These are practical solutions that could be employed to incorporate citizens, rather than just excluding them. These solutions have been successful in addressing the main problems that this theory speaks to. The expertise critique's inability to effectively address the opposing evidence has ultimately caused this theory to lack a strong argument.

III.   Defining Empowerment

To begin understanding empowerment it first needs to be conceptually defined, as empowerment can have different meanings. Empowerment in its literal understanding means to give one power or authority and the feeling that it evokes can generally be understood as subjective. The problem with this definition is that it is obviously too simplistic to speak to the complexity that surrounds the framework of empowerment, especially when considering its relation to citizen participation. The act of being empowered would be better understood through a framework based on a continuum, where the level of empowerment would relate directly to the outcome or the agenda behind the participatory forum taking place. Sherry Arnstein's classic piece *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* she discusses the different levels of citizen participation in detail. Arnstein created an eight-rung scale that ranked the various categories of citizen participation, which eloquently provided an illustration of the degrees of power that certain aspects of citizen participation entail. This scale demonstrates that citizen

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[37] Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy, pg 129
[38] Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy, pg 128

participation is based on a progression, where the effectiveness of one's participation is dependent upon the level of participation that is allowed or encouraged[39]. In other words, citizen participative measures can create feelings of empowerment, but only if policymakers create an environment that is truly willing to incorporate the voices and ideas of the citizens involved. This may seem like an obvious principle of citizen participation, but realistically a deliberative democratic discussion could take place without policymakers necessarily considering the opinions being raised in the discussion. Ironically enough, this could foster feelings of empowerment in participants, because they may feel like their voices were heard – even if in the actual decision-making process their opinions may have weighed very little. This type of empowerment would be found on the lower ends of the empowerment continuum, where although it does create the subjective feeling of empowerment the overall process is not empowering. This fundamentally means that deliberative democratic forums are not inherently empowering.

To effectively illustrate the different levels of empowerment that could be achieved within the TCHC tenant engagement initiatives, an empowerment continuum was created. This continuum pictured below details the five different levels of empowerment that could be achieved, where the lowest level on this continuum would be non-participation and the highest would be the full participation level.

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[39] A Ladder of Citizen Participation, pg 217

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┌──────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Partial Participation │        │ Shared Participation │
└──────────────────────┘        └──────────────────────┘
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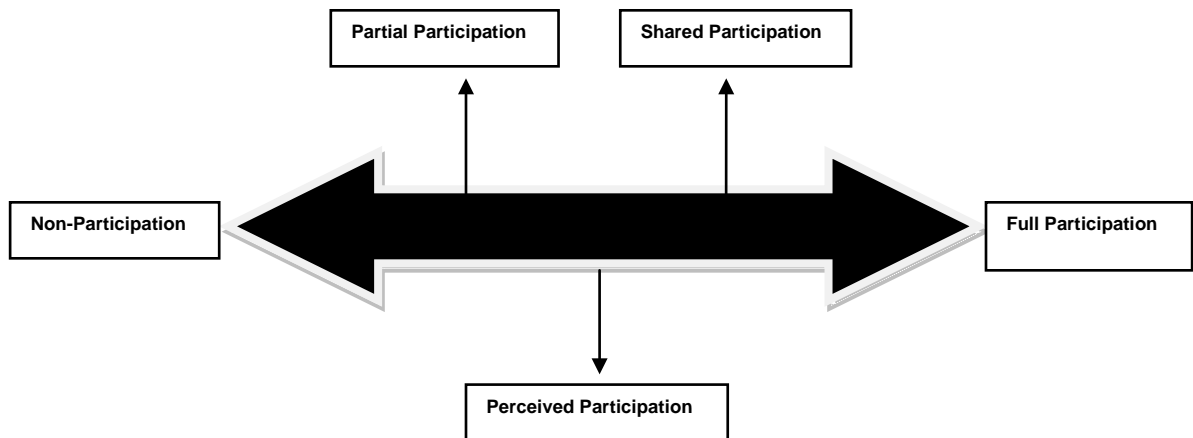
Figure 1.2

- **Non-Participation:** This level does not necessarily speak to those who have
  not participated in any programs/initiatives, but rather it entails a discussion
  that does not allow tenants to actively participate. This stage could be
  demonstrated through an example of an information session. TCHC staff
  could invite residents from a particular community to attend the discussion,
  but these residents are essentially not invited to actually participate in the
  discussion itself.

- **Partial Participation:** This stage is characterized by tenants who are able to
  participate in any given program, but the general feeling is that nothing will
  be done. So although they are participating, residents understand that their
  concerns will most likely go unheard.

- **Perceived Participation**: This stage differs slightly from the one prior to it.
  Tenants may participate in a program and they may feel as though what they
  are saying is actually being heard, but in actuality staff and administration will
  probably not produce anything concrete from their concerns/ideas. This
  stage is what could be defined as engaging in a false sense of
  empowerment. Residents may feel empowered because of the feeling of

perceived participation, but the process itself is not empowering, therefore this creates a false sense of empowerment.

- **Shared Participation**: This stage is applicable when both administration/staff and tenants come and collectively work together. The decision-making at this level is a shared responsibility; although tenants do not have full decision-making power neither does the TCHC administration/staff. Both sides must agree on the final outcomes, so both sides' decisions and opinions carry equal weight.

- **Full Participation**: This is the ideal stage which empowerment levels should reach. It is essentially the highest level of empowerment that can be achieved within a deliberative democratic environment. This level of participation is genuine and the actions and decisions of participants are taken seriously. Essentially, this stage comes into effect when decision-making is controlled solely by tenants and their ideas and concerns are actually implemented into concrete results. In other words, the participatory process is authentic and this is fundamentally why such a high level of empowerment can be achieved. An important aspect of this level and what makes it relatively hard to achieve, is that the outcome of the process should only be influenced by the participants. The administrators behind the meeting should only be there to help facilitate the meeting, they should in no way influence the democratic discussion occurring. If staff interferes in the discussion they are ultimately jeopardizing the participants' ability to achieve their full empowerment levels. The full participation stage can also be

characterized by the Empowered Deliberative Democracy (EDD) literature by Fung[40].

As already stated, full participation would be the ideal stage for residents to reach in regards to their feelings of empowerment. To incur a level of empowerment that would be at the highest end of the continuum, the deliberative democratic discussion should be one that not only seeks to empower residents, but that is also empowering in itself. The type of participation that is enforced should be authentic and real, where the involvement of the participant is deeply embedded in the decision-making process[41]. A truly authentic participatory initiative would have the following fundamental elements incorporated within its process: focus, commitment, trust and the ability to reinforce an open and honest discussion[42]. Most importantly, an authentic participatory experience would be one that is dependent upon the opinions and inputs of the participants, rather than that being an additive to the process[43]. In other words, public administrators need to allow citizens to control the discussion, rather than just treating them as people who are stating how they feel. Administrators need to adjust their framework of thinking, in that they need to steer away from relying so heavily on technical and expertise models of administration[44]. Instead they should embrace unconventional methods and processes that step away from this type of thinking and ultimately allow participants to achieve a full participatory experience. Ultimately participants should feel as though their opinions are the only ones that essentially matter and this only makes sense considering that the outcome of the process will have a direct effect on them.

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[40] Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance, pg 7
[41] The Question of Participation: Toward Authentic Public Participation in Public Administration, pg 320
[42] The Question of Participation: Toward Authentic Public Participation in Public Administration, pg 320
[43] The Question of Participation: Toward Authentic Public Participation in Public Administration, pg 320
[44] The Question of Participation: Toward Authentic Public Participation in Public Administration, pg 321

This ideal framework of empowerment is perfectly illustrated through Fung and Wright's discussion of *Empowered Deliberative Democracy* (EDD). EDD essentially is the highest level of empowerment that can be achieved within a deliberative democratic environment. It has three general principles: the problems being discussed are concrete concerns, there is a strong involvement of citizens in the decision-making process and the process in which the deliberations take place should be founded upon a holistic approach that is inclusive of all participants[45]. The principles are consistent with levels of empowerment that would be found on the higher level of the continuum. Furthermore, these principles effectively demonstrate why this level of empowerment would be the most desirable in a deliberative democratic environment.

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[45] Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance, pg 15

Chapter 4: Toronto Community Housing Corporation's Tenant Participation System

I.   Tenant Participation within the TCHC

Deliberative democracy is directly related to ideals that tenant participation attempts to reinforce, whereby the foundation of tenant participation lies in accounting for voices that would otherwise go ignored. Tenant participation models attempt to provide an outlet for residents who want to voice their opinion on a particular matter, and through participating, residents can contribute to the greater good of their communities. The TCHC implemented the Tenant Participation System as a structure that could give residents a healthy way to contribute to their communities, and also as a means that would give greater strength to the relationship between residents and the TCHC staff. Also the Tenant Participation System serves as a measure of accountability on behalf of the TCHC, ensuring that the TCHC is doing their part to ensure their residents are happy with their services and the communities they live in. TCHC's management structure is comprised of 27 Community Housing Units (CHU). The TCHC implements tenant participation initiatives through its CHU Tenant Councils. These CHUs are comprised of the tenant representatives for each CHU, who were voted on by residents in that particular CHU. There is one tenant representative for each building/complex who is voted on by their peers within that particular building/complex, and together the elected representatives makeup the neighbourhood council for a particular CHU. The tenant representatives for each CHU are accountable to their communities, as they are in theory supposed to be the representative voice of the community they are representing[46]. The CHU Tenant Councils are supposed to provide an outlet for tenant

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[46] A Guide to Toronto Community Housing, CHU Councils, pg 2

representatives, TCHC staff and community service providers to discuss ideas and issues that residents in the various TCHC communities feel are important[47]. The CHU Tenant Councils not only discuss grievances of community members, but they also deal with budgetary problems, such as how to allocate certain resources and where priorities should be set[48]. This type of process would be consistent with the full participation empowerment level, as the representative for the tenants is one of them who was democratically elected by the greater community that representative serves. In other words, deliberative democracy can still be achieved through having a system of elected representatives who serve their communities. This is possible because although these representatives are the voice for their communities, the meetings are public and interested tenants are always welcome to come. In addition to this, if tenant representatives fail to incorporate their peers there are rules in place to remove that particular tenant from that position. Ultimately, decision-making always beings with deliberations and ends with a voting process and these methods are aligned with the principles found in deliberative democracy.

Also on the TCHC Board of Directors there are two TCHC tenants that sit on the board and they are active in the core TCHC budgeting and business decision-making process. These tenants on the Board of Directors are elected every two years and are voted upon by the tenant representatives from across the 27 CHUs. More recently in early 2010 the TCHC held its first ever Youth Tenant Representative Elections, which was a huge stepping stone for increasing youth participation within social housing not only in Toronto, but also within Canada[49]. The TCHC formed 11 Youth Councils, which include 175 youth and these youth will focus on the issues that are important to their peers in the communities they live in. Probably the most influential tenant participative

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[47] A Guide to Toronto Community Housing, CHU Councils, pg 2
[48] TCHC Website – Tenant Representative Section
[49] TCHC Community Management Plan 2010-2012, pg 19

tool the TCHC has implemented is participatory budgeting. This will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

II.   <u>History of Participatory Budgeting</u>

Participatory Budgeting is a program that encourages all interested participants to engage in the budgeting discussion of a particular matter. This has ultimately made it one of the most influential accomplishments within the citizen participation agenda. This program allows all interested participants to engage in the discussion The concept of participatory budgeting first came about in the 1980s in the area of Porto Alegre, Brazil, where it developed in response to corrupt governmental practices that allocated public funds for private political purposes[50]. In the late 1980s a coalition of liberal parties came together and was able to gain power within the municipal government of Porto Alegre and with their successful win they executed a revolutionary reform called Participatory Budgeting (PB)[51]. Participatory Budgeting in this context was meant to be founded upon a bottom-up procedure based on the grievances of the public. Meetings were held annually and consisted of individual citizens and several different citizen interest groups as well. The major aim of participatory budgeting was to deliberate and decide on specific projects that were to be implemented in certain municipalities throughout the course of the year[52]. The process would normally start in the early spring and regional assemblies would be held in each of the city's districts[53]. These meetings were actually quite large, and could sometimes have an occupancy level of up to one thousand people. The objectives of these initial meetings were to select delegates to represent the interests and people of these particular districts, and also to review the past year's

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[50] Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance, pg 9
[51] Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance, pg 9
[52] Participation, Activism, and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment and Deliberative Democratic Theory, pg 46
[53] Participation, Activism, and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment and Deliberative Democratic Theory, pg 46

projects and budgets[54]. Over the next few months these delegates then meet on a weekly to bimonthly basis to familiarize themselves with the projects that were of priority in their particular districts needs[55]. In addition to the current project that they discussed, these meetings also provided an opportunity to discuss any other pressing issues within these communities that had not already been highlighted. After a list of priorities was completed that was representative of each district, a regional meeting was held in which regional delegates voted on the most important priorities. Also, in this meeting councillors were elected to serve on the Municipal Council of the Budget, which was a smaller group of representatives from each of the districts[56]. This council met with representatives of the administration in order to create a budget with the available resources that would be sufficient enough to execute the approved projects and concerns. Over the next few months following this, the council met on a regular basis to ensure the proper execution of these approved projects. Ultimately, through joint discussion and deliberation, citizens, the mayor and his/her staff would collectively decide the major projects of interest within a particular district and ultimately implement them.

The Porto Alegre example perfectly illustrates how empowerment at the highest level of full participation can be achieved. Within this particular model of participatory budgeting, citizens are directly involved in the deliberation processes and hold a considerable amount of power in regards to making decisions. Not only are these citizens involved in the initial decision-making process, but they are constantly kept up-to-date on the developments of their decisions and are also invited to the numerous ongoing meetings that take place to discuss the progress of these developments.

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[54] Participation, Activism, and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment and Deliberative Democratic Theory, pg 46
[55] Participation, Activism, and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment and Deliberative Democratic Theory, pg 46
[56] Participation, Activism, and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment and Deliberative Democratic Theory, pg 5

In addition to the empowerment that participatory budgeting provides for residents, there is also evidence that demonstrates that this program has the ability to successfully implement decisions that is beneficial to the entire community as well. One of the main priorities that residents in Porto Alegre wanted addressed was basic sanitation and that is to have a functional water and sewage system that would be available to all residents. Before implementing their deliberative democratic program called participatory budgeting only 49% of residents had access to clean water[57]. After this program was implemented, the government heard what the residents were saying and a staggering 98% of residents had access to water, with 85% being served by a water sewage system[58]. This is just one of the several successful examples that the participatory budgeting program has been able to achieve within Porto Alegre. This example illustrates the importance of such a program, as it has the power to influence not only the residents directly involved, but also the greater community as well.

What is most important in this Porto Alegre model is that the administrators who manage the implementation of this process act as overseers, rather than interjectors. In other words, the administrators have no influence on the actual decision-making outcomes and what projects are chosen to be implemented. They are essentially there to only provide support and information to participants. By allowing participants to have full decision-making power, residents can truly become empowered as a result of these deliberations because it is their decisions that are being executed. Moreover, the proportion of residents who have decided to partake in participatory budgeting has increased over the years and this is especially true with those populations living in disadvantaged areas[59]. This is a clear indication of the success that this program is having within the Porte Alegre area. More important, the fact that the rise of participation

[57] Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre: Toward a Redistributive Democracy, pg 485
[58] Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre: Toward a Redistributive Democracy, 485
[59] Participation, Activism, and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment and Deliberative Democratic Theory, pg 48

rates is within impoverished populations discredits the previously mentioned strong-egalitarian criticism. The Porte Alegre example demonstrates that regardless of the inequalities that exist within a particular society deliberative democratic practices can be successfully carried out. Overall, participatory budgeting is an excellent illustration of a deliberative democratic discussion. Participatory budgeting highlights issues of importance on the municipal agenda that the public chooses and ultimately these issues are accounted for and acted upon.

III.   Participatory Budgeting and the TCHC

Participatory budgeting within the TCHC context established a very similar approach to the Porte Alegre example within their communies. TCHC's approach attempted to incorporate all the information and decision-making from tenant discussions at the neighbourhood council meetings in making decisions. The TCHC started the implementation of participatory budgeting in 2003, and this initial launch involved over 6000 participants and a total budget of $10 million in capital expenses[60]. The following year tenants created an advisory committee entitled "The Tenants Advisory Committee, which was developed to establish clearer guidelines as to how this process should be implemented[61]. This committee, along with TCHC administration set the guidelines for the following years and established a set budget of $9 million that would be designated for tenant decision-making[62]. They decided that CHUs are to be allocated $7.2 million per budgeting cycle and the amount that each CHU was to receive would be based on the number of housing units that particular CHU had[63]. The remaining $1.8 million would be utilized for a special priority project that would be selected through a voting process,

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[60] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 684
[61] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 684
[62] How Does Participatory Budgeting Work – TCHC website
[63] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 684

which would be conducted during a one-day meeting consisting of representatives from all the CHUs[64].

The participative budgeting first starts at the neighbourhood council level, otherwise known as the building level. At this stage, the tenant representatives and tenants from each building identify their key issues and prioritize them. Once the participants have highlighted their concerns and priorities, a democratic process is employed to rank the priorities. Voting is carried out through the use of ballots or dots to rank the issues in order of priority. Once the voting is complete, the top five selections are chosen and then forwarded to the designated neighbourhood CHU council. The next step involves ranking priorities across all buildings located in a particular Community Housing Unit (CHU), where tenant representatives and tenants decide on the projects that will be funded through the allocated budget set aside for their CHU. In addition to indentifying projects that will be funded through the CHU budget, residents also select one priority project that requires additional funding outside of the allocated CHU budget[65].

This priority project is then submitted for review to the TCHC's Application Review Committee, which is inclusive of both staff and tenants. The purpose of this committee is to ensure that the purposed budget forwarded by the CHU contains the appropriate quotes, has a clear focus and most important, that it does not breach any building codes or other health and safety related policies[66]. This meeting consists of one tenant delegate from each CHU and is a forum for all delegates to share their CHU's priorities and potential projects that they believe require funding from the $1.8 million that TCHC has set aside for priority projects[67]. Each delegate states their ideas through

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[64] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 684
[65] How Does Participatory Budgeting Work – TCHC website
[66] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 685
[67] How Does Participatory Budgeting Work – TCHC website

their own elaborate presentations and at the end of this meeting the delegates vote on

which projects they feel are most important. To allow delegates to make informed

decisions, they are given background information regarding the approximate costs and

brief summaries of the proposed projects they are to vote on. The idea is that these

delegates who are representatives for their particular communities will take into

consideration the needs and ideas of the residents they are representing[68]. After the

vote is taken, the Inter-CHU group then recommends the purposed project with the most

votes to the TCHC's CEO[69]. The CEO then presents a finalized list of specified projects

chosen by tenants that is to receive funding and forwards the final budget to the TCHC's

Board of Directors for approval[70]. The approval process is usually quick and the projects

forwarded to the Board of Directors are normally approved. Once projects are approved

efforts are then set in motion to ensure the implementation of the approved projects.

In practice, the TCHC's participatory budgeting model has achieved the essential

principles that make it possible for the participants involved to achieve levels of

empowerment at the full participation stage. The fundamental requirement for full

participation would be that the final decision-making process should be solely in the

hands of tenants and from the agenda that the TCHC has created this seems to be the

objective they are attempting to achieve. The TCHC's participatory budgeting model has

not only the capability to fully empower its residents, but it also adheres to the three

principles of participatory budgeting in general. The first principle is that all citizens

should have the ability to participate and this sentiment has been made quite clear by

the TCHC through their various methods to engage their residents[71]. The second

principle is that participation should be governed on a regular basis through democratic

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[68] How Does Participatory Budgeting Work – TCHC website
[69] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 685
[70] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 685
[71] Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre: Toward a Redistributive Democracy, pg 468

rules that take place within a reliable institution, with participants having the power to decide the internal rules that are enforced[72]. Again, this principle has been demonstrated through having residents choose the final projects that are to be approved for funding. The third principle is that participants should allocate resources based on both their substantive list of criteria that they have developed, and the technical criteria that concern the economic, political and legal practicability of their concerns[73]. This principle has also been achieved through the TCHC's rigorous approval process, which ensures that projects that are approved meet the approved guidelines on all levels.

The TCHC has made reasonable efforts to actively seek out and motivate their residents to participate in their participatory initiatives. According to the TCHC, they have enforced a rigorous participatory engagement plan which involves, but is not limited to door-to-door visits and placing posters and flyers in communal areas of buildings and residents' mailboxes[74]. TCHC staff also attempts to engage residents that live in buildings who have a historical low rate of participation, by setting up stands with information in the lobbies in these areas, thus allowing residents to view the available information at their convenience[75]. Moreover, TCHC staff attempt to eliminate barriers that some residents may face, such as transportation, childcare concerns and language differences. The TCHC either provides transportation to and from meetings or reimburse any costs incurred, provide lunch and snacks for participants at these meetings, reimburse residents for daycare and provide interpreters when available[76]. The TCHC has also made attempts to ensure that their information is accessible to the diverse community they serve. They have done this through ensuring that their materials are available in different languages, by providing all key informational materials in 18

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[72] Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre: Toward a Redistributive Democracy, pg 468
[73] Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre: Toward a Redistributive Democracy, pg 468
[74] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 685
[75] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 685
[76] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 685

languages[77]. Within meetings communication is not solely based on speaking. TCHC staff encourage residents to use a multitude of communication methods, such as visual aids, to express their ideas.

Fundamentally, the type of forum conducted by TCHC exemplifies deliberative democracy and empowerment, since through positive and open dialogue, which essentially is open to residents who are interested in the issues, real decisions are made. Residents then can feel empowered because ultimately their voices and concerns are heard through a bottom-up approach, but more important, their ideas are put into action and this is essentially what evokes feelings of empowerment.

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[77] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 686

<u>Chapter 5: Interviews</u>

I.   <u>Participant Responses to TCHC's Tenant Participation System</u>

      To give a greater understanding as to how effective the TCHC Tenant

Participation System was, interviews were conducted with five tenants who are currently

living within various TCHC communities. Before interviews were scheduled, the

questions had to be approved by the University of Western Ontario's Ethics Review

Committee. The respondents were asked a total of eleven questions through a

telephone interview, in which the information was recorded and stored on a computer.

The questions asked mainly related to how these tenants felt about the participatory

initiatives and in particular, whether they were effective or not.

      These tenants are quite active in one way or another in the initiatives that take

place in their communities. The experiences of these tenants are extremely diverse and

extensive, and include, but are not limited to, serving on the Board of Directors, serving

as youth and tenant representatives and serving on special committees such as the

Tenant Engagement Reference Committee (TERC). Although the number of

interviewees is limited, the information that has been obtained from these five individuals

is invaluable. Unfortunately, because the number of interviewees is so small

generalizations cannot and should not be made from the comments that these

individuals make, but this should not in any way devalue the weight that their comments

hold. It is safe to say that these individuals do feel as though their opinions are reflective

of the greater communities they serve and this should also be taken into consideration. It

should be noted that to maintain the identities of these tenants confidential, random

names have been assigned to them to ensure that their opinions can be heard without

any unintended consequence occurring.

In addition to the five tenants that were interviewed, one Toronto city councillor, John Parker, who is currently serving on the Board of Directors for the TCHC was interviewed as well. Although Councillor Parker's experience with the TCHC Board is very limited, he has strong local experience within his ward, in regards to understanding and witnessing the first-hand effects of tenant engagement initiatives.

II.   Selection Process

It is no secret that the TCHC had a tough year resulting from the Auditor General for the City of Toronto's two part report, which essentially revealed areas of questionable decision-making on behalf of the TCHC administration[78]. Although these events have nothing to do with the objective of this paper, they unfortunately have had an adverse effect on the development of the interview portion for this paper. After the TCHC Board of Directors was completely dissolved, and head administrators such as the CEO were fired, obtaining interviews from the administration proved to be very difficult. This is why only one interview was obtained from an administrator, Councillor Parker. Most of the other councillors and board members who had served on the Board did not respond to requests to participate in these interviews, and one can only assume that this was a result of the negative publicity attached to this scandal.

The selection process for the tenants was not any easier, as the TCHC does not divulge the contact information of its tenant representatives. Seeing that the Board of Directors, which included the two tenant representatives, was dissolved the TCHC held a new election for tenant board representatives. I attended a meeting that was meant as a meet-and-greet for the final eight candidates and this is how I was able to obtain the

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[78] Toronto Community Housing Corporation – Procurement Policies and Procedures Are Not Being Followed Report

contact information for four of the five interviewees. The fifth interviewee was selected

through a referral from one of the tenants who served on the TCHC Board of Directors.

III.   Results of Interviews

The responses from the interviews were very interesting in that they somewhat

contradicted what the TCHC purported about their own Tenant Participation System. As

illustrated through the participatory budgeting program and the other tenant engagement

initiatives that TCHC has implemented, the TCHC has maintained that they have created

a system that is equitable and accessible to all tenants. Some of the tenants interviewed

disagreed with this sentiment. One tenant named Jane, who served on the Board of

Directors, stated that there tends to be a lot of red tape in regards to getting tenant

decisions passed. In particular, when asked if residents can get what they want through

the various participatory initiatives Jane stated that politics play a heavy role in the

workings of these initiatives and this ultimately impedes their true objectives. Another

tenant named Joe also agreed with this, stating that the selection of tenant

representatives can be undemocratic because of the role the administration plays in the

selection process. Interestingly enough, Joe, who was a tenant representative at one

point, said that because of the low tenant participation rates, sometimes staff will

nominate residents whom they know will participate. He also stated that sometimes staff

will try to sway residents in favour of tenants who pose less of a "threat" to the

overarching goals of the TCHC. This view was also shared by another experienced

tenant, named Maria who has served on several different tenant committees. Maria felt

as though the TCHC was inherently flawed. She said that when staff promotes tenant

leaders, it was as if they were "pushing" out the more experienced tenant leaders and

introducing newer leaders. This goes back to what Joe spoke about in regards to the

"threat" that the experience of these tenants posed to the operations of the TCHC. Maria referred to this process as what is popularly known as the "glass ceiling effect," and she felt that this was a method that was employed to retain power within TCHC management. She said that staff and management often benefit when there is a turnover of tenants in elections, because of the power imbalance that results.

In regards to the openness of the environment in which the tenant meetings took place in, Jane said that they were almost always influenced by an administrative agenda. Jane said it occurred quite often that tenant leaders would implement a model to be followed and staff would come in and change it without consulting the tenants involved. She felt as though the decisions being made were entirely influenced by staff and that there was a general feeling about staff that "we are listening to you, but not really listening to you". Maria shared the same feeling where she stated that, "it feels like they're giving us feedback on what they want us to give them feedback on". Maria felt as though there was a struggle by TCHC to keep the agenda focused on the goals of tenants, rather than on the TCHC and their goals. Maria also said that the problems were not only centred on administration, as there was often conflict amongst tenants as well. This conflict mainly focused on the selection of leadership roles. Those who were better known within the meetings often were able to express themselves more easily than others in less "privileged" positions. She said this was especially true in regards to the participatory budgeting related meetings. The system has been constructed to allow the strong voices among the tenants to rise. Maria stresses that there need to be more equitable ways to distribute funds because of the strong competition over the allocated money. Her problem with the current model is that there are many communities who put a lot of effort into attempting to promote their project and ultimately at the end there is only one winner and many losers, which is not fair.

An issue that Jane, Joe and Maria all agreed on was the lack of communication there was between TCHC and their tenants. Both Jane and Joe agreed that there is a strong disconnect between tenant reps and TCHC, but also between the tenant reps themselves. Jane pointed to the new phone system which was installed in 2008 as a contributing factor to staff being unreachable. Jane and Joe both agreed that this lack of communication and updates is why people don't really show up to meetings. Maria on the other hand, believes that communication is the area where greatest improvement in needed for the TCHC, but at the same time she believes that the TCHC is doing what they can to inform residents about upcoming meetings. Overall they all agreed that because of the lack of communication, the same old group of tenants kept stepping up and coming to the meetings.

Overall, Jane and Joe are quite sceptical about the TCHC tenant participation system. This is mostly due to the interference of the administration in the discussions and implementation of tenant plans. They both initially felt empowered when starting out in tenant engagement programs, but after realizing the limitations involved as a result of the politics this feeling quickly disappeared and was replaced with anger and frustration with the system. Maria's feelings about the role management plays were similar, but at the same time she has more faith in the system. She believes that the system could have the potential to have a positive impact within the greater community, but only if the TCHC truly gives tenants a greater role to play.

The other two interviewees, Michelle and Laura generally held a more positive perspective on the Tenant Participation System. Michelle and Laura both felt that residents were able to get what they want from the tenant engagement programs. Both of these tenants felt that the TCHC was doing what they could to accommodate the needs and requests of the tenants they were serving. They expressed an understanding

that not everyone could be satisfied with these meetings, but felt as though a valiant effort was being shown on behalf of the TCHC to communicate with their communities. They both felt good after participating in these initiatives and found that such participation was definitely beneficial. In regards to the environment, they both felt it was quite comfortable. Laura stressed the fact that the TCHC was doing a lot to accommodate their tenants and this was evident through the interpreters they provided, the food – which she mentioned was part Halal so their Muslim residents could also eat as well – and the transportation that was provided. They both felt that their voices were taken into consideration. Both Michelle and Laura expressed the view that they were not naive in thinking they could "change the world", but the mere fact that there was an opportunity for them to talk about their views was in itself a positive and "feel-good" experience. They both felt that reasonable attempts have been made to educate their communities in regards to upcoming meetings, but do admit that more could be done. They both agree that residents have become more involved as a result of the participatory initiatives. More important, they both agree on the importance of such a system, which they believe has had a positive impact on their communities. However, they both stressed once again that more could be done to address the present holes within the system.

Councillor Parker's views were similar to those of Michelle and Laura, in that he held a more favourable and optimistic view of the TCHC Tenant Participation System. He believed that the tenants' voices definitely have the potential to make a difference and that through these initiatives communication between the TCHC and residents can definitely be strengthened. Councillor Parker thought the meetings were professionally run and he disagreed with the notion that the meetings were run by TCHC administration. Councillor Parker stated that the residents were the ones who set the

agenda and provided the content, while staff was only there to support the tenants. He

believes that the areas TCHC is lacking are in the frequency of the programming, and he

attributes this to the lack of resources available for tenant engagement practices.

Councillor Parker spoke of the "same ten people" rule as a problem with the tenant

meetings. He said that the meetings consisted of the same people and he is unsure as

to why other tenants are not engaging themselves with the ongoing initiatives. He

acknowledges that there are a vast number of people who do not show up for these

meetings, but he does not know whether the TCHC is not reaching them or if people are

just not interested. Overall though, Councillor Parker believes that the Tenant

Participation System is a healthy program that ultimately strengthens the relationship

between tenants and TCHC staff and administrators.

IV.   Analysis of Interviews

The results from the interview illustrated a different picture of what the TCHC had

hoped to achieve through their Tenant Participation System. There were mixed feelings

in regards to how empowering this system was, as some tenants felt as though the

agenda of the meetings was predetermined by TCHC staff and administrators. TCHC

staff's main purpose is to ensure the smooth functioning of the meetings[79]. This differs

from what the TCHC model states, which is an agenda that appears to be solely driven

by tenants[80]. In particular, the participatory budgeting model emphasizes a bottom-up

approach, where residents are promoted as the decision makers in regards to how their

allocated budget is spent. According to what some of the tenants felt that had direct

experience with the participatory budgeting initiative, this ideal that TCHC promoted was

not achieved. They referred to the issue of staff overriding their views with ones that

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[79] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 687
[80] How Does Participatory Budgeting Work – TCHC website

favoured the TCHC. Some of the interviewees felt that this was a major issue and this was made evident through the number of times the issue was spoken about in the interviews. These tenants felt that this issue ultimately hindered the whole participatory process and because of that they lost faith in the system itself.

This problem of prioritizing the staff/administration agenda undermines the purpose that the TCHC is attempting to achieve and also conflicts with what deliberative democracy is truly about. In order to successfully apply deliberative democracy there needs to be an open discussion and the residents need to be the ones in charge – not the officials with power who are responsible for establishing the meeting. Residents cannot be fully empowered if they are not the ones making the real decisions and this point seems to have been missed by the TCHC.

Out of the five tenants that were interviewed, three generally felt that the system and in particular the tenant and participatory budgeting meetings, were in principle supposed to emulate a deliberative democratic discussion. In reality though, they felt that such a discussion was not achieved. The other two tenants and the councillor disagreed with this sentiment, as they felt that although the TCHC had its shortfalls it was overall an effective tool in empowering residents. The difference in opinion between these two groups could be attributed to the amount of experience that these tenants have had. The three tenants that held a generally negative view of the TCHC participatory initiatives are older and held various positions within the tenant engagement systems. In particular, two of the tenants have had several years of experience working on several different projects with TCHC administration and staff. This group of tenants have been through the system and ultimately understand the dynamics and most importantly, the end result of the various tenant participatory programs.

On the other hand, the two tenants who had less critical views are young and have relatively little experience within the TCHC tenant programs. These tenants have not had the experience like the previous group, to see if their opinions and views were actually carried out. Their answers reflected a more optimistic view and this could be attributed to their age and experience. In regards to Councillor Parker, he is currently serving on the Board of Directors for the TCHC and one could make the argument that his interests are aligned with those of the TCHC administration. So of course it would be in his best interest to promote the TCHC's tenant engagement efforts as one that empowers residents.

If TCHC's participatory budgeting process were to be categorized on the empowerment continuum, it would be classified as perceived participation. The reason being is that TCHC ultimately has the final say on what projects get approved or not[81]. The three tenants felt as though the outcome of the participatory budgeting was always a result that put TCHC administration's concerns first and then tenants'. Although some of the projects they initially wanted to implement were done so, there were always changes made to the original model without their consultation. In essence, residents are not being fully empowered because their decisions are not being respected. Instead they are receiving a false sense of empowerment. This would not be categorized as shared participation, as again the decision-making is not a 50/50 agreement between tenants and administration, but rather it is only TCHC administration that gets the final say.

Although the interviews conducted were small in number, they have provided interesting insight into the actual workings of the TCHC Tenant Participation System. Unfortunately, sometimes programs do not always deliver on their intended objectives, but there are many who still have faith in the TCHC to engage their tenants. Hopefully

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[81] Deliberative Democratic Practices in Canada: An Analysis of Institutional Empowerment in Three Cases, pg 685

moving forward into the future the TCHC can make adjustments in their delivery so that

all tenants who participate in their programming can feel empowered.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

I.   Conclusion

Overall this paper has effectively illustrated that deliberative democracy and empowerment are related, but more important, that participation in a process of deliberative democracy has the ability to produce feelings empowerment. The TCHC's Tenant Participation System is a contemporary citizen engagement model that attempts to empower residents through allowing them to be involved in the decision-making process that affects their communities. In practice, the various initiatives the TCHC has launched and in particular, the participatory budgeting program, contain the principles of what would constitute a deliberative democratic discussion. Unfortunately, as demonstrated through the interviews of selected tenants, full levels of empowerment cannot be reached unless decision-making is driven solely by the tenant agenda.

Empowerment is not a clear cut ideal, as it contains several different levels. Establishing a definition of empowerment that is relative to the goal of deliberative democracy has helped conceptualize the level of empowerment that such a discussion should seek to invoke. By utilizing the example of participatory budgeting in its original contexts this relationship is further reinforced. If implemented properly, deliberative democracy can assist in creating a strong political system that can effectively build stronger communities and empower residents – which is the ultimate goal of this theory.

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