The fallacy of consensus:

How conflicts can be essential to determine community participation

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Preservation

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Urban Planning

By

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May 2020

Abstract

The purpose of the research is to contribute to an emerging body of critique of community participation in planning practice. The critiques in this research are grounded in the analysis of two situated planning practices in New York City. One of them followed the normative decision of the communicative planning, and the other followed the agonistic methodology. The research starts with background research of what aspects led to or helped shape the planning process in both cases. It follows an in-depth analysis of the negotiation and participation processes, outlining differences, and similarities. Several critiques were offered regarding power and the idea that communication can suspend power relations. First, it outlines the importance of previous conditions – political scenario and community power – to shape planning decisions. Second, it argues that power holders generally lead the negotiation in communicative planning. Third, it argues that communicative practice does not create spaces for the expression of conflictual ideas and end up excluding segments of the population. It concludes that conflicts are fundamental to an equity-driven planning practice and outlines several recommendations that planners or government agencies should follow to ensure meaningful community participation.

Acknowledgments

I faced several challenges in my personal life. No challenge has been worse than not being heard. Therefore, first and foremost, I am thankful to every person who silenced me. They shaped who I am, taught me the importance of inclusion and participation, and have a fundamental role in the development of this research.

However, my potential would never be unveiled without my partner, Diego Tavares, for whom I am thankful for opening my eyes. Thank you for helping me to see who I am and what changes I want to bring to the world (and for bearing with me in this stressful thesis and coronavirus times!). I also want to thank my parents, Sergio and Mara Estefam, for their unfailing support and encouragement, even from afar.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my advisor, Ryan Devlin, for the tremendous knowledge, support, and guidance throughout this process, and my reader Jose Vallejo, for enlightening me with his creative participatory approach and for showing me the problems with consensus at the first place.

Prologue

I was eighteen when I first realized the importance of community participation. Being raised in a middle-high income family in Sao Paulo, Brazil, I spent two-thirds of my life confined in an unrealistic reality. All my neighbors and friends were equal to me, had the same daily routine, and I dare say, almost no difficulties or struggles. In my architecture-studies years, something luckily forced me out of those limiting boundaries. What appeared to be a challenge – to visit vulnerable areas and *favelas*, get in contact with people living in extreme poverty – was, in reality, an opportunity. After that experience, my core values erupted into new concepts and ways of life. My eyes opened to a new world, to a new reality.

Being forced out of these socially imposed boundaries made me realize that every human being has a history. There is a reasoning for every action, and everybody – regardless of social-economic-personal reasons – has the right to be listened to and to influence decisions, especially the ones that will directly or indirectly affect them. A city can then become the stage where each person can emerge as the subject of their own history.

From that moment on, and being myself part of a minority group, a woman and an immigrant, that sometimes struggle to be heard, my role as a planner and as a person was clearly defined. My career goal was to create spaces of participation and enable every citizen to speak up and have a voice.

Unfortunately, my extensive experience in Brazil did not allow me to address this inherent creative potential adequately. I could not develop and deliver sustainable results for people and communities. This decision led me to study in New York, and, since day one, my goal has been to learn better practices and to apply what I learn to every project I worked on, regardless of its size or significance.

This thesis summarizes the efforts of a lifetime. It aims to illuminate this equity-driven path and potentially enable me, other planners, and other professionals to be conscious about the impact of their actions, to empower stakeholders, and to create more equitable and just cities and societies.

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I. Introductory Notes

1. Introduction

> *'The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you'* - (Arnstein 2019).

Urban spaces are unpredictable and dynamic. Diverse groups, with various cultures and ways of life, coexist, and share the same spaces. Planners have long acknowledged the relevance of this diversity in urban planning decision-making. They acknowledge the inclusion of these different voices as pillars of democratic societies. Nevertheless, rarely do the plans – current or past - go beyond a community consultation and reflect the community's needs. Rarely do the plans adequately acknowledge imbalances and promote a redistribution of power.

Since the 1960s, scholars have been discussing different methodologies to engage with the community and maximize their voices. Although opinions and approaches are diverse, scholars generally agree about the planner's role in instituting a more open, democratic, and socially just society. However, the shift from theory to reality is enormous. Due to power relations and conflict of interests, most of the plans leave something behind: some voices remain unheard, and some struggles remain invisible.

From the various methodological approaches in planning theory, two main methods arose from the tentativeness of empowering communities and creating democracies: the communicative, and the agonistic methods. While communicative planners believe in the role of consensus to accomplish social justice, the other approach, on the contrary, introduces the importance of conflict to achieve power balance.

The goal of this research is to compare these two approaches and investigate what aspects enable or impede participation. It will examine two redevelopment and rezoning cases in New York City – each one using one of the cited engagement approaches. The first case, the Essex Crossing development, is located in the Lower East Side and consists of a mixed-use development of nine lots in a racially and ethnically diverse and gentrifying neighborhood.

Originally called Seward Park Urban Renewal Area, it was kept underdeveloped after almost sixty years due to political and social conflicts. The second case, in Downtown Far Rockaway, consists of the rezoning of a markedly low-income Downtown Area in an area underdeveloped for nearly sixty years, which aims to become the new commercial hub of the Rockaway Peninsula.

The New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) led both developments, assisted by the New York City Housing Preservation and Development (NYC HPD). They were both supervised by a Task Force composed by different stakeholders, such as elected officials, Community Board members, City agents, and members of community organizations.

These cases are currently considered examples of how to manage and conduct community engagement in the City successfully. Newspapers and magazines celebrated the cases as highly successful in terms of community engagement. Websites featured them as the "*Anti-Hudson Yards*" development (Kimmelman 2019), and as a model of community participation (Davidson 2019; Mancini 2018, 2019). While they were both defined as successes, one involved a lot more conflict, while the other relied more on an idea of consensus that, upon closer scrutiny, was somewhat shallow and empty.

Along these lines, the case-studies research aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of these potentially successful cases. It intended to depict how participation occurred in both cases, who participated and how participation evolved in each case. The case-studies research ultimately aimed to disclose the consequences of the two commonly used participation methodologies and whether or not these methods enable diverse communities to participate and have a voice.

In support of this research, twenty interviews were conducted with different stakeholders: City agents, Task Force members, participants and non-participants community members, and developers. The information gathered from these interviews, compared with an extensive bibliographic review, and with secondary sources – media coverage, meeting minutes,

recorded public meetings, among others – set the stage for conclusions about these methods of engagement, and recommendations for achieving success in community engagement.

Ultimately, this research has the overall objective of refining community engagement in Urban Planning. Moreover, it aims to shed light on potential power dynamics that pervade Urban Planning practice, even plans recognized as highly participatory. It finally aims to understand if the communicative and agonistic methodologies contribute to or annul power imbalances.

The knowledge gathered with this research can inform City Agencies or private parties on how to achieve plural community engagements. It can make them aware of possible pitfalls of engagement processes and possible ways to solve them. It can also assist them in how to inform future decision-making and participation designs in plans and developments. Conclusively, the results of this research can assist in creating a more diverse and democratic society.

The first part of this research reviews the planning literature on the key arguments and methodological discussion of participation in planning. It aims to present an appropriate framework to guide the empirical investigation.

The second part then provides the context of and the background for the two case studies. The cases depict how existing methods, although theoretically participatory, promote imbalances and allow dominant groups to continue to control decision making. This discussion is subdivided into three subparts:

1. Antecedents: that investigates the political, historical, and social context that influenced participation;
2. Negotiating for community benefits: that explores the dynamics of participation, the reasoning and methods adopted by key stakeholders, the struggles that occurred, and the extent to which various participants got their way; and
3. Results: that investigates the outcomes of the developments and whom it benefits.

The research concludes by suggesting the role of conflict in participation and summing up key findings and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

Cities are congregations of different communities – uniform groups of people linked by social ties and shared perspectives, engaged in joint actions (MacQueen et al. 2001), and above all, with different ambitions and interests. As such, cities are battlefields, where competing communities struggle to materialize their ambitions (Montgomery 2013). Throughout the years, scholars in the planning field have explored ways to overcome these battles and establish a more equitable and just society.

The first attempts to engage with the community arose in the 1960s when due to extensive urban growth, political actions demanded structural changes, and the reduction of racism and inequalities. These movements resulted in landmark studies from Jane Jacobs (1961), Sherril Arnstein (1969), and Paul Davidoff (1965). These three influential planners set the frame of how participation can ensure more equitable developments and produce better cities (Laskey and Nicholls 2019).

However, it is essential to address the question of power when talking about participation, equity, or democracy because power imbalances may be lying beneath the surface. Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2013) acknowledged that social conflicts could be latent (p. 245), while Abu-Orf (2005) mentioned a nexus embedding power and knowledge (p. 45). Expanding on that, Flyvbjerg (1998b) unveiled that power dominates rationality by defining what the physical, economic, ecological, and social reality itself is (p. 36). From that framework, the author explained that the primary modernity tension is between consensus and conflict (Flyvbjerg 1998a). They represent two methods of acknowledging and overcoming power relations in planning. They also represent two opposing methods of participation: the communicative or the agonistic planning.

2.1. Communicative Planning

Jürgen Habermas is one of the leading representatives of the deliberative or communicative approach to planning. His theory is constructed upon the concept that power imbalances are not quintessential to decision-making and that all deliberation is inevitably linked to an unforced consensus. (Jezierska 2019; Van Bouwel 2009)

According to this theory, stakeholders can bypass disagreements by using a universal and unforced rationality. There is an underlying consensus-building force that enables all participants of negotiation to search for a joint and cooperative truth (Flyvbjerg 1998a). According to this view, empathy, transparency, time, and equality (Pløger 2001), result in acts of mutual understanding (Flyvbjerg 1998a) and will suffice to overcome conflicts. Therefore, for this theory, the human being is defined as inherently democratic and primarily in search of a cooperative truth (Flyvbjerg 1998a).

Expanding on that idea, Healey (1992) defended communicative forms of planning as a progressive way to foster participation in the face of increasing capitalist forces (Healey 1992). Communication and argumentation have the power of removing power relations, through recognition and appreciation of differences, which will inevitably lead to a consensus (Abu-Orf 2005). Her theory, however, recognized that this consensus would not be stable but dependent on who the participants are and what the existing scenario is.

For Healey, each person has a unique set of understandings and beliefs determined by social, economic, historical, cultural, and subjective influences (Healey 1992). Sometimes, because people see things with different lenses, even the same topic can be expressed differently. However, conflicts can be mediated and solved through open and understandable communication between stakeholders, with mutually reconstructing concepts, and collective transformation of knowledge (Abu-Orf 2005). Healy articulates that "*nothing is admissible except the claim that some things … cannot be discussed*" (Healey 1992, p. 243). As such, this theory assumes that communication can overcome power-relations. However, that will only

happen within a secure arena of participation, where stakeholders share a consistent understanding of each other.

Another important scholar of the communicative planning theory is Forester. In a detailed analysis of communicative planning, he raised the importance of language in planning practice. He gave content, context, and expressions a central place in his theory. For him, being aware of micro-scale communication can overcome power relations. That means that a planner that is aware of the way he speaks, the language he uses, and the way he presents contents can overcome power imbalances (Abu-Orf 2005).

Some scholars currently endorse and build upon communicative planning. Surpassing the individual characteristics, they postulated that the main issue for genuine participation is communication - style, and vocabulary- that provide knowledge transfer and can overcome hierarchical relations (Bowen and Martens 2005). Moreover, Lazar and Nuijten (2013) discussed the cultural meaning attributed to vocabularies. Similar to Healey's theory, they argued that each society attributes different meanings to the same word. Therefore, they created the term "*citizenship language*," hinged on different word meanings in El Alto, Bolivia. For the authors, cultural meanings define languages, which should be central in community engagements.

2.2. Agonistic Planning

One effective way to allow for a participatory framework within this power-centered perspective is by permitting conflict to exist (Mouffe 1999). Mouffe, one of the most important scholars of the agonistic theory, assumed the notion of antagonism and dimensions of power as inherent in social relations (Yamamoto 2016). Therefore, she declared that the deliberative democracy, based on agreements, is conceived within a "*dream of perfect harmony or transparency*" (Mouffe 1999, p. 752). Contrarily, planning and every decision-making should recognize and embrace different perspectives instead of promoting coercion.

She called this perspective '*agonistic pluralism'* (p.754), which fundamentally challenges the idea of universalism and standard search of agreements, previously posed by Habermas

(Mouffe 1999). For the author, each person carries with them a political set of beliefs, which should be considered in decisions and centrally positioned in democracies. To adopt other people's ideas, which she calls "*adversaries*" (Mouffe 1999, p. 755), means to change one's personal political identity.

Therefore, she contested the idea of consensus through communication or rational persuasion. Democracies are built upon an openness to the present and by each person having the space to defend their point of view (Mouffe 1999, p. 755). However, democracies also rely on the idea of recognizing and legitimizing conflicts. The only accepted consensus happens when ethical-political issues are discussed. Nevertheless, Mouffe recognizes them as conflictual consensus. Finally, she concluded that, for any democracy, it is fundamental to realize exclusions, instead of hiding behind rationality or moralities (Mouffe 1999, p. 758).

Since 2000, urban planning scholars have been adopting the agonistic point of view. They tend to see conflicts as the natural order of planning and social relations. Authors also tend to consider it as the most democratic method of planning (Yamamoto 2016). They agreed with Moufee and saw communicative ideas as fallacious, primarily because they do not adequately address power and political relations, which will inevitably be a barrier to communication. Authors concurred with the inevitability of power imbalances and conflicts.

Abu-Orf (2005) stated that communicative planning leaves the practical context of power relations behind. Even if governments try to apply a communicative plan methodology, it will fail because power frameworks will dominate. He drew his conclusions from the process of developing a Master Plan for Nicosia in Greece. This case showed a divided city, where formal planning institutions blocked and contrasted communities' initiatives to mobilize the development of the city.

Abu-Orf (2005) also mentioned that communicative planning assumes that planners can promote distortion-free communication (p. 44). Drawing on the Nicosia Masterplan, he concluded that planning is commonly decided by top-down forces, and by legal and technical knowledge, that inevitably promotes exclusions. He added that distortions in communication could be strategic actions used to cover political agendas.

Flyvbjerg (1998b) illustrated how power could shape even survey results in the case of Aalborg, Denmark. This plan aimed to adapt the transportation network of a medium-sized European city. The plan was idealized to be rational and democratic and was even recognized by the Organization of Economic Cooperation (OECD) as a model for international adoption (p. 4). However, Flyvbjerg unveiled the hidden exercise of power and protection of special interest in the plan. He argued that power shaped what is considered as reality and defined what is rational (p.277). He defined the plan as a metaphor for modern politics, modern administration, and planning (p. 225). He concluded that communities do not shape planning. An invisible power that can shape what people see as rational shapes planning.

McGuirk (2001), agreed and mentioned that communicative planning could not suspend power. She drew her conclusion from a case-study in Newcastle, South Wales, Australia, where planners attempted to use the communicative planning theory. However, the author concluded that conflicts persisted and that a transparent reflexive reasoning process was not attainable. Most importantly, she concluded that power always framed the negotiations, interpretations, and calculations of the project (Mcguirk 2001, p. 213). She ultimately concluded that all consensus inevitably involves the exclusion of some voices.

Van Bouwel (2009) examined the consequences of a consensus-based reality to the scientific scenario. He mentioned that regardless of the situation or the proposals, the perceptions of privileged classes are likely to dominate. He concluded by expressing the importance of an agonistic democratic framework for dealing with dissent and plurality of approaches instead of promoting the establishment of a consensus.

Hillier (2003) discussed that the consensus craved by Habermas is idealized, and would only work for small scale developments, that allows the neutralization of politics (p. 40-41). However, she added that the majority of the planning practices fall under the pragmatic category and that negotiation and compromise will suffice to solve them (Hillier 2003). She stated that consensus is a social product that creates ideological and methodological commitments (p. 39).

Neuman (2000), after his decade of work as the planning manager in the New Jersey Office of State Planning, concurred that consensus in urban planning is unrealistic. He mentioned that the conditions surrounding consensus processes tend to be divorced from the exact center of power (p.345). That usually results in thin agreements, dependent on temporary arrangements of person, which may be continuously reviewed.

Additionally, Pløger (2001) added that the primary failure of communicative planning is not dealing with the government and its political context (p. 219). The author compared public participation in Norway, and citizen involvement in Denmark, countries that have institutionalized participative planning as a way to secure public participation and assure consensus (p. 237). However, the legal framework in which decision-making occurred maintained power relations in both countries. Political forces shaped the decisions instead of the neighbor's demands or concerns. Pløger (2001) concluded that legal frameworks can still be a technique of maintaining political bodies of power and sustaining little space for participation.

To that point, developers can also gain influence in the legal framework and, consequently, in power relations. They do that with the creation of informal networks that bypass formal structures and influence decisions. Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2013) thoroughly described this model. They illustrated by disclosing a Greater Dublin Area plan, where developers' economic interests shaped all decisions. That happened because they had access to an adjacent system that existed beyond the official planning processes. Therefore, these authors claimed that planning decisions tends to reflect the interest of dominant groups (p. 248).

2.3. Spaces of Participation

Some cities, such as New York, institutionalized, and legitimize the citizen participation in the Community Boards (Hum 2010). Institutionalized in the 1950s as community planning

councils, these institutions currently serve as an official board, but only in an advisory capacity. They influence city services, land use and zoning, and budgetary matters (Hum 2010).

Members of the Board either live or work in the community and are appointed by the Borough President. Ideally, they should represent local communities' voices, which is not usually represented in the traditional urban planning scheme. A 1974 New York Times noted that *"perhaps the best argument for the boards' existence is that they provide a point of view in planning decisions that might not otherwise be expressed"* (Selver 1974, cited by Hum 2010, p. 473). However, they can also easily be replaced in case of opposition. Hum (2010) cited one clear example of that in the case of Atlantic Yards, where opposing members from the Community Board, that might pose a challenge to the approval of the plan, were inexplicably removed.

Additionally, several times the Community Board functions as a "*symbolic inclusion"* (Hum 2010, p. 462). They often do not represent communities' needs but replicate political agendas and have no binding votes on legislation or significant projects (Smith, Choi, 2020). Accordingly, within these official spaces of participation, not all voices are represented, and activist citizens tend to be left out. To that point, Inch (2014) cited a Scotland case, where decision-makers unconsciously classified citizens into deliberative and agonistic. Deliberative citizens were the ones that could easily be educated to accept whatever plan was proposed. Contrarily, agonistic citizens were the ones that contested ideas and presented their points of view. Respectively, they were classified as 'good' and 'bad' citizens, and only the first ones could participate in planning decisions. Miraftab and Will (2005), elaborated on that in a Western Cape Town case study. In this region, urban poor and oppressed communities did not have voices in the decision makings. They were classified as ultra-left and not allowed to participate in decisions. These dynamics of exclusion led to the creation of the Western Cape Town Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC), composed of poor and oppressed communities. They found the "invention" of their own space of participation as the only way to have their voices heard and to influence decisions.

Conclusively, the literature review cited above offers a framework for researching the results of different methodological approaches to planning. An empirical investigation, reported in the next section of this research, discusses the evidence gathered in case studies of relations of power, knowledge, and participation in planning. The cases make use of Healey's typology of styles of discussions, and Mouffe's ideal of agonistic pluralism.

3. Methodology

The first stage of this research was an in-depth bibliography review, described in the previous section. This review created the baseline of what research methods should be applied to accomplish better possible results. It also informed how scholars see participation, power-relations, and inclusion differently, and what their suggestions are to achieve just societies.

The literature review followed twenty semi-structured interviews carried out from December 2019 to February 2020. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour of duration and took place in convenient locations for the respondents: in their own offices, cafes, in the development site, or by phone.

Interviewed stakeholders were separated into four categories. Questions varied according to the stakeholder group. Some questions, such as "*what could have been improved in the engagement process*," were asked to all stakeholders. The stakeholders' categories are as follow:

1. City agents: representing stakeholders that work or worked in the Planning, Economic Development, or Housing Agencies of the Community Boards.
2. Participants: representing members of the surrounding community organizations that participated in the Task Force.
3. Non-participants: representing members of the surrounding community organizations that did not participate in the Task Force.
4. Developers: representing members of the Real Estate or Planning firms involved with one or more projects in the site.

The main intention of the interviews was to understand each stakeholder's perspectives and perceptions of inclusion. Furthermore, it aimed to understand their point of view about the engagement process and whether or not they are satisfied with the achieved results. The interviews also aimed to address economic, political, and institutional constraints and the stakeholder's inputs of what could have improved during the process.

Consent forms were issued, delineating guidelines about how the information would be gathered and used. The consent form also explained that interviews would be recorded and later transcribed, that their privacy would be protected and that the data generated would be used exclusively for academic research. These privacy assurances assisted in enabling the openness and transparency of respondents.

Non-probability or 'snowball' sampling methods were adopted to generate respondents based on the criteria above delineated. One challenge of the snowball sampling method is that respondents may suggest others with similar characteristics or outlooks. To reduce the possibility of a biased result, respondents should have different characteristics and different roles in the studied projects (Fox-Rogers, Murphy, 2013, p.254). Attempts to connect with 80 possible initial contacts were initiated, to assure the diversity of stakeholders (through e-mail and phone calls).

From these initial contacts, four stakeholders served as initial informants. Half of the interviews (ten) discussed Essex Crossing or the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area, while the other ten examined the Downtown Far Rockaway rezoning. The interviews provided rich and detailed insights about the nature of stakeholders' interactions and their relations with the project and the outcomes.

The interviews were transcribed, and, after that, a systematic in-depth review was carried out. Dominant themes in the interview were reorganized and categorized into clear statements, and after, tied together into a descriptive statement. Following that classification, statements and the existing bibliography were compared, and conclusions drafted.

The complementary form of data collection was secondary sources research, which aimed to confirm and supplement the respondents' points of view. In-depth research was done by collecting information from newspaper articles, transcripts, meeting minutes, conferences, audios, or videos (when available) of Community Board Meetings, Public Hearings, and conferences. The secondary sources' research was also based on published reports and press releases.

The data collection and analysis helped in getting a better picture of the dynamics and conflicts of each case study and assisted in examining and exposing the most predominant issues at play.

II. Case Studies and Discussion

In the following section, two comparative case studies in New York City delineate congruencies between theory and practice. As previously mentioned, the media marketed the cases as examples of socially sustainable and equitable developments. The goal of this section is to investigate further the participatory and negotiation processes in these developments, what methodologies of participation they used, and what voices had representativeness in the outcome.

1. Antecedents

The redevelopments of the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area and the Downtown Far Rockaway provide excellent examples of efforts to include participation in planning even in the context of diverse political relations. The plans, pursued in the late 2000 and mid-2010 respectively, were said to be drawn from one another. However, due to various situations, they produced contrary outcomes.

The discussion below details the historical background of the areas and explains how the political and social context led to the plans and influenced the community engagement.

1.1. Historical Background

a. Downtown Far Rockaway Rezoning

In the complex history and progress of the Peninsula lives the story of the Downtown Far Rockaway Revitalization project. Due to the extent of this research, a summary, with events that influenced the project, will be presented. It follows the description and history of the rezoning.

Neighborhood Context

In the 1900s, the Peninsula was a vacation area for New York City residents (Copquin and Jackson 2007). After the 1929's economic crash, tourism activities decreased. Beach-going

in New York also decreased with the rise of air travel. People could fly to beaches further away, like Florida, rather than rely on city beaches like Rockaway or Coney Island.

To minimize economic impacts in the beach area, the New York City Department of Parks integrated the zone under their jurisdiction (DuBois 2016). This solution, however, did not have a long-term effect, and, by 1960, the beach bungalows in the neighborhood became subsidized housing (DuBois 2016).

The increase in public and subsidized housing, especially on the Eastside, led to a change in the population mix. Consequently, high-income residents moved out of the area to the suburbs (Copquin and Jackson 2007). In that same decade, the City classified parts of Rockway as Urban Renewal Areas, which resulted in the bulldozing of several bungalows. Moreover, the City drafted public housing plans to accommodate returning World War veterans and southern migrants (DuBois 2016). These plans were never fully completed, but the construction of public housing in the Eastside and the consequent change in the social mix arising from them concretized the East and West division.

Some public efforts have happened in the Peninsula since the 1960s. However, they did not address the aims or difficulties of residents, especially the ones residing in the East of the Peninsula (DuBois 2016). Kaplan and Kaplan cited that these individuals have never been the focus of public improvements because they were "*invisible to the larger population,*" which led to the possibility of "*sweeping* [their problems] *under the carpet*" (Kaplan and Kaplan 2003, p. 188).

This scenario changed in 2012 when Hurricane Sandy devastated the Peninsula: it destroyed homes, the boardwalk, and partially destroyed the A-line (Erdos 2018). Far Rockaway was significantly less damaged than the rest of the Peninsula, due to its higher elevation. However, the local community still faced blackouts, a reduction of employment opportunities, and a lack of access to resources (NYC Small Business Services 2019).

The Hurricane, however, resulted in greater community cohesion in terms of sustainability and emergency response. One interviewed grassroots community organization created at that time rebuilt 300 homes for the storm's survivors. At the same time, it brought

the government's eyes to the area. Several programs and improvements were planned and executed in the Peninsula to expand emergency response and climate resiliency.

Project Background

The Downtown Far Rockaway revitalization area is a 23-block area located in the confluence of the A train and the Long Island Railroad, between the Central Avenue, Mott Avenue, and Beach 20th Street, in the Rockaway Peninsula, Queens.

Far Rockaway is one of the ten neighborhoods that make up the Rockaway Peninsula. Each one has its own economic and social identity. However, the Peninsula is roughly divided into East and West. Higher incomes are concentrated in the West end of the Peninsula, while in Far Rockaway, located in the East, the poverty rate is above the citywide rate.[1]

Almost half of the Peninsula population reside in Far Rockaway (45%). Additionally, two-thirds of that neighborhood's residents identify themselves as African American or Hispanic. Residents of the Westside, on the other hand, majorly identify themselves as white. However, although the majority of the Far Rockaway population is low-income, the neighborhood also includes sections of middle-income households. (Office of the State Deputy Comptroller for the City of New York 2018). Still, the median household income of the neighborhood as a whole is 20% lower than Citywide, and approximately 20% of the population lives below the poverty line (NYC Small Business Services 2019).

The Downtown Far Rockaway Rezoning idea did not arise from Hurricane Sandy's path of destruction. Discussions about the plan started in 2006, but it was only at the end of 2015, three years after the Hurricane, when the proposals became public (Community Board 14, Queens 2015).

The development of the plan started when an abandoned, and underdeveloped shopping center caught the attention of the local elected leadership. The shopping mall considered the centerpiece for the Downtown Far Rockaway Development, remained

[1] According to the Office of the State Deputy Comptroller for the City of New York, the poverty rate in New York City is 18%, while in Far Rockaway, it is 25%.

undeveloped for 40 years. (Preston 2018), and was considered one of the signs of the neighborhood's declining downtown (Honan 2016).

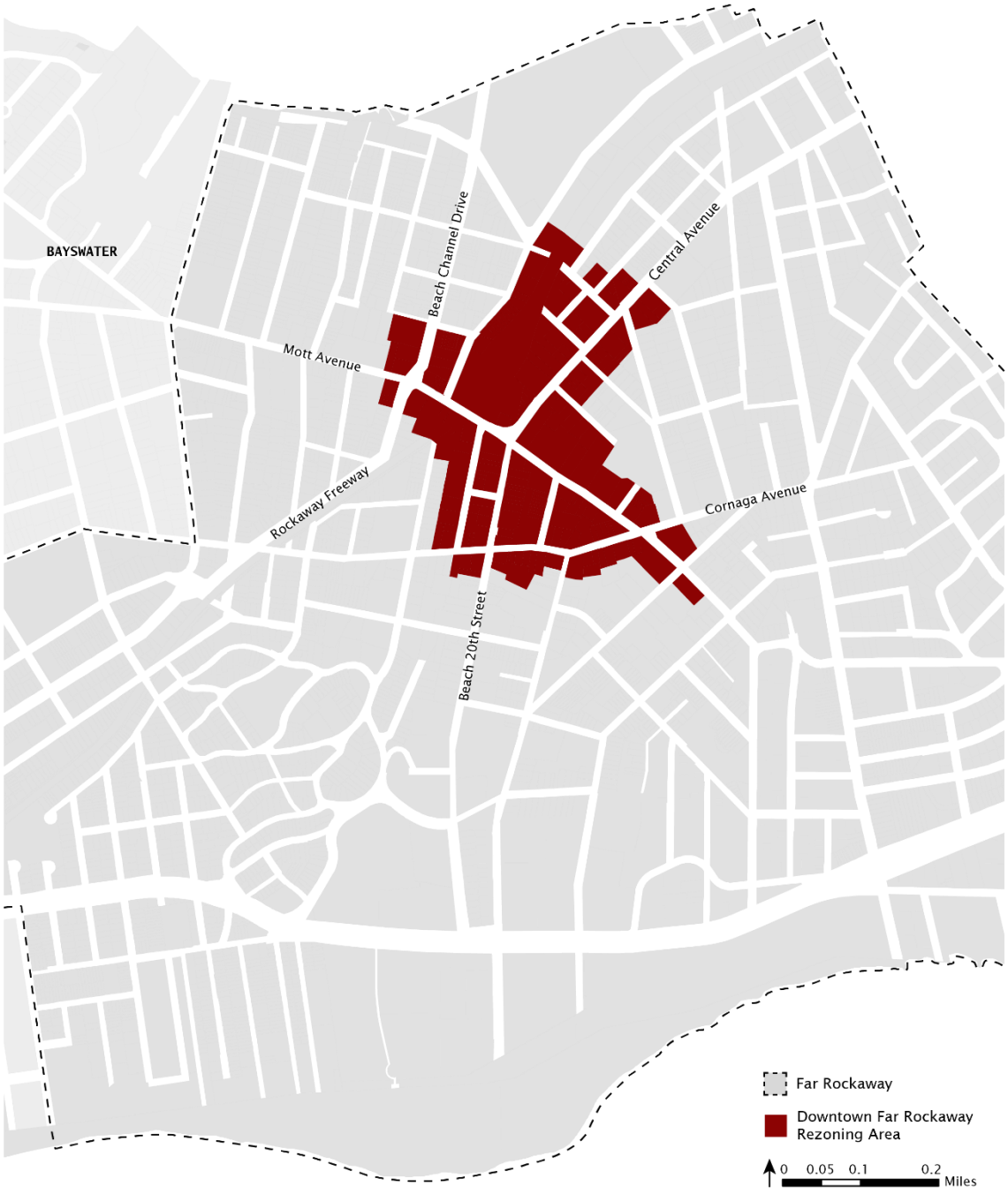


Figure 1: Downtown Far Rockaway Rezoning, location map. Image produced by the author.

Intending to revitalize the neighborhood, the Councilmember Donovan Richards created a Task Force. It was composed by three subgroups, a political one – represented by Donovan Richards and five other elected officials; a community subgroup – represented by the Rockaway Development and Revitalization Corporation, NYCHA tenants and youth associations, one association representing people of color and another answerable to small business owners; and an institutional one, represented by the local library, and religious institutions (Richards 2016). According to the November 2015 Community Board 14 Meeting, the formation of this group would push for an equitable and diverse revitalization of the area.

In February 2016, this working group sent a letter to the mayor, sanctioned by the Councilmember, demanding investments in the downtown area. They also set a collection of guidelines and recommendations: to create a commercial and transportation hub; reposition the area as a mixed-use district; improve the public realm and public spaces; enable access to community services, education and quality of jobs, and build community capacity (Richards 2016).

This letter preceded the release of $2 million of federal funds by the U.S. House of Representatives (U.S. Representative Gregory W. Meeks 2016) and a $91 million Capital Fund released by the Mayor of New York, which represented the most significant investment in the area in decades.

After several Working Group meetings and workshops to gather communities' inputs, the New York City Economic Development Corporation released a Request for Proposal in December 2016. According to the local newspaper 'The Wave' (Offner 2016), it included recommendations from more than nine months of work with the community.

In the following month, according to the Community Board Full Board Meeting minutes (Community Board 14, Queens 2017b), the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) had begun. During this procedure, the Borough President, the Department of City Planning, the Community Board, and the City Council reviewed land use applications.

In March 2017, the Community Board approved the plan with conditions after a hearing in which half of the community spoke out against the development and half expressed support

for it. Community members were mostly concerned about housing density, lack of educational facilities, the construction of a new hospital, that could bring more density, and the lack of a sustainability and emergency response plan. Community members also questioned if created jobs would remain local and advocated for apprenticeship opportunities. The conditions delineated by the Community Board addressed some of these concerns. In essence, the new plan should include protecting labor agreements, water and sewer upgrades, a new school and playground, a municipal parking lot, healthcare and daycare facilities, and affordable new housing units (Savitch-Lew 2017a).

In July 2017, the City Planning Commission approved the plan (Johnson 2017). In August, the City Council unanimously approved the plan (Healey 2017). The plan addressed some of the concerns awakened by the Community Board, such as more flexibility in terms of parking, expansion of daycare and healthcare facilities, and provision of a site for future construction of an elementary school (NYC Mayor's Office of Operations n.d.).

Construction started in the following year, angering local businesses. In December 2018, while hearing the local business owners complain about construction, the Community Board District Manager mentioned that "*you have to break a few eggs to bake a cake"* (Mancini 2018). That sentence may have been unfortunate, but automatically reminded people of the standard reply given by the world-famous Robert Moses, "*you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs*" when responding to the critics of impactful project that disrupted tens of thousands of lives for decades (Callahan and Ikeda 2004).

During a May 2019 community meeting, the leading agency explained that they designed the project to support community goals, rejecting Robert Moses' framework (Mancini 2018). Still, community members had several complaints about the plan's effects on local businesses, density, affordable housing, and gentrification.

Recent meetings carried out during the construction phase of the plan showed the persistence of community complaints (Community Board 14, Queens 2020). Business owners, represented by the Rockaway East Merchants Association (REMA), mentioned that they are still facing challenges due to the plan. In essence, some business owners cited a 50% decline in

shopping traffic, while others complained about power and water outages due to the construction. Additionally, although one of the commitments of the rezoning was to promote local hiring and job opportunities for local residents, community members still lack protection in workforce development, and the construction jobs do not target local hiring (Community Board 14, Queens 2020).

b. Seward Park Urban Renewal Area (SPURA) and The Essex Crossing Development

The area, comprised of nine city-owned blocks in the Lower East Side, totaling 1.65 million square feet, is one of the longest-running and more controversial redevelopments of New York. This subsection will first delineate the neighborhood story and context and follow with details of the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area and the Essex Crossing Development.

Neighborhood Context

The neighborhood is considered the fifth most racially diverse neighborhood in New York City (School of Law, Wagner School of Public Service, New York University 2018). However, the several waves of gentrification resulting from the rezoning' in Chinatown, and several new high-rise developments in the area are changing the neighborhood. The NYU Furman Center, for example, reported that condo prices rose abruptly from an average of $280 thousand in 2000 to an average of $1.6 million in 2018[2].

At the same time, the neighborhood has the ninth highest poverty rate of New York City, which shows social disparities within the area. (School of Law, Wagner School of Public Service, New York University 2018). Additionally, the Lower East Side has one of the highest concentrations of NYCHA developments from the City. According to the NYCHA official database (NYCHA n.d.), of the 326 NYCHA developments across the City, thirteen locate in the Lower East Side (4%). They consist of approximately 69 residential buildings that hold

[2] This value is higher than the Citywide median sales price per unit for a condominium ($900 thousand). It is compared to Clinton/Chelsea and the Upper West Side (School of Law, Wagner School of Public Service, New York University 2018).

approximately 7.5 thousand residents. These residents account for 5% of the neighborhood population[3].

The local community was profoundly affected by Urban Renewal projects. Before the 1950s, the area was home to immigrant Jews, Italians, and Puerto Ricans. In 1955, the Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance designated the area as the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area (SPURA). On that occasion, the City bulldozed several tenement houses, and constructed four tower-in-the park-style cooperative apartment buildings, along with retail (NYC Department of Housing Preservation & Development 2011).

In 1965 the Urban Renewal Area was extended. Demolition began in 1967 under Robert Moses' administration. The plan was to construct the Lower Manhattan Expressway that would connect Manhattan and Brooklyn. The City dropped the plan in 1967, but not before demolishing most of the buildings on the site. Sadly, that demolition preceded the eviction of approximately 2,000 families, mostly Puerto Ricans (Kim 2019).

Since 1967, the City has made several plans and attempts of developments but did not fully accomplish any of them. One of the main barriers to the development of the area was the politicization of the neighborhood. Sheldon Silver and William Rapfogel, respectively, speaker of the New York Assembly from 1994 to 2015, and the leader of the Metropolitan Council of Jewish Poverty took the lead in blocking all the proposals for the site. They mainly wanted to maintain the Jewish identity of the neighborhood (Buettner 2014) and to assure that the Jewish voting bloc continued in the neighborhood (Russel 2019). They were both active in the negotiations of the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area (SPURA). Interviewees recognized them as the first and the second most influential politicians in the area. Moreover, almost all of the ten interviews recognized them as key figures to the site (under)development.

Buettner (2014) mentioned that Silver's official position was that any development in the site should come with a consensus among the diverse racial and ethnic mix of the local

[3]This number was achieved by combining the neighborhood population, retrieved from the NYU Furman Neighborhood report (School of Law, Wagner School of Public Service, New York University 2018), with the number of residents per development, gathered from the NYCHA Development Interactive Map (NYCHA n.d.)

population. However, he added that several archives showed that Silver and Rapfogel undisputedly favored developers and Jewish communities in proposals. They primarily opposed affordable housing, which would alter the demographics of the neighborhood, and they mentioned that they would rather have an empty lot than having minorities and low-income populations living there (Buettner 2014).

Their participation in the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area development terminated in 2015 when the Essex Crossing development approvals were already underway. On that occasion, they were arrested for corruption (Litvak 2019). Still, when announcing the winners of the Request for Proposals, Mayor Bloomberg specifically thanked the Assembly Speaker for this support throughout the process (Bloomberg 2013).

Project Background

Discussion about the redevelopment idea began in November 2003, when the NYCEDC and NYC HPD initiated debates about the possibilities of developing the site. On that occasion, however, the engagement was not in focus. Kurutz (2003) uncovered that members of the Seward Park Housing Corporation opposed the plan. Community members claimed a lack of transparency about the agency's intentions and mentioned that they found out about the plans through a newspaper article. However, in 2007, the scenario changed when the Community Board proposed a community plan. That plan put the community in a central position.

A split within the community represented one of the main challenges of the site. The central community conflict was that Latinos and housing advocates demanded more low-income housing and wanted to avoid displacement and gentrification. On the other hand, residents in the nearby co-ops, mostly Jews, advocated for commercial uses that would spur economic development (Bagli 2013). Moreover, one of the interviews highlighted that during negotiations, no matter what was the socio-economic-political group of the stakeholder, their main request was to impose a freeze and stop the development.

Figure 2 – Essex Crossing Development, location map. Image produced by the author.

Some community organizations created the 'SPURA Matter' report in 2009. The Pratt Center for Community Development produced this document in partnership with a coalition of twenty community organizations. It consisted of a comprehensive report examining what residents sought to include in the Seward Park Renewal Area.

Five community organizations were central in the report, especially the Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES). The report was based upon an extensive engagement, with 250 workshop

attendees and 300 (offline) survey questionnaires. The report stated that it tried to go beyond traditional participatory methods to include vulnerable populations.

Workshops started with a historical background of the neighborhood. After that, non-traditional creative participatory activities happened. One of the engagement methods of the workshop was mapping activities, where residents could indicate places of importance in the neighborhood, and a voting game. The report mentions that workshops incorporated translation into several languages in order to promote broader participation. The report also outlined an oral history project conducted by GOLES, where residents had the opportunity of talking about past, present, and future predictions for the neighborhood (Center for Community Development at Pratt Institute 2009).

The main discussion about the project took place inside the Community Board. According to one interview, discussions about the development started within the Community Board Land Use Committee and lasted for two years. Within that committee, members fashioned guidelines and recommendations for the uses of the area, in June 2009 (Community Board 3, Manhattan 2009). After that, two Task Forces followed. The first, initiated in 2010, had the community members selected by the Community Board. The Lower East Side BID, the University Settlement, GOLES represented the community in these meetings. They were later joined by Tito Delgado, a former tenant whose family had been displaced by the site (Litvak 2012). They were responsible for overseeing the Request for Proposal, assisting in the developer selection, and overseeing the engagement process.

The second Task Force, ongoing since 2012, discussed and oversaw the project implementation. As per one interviewed Task Force member, participants from the first Task Force selected the ones for the second one. The second Task Force still currently meets quarterly, and periodically update the progress of the project in the Community Board 3 Full Board meetings.

Additionally, to better understand and mitigate community conflicts, the Community Board and the City agencies took several actions. First, in 2010, the City hired two professional mediators from Pratt Institute to facilitate meetings and to help guide the decisions. (Litvak

2010c). One interview mentioned that the main advantage of having a mediator was to have a neutral party within the recently created Task Force. Because they were not involved in the process, they would be able to understand different sides of the story and enable a balanced negotiation.

Moreover, to assure inclusion, the Community Board attempted to provide spaces for participants. City agencies and residents had the opportunity to express their voices during Community Board Meetings. For example, before the approval of the Request for Proposal (RFP) guidelines, community organizations, and City agencies such as NYCEDC and the Department of City Planning, had a similar amount of time to present their point of view (Community Board 3, Manhattan 2010).

As indicated by the Task Force meetings summary, in January 2011, the Community Board approved the guidelines to inform the RFP. They then forwarded them to elected officials representing the area as well as to the Deputy Mayor of Economic Development Corporation, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, and the Department of Transportation (Community Board 3, Manhattan 2011). These guidelines outlined robust community participation and constant communication with the Community Board and with the Task Force, during and after the RFP and the ULURP process. After the approval of the guidelines, the Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and the State Senator Daniel Squadron released statements showing their support for the project (Litvak 2011b).

The ULURP process begun in March 2012 and mostly followed the guidelines previously approved by the Community Board. With a mixed feeling from the community – some happy that the development finally happened and some apprehensive with the effects of such development, the City Council unanimously approved the ULURP application in October 2012 (Sanchirico 2012).

The New York City Economic Development Corporation and the New York City Department of Housing and Preservation released the RFP in 2013, after the completion of the ULURP process, and following the guidelines drafted by the Task Force. The document stressed the community role in the process several times. Moreover, it added several community criteria as requirements

to the developer response. These criteria would be detrimental to the selection of the respondents. (NYCEDC 2013)

One of these items was that developers should preferentially collaborate with a local partner, defined as a locally-based organization with a history of improving the quality of life of Community Board 3 via social services, cultural activities, financial investments, or housing. Moreover, the RFP mentioned that developers would be required to work with the Task Force during the development, construction, leasing, and operation of the project phases (NYC Department of City Planning 2012).

The RFP also demanded developers to provide a broader community engagement during the marketing plan. Engagement included: participation in the Community Board meetings, meetings with other community organizations not included in the Task Force, discussion of the project with private and not-for-profit community organizations, and producing informative flyers (NYCEDC 2013).

Community members participated in the selection of the developer. The lead agency was not allowed by law to display the number or name of respondents. However, members of the Task Force received blind summaries of the proposals (Litvak 2013) and gave their feedback as if proposals met the community requirements (NYC Department of City Planning 2012).

One of the respondents, a developer that partnered with the Coalition to Protect Chinatown and the Lower East Side, had an anti-gentrification proposal. He had previously developed a petition with 8,000 signatures to support 100% of affordable housing in the neighborhood (Dillon 2012). This petition, managed by the People First NYC organization, specified that the recent rezoning of the area was already causing gentrification. Moreover, the respondent stated that the only way to stop it was by placing community-centered uses in the lots, workforce development programs, and affordable housing (People First NYC n.d.).

However, they did not win the proposal. In September 2013, the City selected Delancey Street Associates, a joint venture comprising L&M Developers Partners, BFC Partners, and Taconic Investment Partners (Bagli 2013). They partnered with Grand Street Settlement and the Lower East Side Employment Network (LESEN) on community facilities and outreach (NYCEDC n.d.).

Delancey Street Associates proposed a mixed-use development, with buildings within the limits of the existing zoning. They purposely created "*mundane buildings*," as mentioned by one of the interviewees, so that it would not stand out from the peripheries and would possibly avoid gentrification. The proposed program would bring 1,000 residential units, approximately 400 affordable units, and 100 affordable for senior housing units. The program would also include commercial space: retail, public market, office, and others (AKRF, Inc. 2014).

In December 2015, the construction of the project, now officially named Essex Crossing, started. The local district manager and the developers made sure to keep the community informed of potential construction effects and local workforce development programs taking place during and after the construction (Community Board 3, Manhattan 2016). When interviewed, developers restated their intent of maintaining transparency and of letting the community know what is happening in the neighborhood. They also assured to keep continuous information sharing in the still-existing Task Force, the Community Board Land Use Meetings, NYCHA meetings, and through the distribution of flyers in surrounding apartments.

As of 2020, the construction of the development is still ongoing. Out of the nine development lots, construction is complete in five lots, and two are currently under construction.

1.2. Social context

As previously mentioned, the two plans followed the same engagement logic and methods. An interviewed City Agency mentioned that the Essex Crossing framework, recognized as successful in terms of community engagement, was used to model the Downtown Far Rockaway Plan. However, even though the intention was similar, the results were the opposite. One of the primary reasons for these differences was the pre-existing community cohesion and subsequent community power. The pre-existing social context set the baseline for the community engagement approach in each case.

Community cohesion is recognizably a key factor underpinning community engagement. Conducted interviews across diverse stakeholder groups of both sites recognized the force behind community unity. One interview mentioned that the key to a thriving community is organization and empowerment, which leads to independent communities. Another one added that building coalitions could secure control, and give political voice to communities, especially to marginalized groups. Therefore, whether or not a neighborhood has these consistencies can influence community empowerment and shape the success of community engagement.

The Lower East Side, where Essex Crossing is located, is a representative of this substantial and established community power. There are approximately 60 local community organizations in the neighborhood. They vary from social services and advocacy organizations, neighborhood preservation organizations, business organizations, and community support organizations (The Lo-Down n.d.). Twenty-five of them is located in the surroundings of the Essex Crossing development. Some of these community organizations have an extensive history advocating for the community. The Henry Street Settlement, for example, completed its 125th year advocating for the neighborhood and neighbor's needs in 2018 (Henry Street Settlement n.d.).

Figure 3: Lower East Side community-based-organizations. Image produced by the author.

Mostly, the Lower East Side community organizations are aware of their power to slow down or block land use approvals, influence decisions, or even determine on public funds that the project may receive. They commonly use protests and rallies to challenge political decisions, and the aims of the community have shaped developments in the site for decades. The Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES), for example, is one of the lead community organizations advocating for neighborhood preservation and affordability, responsible for rallies about climate change, affordable housings, tenant harassment, among others (GOLES n.d.).

This activism of community organizations was one of the challenges to develop the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area. It is recognizably one of the reasons why the area remained undeveloped for so long. Several times during the SPURA project, community groups had stopped developments. In 1988 a non-for-profit development was paused due to ethnic and racial conflicts among community members (Williams 2017); in 1994, the Jewish community stopped proposals for more affordable housing (Lambert 1994); and in 2000, the lack of community consensus led to the abandonment of a mix of affordable and market unit development.

The mediator consistently recognized the conflicts within the community. "*The city is not the problem. The problem is the diversity of the community with diverse interes*ts," mentioned the mediator during the negotiation process (Litvak 2010c). He also recognized that the influence of local community organizations resulted in a somehow vulnerable project: any stakeholder had enough power to stop the process (Litvak 2010a). Therefore, the Essex Crossing development engagement process would have to go beyond traditional community participation. To be successful, it would fundamentally have to recognize contradictory ideas and learn how to plan in the face of conflicts.

Downtown Far Rockaway, on the other hand, had the contrary scenario: dispersed and unifocal community organizations composed its social layer. As mentioned in one of the interviews, the 2012 Hurricane Sandy's consequences to the Peninsula led to the creation of some community organizations, or union of formerly segregated ones. Another interview

mentioned that these organizations, due to environmental vulnerabilities of the Peninsula, only targeted sustainable development and emergency response. The interviewee added that although the number of community organizations is significant in Downtown Far Rockaway, there is no diversity in terms of focus, and all of them advocate for the same thing.

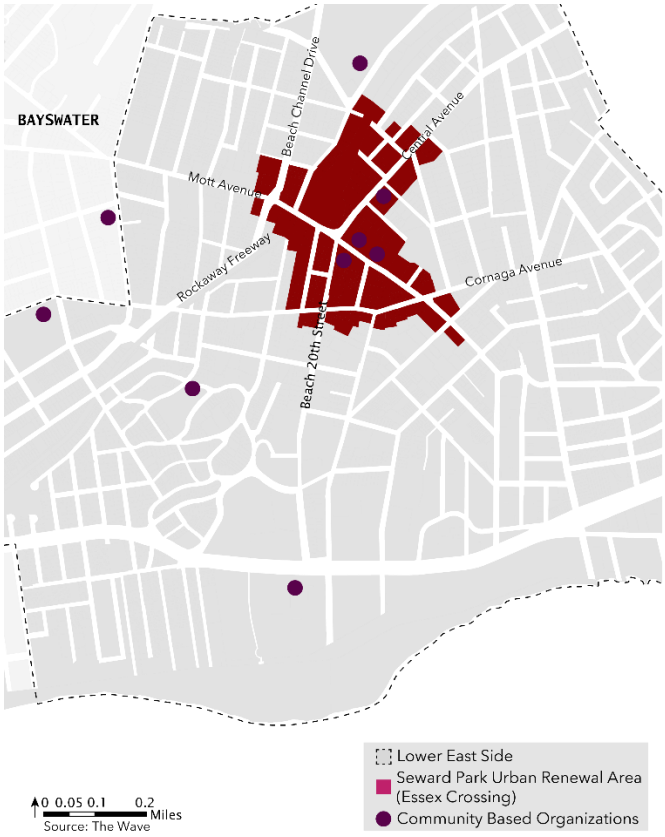


Figure 4: Far Rockaway community-based-organizations. Image produced by the author.

Therefore, with the start of the rezoning, most of the community organizations *in situ* had to change their focus. They had to adapt to a new set of language, legal, and technical terms that they were not used to. Buzzwords like displacement, gentrification, or affordable housing were not common in their daily discourses. They may not have fully understood what was said or may not have had enough vocabulary to sustain an argument.

Improved communication can mitigate power-imbalances (Abu-Orf 2005). However, a lack of shared vocabulary, which seems like the case for Far Rockaway, inevitably causes power-imbalances, and has the effect of silencing some voices (Bowen and Martens 2005, p. 206), and

erasing potential dissatisfactions. Additionally, these distortions and misunderstandings in communication can be strategic actions to reinforce power inequalities and cover political agendas (Abu-Orf 2005).

Another relevant point is how community cohesion can protect the structural context. Bastia and Montero Bressán (2017) associate the force of grassroots movements and community activism with a sense of belongingness. In the Lower East Side, this sense of place is noticeable. That leads to an unwillingness to change, especially in terms of social context. To that point, one person mentioned that the neighborhood character was unwilling to change because of the amount of NYCHA developments. Another person argued that the increase in land value would inevitably lead to gentrification in the surrounding neighborhood.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the character of the neighborhood will change. That is due to the existing programs aiming to keep jobs locally. It is also a consequence of affordable housing programs, and programs aiming to bring back previously evicted residents, that will result in a mitigation of displacement. Additionally, it is due to a deep cultural root that will allow the neighborhood to maintain its character.

The opposite happened in Downtown Far Rockaway. Three out of ten interviewees mentioned the segmentation of the current community members and organizations. One of them complained that only highly impactful events have the power to unite the community. As a long-time citizen of the Peninsula, she could only remember three events that resulted in community cohesion: Hurricane Sandy, which destroyed several homes, one current transportation plan, and home insurance issues. Another interview mentioned that some community groups in Downtown Far Rockaway engage in a way that creates subdivisions. For example, homeowners or civic associations focus on specific matters without having a sense of what is happening on a broader scale. Finally, one interviewee from a community organization, when asked about what could have been better in the Downtown Rockaway plan, complained that community cohesion is missing in Far Rockaway. He added that the neighborhood and the Peninsula are missing people who care and that are willing to advocate for the area. Downtown Far Rockaway interviews also added that the community does not participate in Public Hearings

and Community Board meetings and, if it were not for the local newspapers circulating in the neighborhood, no one would not be aware of what happens in the region.

Without an established community empowerment scheme, and a stable connection to the land, the Downtown Far Rockaway engagement had few restrictions. City agencies, or whoever would be planning for the area, would have the free-will to do whatever they wanted, and would possibly face weak community opposition. The only possible scenario of encountering a strong community opposition would be if the plan focused on sustainability or emergency response, which would encounter strong and coherent community organizations. However, this was not the case for the Downtown Far Rockaway plan.

These opposing scenarios – one neighborhood with strong social relations, and the other with incipient community advocacy, was the first step to the establishment of contrasting participatory methods.

1.3. The power relations behind the development

The starting point of the projects may have been influenced by externalities – such as the Hurricane Sandy that destroyed the neighborhood or an unexpected consensus among stakeholders. However, in both cases, planning happened in a context of power imbalances, in which political agendas of decision-making were carefully managed. This section addresses the questions of how and why these two stalled projects got unstuck. It concludes that what led to the developments was nothing but a confluence of power brokers' interests.

Interviews supported this hypothesis of the intersection of power and planning**.** In the Downtown Far Rockaway development, the initiative of rezoning the area came directly from the Councilmember, who created the Task Force and signed a letter to the Mayor advocating for the improvements in the area. The Far Rockaway Councilmember is currently running for Borough President (Parrot 2019), and the search for political and community support may have been the reason why he was so active in this project. To that point, one interviewee mentioned that politicians and elected officials gain more votes and more support from projects that are

approved then from endless discussions. Another interviewee added that the Downtown Far Rockaway plan was not a community-led or targeted plan, but a deal between the Councilmember and the Mayor.

The main challenge to the development of the Seward Park Area was conflicts of interest and power struggles. One of the interviewees mentioned the conflicts and lack of consensus was due not to social or economic differences, but above all, to power imbalances. Furthermore, several interviews mentioned the consequences of Assemblymember Sheldon Silver's political influence in the underdevelopment of the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area. One interviewee mentioned that Silver's political advocates would have been happy if nothing happened, while others cited that stakeholders were afraid that the Assemblymember could get revenge depending on their votes. No information was found on why Silver agreed to the Essex Crossing project. Regardless of the reasons, his participation was interrupted in 2015 due to his arrest for corruption. His downfall, however, played a fundamental part in carrying on the project.

Another significant influence on the development was Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Two interviewees mentioned that Bloomberg's way was fundamental in overcoming political impediments for the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area. Julian Brash (2011) cited that urban developments are reflections of political, cultural, and economic conditions. He stated that the Bloomberg administration branded several projects to support his ideology of entrepreneurialism, and competitiveness, aiming to enhance the neoliberal aspect of cities. However, when compared with other concurrent developments, Essex Crossing stands out for its tolerance to conflicts approach, which was due to City Council requirements and the community's history of conflicts and tensions.

The announcement of the start of the project initiated three and a half months before Bloomberg left the office. In that period, local stakeholders feared that the project might change with a new Mayor in office. A community member, for example, mentioned that "*the new mayor is going to want to put his stamp on the project*" (Bagli 2013). However, as

mentioned in one interview, that project was a shift from the 'CEO Mayor' traditional way of thinking. He added that De Blasio's ideology is more aligned with the plan, and therefore, nothing changed.

An interviewee from a City Agency member added that Bloomberg recognized it as a unique situation that required a unique solution. Interviewees also mentioned that he was the only one who dared to do something about that complex area. Secondary sources data added that he did not fear political repercussions from redevelopment opponents (Litvak 2010a). Several elected officials followed his support. Jenifer Rajkumar Democratic Leader for the 65th Assembly District (2011-2015), for example, supported the project by saying that "*elected officials should not miss this once-in-a-generation opportunity … just because they lack the political will or courage"* (Rajkumar 2013)

Apart from that, the negotiations began during the 2008 world crisis. That means that on the one hand, this economic crisis enabled participation to emerge slowly. On the other, new initiatives were fundamental to give the impression of change in the local economic scenario. Therefore, it is understandable why the City Council and the Mayor supported this project.

Although different in their essences, the two projects kicked off for the same reasons: to fulfill a political will. Both projects mainly aimed to bring benefits to local leaderships and influential groups.

2. Negotiating for community benefits

The discussion below went further into the negotiation process and analyzed whether the plans were genuinely participatory. Three elements stood out: who participated, where did participation occurred, and how did people participate. This section also explored how the developments made use of the two different approaches – agonistic and communicative - and whose voices were left out.

2.1. Where did participation happen?

a. Official Participation

Pløger (2001) mentioned that one of the conditions for participation in planning is the institutionalization of public communication in spaces with politically agreed principals and politicians articulating public interest. In both study-cases, the Community Board, as a space for formalizing local issues (Hum 2010), catalyzed participation. This section explains how the process of participation occurred in these established spaces of participation. Mainly, it investigates how each space included or excluded participants based on their agreement or opposition to the plan and their relationship to established power relations.

Representativeness in the Community Boards

First of all, it is essential to emphasize the role of power relations within the Community Boards. Scholars generally agreed about the influence of powerful stakeholders – primarily elected officials – in the Community Boards' decisions and recommendations (Moskowitz 2010). Although these powerful groups may disregard communities' opinions for good reasons, such as the need for a specific improvement, often more troubling issues are behind these decisions (Moskowitz 2010). Instead of representing the community, which they should in the first place, Community Boards and other formal spaces of participation end up representing elected officials, the Borough President, and the City Council members (Hum 2010), or even developers (Moskowitz 2010).

Three interviews carried out with Downtown Far Rockaway community organizations endorsed that idea. One of them, for example, mentioned that the Councilmember openly alleged that he would not respect any decision coming from the Community Board.

Another pressing issue in Downtown Far Rockaway were the uncertainties of the impact of the Community Board in the neighborhood. Some interviews mentioned that the Community Board did not represent the local community, while others added that the Institution was not active in the neighborhood. One interviewee mentioned that the City government, mainly represented by the Community Board, usually has predetermined ideas of what they want to see and avoided asking people about it. Additionally, Milan Taylor, member of the Community Board in 2016, criticized the Community Board, saying that they were "*making decisions on behalf of the entire community*," but it "*does not represent the demographics of the entire community"* (Savitch-Lew 2016). For example, during the scoping meetings in 2016, more "*average*" residents' inputs were invited (Johnson 2016).

Consulted City agencies, conversely, mentioned the activism of the Community Board. One interview mentioned that the Community Board Chair and District Manager were very active. Furthermore, Councilmember Richard stressed that throughout the process, he wanted to hear the community voices (Honan 2017) and that the community participation was vital to getting the Mayor's attention (Gannon 2016). These different ideas depicted a gap between the official vision – the one sanctioned and marketed – and the community vision, from the people who view and experience the changes in the neighborhood. That controversies are possibly a reflex of power schemes, although they can also be a consequence of lack of communication.

As previously mentioned, The Seward Park Urban Renewal Area suffered for decades under Assemblymember Silver. However, neither the interviews nor secondary source research show any criticism of the Community Board 3. They did not mention a lack of representativeness or power-relations within this Institution.

Spaces of Participation

Participation in the Essex Crossing development happened only in the boundaries of the Task Forces, such as the Community Board. Workshops and online sessions happened at the beginning of the process. They took place before the designation of the guidelines for the Request for Proposals. Other than that, all the discussions and negotiations that will be outlined in the following sessions occurred within the Community Boards, more specifically, in the Task Force meetings.

On the contrary, Downtown Far Rockaway, during the negotiation process, held public workshops and open houses, with boards displaying the proposals and collected feedback through sticky notes (Savitch-Lew 2016). The workshops, planned by the NYCEDC and carried out by the Councilmember, aimed to identify the neighborhood strengths and needs and to strategize recommendations.

Additionally, the Rockaway Development and Revitalization Corporation, in collaboration with the Councilmember Donovan Richards and with the NYC Small Business Services, promoted small business consultations in 2016 (Hester Street 2018). Represented by the Rockaway East Merchant Association (REMA), and with the help of Hester Street, a nonprofit organization specialized in urban planning and community engagement, the drafted several strategies to improve small businesses in Downtown Far Rockaway (Hester Street 2018).

In the model of Workshops and consultations, citizens can express some limited ideas, usually through the use of sticky notes, or through one-on-one conversations. However, the powerholders often restrict the input of citizens (Arnstein 2019, p. 219). Participation, instead of being an activity of knowledge sharing and collective decision-making, end up serving merely as evidence that participation occurred. In this model of 'statistical-evidence' participation aims to generate numbers and creates what Hillier (2003) called the "*ideal of participation and reality of nonparticipation*" (p. 43). Although the City and elected officials indeed planned for participation, the result was a lack of participation and space where the community had limited influence in the decision-making process.

Moskowitz (2010) mentioned the potentiality of knowledge and legal education to mitigate these pitfalls, which he exemplified with the WE ACT educational movement to empower West Harlem residents by giving then legal and technical knowledge to advocate for recent rezoning and redevelopments. However, in Downtown Far Rockaway, the City Agencies did not provide any kind of training or education to the local community. The secondary research did not show much content about the information shared with the community in workshops or other engagements (Healey 2015; Hester Street 2018; NYC Department of Transportation 2016).

Another space of participation of the Downtown Far Rockaway revitalization plan, and maybe the one with the most significant inputs, were Public Hearings. Four public hearings happened as part of the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Scholars frequently agree that Public Hearings are not the most efficient way of promoting participation. Moskowitz (2010) mentioned that it produces little meaningful opportunities for participation (p.34), while Gross (2005) mentioned that community groups might feel uncomfortable giving their opinion. Still, it was within this framework that community members mostly found their voices.

Councilmember Richards, during a 2016 Public Hearing, appealed to the community: *"your time is now!"* and added that the reason for the hearing was to *"give everyone a chance to be put on record"* (Johnson 2017). Public Hearings were then, the space for community expression. In May 2019, for example, while NYCEDC was presenting the project, attendees raised concerns about several topics, such as affordable housing, density, or infrastructure improvements (Community Board 14, Queens 2019).

Furthermore, in the 2016 Public Hearing, held in the Community, ten people manifested opposition to the project, another ten showed support, and two were neutral Board (Savitch-Lew 2016). Their main concerns were density, lack of educational facilities, construction of a new hospital, and the lack of emergency response. The community also mentioned worries about local jobs and apprenticeship opportunities, community ownership, and community gardens.

The Community Board adopted some of this concern, approving the plan with conditions. Conditions included project labor agreements and an increase in parking spaces. However, not all of them were adopted by the City Council, since community members still complain about the local workforce development and the effects of lack of parking spaces on local small business (Kase 2020).

Public hearings usually display aspects of the communicative plan in practice. Every member has the right to speak for the same amount of time and express their perspective. When that time is not respected or when some stakeholders have more time to speak than others, usually community members complain about inequalities of participation and power, similar to what happened in both projects. However, although community voices might be heard, Public Hearing spaces categorized as what Neuman (2000) called Forums of Participation, places where issues and politics are discussed, and not Arenas of Participation, where decisions are made.

Therefore, although Public Hearings might give communities space to participate, it lasts just a short period. When decisions were to be made in Downtown Far Rockaway, the power framework was imperative. That power dominance resulted in the City Council and the councilmembers holding the decision power in the Far Rockaway plan. Councilmember Richards, for example, mentioned that the "*real"* conversation and the substantial negotiation would happen only after the Community Board approval (Johnson 2017).

Later in the process, the City left out some of the circumstances delineated by the Community Board and mentioned in the cited Public Hearing. Thus, in this case, public hearings were used as a legalized method of pretending to have an equality of power (Flyvbjerg 1998a). The results of the discussion and the eventual consensus achieved during the public hearing, and in other methods of participation, were nothing more than ambiguous agreements, that were later modified in subsequent actions (Neuman 2000), aiming to, again, fit the powerful group wishes.

Conclusively, these two cases showed different official spaces of participation. The Essex Crossing engagement was built with eight years of continuous community engagement

inside the Task Force. The Downtown Far Rockaway plan, on the other hand, happened in four years of punctual engagements, such as Task Force meetings, workshops, and community consultations[4].

b. Unofficial Participation

City Agencies and Community Boards consciously tried to implement robust participation in both cases. Official spaces of participation allowed, in some cases, more than in others, the channel of community voices. However, the inefficiency of these channels caused the use of unofficial participation methods. Called invented space by Miraftab (2004), these spaces aim to complement the institutionalized spaces of participation. They usually emerge in contexts in which the government is less responsive to people's aims (Silva 2016).

In the Essex Crossing development, all the conflicts ended up being integrated into the Task Force discussion. Some of them emerged as proposals for the final project. The leading example of that happened in 2011 when some active community members gathered in the "Save the Essex Market" organization geared up to defend the permanence of the 1940 building. They gathered more than 800 signatures in an online petition and tried to have the building protected by the Landmarks commission (Litvak 2011d). The building was not landmarked, as some community members desired. However, the developers preserved the Market used in the new complex of buildings.

Two interviews mentioned that other groups from the Lower East Side and Chinatown challenged the project and participated behind the scenes, by negotiating with the City and trying to disrupt the Task Force meetings. However, when recently interviewed, one of these groups mentioned that overall, they were satisfied with the project, especially with the workforce development and support for local community organizations.

Opposing community organizations in Downtown Far Rockaway did not have a space to voice their complaints. They mostly used internet resources, their own community spaces, and

[4] These years are considering the idealization on the project until the beginning of the construction phase.

legal complaints to advocate against the project. On their website, the Bayswater Civic Association mentioned that they held periodic meetings to discuss how they could participate in the project and how to change some of its parameters (Bayswater Civic Association n.d.). Another community organization encouraged the community to write letters to elected officials and to publish comments to the City Planning Commission website. A third interviewed community organization claimed that they would like to participate in the process, but did not have the space to do it. Finally, community organizations co-signed a letter to the City Planning Commission, urging for the disapproval of the plan (Bayswater Civic Association 2017). They mentioned that they did not have time to speak in the formal spaces of participation, and the given time was "*certainly not enough time to provide a comprehensive explanation of the flaws of the plan*" (p. 4). Additionally, some procedures happened without the knowledge of the community, such as a site visit conducted by the Councilmember Richards. They added that if they knew it, they would want to participate (p. 5).

These represent discrete ways of channeling the concern, shy community protests, but yet, they depicted an important message. In Far Rockaway, community conflicts did not have a space to be expressed. Communities had to either give up or find their own ways to voice their opinions.

2.2. Who participated?

In New York, Community Boards are responsible for mediating local consequences of economic development initiatives, urban policies, and racial shifts. However, as observed by Hum (2010), these spaces often have a lack of community accountability, and fail to promote the inclusion of a segment of the population – usually the urban poor (Miraftab and Wills 2005). This section will explore whether these local spaces of participation were inclusive in terms of the selection of members of the Task Forces and whether authentic participation happened.

a. Task Force Members Selection

The Essex Crossing development, in some levels, challenged the idea of exclusion within local spaces of participation. Some Lower East Side community organizations recognized that there was room for improvement, and there are always more people that could have participated. However, in general, the community participation in Essex Crossing was considered representative of the different groups of classes, ethnicities, and social-economic levels. The process as a whole was said to allow effective communication within the established legal framework.

The Community Board Chair chose the Members of the first Task Force. According to interviews, he would ensure that the participation was high because he had access and understood different social layers and classes from the neighborhood. He also held trustful relations with the community. The second Task Force, responsible for overseeing the RFP and the ongoing construction until currently, was selected by the members of the first Task Force.

Later, during the process, the composition of Task Forces changed to accommodate the community's needs. For example, in 2011, one of the most crucial community organizations asked for more representation of low-income residents and former evicted residents. The Community Board, open to communication and participation, adopted this requirement by adding two former tenants in the task force (Litvak 2011b).

Although City Agencies mentioned that the Downtown Far Rockaway project mirrored and learned from the Essex Crossing experiences, the results in terms of who had a seat at the table were completely different. The Far Rockaway meetings happened in the Community Board, but, as previously mentioned, the councilmember Donovan Richards was the one who initiated the Task Force. When asked, the City agencies answered that the councilmember selected them because they were crucial stakeholders of the neighborhood. Neither the interviews nor the secondary source research informed why the Task Force members were selected.

Interviewees mentioned that during the Task Force meetings, City Agencies interviewed participants about who else could participate. The reason for bringing the questions would be to bring more people to the meeting and enhance participation. However, one local community

organization that did not participate in the process mentioned that they opted-out because there was a limited number of community organizations that could participate. Then, they preferred to give their seat to more relevant organizations. Another interviewed community organization complained that they never had the chance to participate as much as they wanted. They added that they were not even aware of some approval or legal processes that were happening. They further said that they did not believe in the plan since, for them, it did not support the community; on the contrary, for them, particular interest shaped all the aspects of the plan.

The differences among these processes started in the pre-phase of the engagement plan. It started with the selection of who had the power to select participants. The fact that a Councilmember had the authority to select who participated can result in a biased plan – a plan where power brokers, who distance themselves from the community, are the ones who are choosing who will have a voice.

In contrast, the Essex Crossing development started with the Community Board Chair, who was more able to select a variety of people to represent the neighborhood. Later in that process, the community members, represented by the Task Force, selected who should carry on the negotiations, which resulted in a more community-focused approach.

b. Conflicts

One of the unique findings of the Essex Crossing Development was that conflicts shaped the engagement process and decisions. Community organizations, regardless of their position – for or against the development – had a seat at the table.

The project came from several unsuccessful attempts at developing the area. After decades of unsuccessful efforts, the City finally recognized the role of the social context and its embedded conflicts to achieve results. According to one interview, the City mandated a community agreement as one of the conditions to release funds and to support the project.

Community organizations, elected officials, and City agents recognized that conflicts would occur in these meetings but were still willing to participate in the discussion and to

advocate for their benefit. One interview mentioned that, to help in the discussions and decisions, stakeholders divided themselves into two groups. The first group, which was represented by GOLES, advocated for a bottom-up design, with as much community inputs as possible. The second group, represented by University Settlement, made sure that the local institutions had what they wanted and assured the transparency of the process. A mediator balanced all discussions within the Task Force.

The Downtown Far Rockaway Development, on the other hand, had the idea consensus as the baseline of decisions. Less information was gathered about who effectively participated in the process. However, two stakeholders stand out: the local Councilmember and the Rockaway Development and Revitalization Corporation, which held two seats in the Task Force. With a lack of established community power, this organization posed itself as the exclusive representative of the community within the Task Force and within the Community Board meetings. Although community members and organizations opposed the project, no higher conflicts existed within the Far Rockaway Task Force.

Struggles within the community, or even involving City agencies, existed in the Essex Crossing and the Far Rockaway process. However, Far Rockaway faced the problem of avoiding social conflicts. This avoidance took place as an illusion of consensus, which, in reality, led to the exclusion of some voices.

2.3. How did participation happen?

As mentioned above, these two cases had a similar format. However, their negotiating and decision-making processes were different; they acknowledged and dealt with power relations and the conflicts differently. This section will look into the decision-making process and explore how each Task Force reached decisions.

a. Who led the processes?

To facilitate a collective agreement, in the Lower East Side development, the NYCEDC hired two mediators who should communicate to stakeholders and help to build the plan.

However, because of conflicting ideas, one of their challenges was to build trust and to make the community understand they were working for them. Consequently, interviews mentioned that one of them tried to know what each stakeholder wanted before the Task Force meetings. He met with every member individually to understand their point of view and explain the consequences of the project, highlighting that changes would be inevitable. Following Patsy Healey's (1992) communicative planning ideas, they tried to understand each person's unique background and the range of meanings of each expressed concern.

The Far Rockaway Development, on the other hand, had two main stakeholders leading the project. First of all, Councilmember Richards controlled the project. City agencies unanimously recognized him as the main stakeholder, and the force without which the project would never have occurred. At the same time, one community organization, which had two seats at the Task Force, was central to the project. Not only did this organization uniquely represent the community in all the phases of the project, but it was also exclusively granted several benefits for neighborhood improvements (NYC Small Business Services 2019). This pattern shows a centralization of power in the hands of a few and led to community members claiming that "*only friends of the Councilmember Donovan Richards"* could have a voice. (Perez 2017).

b. How negotiating unfolded?

Scholars mention a tendency to showcase ideas and confining (some) citizen participation only to a determined period, usually during the implementation phase of a project (Inch 2014). To that point, the Downtown Far Rockaway revitalization had nine months of intense community participation previous to the release of the Request for Proposal (Offner 2016). However, the meeting minutes available in the Community Board 14, Queens, show that discussions about the Downtown Far Rockaway revitalization happened less than ten times throughout five years[5]. The minutes show some discussions between Community Board and

[5]. Minutes retrieved from the official Community Board 14 Queens website, from January 2015, when the Task Force began its activities, to May 2019, the last available Meeting Minute.

City Agency leaderships, where community members had the opportunity of voicing their concerns, such as density, affordable housing, parking spaces, or lack of educational facilities. However, at the same time, on the occasion of the Community Board rezoning approval, in 2017, some community members were outraged that they only had one minute to speak (Community Board 14, Queens 2017a).

Ideally, the Task Force should include diverse neighborhood visions. Although councilmember Richards claimed that the engagement process did not result in a consensus (Gafvert et al. 2018), no risky conflicts existed in the Task Force. All the members seemed to be on the same page and, directly or indirectly, supported the project.

It did not mean that every community organization was for the project. As previously mentioned, one community organization was entirely against the project, ironically calling it "*a plan that 'revitalize' the neighborhood*" (Bayswater Civic Association n.d.). Additionally, in a Public Hearing held in 2016, half of the speakers showed opposition against the project (Savitch-Lew 2016). At the same time, only one community organization led almost all the initiatives in the site, managed all the grants, and mediated all the existing conflicts. What in reality happened was that consensual projects deemphasized pluralism to focus on dominant group ideals (Van Bouwel 2009, p. 214). Consequently, part of the community was excluded and had to find other ways of expression inside and outside of the official spaces of participation.

However, when asked about potential organizations that opposed the project, the City agents answered that no organizations were against it. They added the needlessness of improvements in terms of community engagement due to the extreme transparency and community-led process. They also acclaimed the transparency and inclusiveness of the project, which per them was guided by the community. Still, they recognized the role of elected officials as key stakeholders. According to them, the project embraced different perspectives and tried to include different populations

When asked about potential improvements, one City agent mentioned that engagement could have been more inclusive with the provision of translations during the meetings; another

suggested the use of digital tools of engagement. A third mentioned the difficulties in keeping momentum and sharing milestones with the community. None of these suggestions addressed furthering the degree of participation or engagement of excluded community organizations.

What one sees, in this case, is not a consensus but an illusion of consensus. The City Authorities evaded social conflicts since planners engaged with some community-based organizations and disengaged from others. Several community organizations were classified as problematic and composed by “bad citizens” due to their activism and opposition to the proposals, following Inch's (2014) critics to democratic planning practice. They were utterly ignored by City Agencies. That reinforces the hypothesis that the achieved consensus, in reality, represented the exclusion of some voices (Mcguirk 2001; Van Bouwel 2009).

Social conflicts between community organizations and members remained hidden not only because of a lack of communication but also because of a lack of space for participation. What ultimately existed in the Downtown Far Rockaway plan was a reflection of the existing power relations where the powerful voices remained heard, while the not powerful ones disappeared.

The topic of the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area, on the other hand, appeared numerous times in the Community Board 3 meetings, under the name of Seward Park Urban Renewal Area (SPURA), and Essex Crossing. It was discussed both in the committees (Land Use and Economy Development) and in the Full Board meeting and mentioned at least once a month from 2008 to 2019. This case presented a radically different scheme of negotiation and of participation, where powerholders tried to hear communities’ voices, and include their concerns in the decisions.

The main topics of discussion were affordability, diversity in commercial spaces, and building heights (Litvak 2010c). Among community and Task Force members, the primary debate was affordable housing. While some members of the Task Force wanted market-rate apartments to be kept minimal, some others wanted commercial tenants that would spur economic development (Litvak 2010c). However, it was the last thing addressed. The Mediator

believed that the community was not ready to discuss it at the beginning of the negotiations (Litvak 2010a).

Principally from the guideline's approvals on, discussions were carried out, and some conflicts appeared, mostly in terms of affordable housing percentages and the future of Essex Market, a historic food market placed in the neighborhood (Litvak 2011d).

Some community organizations complained that Community Board members and Task Force members did not consider their opinions and positioned themselves against the project. In 2011, GOLES, one of the most crucial community organizations of the Lower East Side, and members in the Task Force, considered not participating in the steps after the approval of the guidelines. They advocated for 70% affordable housing and demanded '*real community reviews'* (Litvak 2011c). They also criticized the Community Board for selling out the community (Litvak 2011c). Interviews added the difficulties of talking to GOLES and bottom-up community organizations. They mentioned that they did not talk about tangible things and that they did not want anything to be done in the area.

Nevertheless, recognizing conflicts as essential to the triumph of the plan, and holistic participation as one of the crucial aspects for the success of the project, the chair of the Community Board, David McWater, asked the organization to participate in the process. He essentially recognized the timing of the project, since they were in the last two years of Bloomberg's administration, which brought uncertainties of continuity with the change of Mayor. Hence, he urged the community to continue engagement. He questioned them "*to consider whether walking away is worth the gamble … For what? So that 20 years down the road, you get 100 more units* [of affordable housing*]?*" (Litvak 2010b). The planner responsible for the mediation also recognized the community union as fundamental and counseled the community organizations to stay united. He also often highlighted that it was all about trade-offs (Litvak 2010a).

In a balanced decision, community members understood that pressing issue and, in general, agreed to come to a mid-point decision. For instance, Tito Delgado, a member of the Task Force representing previously evicted tenants, concluded: "*we had to go along with 50%*

affordable and 50% market rate … or we would have another 50 years of empty lots" (Bagli 2013).

Other conflicts arose from the developer selection of phase. In March 2011, members of the community and the Community Board asked for more participation in the selection of the developers. Although community acceptance was one of the Selection Criteria, members were not allowed to participate as much as they wanted. Projects had legal and disclosure agreements, which allowed Task Force members to have access to only some aspects of the project (Litvak 2011a).

Moreover, in April 2011, residents and community organizations nonparticipants in the Task Force, complained that they could not give their opinion or participate in the decision making as much as they wanted. They cited that they could only speak at the beginning or end of the sessions. The Community Board was inflexible and opposed changing the format of the discussions in the Full Board meetings. Therefore, some members ceased their participation and claimed that the process aimed to make sure they could not have input (Litvak 2011e).

However, not all community organizations sanctioned this idea of non-participation. One community organization interview said that every development has opposition. Nevertheless, they claimed that in Essex Crossing, there was space to participate and to be vocal, both in support or in opposition. Another community organization complimented the process, especially the developers, mentioning they were already used to doing affordable housing and, consequently, cared for the community more than usual.

Although not without issues, in general, the Essex Crossing development presented a negotiation that accepted conflicts. Every member could give their opinion – which does not mean that it was accepted. The result of the development was a deal in which no stakeholder – not the developer, not the City and not the community – was completely satisfied.

As Essex Crossing embraced the differences and recognized conflicts as solutions, it adopted the agonistic model of planning. Recognizing the absence of consensual social relations that inevitably create power distortions, conflicts served to generate ideas and solutions to complex matters. In the agonistic model, conflicts are "*valuable ties*" (Flyvbjerg

1998b, p. 228) that protected the democracy (Hirschman 1994; Mcguirk 2001). Therefore, instead of trying to achieve a common understanding, planners focused on the achievement of a deal, negotiated between stakeholders. As one interviewee said, the ultimate goal of the community engagement was to leave all involved parties "*equally unhappy*."

c. External Constraints

Moskowitz (2010) explained the role of developers' contributions to financing political campaigns and how that impacts elected officials' decision-making (p.33). Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2013) approvingly mentioned the informal networks created by developers to influence decisions. To that point, this subsection will investigate the influence of external issues in the developments. It will further investigate how the City Agencies' goals influenced the decisions, as well as if the developer's role somehow shaped the project.

In terms of the developer role, one interview with a community organization directly related to the Essex Crossing Development, when asked about what could be improved, said that for decisions, one has to go to who has the power, which is the developers. They complemented the money shapes the power paradigm.

However, the City Agencies were mainly responsible for constraints in terms of economic revenues in the Essex Crossing development. According to interviews with the Lower East Side Task Force members, the NYCEDC suffered political pressures and acted within the constraints of what they could do. One person added that as a private company, NYCEDC needed to generate revenue with the project – approximately $100 million. Therefore, the project would have to include revenue-producing characters so that it could achieve community benefits (Litvak 2010a). To that point, one interviewee concluded that every community-led facility should follow by a profit-oriented one. Another interviewee complained that information shared by this agency was limiting, which made Task Force members feel manipulated and increased the quantity and strength of conflicts.

At the same time, interviewees criticized NYC HPD for not being as effective as they could. One person mentioned that they did not put enough effort into finding previously evicted

tenants that should be given preference for affordable housing lotteries. Interviewees added that the lack of information from this agency impeded the '*right to return*' policy to occur effectively.

These constraints were not found in the Downtown Far Rockaway Plan. No interview mentioned City Agencies or developers as constraints to the project. Stakeholders who participated in the project, embedded in the illusion of consensus, did not have anything negative to say about the plan, let along to about the lead agencies. They did not transparently share the difficulties they encountered during the development of the plan. The excluded community organizations and members, eager to participate, did not target their complaints to City Agencies or developers. They mainly complained about the fact that their voices were not included in the process as a whole.

3. Results

This section will detail the results of both plans. It will specifically investigate who benefited from the outcomes of the plan. It will also investigate to what extent conflict or the lack of it, shaped the outcomes of the plan and shaped who participated.

3.1. Essex Crossing

Essex Crossing primarily aimed to accept and plan in the face of conflict. Even before the development of the plan, City agencies and stakeholders were aware that involved organizations only related through conflicts, and a consensus would not be possible. Subsequently, every conducted interview about the Essex Crossing development (totaling 10) mentioned the same thing: that the plan was a deal, and that no one was 100% happy about the results. They all added that the plan was not ideal, but only a possible plan. Expanding on that, Mayor Bloomberg, in the inauguration of the development, made clear that '*if anyone gets everything we did not try hard enough*.' (Bloomberg 2013)

Some interviewees even mentioned that stakeholders said yes to a plan that they did not fully support. Interviews mentioned that had they known that De Blasio would be the next Mayor, they would have done things differently. Still, the development delivered several community benefits, most of them arose from conflicting situations. Moreover, a list of community benefits will be presented, with a brief explanation of how or if conflicts were essential to get to them.

a. Affordable Housing

Affordability was one of the main topics of conflict among community members. Before the Essex Crossing development, communities struggled with different opinions: part of community members advocating for more affordable housing, while others complained about the amount of NYCHA developments in the site, and advocated for economic development. This pattern was maintained in the Task Force. Part of the community organizations advocated for

affordable housing, while some others wanted more focus on activities that would spur economic development (Litvak 2010c).

Interviewees mentioned an initial inflexibility from grassroots community organizations that wanted 100% affordable housing in the residential developments. As previously mentioned, some grassroots community organizations considered leaving the negotiation in 2011, claiming that they were being ignored (Litvak 2011c). However, interviewees from the Task Force and City Agencies recognized that the inflexibility of these community-based-organizations was, in reality, a negotiation methodology. They claimed to want 100%, but overall, accepted to bargain and achieve a lower percentage.

Interviewees from grassroots community organizations mentioned the effort in negotiating for affordability. Some of them mentioned that they did not fully agree with the project and that if it were for them, they would have a higher percentage of affordable housing. However, they recognized the conflictual situation and the inevitability of getting to a mid-point. For them, it would be the only way to avoid another long and painful process (Bagli 2013). One interviewee from a housing advocacy community organization compared the Essex Crossing development with other ongoing developments in New York City and concluded that, when strategically seeing, the results were highly successful for the community. They applauded the preference to the previous tenant, evicted in the 1960s, for affordable housing lotteries.

b. Essex Market

Another cited benefit, emphasized by three out of four contacted community organizations, was the Essex Market. Community members cited that the Market was one of the most traditional aspects of the neighborhood. It serves the neighborhood since the 1940s and is considered as representative of the mixed culture of the neighborhood (NYCEDC n.d.). It is currently city-owned, and part of the NYC Public Market network (NYCEDC n.d.).

Due to the cultural importance of the Market, in 2011, some active community members gathered in the "Save the Essex Market" organization. They aimed to preserve and landmark the

building and gathered more than 800 signatures in an online petition (Litvak 2011d). Moreover, one interviewee from a community organization within the Task Force mentioned that they advocated for the maintenance of the Market and for commercial use that would reflect the cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity of the neighborhood.

Due to this outstanding relevance, the NYCEDC unprecedently partnered with the Lower East Side Partnership, a local business improvement district, to negotiate and craft the best ways to protect local vendors of the Market (Crenshaw 2018). That partnership resulted in the "*building community at the new Essex Street Market*" report, developed by the Essex Street Market Vendor Association, the Lower East Side Partnership, and the NYC Small Business Services. The main goal of the report was to understand what uses of the previous Market should be preserved, and how the communities would want to use the new spaces. They conducted surveys, focus groups, and workshops, which included several Task Force community organizations (Saxelby, Vu, and Lower East Side Partnership 2011).

The development did not maintain the building structure, with the claims that the old building was not suitable to last, and that they had to move to ensure that the place would thrive ((Crenshaw 2018, p. 7). However, the NYCEDC, with the Lower East Side Partnership, outlined several actions that aimed to keep the market legacy and its culturally enriched environment, which came from the relevant community advocacy to keep the building and its entrenched values.

After the completion of the building, previous local vendors could come back and would pay the same rate as they used to. Additionally, there was a requirement of attaining 70% of minorities and local businesses in the new Market. Nonetheless, some interviewed community members mentioned that the new building is gentrified and different from the original one. Other interviews characterized it as too commercial and not the character of the Lower East Side.

c. Building Configuration

One of the most significant topics of discussion in almost all developments in New York City is building heights. The case of the Essex Crossing development was no exception. The Task Force members discussed the building heights in 2011, on an occasion when an architecture firm hired by NYCEDC constructed a model, following the previously approved guidelines, to showcase a possible configuration of the development. Using that model, architects changed Styrofoam pieces to one place to another, studying the best configuration (Litvak 2011e).

Although meant to be collective decision-making, community members felt excluded and claimed for more space for participation. Community Board members endorsed that exclusion: they implored for more resident's participation, suggested the Community Board 3 had its own architect, and asked for more time to review the design. Task Force members even suggested a town hall meeting, which would give residents more options to participate (Litvak 2011e).

Interviewees from community organizations did not have strong opinions about the building configurations. One of them mentioned that the developer purposely built mundane buildings, that would avoid gentrification as much as possible. He, however, added that planners could not control externalities. He added that gentrification would occur in the neighborhood, regardless of the building configuration.

d. Lower East Side Employment Network

The most cited community benefit – cited by four out of four interviewed community organizations – was the Lower East Side Employment Network (LESEN). It consists of a collaborative workforce development program that works in partnership with Community Board 3 and helps companies recruit and hire local employees (LESEN n.d.). This network has not formed for this project. It was formed in 2007 by an alliance of workforce and training nonprofits, as well as the Community Board (Savitch-Lew 2017b). However, it was widely used in this development and, according to interviews, kept jobs locally.

One community organization mentioned their satisfaction with the workforce development and for the network of community organizations being crafted by the developers. They specifically mentioned that, although not initially in favor of the development, the developers were providing goods that they would not expect.

Local workforce development is a popular topic of conflicts in big scale developments. However, no information was found to support whether or not the use of the Lower East Side Employment Network arose as an attempt to avoid conflicts.

Essex Crossing was a unique situation. The conflictual background of the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area made development impossible for decades. The Essex Crossing development had to embrace conflicts in order to be successful. Almost all aspects of the plan and all the community benefits were essentially shaped by dissents of community members and stakeholders. To that point, conflicts were and the underlying element of the planning process – not consensus.

3.2. Downtown Far Rockaway

City Agencies regarded the Far Rockaway as the perfect plan. When interviewed, those responsible' for the development of the plan noted that nothing could be changed or improved. During their interviews, only insubstantial changes were noted: further translations, use of digital tools, among others. Conversely, members who did not participate expressed numerous opinions and concerns. To that point, although Downtown Far Rockaway presented several community benefits, no evidence was found if they reflected the community's needs or complaints.

a. Affordable housing

From the beginning of the negotiations of the Downtown Far Rockaway plan, affordability and housing density were the main concerns of the community. Communities feared that new development would bring gentrification and evict the current residents, that would no longer be able to afford to live in the neighborhood. Additionally, they feared that the new developments

would bring a high density, and would overutilize the existing infrastructure and parking spaces (Savitch-Lew 2016 and Mancini 2018).

Moreover, an interview conducted with a local community organization in Far Rockaway criticized the plan for its focus on housing, and not on other fundamental infrastructure for the neighborhood. They added that, although advertised as an infrastructure improvement and redevelopment project, the Downtown Far Rockaway plan was a housing project, that arose from a deal made between Council Member Richards and the Mayor's Office. For them, none of the necessary neighborhood improvements were made, and the plan targeted only to creating more housing units.

Indeed, the Downtown Far Rockaway aimed to attend the community needs through the provision of mixed-use affordable housing. The councilmember expected a total of 1,700 residential units, of which he anticipated to be partially subsidized by NYC HPD. Local churches who represent two out of fifteen of the members who previously signed the letter asking for improvements to the area are developing mixed-use housing projects or selling their air rights for housing projects.

b. Small businesses

The local businesses were considered one of the critical aspects of Far Rockaway development. An extra $1.5 million was provided in 2019 by the NYC Small Business Services (NYC SBS) to improve local businesses in the area (Brienne 2019). That includes façade improvements, storefront improvements, capacity building, and business attractiveness (NYC Small Business Services 2019). The Rockaway Development & Revitalization Corporation, one of the most important stakeholders in the process, and member of the Task Force since its first discussion received all these grants. The research or interviews did not justify why this organization received and managed the grants, instead of one centered in small businesses advocacy and management.

Neighbors welcomed the small businesses changes. However, the local business owners, represented by the Rockaway East Merchant Association (REMA), complained about the construction impacts in their business, a significant decline in shopping traffic, and lack of parking spaces to support their businesses (Community Board 14, Queens 2020).

c. Communities complaints

Some community inputs, although pressing, were not integrated into the project. These complaints were gathered from interviews and secondary source researches. However, since the Task Force discussions were not publicly accessible, there is no evidence to what extend these topics were discussed in the meetings.

One interviewee from a local community organization had several complaints. They mentioned that the plan did not require parking spaces. They mentioned that the plan aimed to construct more than 3,000 housing units, with less than one parking space per apartment, and that more parking spaces would be removed. They also complained about the removal of a bus parking lot to the street. The community organization added that they understood the importance of the improvements, but highlighted that the plan was not respecting the neighborhood's unique characteristics. They concluded that after the completion, the plan would damage the neighborhood for generations.

Additionally, a document with questions submitted for the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), with comments from local community organizations, questioned several transportation measures that the Department had for the neighborhood (NYSDOT and Bayswater Civic Association 2016). When asked about the advantages of moving the buses from a parking lot into the street, the NYC DOT said that this decision was based on community requests. However, the community organization refuted and challenged the Department to identify who was the community they were talking about (p. 2).

Other common community complaints were in terms of workforce development. One of the conditions for the rezoning, posed by the Community Board, was the protection of the local workforce (Kase 2020). However, a 2020 Community Board meeting showed that the local

workforce was not being developed. In that meeting, community members complained that local jobs were not given to local companies and members (Community Board 14, Queens 2020). The research or interviews did not inform whether or not local workforce development programs were altered.

However, the most critical finding of the interviews was the lack of information of some community organizations, when asked about improvements, or consequences of the development. Two out of four community organizations interviewed in Downtown Far Rockaway were not aware or did not feel that they were empowered enough to give their opinion about the plan or its consequences.

d. Other improvements

The Downtown Far Rockaway plan also incentivized active ground floors, especially in major corridors, commercial, and retail uses (Savitch-Lew 2018). Furthermore, it envisioned a streetscape reconstruction, which includes a new plaza, a new gathering space, and new sewer and storm infrastructures (Savitch-Lew 2018). The plan also envisioned the revitalization of Queens Public Library branch with a new two-story facility, and a streetscape reconstruction project.

In conclusion, although the two plans had their flaws, the Lower East Side plan succeeded in hearing and accomplishing the community's needs. Several aspects of the plan came directly from community requirements, such as the maintenance of the Essex Market, or the affordable housing component of the plan. The Downtown Far Rockaway plan, on the other hand, promoted benefits that community members, in general, were not advocating for or, even worse, did not feel empowered enough to give their opinion. While the Essex Crossing was indeed planned for the community, even though no one was totally happy with the results, the Downtown Far Rockaway was a plan said to be for the community, but utterly guided by power holders.

III. Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Conclusions

Seeing from afar, the Essex Crossing development and the Downtown Far Rockaway revitalization are similar. Both cases institutionalized community engagement in a Task Force. These institutions should serve as a bridge between communities and decision-makers. However, their results were extremely different. This section will outline some conclusions that arose from the research, analysis, and discussion.

First of all, the cases illustrate how power determined public participation, citizen, and community-based organization involvement based. Politics and elected officials, due to their position and autonomy to make decisions, almost automatically are power-holders. Both developments were directly enabled or impeded by the indirect acts of elected officials – the councilmember Richards in Downtown Far Rockaway, and the Assemblymember Silver in Seward Park Urban Renewal Area. Real Estate Developers are also a fundamental piece in the decision-making process, as one interview above-cited mentioned, to make changes, one has to go to the one who holds the money, which is necessarily the developers. However, community-based-organizations tend to represent the weak group in the hierarchy of power in most of the neighborhoods. That was the case of Far Rockaway, where the neighborhood had a newly established community-context in terms of real estate development and urban planning. They had a possible lack of knowledge and vocabulary. Therefore, the inexperience of the community-based-organizations led them to be at the bottom level of decision making, and they barely influenced the results.

Due to its conflictual context, the Seward Park Urban Renewal area faced a different scenario. The activism of community organizations significantly influenced in keeping the site underdeveloped for more than five decades. Additionally, community-based organizations in the site are used to protest and influence in urban planning and real estate development

decisions. As Moskowitz (2010) puts, they are fully aware of their ability to slow down or block land use approvals (p.6). That awareness of their power makes them climb up the hierarchic power chain and take a leadership position. They are now an influential stakeholder in the decision-making process, with the power to partially keep their demands.

Conclusively, community Politics and experience of community-based-organizations are a significant factor in producing truly engaged participation. An activist community background can result in a shift in power relations and make (some) community organizations voice heard.

Additionally, the role of the community-based-organizations in the Lower East Side led to the adoption of the agonistic community engagement method. Aware that the community's needs should necessarily be considered, power brokers inverted the consensus logic and worked in a deal-making. The ultimate goal of this project would be to produce a plan that no one would be completely happy.

Far Rockaway, on the other hand, was embedded in power-relations, where the main stakeholder was the councilmember. Most of the engagement process followed the communicative planning theory, a method that believes in the role of communication to overcome power relations (Flyvbjerg 1998a). However, as Pløger (2001) explained that engagement usually happens in institutionalized spaces of participation. Hence, they are in systems of domination, of the legal power of ordinary political authorities, and power regimes of bureaucratic management (p. 238). Therefore, communicative planning fails in these spaces of participation since it is impossible to unlink power and planning. As a result, to achieve a consensus, the plan considered only some stakeholders' needs. As posed by Mcguirk (2001) and Van Bouwel (2009), what ended up happening was the exclusion of some voices and dominance of the power-holder class.

Conclusively, agonistic methods for community engagement in urban planning may produce more equitable and just results than consensus-based methods. Considering that conflicts are inevitable to any social relationship, (Yamamoto 2016), any conflict-free

environment will exclude some stakeholder voices. Therefore, a democratic society – and a democratic engagement method – ultimately recognizes differences instead of promoting coercion or exclusion (Yamamoto 2016).

2. Recommendations

There is no recipe for empowering communities and promoting genuine community engagement. After outlining the success and failures of the cases, this section will outline some critical recommendations that stand out and are central to promoting inclusive community engagement.

1. *Planners should be suspicious of situations where consensus is said to exist without any conflict.*

As Mouffe (1999) mentions, the idea of a consensus is unrealistic, and is likely to produce the exclusion of some voices – usually the disenfranchised or urban poor (Hum 2010; Miraftab and Wills 2005). These exclusions result in the perpetuation of segregation and lack of equity in cities and societies. Planners should be aware of this perspective possibility of exclusion arising from conflicts and should be doubtful in situations where consensus is said to have been achieved.

2. *Planners should be less concerned with fostering consensus. They should invite dissent from various community groups.*

The Essex Crossing case was an exception. It is not usual to find such a powerful social context, and community-based-organizations usually struggle to have their voices heard. However, instead of waiting for community organizations to gain power, planners should bring together different points of view to the negotiation table. Spaces of participation should be the most diverse as possible.

In these environments, planners should pose themselves as a facilitator, enabling the inclusion of diverse voices, even if they are conflicting (Miraftab and Wills 2005). Instead of trying to foster a consensus, they should incentivize disagreements. Planning in the face of conflict is one effective way of ensuring that people with different goals, backgrounds, and interests are participating in the decisions.

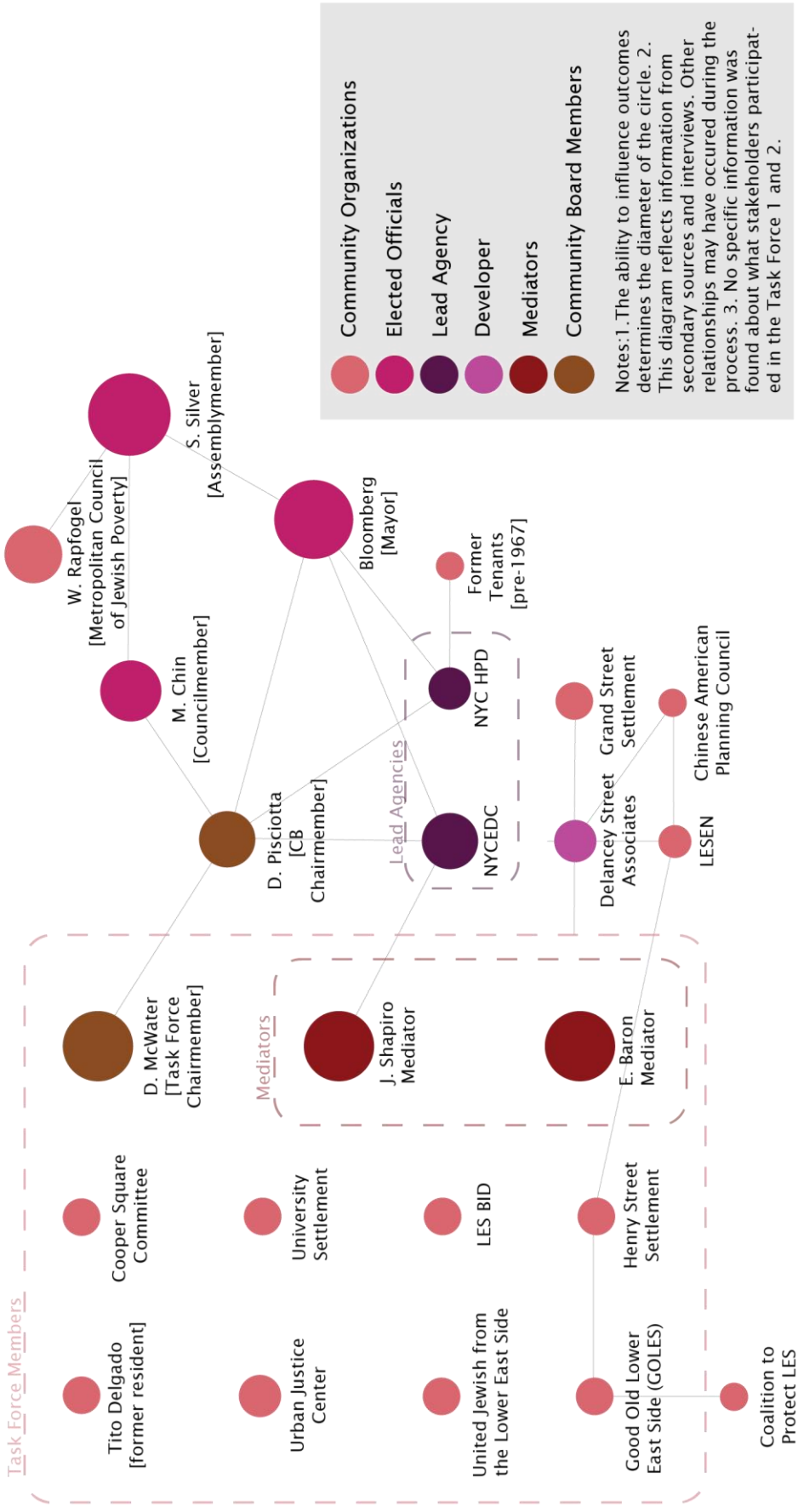
3. *Planners concerned with equity and justice, should try to foster and encourage experienced, knowledgeable, politically skillful community groups, either by working with them or working for them.*

Working with or for community-based-organizations can help to identify critical issues and concerns of the community. These relationships between planners and community organizations can help to build trustful relations and enable a reliable connection between planners, the community, and the traditional decision-makers. Additionally, these organizations likely hold the knowledge on how to advocate for neighborhood change, how communities usually react to changes, and how to influence elected officials, developers, or Community Board members.

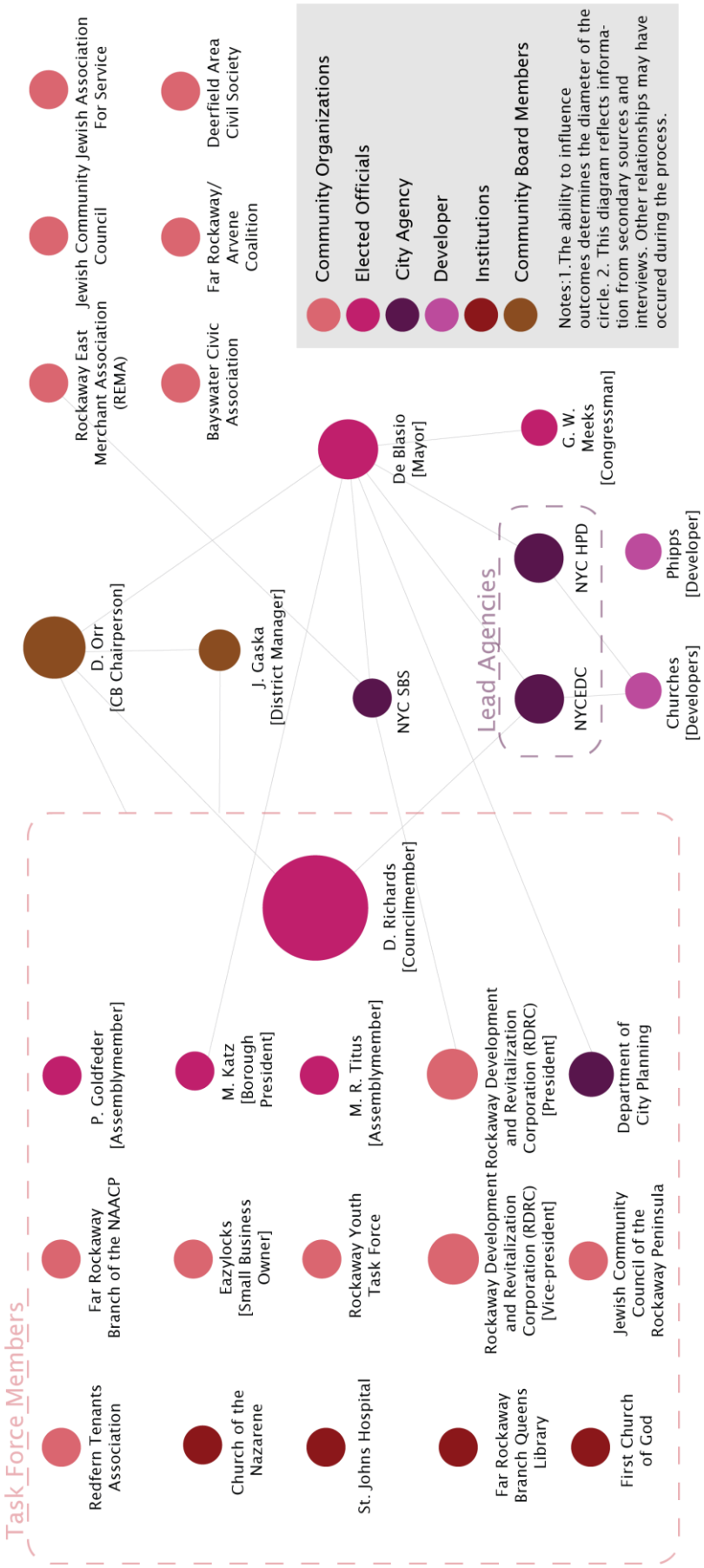
V. Appendices

Appendix 1: Case Studies Location Map

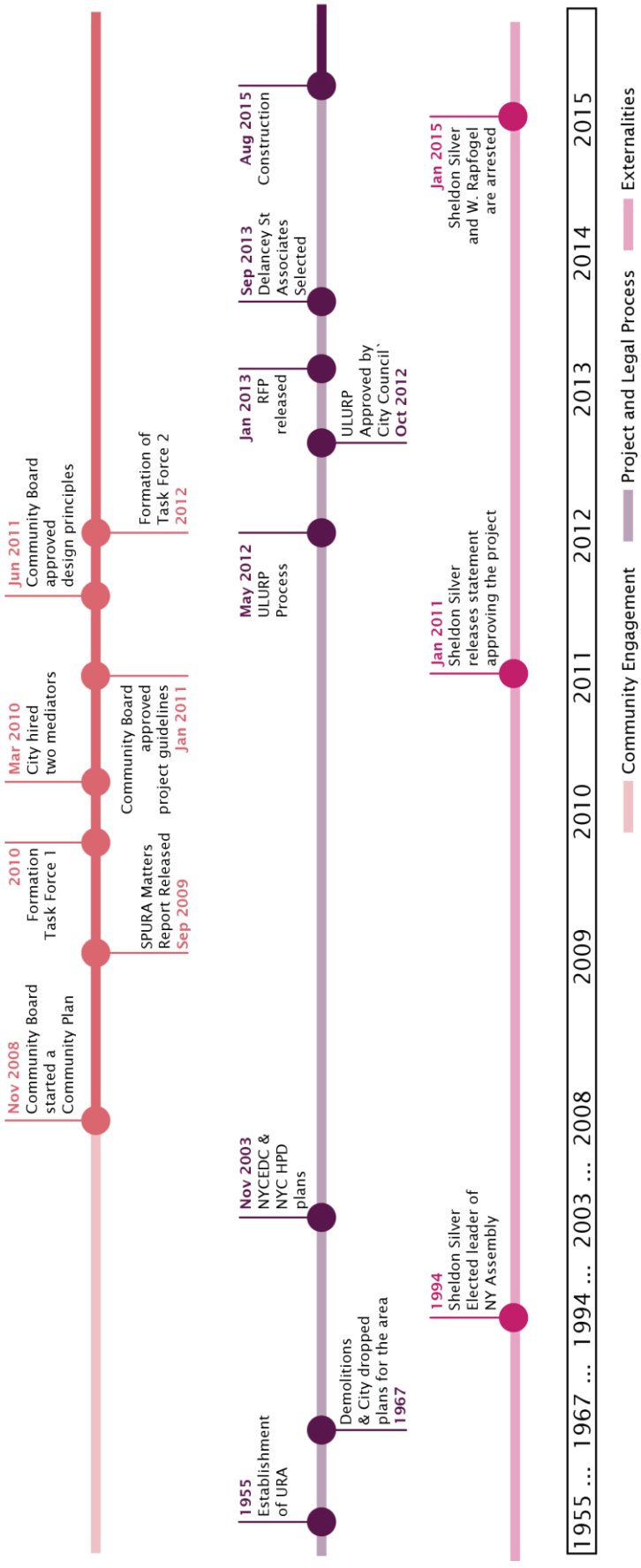
Appendix 2: Stakeholders Map – Essex Crossing



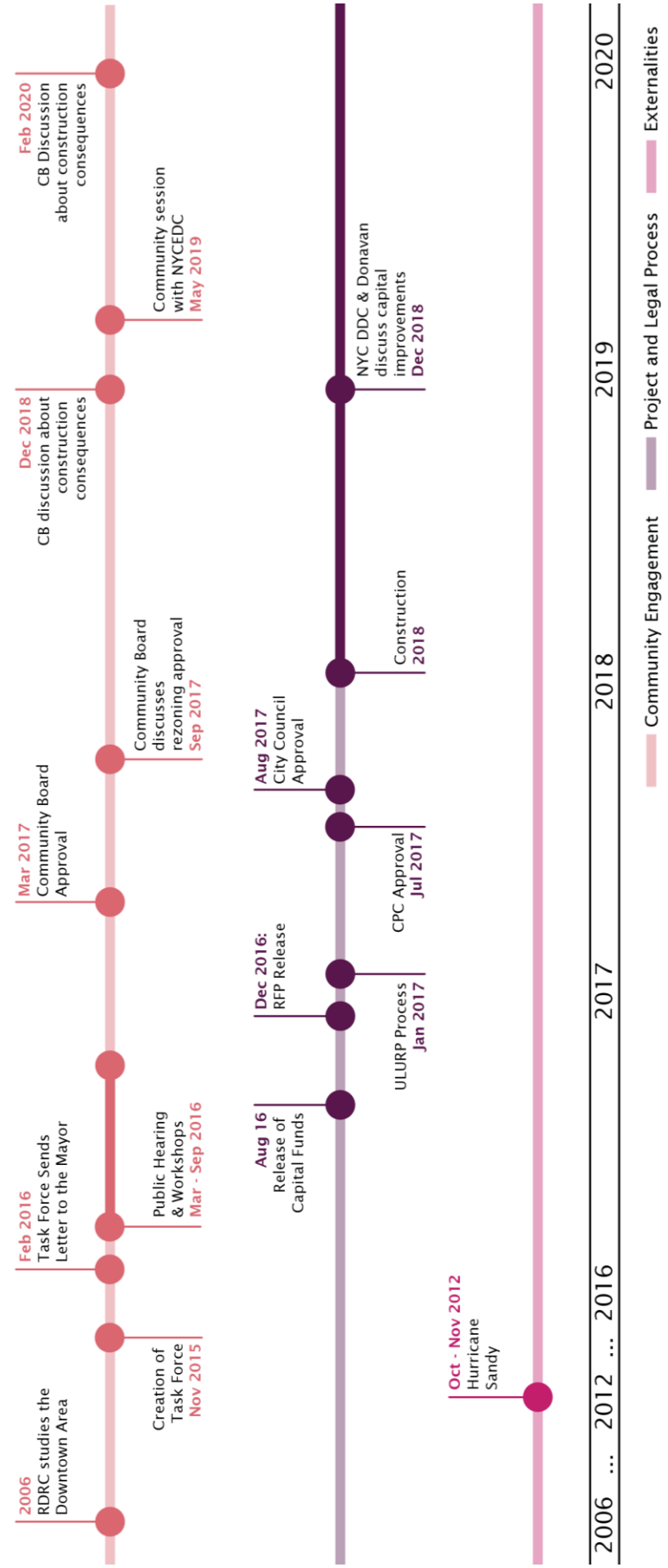
Appendix 3: Stakeholder Map: Downtown Far Rockaway Rezoning



Appendix 4: Timeline- Seward Park Urban Renewal Area and Essex Crossing Development



Appendix 5: Timeline- Downtown Far Rockaway Rezoning



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