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DECISION MAKING AND CONFLICT IN AN URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD:
AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF THREE ISSUES

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln

PH.D.

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PREVIEW

DECISION MAKING AND CONFLICT IN AN URBAN
NEIGHBORHOOD: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF THREE ISSUES

BY

Geoffrey W. Grant

A DISSERTATION

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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Sociology

Under the Supervision of Professor Jerry S. Cloyd

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 1980

TITLE

DECISION MAKING AND CONFLICT IN AN URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD:

AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF THREE ISSUES

BY

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DECISION MAKING AND CONFLICT IN AN URBAN
NEIGHBORHOOD: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF THREE ISSUES

Geoffrey W. Grant, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1980

Adviser: Jerry S. Cloyd

This is an observational study of community interaction and decision making processes in a San Francisco neighborhood. A number of theoretical approaches to community conflict are reviewed, specifically the work of James Coleman and William Gamson. The structure of the City, neighborhood, and interest groups is described. Then three specific issues of conflict within the neighborhood serve as cases where community conflict was observed. The first case involved the attempts by a group of people to restore a local park. The second case involved the attempts of local institutions, hospitals, to expand their facilities in the community and the resistance to that expansion. The third case involved conflict over a proposed community cultural center. Each of these cases was analyzed to see what it could show about the processes of conflict and methods used to reach goals. The theoretical orientations of Coleman and Gamson were analyzed in the light of these observations, and they were found inadequate to understand the processes of conflict and decision making within these contexts. Finally the observations were used to develop a

model of community group decision making and conflict. It was found that there was a culture of community activism acting to maintain diversity of neighborhood characteristics and a positive residential nature. The process of change in the issues, the role of the Federal Government, and the personal energy of the leaders is also discussed.

PREVIEW

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although it may be trite to acknowledge the aid of one's wife when writing a dissertation, I cannot honestly avoid placing my wife, Sue, at the top of the list of people who have made a major contribution to this work. A thousand and one times she has taken time from her overly busy day to sit down at the spur of the moment to read a chapter, proof read a page, look up the spelling of a word, or do one of the endless tasks which a project such as this creates. Not only did she endure my presence at home while I was writing and re-writing this dissertation, she put up with my absence while I was in the field doing the observation, and during the endless weekends when I couldn't stay home with her and my son, Jeremy. While this work has not been easy for me, I'm sure it has been difficult for her. Her love and support made possible the completion of this dissertation.

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of my sister, Anna Darden. Not only was she willing to spend hours talking with me about my ideas, she aided me in the task of copy editing the rough drafts, and they were plenty rough when she first saw them. Her experience and insight were a great contribution. She openly shared her familiarity with both the City and the neighborhood. Her contributions cannot be easily summed up or even enumerated.

I would like to both acknowledge the contribution and thank my committee for their help, advice, and understanding through what were, for me, some difficult and troubled times. I am especially indebted to Professors Harry J. Crockett, Jr. and Jerry Cloyd. Professor Crockett aided me in my re-instatement in graduate school. He shepherded my cause through the formal, bureaucratic channels of the University when I was unable to be present to look after my own interests. His help was surely beyond the "call." Professor Cloyd provided the critical reading of the dissertation which greatly helped its logic and clarity. The reader should keep in mind that those places where it lacks these qualities are in no way Professor Cloyd's fault, but rather my own inabilities. There were times when he saw exactly what I was thinking even when I was unable to commit it all to paper. His faith in this project provided me with the push to finish. While the graduate student-advisor relationship is laden with a potential for conflict, I found my own experience to be both warm and positive. I have very positive feelings of what I have received from both Professors Crockett and Cloyd.

I would also like to acknowledge the people who this dissertation is about. They are more to me than just the subjects of my study. I spent a good deal of time with many of them and they accepted me, not as a researcher, but

as a friend. For the four months I was in the community I never felt that I was intruding, or was in-the-way, although I was something of a permanent fixture at some of the meetings. These people not only provided me with information, but truly made me feel at home among them. They were dedicating their lives to the interests of their community and I have come to respect them a great deal for their courage and sincerity. I have also been surprised at their success in dealing with the City bureaucracy. To find that a relatively small group of individuals are able to take on a whole city the size of San Francisco and win on the issues gives me faith that, at least occasionally, individuals are able to stand up to large scale organization, and to change the very nature of that organization for the better.

Special thanks goes to my typist, Irene Vick. Her speed and accuracy magically transformed my often badly cluttered pages into finished copy.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

PREVIEW

Introductory Statement

This is a study of community interaction and decision-making processes in a San Francisco neighborhood. We will begin by surveying some theoretical treatments of such processes. These contributed by sensitizing the writer to relevant relationships and events during the data collection and interpreting the processes observed. Next, we will attempt to set the stage by describing the relevant organizational structure of the City, the nature of the sub-community in which the study was conducted, the relevant associations within the sub-community and the important actors in the decision-making processes observed there.

Once the stage has been set, and the actors introduced, we will present a drama in three acts, each followed by an analysis of what that episode has to show us about social decision-making in this specific community and its general implications. Finally, after all three issues have been reviewed, we will attempt to draw general conclusions about the decision-making process in this setting and what it has to say about the validity and relevance of the orientation to community decision-making with which we began.

Throughout this dissertation the identity of the community has not been exposed. As author and researcher I felt that I owed the individuals who were so kind and open with me in their discussions of sensitive community issues the courtesy to keep their identity confidential. The purpose of this research was to investigate the community

decision-making process. Nothing would be gained in working toward this goal by discussing the personalities involved who were the sources of this information.

The names of all community groups have been changed as have the names of all community leaders. In quotations where these names were used, they have been omitted and the category referred to put into brackets in its place, such as (community) instead of using the community's name.

Concealing the identity of the individuals, organizations, and the community should in no way detract from or add to the quality of the observations or generalizations drawn from them.

The major focus of this study is the articulation of politics and local interests. This articulation may be further broken down into a number of social processes, such as interest group formation, conflict, and the methods used in pursuing local interests. While conflict seems inherent in these processes, the way in which conflict is played out in the local community is seen as unclear. There are a multitude of ways in which groups can conflict with one another. One of the major focuses of this study was to find out what the nature of the methods used in these conflicts were and why the various groups used particular methods in reaching for their goals.

On this stage there are many players and their roles are often complex and intertwined. The reader must remember that no matter how complex the interrelationships

of community leaders and groups, they do not interact in a vacuum, but the City, State, and Federal authorities also play roles.

Concepts and Definitions

Community

The sociological literature on the community has contained numerous definitions of the term "community." Each has focused on one aspect of a community as being more important than other aspects.

Albert J. Reiss Jr. (1959) has pointed out two major approaches to the community, ecological and social organizational. The social organization perspective has been further broken down into the community as microcosm of society and as interaction space. A third major approach is a more social psychological approach exemplified by Robert M. MacIver and Charles H. Pages' (1949) "community of sentiment."

The ecological approach may be best seen in the work of Amos Hawley (1950) who focused on the spatial interrelationship of community life. He looked at the day to day rhythm of community activity. The ecological approach, as Reiss noted, focuses on the internal structure of the community. This has ignored the more social psychological view of community interest, a fact Leo Schnore (1967) points out when he says, "The ecologist, then, does not deny the existence or importance of the psychological aspects of community life. He simply prefers to regard it as a

separate facet of the object under investigation, and to leave its study to others." (p. 86)

The social organization approach to community has two sub-parts. Reiss (1959) describes the first as:

The conventional treatment of communities, particularly omnibus community studies, presents the community as a microcosm of the larger society social macrocosm--as the smallest territorial system which encompasses the major features of society. A community is usually seen as possessing a system of stratification, a power structure, characteristic institutions such as educational, religious, and economic ones, and so on, depending upon the "complexity" of its organizations.

(Albert J. Reiss Jr.,
1959, p. 125).

The second sub-part of the social organizational approach focuses on interaction space. This was first defined by E. T. Hiller (1941) as quoted in Reiss (1959). This view, "takes as its major focus that the community involves collective action toward the realization of common goals, arising in a residence sustenance locality." (p. 126, Emphasis in original). This interactionist definition of community was carried on in the work of Harold Kaufman (1959) who pointed out that the "community may be seen as a network of interrelated associations, formal and informal, whose major function is problem solving for the local society." (p. 12)

In a more psychological approach to the term community, Robert M. MacIver and Charles H. Page (1949) have defined as "...awareness of sharing a way of life as well as the common earth." They list four elements in their notion of

"sentiment": 1) a common interest as members of a community and the obligations and responsibilities that form social cohesion, 2) a "we-feeling" which may be based on interest or sentiment, 3) a "role-feeling" which refers to reciprocal relationships and 4) a "dependency-feeling" which involved both physical and psychological dependency. This conception of "community" may be applied to the small area or geographic residence or to the larger multigroup urban district which is not so geographically focused.

MacIver and Pages' definition of the term community is very similar to the counter-culture use of this term. Within the counter-culture those referring to a "community" usually mean a kind of cultural solidarity and similarity between people. This similarity is important because the neighborhood which is the focus of this study has had a long history of being a counter-culture center.

Group

Within any community there may be a number of different groups which maintain different perceptions of their community. These group differences do not create new or different communities, but a single "community of sentiment" in which conflict may become a dominant relationship. The interests and goals of competing groups are still very much intertwined within a single community.

There may be individuals who live within the residential area but who are not "of" the community in the sense that they do not carry any mental image or identification in

terms of group belonging. The local community non-members do not see their interests identified with the community in any way. Most probably the majority of individuals living within large, multicultural, urban neighborhoods never associate, identify, or participate in any community activities. By far the most important community members are those who actively participate in community affairs.

It becomes important to identify the groups and their nature that are involved in the community. There are collectivities with common social characteristics which are not strictly groups at all. Both Ralf Dahrendorf (1959) and Ginsberg (1953) have applied the term "quasi-group" to such social categories. Such collectivities usually have very little interest for sociologists. However, when these "quasi-groups" live within a single community they become of interest. There is a chance of forming a consciousness of kind around commonly held social characteristics. At this point they are no longer "quasi" but have become what William Gamson (1968) calls the "solidary group." These groups are more or less formally organized for advocacy of issues. The "solidary group" is described as, "...the constituency of an organized interest group." (p. 34) This is an important concept in community studies. For "solidary groups" play a role in any community dispute, and their entry into any conflict is a major escalation. Community conflict is often carried out in the name of these groups as constitutencies.