Adjusting to Local Context, History, Strengths and Challenges when Partnering with Neighborhoods

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Saturday, November 3, 2012

UNC CHARLOTTE

Charlotte Action Research Project (CHARP)

Research Question

What can we learn about the impact of different neighborhood contexts on participatory community revitalization/organizing processes applied in partnership with challenged neighborhoods?

- Learning from comparisons between very different types of neighborhoods
  - Physical and social characteristics of neighborhoods
  - Culture and history of a neighborhood and neighborhood organization as context for participatory processes
- Reflecting on the importance of considering shifting sources of funding as a determining factor of how a partnership evolves.

The Charlotte Action Research Project

Mission

- *To build and support **partnerships** between community-based organizations serving challenged Charlotte **neighborhoods** and **students and faculty** at UNC Charlotte*

- *Consistently and proactively seek to **integrate teaching, research, and action** to work toward a larger agenda of social justice in partnerships with local neighborhoods*

- *To establish a **mutually beneficial partnership** that will build capacity and engagement in and between these communities*

CHARP Timeline

2008:
Project Begins

- Neighborhood meeting attendance.
- Student volunteers and service learning projects.

Relationship Building

2009:
City Funding

- Graduate assistant neighborhood liaisons.
- Grant writing and events.
- Capacity building to "graduation."

Service Provision

Spring 2012:
Funding Cut

- Internal evaluation.
- "Narrowing" approach.
- Shift away from Service Provision.

Reflection and Regrouping

Fall 2012:
University Funding

- Social Justice and Action Research.
- Networking and coalition building.
- Intentional growth and long-term commitments.

New Stability

Methodology

Comparative case study of partnerships in five different neighborhoods

- Presentation today will mainly focus on two of those in the interest of time

- **Participant observation** (graduate students engaged in the partnership);

- **Service learning** projects (neighborhood planning workshops) leading to significant knowledge of neighborhood physical conditions, history, and stakeholder visions for the neighborhoods;

- **Interviews** (IRB approved) with neighborhood residents focused on

  - Resident relationship with graduate student Community Liaison/CHARP

  - Degree to which program focused on **service provision** vs**. transformational change/empowerment**

  - Place attachment and social capital

  - Leadership in neighborhood and partnership contexts

  - Conflicts—within neighborhood, with CHARP, and external

- **Qualitative analysis** with NVivo software

Data

- 30 **interviews** transcribed and coded in NVivo

- Four years of **field notes** from neighborhood work

  - written reflections on process by community liaisons

  - meeting minutes, flyers, newsletters, email exchanges

  - pictures from events

- Neighborhood **planning documents** and other **service learning products**

Analysis

- **Maps** created to summarize unique qualities of each neighborhood to frame the analysis.
  - Incorporating information from field notes and neighborhood plans.
- **Coding** of transcribed interviews according to themes in interview guide and with additional organic themes emerging.
- **Merging** context of maps with analysis of interviews to create an understanding of the impact of differences between neighborhoods on partnership outcomes and experiences.

Case Study Neighborhoods

UNC Charlotte

Windy Ridge

Graham Heights

Enderly Park

Uptown

Farm Pond

Reid Park
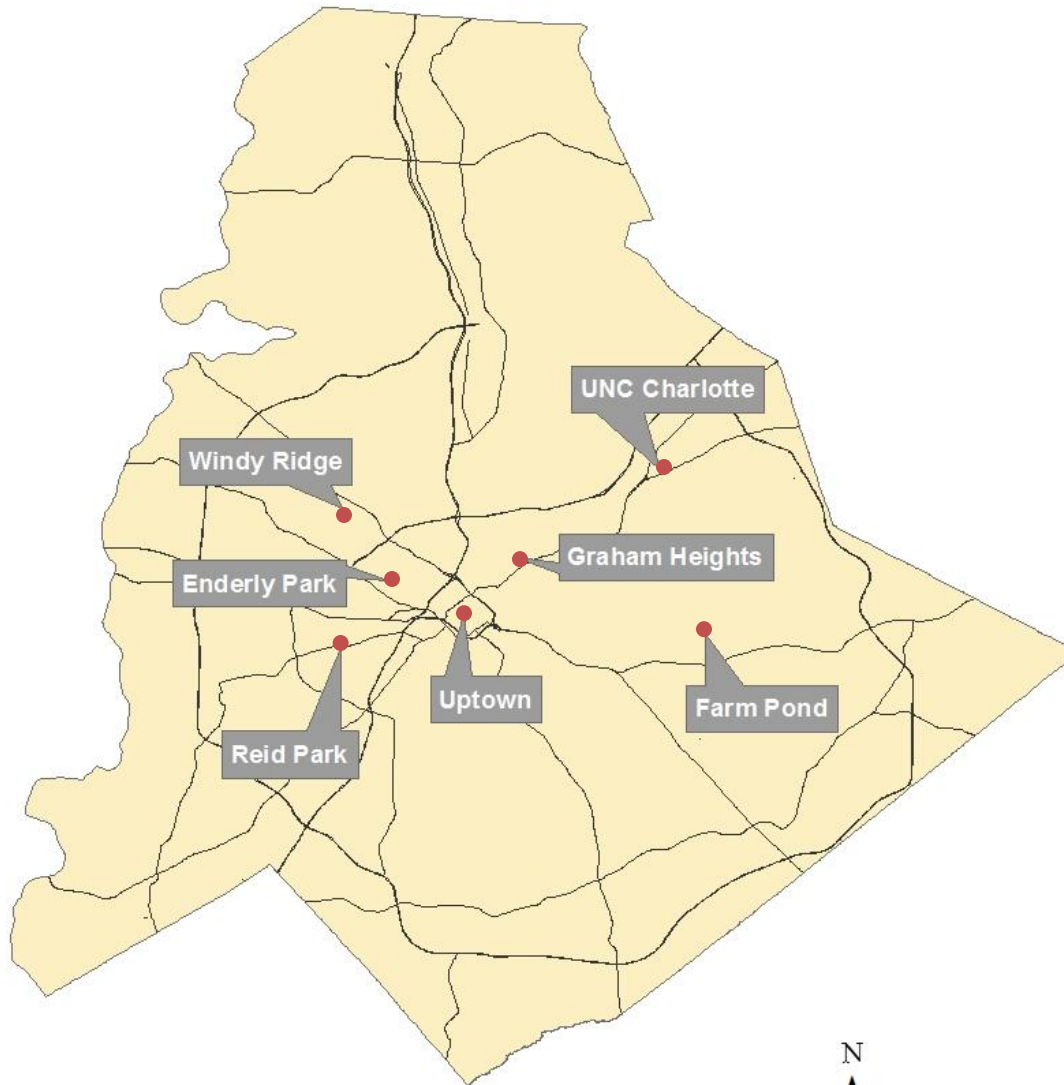
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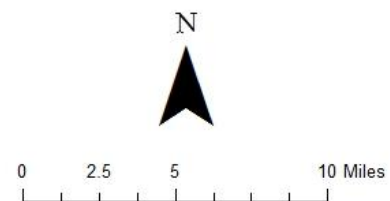
Findings:
Summary Table Quantifying Partnership Outcomes

	Duration	Participation	Social Event Success	Physical Improvement Buy-in	Action Research
Enderly Park	2 years	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow
Farm Pond	2 years	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Graham Heights	1 year	Green	Green	Green	Red
Reid Park	3 years	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow
Windy Ridge	4 years	Red	Red	Red	Green

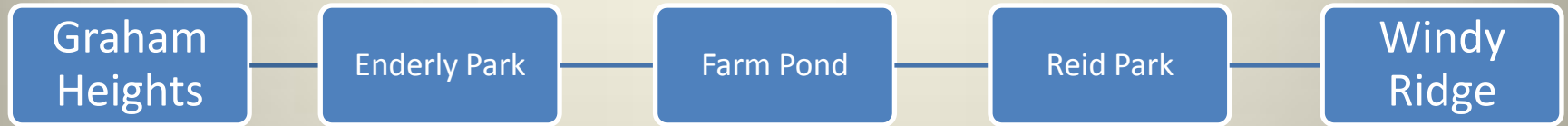**Low** (Red) **High** (Green) **Medium** (Yellow)

Findings:
Contrasting Two of the Neighborhoods

	Duration	Participation	Social Event Success	Physical Improvement Buy-in	Action Research
Graham Heights	1 year	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴
Windy Ridge	4 years	🔴	🔴	🔴	🟢

Neighborhood Context Continuum

| Graham Heights | Enderly Park | Farm Pond | Reid Park | Windy Ridge |

Theme/Element	Graham Heights	Windy Ridge
Establish/Strengthen a **neighborhood organization** with voice and access to create positive change	CHARP model is working – just one year in we see growth in leadership and participation	Not always an appropriate goal – we now propose dismantling HOA
Physical improvements	Small scale beautification projects are generating excitement and sense of empowerment	"Band aid" projects that could do more harm than good as it serves to "satisfy" instead of addressing larger scale issues of environmental justice
Building **social capital**	NA established 1980/Neighborhood built in 1950 – CHARP helping integrate "new-comers" and address internal conflicts w. renters/owners	Distrust and isolation. Neighborhood as waypoint to new location. Little or no progress made over 4 years of trying.
Action Research	With time this becomes possible – we see reluctance to move beyond beautification – relationship w. city is valued and residents are concerned about upsetting it.	Several projects undertaken with success in learning but not much actual change accomplished yet. While projects originate in neighborhood needs not enough participation.

Resident Voices Example:
Attachment and Empowerment

Graham Heights	Windy Ridge

Graham Heights:

"I can see progress that we've made and I really think better things are going to come."

"I mean the people began to feel more confidence...and more people started coming out and start working with us..."

"This neighborhood means so much to me cause I grew up in it..."

Windy Ridge:

"Nobody knows what we're supposed to be doing or what resources we have."

"Honestly there's a lot of people I can [blame]... the police, the builder, the real estate company, the people that live here all have a part.."

"I thought you had to dial 911 to get a police officer...but when...he told me to email him or whatever, that was totally different for me."

Conclusions

- **Same model** of university-community partnership is not applicable in all neighborhood contexts
  - Example of Graham Heights/Windy Ridge begins to explain why and points to adjustments necessary for successful participatory processes
- **Long-term engagement** is critical in working towards all the goals of the partnership
  - for different reasons in different neighborhood types
  - in particular for moving towards an action research approach with real community buy-in as a step up the participatory ladder from the community-based research we currently engage in
- We must be conscious of how **funding** impacts CHARP's mission and guard against **goal displacement** (Froelich 1999) – this is highlighted by the timeline developed in this project.

What's Next for CHARP?

- Strengthen the **action research focus** in all the neighborhoods
- **Capitalize on the relationships and trust** we have built over the last four years in order to bring neighborhood partners together to discuss social justice and develop a clear mission statement for CHARP
  - Community Advisory Board
- **Caution ourselves of being spread too thin** across many neighborhoods
  - need to secure more funding if we want to do this effectively.
- Continue to learn from our partnerships about how to work in very **different types of neighborhoods**
  - extend this research to understand what this means for others (city planners for example) who want to engage residents in participatory processes.