PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN PUBLIC HOUSING?
UNDERSTANDING SPACES FOR PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT
THROUGH THE TENANT REPRESENTATIVE ROLE

By

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for the degree of Masters of Arts
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Abstract

In order to address the disconnection between the governing and the governed in our democracies and bureaucracies, many practitioners and academics are looking at models such as participatory governance to increase empowerment and foster better decision-making. Although this model has some encouraging possibilities, there are challenges to implementing an empowering and participatory process. To better understand these issues, this research focused on tenant representatives’ understanding and experience of their role in a recently implemented participatory process in the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. Representatives reported taking on extensive responsibilities to improve their communities and interviews with tenants suggested empowerment and citizenship were often products of tenant participation. The research also found limitations on empowerment and the extent to which tenants saw themselves as agents and decision-makers in the Tenant Participation System. The paper connects how structure and education impacts the possibilities for agency and empowerment of participants.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mom, Ruth and my dad, Kevin who helped me get to where I am today by being both my support and role models. Their enjoyment of life and capacity for love constantly inspires me. The community of friends and family that I share with my parents gives me determination and hope for positive change in the world because it provides me with the example of what is possible and how beautiful people can be.

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1. Introduction

As there is evidence of decreases in traditional forms of civic engagement in many nations around the world, questions about what can be done to re-democratise and re-connect our societies are becoming crucial. ‘Political disaffection’ or ‘disenchantment’ marked by a lack of trust and political participation in the more sanctioned forms of democratic engagement such as, voting and joining political parties has been noted in world-wide research (Dalton, 2004; Hay, 2007; Stoker, 2006; Torcal & Montero, 2006). For example, in Canada, The United States, Latin America and the European Union, there has been a general decline in voter turnout. (Howe, 2003; Phelps, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Rubenson, Blais, Fournier, Gidengil & Nevitte, 2004; Stoker, 2006; Torcal & Montero, 2006). As voting is one of the easiest political acts to perform and the most sanctioned practice in democracies, this widespread decline should be causing some alarm with respect to the quality or the legitimacy of our current democracies.

As a result of concerns about the quality and functioning of our democracies, increasingly projects focused on engaging people in novel and more direct ways with the institutions that impact their lives, have been put forward (Barber, 2003; Fung & Wright 2003; Wainwright, 2003). Participatory democracy is an example of such a solution, where citizens who are affected by decisions are included in the decision-making process. The important function that public participation in decision-making can serve in a democracy have been described by a number of political theorists and the idea reaches far back into political thought and debate. In “The Social Contract”, Rousseau maintains that when citizens participate in constructing the laws and institutions that govern their lives it enables freedom, responsible government, and responsible citizenry
because the people are active in creating the institutions and laws that they obey. An important point to Rousseau’s “The Social Contract” was that he described individual changes in people that would be fostered through participation and association. Rousseau suggested that as people participate in decision-making they move towards a more rational and justice-oriented nature and through association are better able to make decisions that benefit the common good (Rousseau, 1968). Pateman highlights the important implications of Rousseau’s premise:

[as this system is established] it becomes self-sustaining because the very qualities that are required of individual citizens if the system is to work successfully are those that the process of participation itself develops and fosters; the more the individual citizen participates the better able he is to do so. (25)

Similarly, Mill (1958) conveys the importance of a governance system that enhances the moral, intellectual, and active qualities of the people, and claimed that the most desirable form of government was one in which the citizens participate and share in the sovereignty of the state. In line with this premise that participation encourages public-spirited citizens and good government, Tocqueville (1964) in his work “Democracy in America” describes the benefits that political association can produce, particularly in terms of encouraging concern for the common good and enabling citizens to practice decision-making to ensure they can uphold democracy. Tocqueville (1964) also warns of the dangers that can befall a disengaged populace:

When the bulk of the community are engrossed by private concerns, the smallest parties need not despair of getting the upper hand in public affairs. At such times, it is not rare to see upon the great stage of the world, as we see at our theatres a multitude represented by a few players, who alone speak in the name of an absent or inattentive crowd. (211)

Although Rousseau, Mill, and Tocqueville are some of the prominent classic figures cited in the argument for participation of the populace in political decision-
making, many theorists suggest that by providing spaces for people to deliberate and engage in decision-making that affects them, democracy can be enhanced and civic virtues can be fostered (Barber, 2003; Mansbridge, 1999; Pateman, 1970). One change that has occurred in the more recent literature on participatory democracy is a shift away from such a strong focus on one common good, as the importance of diversity and self-interest in the political process has been recognised (see Habermas, 1996; Jansen, Chioncel & Dekkers, 2006; Mansbridge, 2003). Still participatory spaces that involve deliberation are assumed to enable citizens to connect their individual concerns with the ones of larger society or move from “me” to “we” and to develop citizen capacity (Abers, 2000; Barber, 2003; Jansen et al., 2006; Mansbridge, 1999; Pateman, 1970;).

Of equal importance in these spaces is the potential for empowerment, as people see how they can have a real impact in their community. Participatory processes, when opened up and structured in a way that supports the participation of more marginalized groups in society, can empower and bring in as actors in our democracies groups, which are often left out. Lower levels of participation are typically found among groups that have more barriers to participate or pay a higher cost and gain fewer benefits than the general population through their efforts to impact political decisions. For example, people from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds generally participate less in political activities, have lower impact on the structures and have fewer social ties to decision-makers (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995).

One tactic that has been found to be effective in encouraging participation from lower SES categories and other groups often absent in political decision-making, is to connect decision-making opportunities with issues that concern these groups and lead to
real outcomes (Abers, 2000; Baiocchi, 2003b; Fung & Wright, 2003). Projects that enhance participation from lower SES categories are often based on the Freirean notion to value the lived experiences of people and respect popular knowledge (Freire, 2000). The most successful contemporary participatory project of this kind, is arguably located in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where since 1989 the municipal government has implemented a system that allows the citizens to make decisions on a substantial portion of the annual budget. Although the participatory budget of Porto Alegre is the most well known example, in the last two decades, approximately 1200 municipalities around the world have initiated participatory budgets (Worldwatch Institute, 2007).

Moreover, there are a number of different projects across the globe tying participation to action, enabling public spheres and encouraging groups often excluded from the political arena to contribute to decisions. These examples provide us practices to look at and learn from to elucidate what attributes encourage participation, social justice and stronger democratic practices.

The potential that democratic spaces have to improve our democracies, encourage democratic citizenship and enable social justice drives the interest of the researcher in this thesis topic. In recent years the literature on participation has increasingly focused on the particular attributes of participatory projects that encourage empowerment, broad and deep participation as well as help to move citizens into active participants in their democracies (Cornwall, 2004; Fung & Wright, 2003; Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999; Wainwright, 2003). In part guided by the lessons researchers have taken from the practice of participatory democracy, this thesis focuses on a particular project in Canada
with the aim of understanding the ways that empowerment, learning, and active citizenship can be fostered or limited in the crafting of participation.

**Significance, Objectives and Research questions**

The project of focus was one in Canada called the Tenant Participation System (TPS), which was implemented in the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC). This project was of interest because the TCHC houses a population of people that can be considered disempowered as they are often low income and likely do not have control over political decisions in their everyday lives. Therefore it was interesting to look at the intricacies of enabling participation from those who might not be familiar with the opportunity, and to also analyse in what ways the project empowered them to have more control over their lives and communities. As the opportunity for decision-making lay mainly in the role of the tenant representative, the focus of the research was to look at how this role was utilised and viewed by the tenant representatives and whether it was effective in fostering participation and empowerment.

The tenant representative role is interesting because it involves learning new activities and behaviours as well as increased responsibilities. Past relationships and power dynamics had the potential to affect how representatives approached this new role, as these relationships do not automatically change with a new system. The present study sought to understand the potential benefits and difficulties of the tenant representative role within the TPS, as well as to reveal whether it enabled participation from the general tenant population and allowed the tenant representatives to feel as though they could have an impact in their community. How the different representatives have experienced these new roles and what they have learned from participating in the process is an important
part of understanding the difficulties and successes associated with implementing participatory processes. My intention was to look at the Tenant Participation System to try to gain a better understanding of the intricacies involved in developing a participatory culture and process. The goal of this research was to provide better insight into how the design and implementation of participatory democracy can impact the experiences and understandings of the people involved. The overarching question and sub-questions that framed the research were:

**How do the tenant representatives at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation experience and perceive their roles in the Tenant Participation System?**

- How do the tenant representatives understand this role and conceptualise the limits and possibilities attached?

- What are the social relationships that define and direct this role?

- What are the potentials and challenges of this role for encouraging empowerment of the tenant population and achieving broad and deep participation?

- How are the pedagogical supports and the design of the process affecting the tenants’ perceptions of the process and their roles?
2. Conceptual framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the notion that democracy can be improved through fostering citizen participation and empowerment. The theories that clarify how this may happen touch on reforming understandings of citizenship, providing particular structures of participation that promote empowerment, and cultivating a participatory culture within and through these spaces. This framework focuses on a number of dimensions connected to implementing projects of participation including, citizens’ understanding of their roles as actors; transforming relations; issues surrounding power and the possibilities and barriers for empowerment; as well as the potential supports and structures that can affect these aspects.

Active Citizenship

There are a number of drawbacks to our existing representative system, such as the trend of “political disaffection” mentioned earlier, as well as decision-making that often serves privileged interests before the general population. Therefore an important focus for improving our current democracies is to bring in as participants, citizens who are not being heard or not engaging. Two goals associated with this task are: 1) to reshape understandings of citizenship, moving beyond simply a privileged status with rights attached to more of an active understanding of citizenship that includes a right to participate along with a responsibility to a wider community and 2) to empower people marginalized from decision-making and transform the social relationships that inhibit their agency.

A project put forward by a number of current academics is to shape new understandings of citizenship in order to reflect an active process, where citizens help
shape the society they belong to (Cornwall, 2004; Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000; Gaventa, 2004; Jansen et al., 2006). Gaventa (2004) argues for connecting people to the bureaucracies that affect them and recasting the understanding of citizenship as “practiced rather than given” (29). He refers to this type of citizenship as “participatory citizenship.” This conception of citizenship “recognises the agency of citizens as ‘makers and shapers’ rather than ‘users and choosers’ of interventions of services designed by others” (29). As citizens are given more agency, they move from “passive beneficiaries” to active agents who can ensure greater accountability (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000). Jansen et al., (2006) suggest fostering active citizens by providing diverse spaces for people to practice deliberation, and participate in the institutions that constitute society. They assert that the participatory citizenship constructed by these practices can help to strike a balance between communality and freedom as it supports group participation and a concern for the commons without the expectation of a commitment to shared values. Although one of the goals is to increase concern for the commons, self-interest is also valuable because it motivates people to participate and helps to ensure their interests are being addressed instead of subsumed (Abers, 2000; 2004; Mansbridge, 2004).

The conception of the active citizen described by Jansen et al., Cornwall and Gaventa involves elements of responsibility, agency, and individual needs and interests. Constructing citizens as active, responsible, independent decision-makers can improve the democratic fabric as people are engaged in keeping the decisions affecting them relevant to their needs and experiences. This alternative understanding of citizenship focuses on the importance of linking citizens to the public sphere. It is assumed that
through allowing quality spaces for people to practice participation and deliberation this active or participatory citizenship can be constructed. Gaventa (2006) explains that although the institutions and procedures of democracy are fairly widespread “the critical challenge now is how to deepen their inclusiveness and substance, especially in terms of how citizens engage within democratic spaces to create more just and equitable states and societies” (1).

Providing opportunities for people to participate in deliberative decision-making has the potential to reconstitute citizenship as well as to address social exclusion by supporting the participation of groups often marginalized from traditional decision-making processes. When these groups are invited in as legitimate decision-makers whose knowledge is respected, this can empower people who previously were not considered competent or suitable decision-makers. Transforming hierarchical relations to a more equal and mutually respectful level can be an important aspect to participatory deliberative democracy yet it is also not guaranteed. Transforming relations of power is not an easy or straightforward goal and power relations can be carried forward and perpetuated in participatory processes. There are many different ways that spaces for participation can be opened up. The possibilities for fostering active citizens and transforming relationships are at least in part determined by what kinds of structures, spaces and supports are provided for the participants.

**Empowerment and Participation**

Empowerment is an important potential benefit associated to participation. In fact, the existence or absence of opportunities for empowerment often indicates the extent to which participatory projects really involve a transfer of power to participants. Arnstein
(1969) contends that citizen participation is synonymous with citizen power because “it is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future” (2). Although participation is an important step towards empowering people who are often excluded from “the benefits of society” or even victimised through attempts to help them, projects of participation are not necessarily empowering as some exist to legitimize the decisions of power holders instead of to give decision-making control to participants. Arnstein argues there are degrees or levels of participation that span from projects which do not really provide decision-making power at all, but instead maintain the status quo, to projects that actually put real control over decision-making in the hands of participants. To illustrate this continuum she utilises a ladder of participation that includes eight rungs which ascend from ‘non-power’ to ‘citizen control; and represent “the extent of citizen power in determining the end product’ (2). The bottom rungs are grouped into the category of ‘non-participation’. The processes in these categories are meant to help or educate participants or “engineer their support” not bring them in as respected decision-makers. ‘Tokenism’, which encompasses the middle group of rungs, moves towards giving participants access to power-making structures and therefore some kind of increased impact on decisions, but citizens do not have any clout to ensure their decisions are put into action by the powerful. Finally the top rungs provide participants with real opportunities to make decisions. These rungs include processes where those who typically have little power are enabled to powershare with the decision-makers, as well as processes where those typically outside of the power structures are delegated near-complete control. The important function of the ladder is to illustrate that participation is
not a uniform concept but that there are degrees and gradations of the extent of citizen participation. This reflects the “demands for participation from the have-nots as well as the gamut of confusing responses from the power holders” (3). Arnstein utilises examples from real practices of participation to illustrate the meanings of each of these rungs. Sometimes negative reactions from participants, such as feeling alienated by their experiences in processes associated with the lower rungs on the ladder would force those in power to change participation practices to reflect the rungs of participation higher on the ladder.

Fung and Wright (2003) outline the motivating and institutional supports associated with participatory governance that encourage empowerment and name the model “Empowered Participatory Governance” (EPG). They review a number of projects and describe the institutional designs associated with all of them that help to deepen the participation and influence of citizens in the decisions that affect them.

The underlying values that are promoted in Empowered Participatory Governance are, participation, empowerment and deliberation. The initiatives enact these values in that they “rely upon the commitments and capacities of ordinary people to make sensible decisions through reasoned deliberation,” empowerment is achieved through tying action to the discussion (5). Fung and Wright suggest particular participatory structures can provide new ways of developing democratic strategies that advance a list of values such as, egalitarian social justice, popular control over collective decisions, as well as community and solidarity. The basic shared attributes of projects that reflect the EPG model are:
1. They deal with problems of practical concern to the participant, grounding deliberation in real and specific problems

2. Ordinary people affected by the issues as well as officials are included in the decision-making in what is labelled bottom-up participation

3. It involves deliberative problem solving, which means listening to differing viewpoints and generating decisions based on group concerns and discussions. There is a focus on collaboration and group planning to come to practical solutions that people in the group can collectively accept.

Fung and Wright also outline some design features that help to achieve these attributes, these include, a devolution of power to local units, and a formalized organisation of the local units with each other as well as the centralised authorities. A web of connection and responsibility through these structures is formed that allows the separate units to connect with each other and to central authorities. This enables resource distribution, responsibility and communication.

In the same volume in which the EPG model is described, Mansbridge (2003) explains why these design features, which ensure a connection of the decentralised parts to the centre, are important for a good participatory process by pointing out the paradox of participation first acknowledged by Kaufman. In perhaps an overestimation of the problem, Kaufman (1969) claims, “participation must begin by being unsuccessful if it is to fulfill its principal function” (206). By this he meant if participation is supposed to develop civic virtues and capacities for citizens to participate, it is necessary to accept the premise that at the beginning citizens may not have the capacities that ensure a good process. Mansbridge explains that this has been found in decentralised experiences of
participation where the decentralised units can result in corruption. Kaufman and Mansbridge both suggest that a centralised counter-power may help to avoid local tyranny, because the centre can keep the decentralised units accountable. This notwithstanding, a balance of power is required to avoid both local and centralised tyranny. An additional solution for the paradox of participation is capacity building, which will be addressed later.

Fung and Wright discuss the potential of the EPG design to exceed traditional democratic practices in a number of ways. For example, they suggest it can enhance responsiveness of the state and increase fairness, participation, deliberation and accountability. In addition, effectiveness of problem-solving is improved through giving decision-making power to individuals who have knowledge of a situation through direct experience. The deliberative aspect increases the chances of good decisions through better transmission of information. The EPG design can increase equality through the inclusions of disadvantaged individuals and broad and deep participation by increasing the channels for and incentives to participate.

For the purposes of this conceptual framework I will take a moment to expand upon certain concepts mentioned by Fung and Wright to highlight the issue of citizen representatives. Bottom up participation is named as a key aspect to the EPG processes, in addition both broad and deep participation are considered to be goals of these designs and achieved through increasing channels for participation. Although the EPG model highlights the importance of solutions coming from the lived experiences of the people affected by the decisions they do not outline how decision-making is connected to the people not directly involved in the decision-making committees. This is an important
point to recognise because participatory democracy often uses representatives to enable
the discussion of issues that impact a large number of people. This problematic between
participatory democracy and deliberative democracy has been outlined by Cohen and
Fung, (2004): as broad participation limits the amount of quality deliberation that can
happen, representation is useful in situations where there is a large population affected by
the decisions, yet this limits direct participation which is the main component of
participatory democracy. Deliberation is a key to good participatory process because it
produces more just, reasonable solutions and encourages participants to see beyond their
individual needs to the common good (Cohen & Fung, 2004; Jansen et al., 2006; Fung &
Wright, 2003). “The ambitious aim of a deliberative democracy, in short, is to shift from
bargaining, interest aggregation, and power to the common reason of equal citizens as a
dominant force in democratic life” (Cohen & Fung, 2004, 170). Although the benefits
attributed to deliberation are considered necessary for a good participatory process it
would be difficult to support in large forums of people because opportunity for dialogue
would be limited. In processes that include a large population the opportunity for
deliberation is then often limited to who takes on, or is privileged with, the responsibility
to be a representative.

One solution is to combine both tactics within a system of governance. The
possibilities of connecting citizen representatives to the broad base they are making
decisions for has been demonstrated to some extent in the participatory budget in Porto
Alegre. Although representatives were used, neighbourhood and regional meetings
provided more local forums, where anyone who was interested could discuss budgetary
issues and elect a representative to take forward the interests of the group (Bruce, 2004;
Gret & Sintomer, 2005; Abers, 2000). The process provided a stronger connection between the representative and the people through an accessible forum where anyone could participate and hold both community representatives and government officials accountable. This appears to be a compromise between direct democracy and deliberative democracy and is therefore an activity which should be raised in the deepening democracy literature to a greater extent. Local meetings where people can discuss community priorities and elect representatives provides a stepping-stone for people who may not be politically savvy or inclined to easily access and practice political decision-making. Therefore it could broaden the participatory aspect of deliberative democracy without taking away from the opportunity for quality deliberation and deep participation or recognising the leadership qualities that some people may posses more than others. Somerville (2005) calls this “functional representation”, where representatives from directly democratic forums take issues to a wider body of representatives. He uses the co-operative model to illustrate the idea: representation is used to ensure the needs of the single co-operatives are fed into a wider process of decision-making but the single co-operative units function as direct democracies. “Representation in this context is a technique that allows a two-way linking between participatory democratic bodies on a small scale and larger-scale institutions, in such a way as to extend the democratisation of public life” (134).

Fostering Agency and Building a Culture of Participation

The different goals, structures, roles and relations found in every participatory process can help to determine how broad and deep the participation is, the extent of empowerment achieved and how democratic the process is. Cornwall (2002; 2004)
suggests that viewing participation as a new or expanded space helps to bring into focus the factors and boundaries that define the process. The spaces citizens are invited into to participate are never neutral but are already permeated with existing power relations (Cornwall, 2004). Although these spaces have the potential to transform and empower, interaction within can also reproduce rather than challenge hierarchies and relations of power. Within these spaces of invited participation there are a number of contextual factors such as the culture, history, and political climate that shape the possibilities and practices of the participants. How the space is constructed and defined helps to determine how the members act and participate within the space as well as how they understand their role and entitlements as participants and therefore what is possible within, in terms of deliberation, agency and transformative participation:

At a very basic level, discourses of participation make available particular subject positions for participants to take up, bounding the possibilities for agency as well as for inclusion. Being constructed, for example, as ‘beneficiaries’, clients’ or ‘citizens’ influences what people are perceived to be able to contribute or entitled to know or decide, as well as the perceived obligations of those who seek to involve them. … But the ways in which participants are constructed by others-and perceive themselves to be constructed-within any given space for participation means that they are never neutrally positioned players. Their location as speakers fundamentally affects the nature and effects of their participation; it influences what they say, and how and whether they are heard. (Cornwall, 2004, 83-84)

One important part of enabling the agency of participants in a process is transforming relations of power. Transforming learned relationships can be a very difficult task and may be a formidable barrier to some participants taking on a more empowered deliberative role. Citizens who have been invited to participate may have an understanding of their role as subordinate in society if this has traditionally been the case. This is a large shift then, to move from user, complainer and client to decision-maker,
deliberator, and holder of important knowledge. This issue is compounded in the presence of people viewed as more legitimate decision makers such as experts, politicians or managers. In the face of this kind of authority it could be hard for the average person, let alone the more marginalised, to feel as though they have something valuable to add to the decision-making process, or that they have the entitlement to be heard and listened to. Cornwall (2004) takes from the work of Freire to explain this issue by suggesting that many actors have “internalized discoursed of discrimination that they are barely able to imagine themselves as actors, let alone agents” (84). After outlining the barriers to participants taking on a significant role of agency within participatory spaces, Cornwall suggests some of the ways to work toward “transformative participation”, naming the Empowered Participatory Governance model as a useful framework, along with other tactics of support such as capacity building, participatory methodologies and alternative spaces where “marginalized actors can define themselves” (87).

Jensen (1998) discusses the barriers to changing relations and roles in terms of the ways that people are cultured into acting. For example, she points out that attempting to shift people who have been cultured to relate and act in a hierarchical, individualist culture into the egalitarian framework of participatory democracy is not an easy or straightforward task. She suggests that although many proponents of participation assume that once the structures or proper channels for participation are formed democratic capabilities will unfold this is often not the case because “both identities as well as capabilities among actors must be constructed rather than taken for granted” (118).
Fischer (2006) also claims that good structures do not guarantee an empowering participatory process. In his view another important factor is the social relationships and culture comprising a participatory practise. He suggests not only do structures need to be in place but participatory norms and subjectivities should be “cultured and nurtured” through organisation and facilitation. Fisher utilises postmodernism to highlight how the meanings, identities and culture in a political space are constructed and how assumptions create and define the boundaries of action and political space. Fischer describes how spaces are created by meanings established by the people involved and the interactions of their differing identities. He notes there are cultural and political environments that need to be taken into account along with structural and procedural designs. How the participatory space is shaped and what spaces are made for the participants to act and not act help to create the agency and inclusion of the actors. He suggests that a good design for participation is not easily defined because part of the structure is formed by the social relationships of the people involved and their understandings and intentions tied to the process.

Fischer proposes a number of questions to help outline the participatory culture created within a process. These questions include, asking what roles have been defined, whose voice is considered important and what kind of power relations have been replicated. The way that the understanding of participation is constructed determines what spaces and opportunities for control and participation are available to the participants. He suggests this is another factor that needs to be taken into account along with Fung and Wright’s (2003) structural arrangements. Fischer suggests participatory
practices need to be cultivated and notes that both political and pedagogical support is required for empowerment.

**Capacity Building**

The point made by Kaufman (1969) that the people who are most in need of opportunities to participate are the ones who are least equipped to participate, suggests participation needs to be crafted both in the structures of participation and in the supports, such as facilitation and capacity building. Although Fung and Wright (2003) focus on the structure and design of participatory processes, they do briefly mention the importance of facilitation and education. They note that all the experiments included in their book as examples of the EPG model include para-professional training to enable the development and abilities of the participants. “These experiments not only consist of fora for honing and practicing deliberative-democratic skills, but also literally establish schools of democracy to develop participants’ political and technical capacities” (29).

Cornwall (2004) also suggests that participatory spaces can be catalyzed by education that helps to empower and provide tools to the participants. Constructing empowering participatory practices “rests on strategies to enhance citizens’ political capabilities in the public policy domain, from the ability to make sense of complex budgetary or expenditure information, to having the language with which to argue with technical specialists; on equipping ordinary people with the ‘weapons of the powerful’ ” (85). As Cornwall describes, participants who have been traditionally marginalised from decision-making processes need to make a huge leap to feel entitled to contribute to the process as legitimate decision makers. To move to a position where they can work with experts and policy makers and have the confidence to challenge or modify what is being
said, they need to be provided with the tools to do so. Beyond skills-based education, techniques such as popular education have been suggested as a way to help participants gain more agency and ownership in participatory processes. Cornwall claims that a number of techniques may be required to ensure the agency of participants, including “strategies like popular education, assertiveness training, building argumentation skills, informing people about their rights and about the policies that they are being consulted about, or mobilising to put on pressure from outside” (87).

Fisher (2006) also promotes popular education as a very useful component in a participatory process. After describing the complexity of fostering a participatory culture he describes how facilitation and organisation can contribute to empowerment and a deepening of participation within these experiments. He uses the decentralised planning process of Kerala, India as an example, claiming this project was successful at encouraging participation and empowerment because it involved not only participatory structures but the creation of a particular political and social context through empowerment-oriented ‘conscientization programs’ based on the philosophy of Freire. He claims that the kind of openness and deliberative quality achieved by the process required a restructuring of power relationships from professional/teacher-participant/learner towards bringing the professionals closer to the experiences of the participants. He names two important components involved in constructing empowering deliberative spaces: 1) creating a culture of deliberation and 2) encouraging local political ownership of the spaces, meaning that the participants are able to direct the social space, with their own knowledge and identities shaping the political order.
Jansen et al. (2006) names a number of ways through which education can enable active citizenship and good participatory processes. After recognising the importance of experiential learning they suggest that education can help ensure the development of critical competencies and warn that a “failure to situate experiences in a wider social context, evaluating the meanings restraints and options involved, may as easily promote naivety and prejudice” (200-201). In addition education can enhance and open up participatory opportunities by reaching out to potential participants, increasing access to activities and resources for the participants, and improving the quality of interaction as well as encouraging the transferability of skills between venues (Jansen et al., 2006).

Although capacity building can be an important part of a participatory process, there are also issues that should be considered in the move to provide education. Education is political, and therefore it is important to ask questions, such as what is being taught and by whom, to try to understand what impacts the education might have on the participants and the process. Krantz (2003) provides an example of the conflicting interests that can occur with particular education providers in her observations of the participatory planning project in Madison, Wisconsin. There the staff members were in charge of giving “expert advice” or educating the participants as well as facilitating and convening the meetings. This meant the staff had an unbalanced influence over the process and the decisions of the participants, which produced in Krantz’s view an anti-democratic nature.

What is highlighted in the theories outlined above is that through carefully constructed participation opportunities we can empower groups often left out of decision-making and shift understandings both of how individuals participate in the world as well
as conceptions of citizenship. The relevant theoretical insights on participatory democracy discussed in this section suggest that a) both structure and capacity building help to construct a space that can enable these goals and b) that attention to power structures and social relationships help us to better understand the constraints and possibilities of particular participatory processes. This conceptual framework was built in a dialectic process: as the research was conducted the theories were added and modified to help better explain and understand the participatory space and culture created at the TCHC and the opportunities for empowerment within.
3. Literature Review

Inherent in the existence of democracy is the question of how much and what kind of participation should be allowed in a democratic system. Some argue that more participation from the people is needed for the health of democracy where as others defend representative democracy with the argument that the masses are not fit to make the complicated and important decisions that qualified government officials make. As the shortcomings of the representative version of democracy become more apparent, many people are promoting more interactive and horizontal forms of participation. Participatory democracy is gaining in popularity as it is seen as a way to fix some of the problems associated with our current democracies and there have been a number of studies supporting this view.

Participatory democracy increases avenues of participation for the people affected by the decisions. These increased avenues for citizen participation can then enhance accountability and improve citizen capacity for democratic decision-making. Pateman (1970) argues for a stronger place for participation in our democracies because people learn democracy through practice not solely by instruction. She claims practicing democracy can help develop a populace with a range of increased virtues that foster responsible aware citizens. She suggests that participation is an avenue to develop individual attitudes and psychological qualities that contribute to democracy by increasing the connection between individual and institution. Pateman cites examples of workplace democracy to provide evidence of the benefits that can be accrued through participation in decision-making. She also points to housing as a useful venue to provide opportunities for participation and democratic learning.
As participatory democracy projects have become more numerous, theories such as Pateman’s have been put into practice. One such example has arisen in Canada in the form of a Tenant Participation System in the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. I look at this particular example in my research to help clarify the benefits and challenges involved in participatory democracy. This research focuses on participants’ experiences and perceptions of the process in an attempt to better understand the participatory culture constructed through this project. As many call for the implementation of these processes to improve our current democracies it is important to understand how aspects within these processes can help or hinder a culture of participation and empowerment. To provide a background of what is known, the associated benefits of participatory democracy will be reviewed followed by the challenges and then what has been documented regarding citizen perceptions of these processes.

**The Case for Participatory Democracy**

In “Reclaim the State”, Hilary Wainwright (2003) reviews different projects of contemporary participatory democracy and describes it as a way to provide all the people, instead of only officials, a decisive role in what happens in their communities. She claims that this brings increased legitimacy into a process that usually involves groups who often have their own agendas, making decisions behind closed doors. In this way participatory democracy helps to legitimise or democratise representative democracy. Wainwright explains,

Participatory democracy provides a real alternative, or complement: a distinct and organized public sphere in which the demands of the people can be articulated, developed and negotiated between each other, and finally negotiated with the local or other relevant state institutions. (2003, 188)
Pateman and Wainwright are only two of many scholars and researchers who suggest there are positive outcomes associated with the creation of spaces for the public to participate in decision-making. There is ample research suggesting participatory democracy can encourage individuals to gain new political and deliberative skills as people learn democracy by doing, develop external and internal political efficacy, and move from individual thinking to more community wide thinking (Abers, 2000; Berry, Portney & Thomson, 1993; Lerner & Schugurensky, 2007; Schugurensky, 2000). Baiocchi (2003a) documented how in the participatory budget forums in Brazil neighbourhood meetings comprised of the urban poor gradually moved closer to a public sphere, which included more open ended and public-spirited discussions. Schugurensky (2004) explains that the learning fostered by participation and deliberation in decision-making processes enables the development of a “variety of civic virtues (like solidarity, tolerance, openness, responsibility and respect), but also political capital, that is, the capacity for self-governance and for influencing political decisions” (607).

Schugurensky (2000) breaks down the concept of political capital into five components: knowledge, skills, attitudes, distance from power and resources. Berry, Portney and Thomson (1993) discuss a similar notion through the concept of political capacity and also suggest it is fostered through participation in strong democratic structures. They describe the term as:

The overall ability to take part in the political process. This incorporates a practical dimension (the knowledge necessary to know how to participate), a psychological dimension (the belief that one can influence the system), and an experiential dimension (the drawing of lessons from activity in politics that makes one believe it is worth participating again). (256,257)

The benefits associated with participatory democracy go beyond fostering individual capacities and include increased acceptance of decisions, increased
transparency and reduced patronage (Baiocchi, 2005; Forero Pineda & Sepulveda Rico, 2002; Fung & Wright, 2003.) There is also documentation in some participatory processes that it can encourage participation from groups traditionally not involved in political activities such as low income groups, women and youth (Abers, 2000; Fung, 2004; Gret & Sintomer, 2005; Isaac & Heller, 2003)

**Challenges and Limitations**

Although empowerment is a term commonly associated with participatory democracy it is not necessarily a product. The empowerment of citizens through their involvement in participatory democracy is not guaranteed and, depending on the constraints, they may still feel as though they do not have much control over the process. Although participatory democracy is assumed to produce important benefits it is essential to be aware that there are vastly different practices of participatory democracy and some create more positive experiences than others. Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) describe a number of barriers to ensuring genuine citizen involvement that arise because of unequal power relations. They suggest that power is an important factor in participatory spaces created through decentralisation and that this issue is often ignored. Power issues that are not addressed can result in a particular group or institution controlling the agenda and not allowing proper avenues of participation for the general populace.

Some participatory projects can use participation to add legitimacy to decision-making without actually handing over substantial power to citizens. Although centralisation has some benefits particularly in terms of keeping the decentralised units accountable, if power stays too centralised it can produce tokenistic participation. Taylor (2007) claims that when responsibility is handed down to more localized spaces but
control is still centralised, the resultant effect can be co-optation. She describes the different problems that can occur in participatory experiments such as a recentralisation of power, downloading of responsibility and privileged access to the spaces by more powerful citizens. She found some of these drawbacks evident in her own research on participation in neighbourhood renewal projects. In addition, she found participants felt that they had more voice but not necessarily more power.

Raco and Flint (2001) discuss similar issues regarding community decision-making, claiming that when it is relegated to local spaces it is often constructed as non-political and as an addendum to the policy process instead of an essential part of the process. This, they claim encourages an amateur status, limits the power of the councils and relegates them to an inconsequential role. An amateur status can then limit capacities and information within the councils and cause them to simply exist to legitimise government actions instead of providing spaces for contestation and challenges (Raco & Flint, 2001). Sintomer and Maillard (2007) discuss a form of local participation in France called the “politique de la ville” and raise similar issues of co-optation, limited decision-making and participants constrained to the micro level. They also add that the neighbourhood councils remained exclusive, leaving out people who traditionally did not participate. This often meant more localized power was given to people who were already participating and therefore already had agency. Sintomer and Maillard contend that the shortcomings they reviewed were not a necessary result of participatory processes but a result of the goals and motives behind the particular method and its creators.
Although the challenges are clearly outlined by some, many of the people who discuss the danger for control and co-optation in these spaces, also claim that they do provide new opportunities for resistance, contestation and action (Cornwall, 2004; Raco, 2003; Taylor, 2007). For example Sintomer and Maillard (2007) mention that the “politique de la ville” has enhanced democracy to some extent as councils have managed to hold politicians to better account and forced participants to look beyond their individual interests. Taylor (2007) also provides examples of real and lasting changes produced through the decentralised opportunities for participation she studied that ensured stakeholders concerns and interests were heard by government. There are also a number of suggested methods that can help to overcome the reviewed barriers to deep participation.

Many theorists have provided prescriptions for what should be involved in an empowering and participatory process (see Fung & Wright 2003; Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999; Wainright, 2003). Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) put forward a number of suggestions, including citizen education and awareness building such as popular education techniques, training and sensitizing local officials, alliances to remedy power differentials, and promoting accountability of elected officials through better transparency and watch-dog committees.

Abers (2003) maintains that to encourage participation people need to understand the subject is somehow connected to their needs. When understanding or political skills on a subject are low she suggests supplying methods of popular education. Abers notes that intervention by government is helpful in a participatory process when they are not
directly setting the rules of engagement but instead trying to promote accessibility to the process and include the people who might otherwise not participate.

In Wainright’s view, for participatory democracy to obtain legitimacy it needs to meet a number of conditions: 1) it should be open to everyone affected by the decisions it deals with even if only a small number of people want to participate; 2) the rules need to be mutually agreed upon and openly negotiated because rules were very important in the development of all the participatory processes she reviewed. “Their mutual negotiation was a signal to those involved that they had real control over the process, and any breakdown would lead to a revisiting and revising of them”; 3) there should be autonomy of the participatory process from the state (total separation is not suggested but there should be some form of equality so that the participatory mechanisms have independence, autonomy and respect); 4) finally, she suggests a need for a space of open exchange and sharing of knowledge with a further condition of significant resources involved in the decision-making. “Resources, which could make a positive difference to the lives of the community. The process must get results. It must not be seen as just another consultation exercise that leads nowhere” (Wainright, 2003, 188).

Even when participatory practices include much of the prescriptions for what makes a good process there are difficulties. As Fung and Wright (2003) note in their description of empowered participatory projects, their examples although encouraging and important as they come closest to an idea of Empowered Participatory Governance, only enact the necessities of an empowered participatory process in partiality. In addition the implementation of these processes is often messy: people need to learn new roles as well as unlearn past ways of interacting, and the population needs to believe that the
process is open to them and worthwhile. In Porto Alegre, an example used most frequently as a successful participatory democracy project, there were many difficulties in the first years: people did not trust the administration and so it needed to be demonstrated that participation was worth the effort (Abers, 2000; Baiocchi, 2005; Gret & Sintomer, 2005). Even after years of what has been deemed a success, Baiocchi (2005) notes that there is still distrust on the part of some activists towards the participatory budget. Another difficulty is that there are also always issues of power negotiations within these participatory projects, whether it is between the administration and participants or between different interest groups within communities and it is not easy to ensure a level playing field.

Finally, the prescriptions associated with good participatory processes are not necessarily true in every context. Although cases like Porto Alegre provide encouraging examples of how we may deepen democracy, differing cultures and political histories may have different requirements for achieving deep participation. Gaventa (2006) argues that the project of deepening democracy does not involve one set of institutions and procedures, instead he suggests, there is likely different tactics and procedures required for different contexts. He further explains,

No matter where democracy deepening occurs, far more work is needed in general on how to map and understand the social practices of engagement in that context, and to understand how key concepts like deliberation, participation and decision making are understood and practiced in local cultures. (22)

Roles in Participatory Democracy

Adding to the challenges of participatory democracy are the new roles created. New roles are taken on in participatory projects and sometimes it is difficult to change
the existing relations and behaviours of participants. Edelnbos (2005) found in a review of a participatory process in the Netherlands that the civil servants and the citizens both had a hard time breaking away from traditional roles. He suggested there was not enough effort to make the system attractive to the stakeholders and that there was not enough stakeholder input into their roles. Sousa Santos (1998) also touched upon the difficulties that can be associated with the changes in traditional roles when a participatory process is implemented. In a discussion on the implementation of the participatory budget in Porto Alegre he noted how both the party and community leaders were used to an environment of confrontation, which made it harder to develop a participatory space:

…Neither the party leaders heading the executive nor the community leaders had any experience in promoting institutionalised participation. Both had been socialised in a political culture of confrontation and were not ready to go beyond protest and confrontation. Such a context did not allow for the creation of spaces for negotiation capable of articulating and making compatible all the different claims and demand from different regions, let alone establish a political contract and take part in the institutional mediations necessary; to make it effective. (1998, 476)

These problems are not necessarily permanent, and in the case of Porto Alegre the institutions and relations slowly transformed and improved as the process continued. In discussing the transformation from “techno bureaucracy to techno democracy” Sousa Santos describes the change in the culture of city staff and executives that occurred due to the need to convey information in a more accessible way. They started to use language that was easier to understand and increasingly had to speak persuasively rather than authoritatively. Sousa Santos (1998) suggests this has slowly moved the bureaucratic culture to a democratic one, although he does mention that these professionals have had more success portraying their message in an easier to understand format than actually listening to the people. Abers (2000) noted, after observing a budgeting forum in Brazil,
that over time the meetings transformed, from chaotic with people interrupting to more respectful and organized, as budget council members learned how to better facilitate meetings and participants gained deliberative skills.

An interesting new role in some forms of participatory democracy is the one of a representative, which comes with new responsibilities and privileges that are often unclear or ambiguous. In many situations a representative is still necessary in participatory democracy in order to enable deliberation. If forums are too large it does not allow for everyone to speak and deliberate on their concerns and therefore regardless of their presence everyone is not participating and representation is needed (Urbinati, 2000; Stephan, 2004). Representation can be useful, Urbinati (2000) insists, when it follows agreed upon rules and involves both advocacy and deliberation; “without deliberation there would be no reason for advocacy” (775). Stephan (2004) suggests that this role can connect ideas of deliberative and aggregate democracy and can balance self-interest with public or community interests. At the same time this role does create some difficulties in a participatory process, such as, whom the representative speaks for and how this representative role can still allow for participation or influence from people who are not representatives.

Within participatory democracy the representative role is a difficult one, involving mediation and communication between the upper traditional forms of power and the communities from which the representatives come. The difficulties for representatives in a participatory democracy are somewhat different for a representative in a traditional political system because they are representing people they are interacting with in a more intimate manner. They are expected to be able to speak for the interests of
their community more accurately than a politician or bureaucrat. These issues can become particularly complex in the context of community governance because communities are not a uniform entity. Communities can include diverse interests and needs, which makes representing all the interests within a space very difficult or even impossible (Raco & Flint, 2001; Shirlow & Murtagh, 2004; Uguris, 2004).

Uguris (2004) raised some concerns about the issue of representation under decentralised systems involving tenant participation. She claimed that the housing authorities use of representatives from particular groups in councils for the purpose of obtaining local knowledge and information on needs was problematic because it ignored the diverse interests of individuals within identity groups. An additional matter regarding the tenant representative role is the possibility of the position becoming professionalized. Millward (2005) discusses this issue and provides evidence of how the role in planning and advisory boards in the UK has become professionalized. He suggests this is not a bad thing but an inevitability of participating in a system that involves in-depth information and decision-making. Millward suggests that these tenants not only gain professional skills but also have additional knowledge about the lived user-experiences and therefore add an integral amount of expertise to the process.

Taylor (2007) discusses a similar issue regarding community representatives who were required to know in-depth knowledge of the topics under discussion. In a review of a number of community participation programs she noted that the expectations involving the representatives were often unrealistic, in that representatives were expected to “know how to play the game” but at the same time there were complaints about the “usual suspects” always participating. Chaskin (2005) touches on the challenges that
representatives face when advocating for their own community in his article on a participatory collaborative planning project, called the Neighbourhood and Family Initiative. This project involved community representatives as only one of a few different types of representatives sitting on the collaborative, with professionals from businesses and relevant specialties also participating. He describes how the community representatives felt a lot of pressure because they were directly connected with the community the projects affected. This meant if the initiative failed they would be held responsible and could potentially lose their social standing in the community.

Chaskin (2005) also discusses how the differing ideations of the purpose of the collaborative, the perceived strengths of the process and the values of the differing representatives created intricate dynamics. The difficulties of role-ambiguity were reoccurring with contested understandings of who was a stakeholder in the community and therefore best placed to represent. There were ambiguities in what the participants were expected to bring to their role and what they could expect to gain from it. There was also an issue of long-term and short-term goals with residents more concerned with short-term gains and the professionals concerned with democratic means and long-term instrumental ends.

**Perceptions**

The issues and difficulties that arise in implementing a participatory process, as well as the power relationships and the intricacies of new roles, create a complex system which impact the perceptions of the people involved. Using a citizen’s perception of the participatory process is a useful accompaniment to normative assessments because
citizens bring in different information about the success or failure of a process than the normative criteria (Santos & Chess, 2005).

The impact that participatory structures have on the perceptions of the larger community is an important indicator of the benefits and drawbacks of a participatory system. Some research has shown that when participatory projects are implemented, trust in the decisions made in the community increases (Abers, 2000; Berry, Portney & Thomson, 1993; Forero-Pineda, 2001). Berry, Portney and Thomson looked at the perceptions of community members as well as participants to help evaluate participatory mechanisms in five cities in the United States. They found that the majority of citizens in cities with quality participatory structures had a high amount of trust in their neighbourhood councils. The majority of people polled felt neighbourhood councils were doing a good job in articulating their needs to the government. Citizens generally thought that the councils would involve them in decision-making and were the best organisation to represent community interests. One issue found was that people of low SES had a lower perception of the process being open to them. It should be noted that this perception of neighbourhood council responsiveness changed in low SES citizens depending on their activity. The more active they were in the council, the more responsive they thought the neighbourhood council was.

There is some research available about the impact that quality participatory processes can have on the perceptions of the actual participants involved. In a study on the effects of participatory structures on the evaluations of participants, Morell (1999) found that participants were more likely to be satisfied with the decisions made and re-evaluate their own assumptions when opportunities to participate were frequent and
significant. If this was not the case then satisfaction was dependent on whether their preference won; therefore the people in the minority would be dissatisfied. In addition, Morell noted, structures that created less of a personal connection with opinions allowed participants to more easily re-evaluate their assumptions. Halvorson (2003) found that when participatory processes were perceived as high-quality it prompted participants to see public agencies as more responsive, increased optimism about the agency’s performance and even increased tolerance surrounding differing viewpoints.

**Tenant Participation**

The possible benefits and drawbacks to projects of participation can be seen in tenant participation schemes. Issues around encouraging participation and the positive outcomes associated with it, constraints on empowerment, problems with representation, and the difficulties facing tenants taking on new roles and responsibilities are all found in these projects. Difficulties regarding empowerment are particularly salient in tenant participation experiments.

As the UK saw a large shift towards tenant participation from the 1980’s onward there is a particular focus in the literature on tenant participation schemes in the UK. Flint (2004) explains that the move to decentralise housing governance in the UK was spurred by the critique of bureaucratic forms of housing provision, which were assumed to encourage a culture of dependency and a lack of agency and responsibility amongst tenants. According to Flint the reaction to the bureaucratic welfare model was a consumerist-oriented approach paired with a communitarian emphasis on tenant responsibility, with tenant participation being a product of this approach. Tenant participation is thought to increase channels for agency, empowerment and community
health in general which can help to reframe tenant and housing culture from a dependent,
passive, fatalist framework to an empowered, responsible, egalitarian framework (Flint,
2004; Jensen, 1998; Somerville 1998). Although benefits produced by participation
schemes exist, many discussions of the benefits of tenant participation also invoke the
concerns and challenges, especially in relation to the complexities of encouraging
empowerment and a participatory framework through these schemes. Empowerment
through tenant participation is contingent on many factors such as, social relations, tenant
resources and skills, as well as the structures and rules that frame the extent of tenant
control (Somerville, 1998; Cairncross, Clapham & Goodlad, 1994; Furbey, Wishart &
Grayson, 1996).

Achieving tenant empowerment and agency through tenant participation schemes
can be a complicated endeavour, not only because tenants are often cultured to work
within structures of bureaucracy that limit their agency and choice but because often with
new participation structures, there is a reluctance to provide tenants with extensive
control over decision-making. In her study on tenant participation and representation
Uguris (2004) explains how tenants she interviewed in the public housing participation
projects in Britain still had complaints about their lack of control over the budget, with
most financial decision made centrally. This, she suggests made tenants feel powerless
as the decisions that had a large impact were still out of the realm of their control.
Hickman (2006) demonstrates the reluctance of housing authorities to relinquish power in
tenant participation schemes in the UK during the 1990’s by utilizing the typology of
approaches to participation, outlined by Cairncrosss, Clapham and Goodlad (1997). The
three typologies used to describe the different approaches to participation were:
traditional (where housing authorities were unwilling to share power), consumerist (where the goal was to provide better service), and citizenship (where the aim was to empower tenants). Hickman reviewed nine case studies of tenant participation in the UK and found that instead of one dominant typology occurring in a project often aspects of all three were found with a blend of traditionalist and consumerist tendencies as the most dominant trend. The research also suggested that in the few cases where there was evidence of a strong citizenship typology there was an even stronger traditionalist trend, because in all of the cases the housing management was reluctant to share power with tenants and was committed to retaining power over tenant participation processes. Traditional relations were prevalent in that landlords decided when, where and how tenants were involved in housing service. This often resulted in the limitation of tenant participation to everyday matters, instead of strategic decisions. Hickman even claims that some housing authorities created complex participation structures to retain more control and subvert the already existing tenant groups that were harder to deal with. He suggests the participation structures put in place could actually disillusion tenants with the participation processes because of the “enormous demands on those tenants who did get involved.”

The complexities involved in tenant empowerment are dependent on a number of highly instable factors (Cairncross, Clapham & Goodlad, 1994). Two ways Cairncross et al. suggest tenants can exercise power are 1) through using the rules of the participation structure to promote their interests or 2) to restructure the rules of the game altogether. Tenant power is tied up in the process of tenant participation and the relations between the tenants. Somerville (1998) suggests that participation is just one factor in tenant
empowerment and that there is a combination of ingredients that help ensure tenant control and therefore empowerment in participation projects. He warns that even high tenant empowerment can have disadvantages, for example the “burdens of responsibility” associated with participation may lead to the empowerment of only an elite group of tenants. This can result in an “elite well informed” group of tenants who act on the behalf of all the tenants, which according to Somerville reproduces the representative model of democracy “which gives rise to the problem of disempowerment in the first place” (255).

This raises another key issue associated with tenant participation: successfully encouraging the general tenant population to participate in the first place, so that they may gain the benefits associated, such as empowerment. Similar to what Abers (2000) and Mansbridge (2003) suggest in terms of participatory democracy, Bengtsson (1998) claims that in tenant participation there needs to an instrumental benefit or personal gain to encourage participation so that intrinsic benefits such as self-realisation and self-improvement can be achieved. Bengtsson proposes that a fine balance must be reached in tenant participation that requires enough cost (collective work and decision-making) to achieve self-realisation without this cost exceeding the instrumental benefit, as this would make the participation a sham. Another complication he raises is that tenant participation is often promoted in large housing estates that are composed of a “marginalised, socially and ethnically heterogeneous population with weak ties” whereas successful participation projects are usually found in small estates, with homogeneous populations (118).

In addition to the concerns about simply increasing tenant control and participation to achieve empowerment, and community benefits there are concerns about
how the participatory project and culture are framed and for what ends. Jensen (1998) points to the formative experiences of tenants to explain the difficulties associated with achieving a culture of participatory democracy. She claims that the culture that is generally created within housing does not encourage the kind of democratic abilities or attributes needed for a good process and so the democratic reality of participation often does not match democratic hopes or expectations. Jensen suggests that generally tenants are accustomed to a culture of fatalism because they often “lack choice in housing, education and on the working market” (132). The difficulties arise in producing a participatory system in social housing because tenants often have fatalist and individualist (as they are constructed increasingly as consumers) experiences and both ways of life are not compatible with egalitarianism. She points out, “There is an inherent resistance in the egalitarian culture to recognising that participation is demanding and does not emerge naturally from a system of formal voice options. Information, education and socialization are inescapable preconditions of success in the egalitarian model of democracy” (134).

As reviewed above, throughout the literature on participatory democracy there are discussions around the benefits attributed to participation as well as some of the limitations associated with participatory spaces, particularly concerning power issues and relations. This research attempts to better understand these potentials and limitations through inquiring into the understandings and experiences of participants who are key actors and potential beneficiaries in a participatory process. To elucidate the challenges faced in implementing a participatory process, it is important to investigate how the people who are supposed to benefit from these processes are experiencing them. This is
the perspective I have taken in researching the participatory process called the Tenant Participation System, which is being implemented in the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. To a large extent, most of the issues previously discussed apply to the situation of the Tenant Participation System. There have been challenges of handing over power and encouraging participation as well as difficulties and successes concerning co-operation within the tenant population and between representatives and management. In the Tenant Participation System the challenges involved in learning new roles and gaining new responsibilities are evident. Tenant representatives in this process have to take on the role of community member and decision-maker, and must dedicate a significant amount of their unpaid time in this process. Therefore this research is focused on the tenant representative experience in the Tenant Participation System at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation and how perceptions of the process and their role are shaped by these experiences.
4. Context

The past two decades are marked by an increasing number of exercises to create spaces for people to become involved in the decision-making that affects them. The Tenant Participation System (TPS) at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) is one such exercise. This system of governance was created in 2001 when the housing companies in Toronto were preparing to amalgamate, and in 2003 the first tenant elections were held. The TPS involves a number of different avenues for tenants to impact decisions at the TCHC and help determine local priorities. This includes tenant councils, tenants sitting on the board of directors to help make policy decisions, different budgets that the tenants have decision-making control over and also consultation efforts such as surveys and meetings to obtain tenant opinions.

Toronto Community Housing Corporation

The Toronto Community Housing Corporation is responsible for the provision of public housing across the Greater Toronto Area. The TCHC formed on January 1, 2002, with the amalgamation of the Toronto Housing Company and Metro Toronto Housing Company. The TCHC operates independently under a thirteen-member board of directors, with the City of Toronto as the sole stakeholder. The composition of the board of directors includes three city councillors, the mayor or mayor’s appointee and nine citizens, of which two are tenant representatives (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006).

The Toronto Community Housing Corporation is the second-largest housing provider in North America and the largest in Canada, providing housing for six percent of Toronto’s population. It includes 58,500 units, which house 164,000 tenants. Almost all
of the tenants living in the TCHC (93%) pay their rent on a sliding scale, respective of their income; the rest pay market-based rent (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006e). The average annual income of a household in the TCHC is $13,964, which is well below the city average. The TCHC is predominantly populated by family units which account for 38 percent of the TCHC residents, seniors are also in high representation at 31 percent of the residents and single adults comprise 33 percent (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006f). Additional groups that make up a significant portion of tenants include refugees, immigrants, and people with special needs.

The vision of the TCHC is to be an organisation that is “a pre-eminent social housing provider”, that sets the standards and benchmarks against which other not-for-profit housing providers are measured (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006a, 106). Some of the named values of the TCHC are: engaging residents in decisions that affect them; encouraging open communication between tenants and staff, “providing housing that is healthy, safe and affordable” and providing “education and learning opportunities accessible to all staff and tenants” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006a, 106).

As part of the community based management approach, governance and management of the TCHC is conducted through decentralised districts called Community Housing Units (CHU). Across Toronto, the TCHC is divided into 27 CHUs to enable more local governance. CHUs span defined geographic areas in the city and include a number of buildings and neighbourhoods that share a CHU manager. Managers are responsible for all aspects of the CHUs including security, maintenance, finances, and
directing the CHU staff; at the same time they are accountable to the participation structures (Grant & Hageman, 2005).

The Tenant Participation System

In an attempt to engage residents in the decision-making at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation the Tenant Participation System (TPS) was developed as part of the Community Management Plan. There was a push from the tenants to have more input into decisions made at the TCHC but the implementation of the formal TPS system was directed from the government. The City of Toronto had mandated that the new TCHC would have to include some form of tenant participation in its decision-making processes, although what form this would take was not prescribed. The TCHC spent one year in consultation with 5000 tenants to devise the structure of a participation system, seeking ideas of how the system should function, what would make the partnership between the tenants and the corporation work, and what level of participation tenants would want. Influenced by the participatory budget in Porto Alegre, staff at the TCHC developed the Tenant Participation System (TPS). The TPS generally provides a structure for tenants and staff to work together on issues in the community, decide on priorities, increase communication and help improve how the TCHC functions on a community level (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006e). The TPS reflects the TCHC’s commitment to local governance, a goal that is reiterated throughout the TCHC Community Management Plan. The mandate of the CMP and the TCHC’s approach to building community health includes, support for engaged and empowered communities and “tenants organized to influence the institutions that govern their lives” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006b, 2). According to the TCHC: the
Tenant Participation System, tenant engagement in budget allocation, and involvement of the tenants in policy development and governance all contribute to creating an improved community environment (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006b, 29).

The TPS involves local tenant councils, which are formed in each CHU to allow resident input into the governance of their communities. In every CHU, elected tenants work with management to develop business management plans, allocate resources and keep the TCHC accountable on decisions made and issues that need to be addressed (Toronto Community Housing Corporation 2006e). Tenant councils develop strategies that reflect the particularities of their CHU.

Tenant representatives are selected to sit on CHU councils through elections, which happen every three years. This process is extensive, involving nomination, campaigning and an Election Day held in each housing complex across the city. Any tenant in a TCHC building that is over 16 can nominate a candidate, run to be a representative and vote for a tenant representative. The first election for CHU council representatives was held in 2003 and the second round of elections was held in April 2006. The second election had a higher turnout of voters and candidates. The number of tenants elected is dependent on the number of units per building. Currently there are 360 tenant representatives across the 27 CHUs. Tenant representatives have the responsibility to advocate for the interests of the tenants from their building or community, help tenants to remain informed about issues in the TCHC, and engage them in the participation process (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006d). They enable more effective communication between the TCHC and the tenants; informing the tenants about decision–making and changes at the TCHC as well as bringing forward tenant opinions
and concerns to the management and staff. Although the TPS is based around tenant representatives the TCHC also recognises the important role of tenant groups outside of the formal TPS and holds forums to include the input from these groups as well.

One important part of the TPS is the participatory budget. Originally dealing with $9 million per year, or 13 percent of the capital budget, it has more recently decentralised, with the main opportunity for tenant input involving $1.8 million. In 2003 a working group of tenants volunteers and staff developed criteria for distributing $9 million a year (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2005). This framework continued to be used in 2004 as well as in 2005 and allocates 60 percent of the $9 million according to the size of CHU, 20 percent to be distributed equally between CHUs, and 20 percent to be decided by tenants according to need. Although the original framework developed by tenant representatives in 2003 continues to direct the distribution of the $9 million, individual CHU councils also impact the allocation of funding beyond the $1.8 million within the CHU. This is through their input into the CHU business plan and by working with management to decide on funding priorities.

The participatory budget, which distributes $1.8 million, occurs once a year and allocates funding to various capital expenditures across the TCHC. Within each CHU council, tenant representatives bring forward priorities from their communities that require funding, but are not covered under the CHU budget. Each council chooses one priority, which is taken to a city-wide forum of delegates. A delegate and an assistant from each CHU present the priority, explaining the need and the estimated cost to the other tenants attending the Forum. Tenant delegates vote through “Dotmocracy” on the priorities after listening to presentations and asking questions. “Dotmocracy” is a process
whereby each tenants receives ten dots to put beside projects, which they feel should receive capital funding. Tenants cannot put dots beside the projects from their own CHU but can put more than one dot beside a single project. Priorities with the most dots are the first to receive funding until all of the money is allocated. Following the selection of the projects, it is up to each CHU council and their managers to keep track of the progress of the project and keep their tenants informed. CHU managers are supposed to give their council monthly updates on the progress of projects. The TCHC justifies the participatory budget as a “democratic way of allocating scarce capital dollars in areas that have a day-to-day impact on tenants…” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006c, 2).

**Education in the Tenant Participation System**

To assist the tenant representatives in their roles as decision-makers and communicators the Tenant Participation System provides some education. The main goal is to educate the tenant representatives on governance and how to govern. The education system also attends to the educational needs and interests of the learners. The education co-ordinator spends time sitting with the councils and learning what educational needs there are, with tenant input having a significant impact on what is offered. The local councils are also given a budget, which they can spend on the educational needs that they have.

The education component is highly decentralised, as it is provided through each CHU; however there have been some short-term educational initiatives developed for all the tenant representatives. One example is the tenant forums, which occur approximately twice a year and provide a chance for tenants TCHC-wide to spend a day or two working
together and attending various workshops. In the most recent round of tenant workshops, topics included, how to better communicate; how to work as a team; how to promote human rights; the purposes of a CHU council; activities of a tenant representative and what their role and responsibilities are; as well as budgeting and governance training. New tenant representatives received a full day orientation and an orientation binder.

Although there are TCHC-wide campaigns such as the forums, much of the education component is fairly diffuse with a focus on addressing the education concerns of local councils. This means that there are not many TCHC-wide education initiatives, and when there are they are short-term. Education of tenants is conducted mostly in the specific councils through Health Promotion Officers (HPOs), managers, and a fund set aside for CHU council training needs. The HPOs and managers are trained and directed to help facilitate and educate tenants about how to carry out their role. The HPO is a resource, an advocate, a facilitator in the council meetings and also helps to direct the tenant representative towards thinking in terms of community. CHU managers often have similar education duties as the HPOs, with a responsibility to facilitate productive and respectful discussion and help the tenant representatives understand CHU budgets and CHU business plans. In addition to the guidance given to them by the HPOs and the managers, councils each receive $12,000 which they can use for individual or group education. The money can be put towards training, advocacy, memberships, conferences, consultations, administrative expenditures, community and support. Tenant representatives and staff developed the guidelines for how this money can be spent. In the past this fund has been used to send tenant representatives to the World Social Forum and to train tenants in fundraising techniques.
5. Methodology

This research utilised qualitative methodology to examine the TPS and the representative role within this system. Qualitative methodology was considered the most appropriate for the topic of this thesis as it allows more open and detailed data collection. It was assumed that this methodology would best capture the larger picture of the interactions and understandings of the tenants within the process. Qualitative methodology allowed for more detailed input from the tenants and the freedom to explore issues that the researcher was not aware of in the conception of the research. The research itself was a case study. In addition grounded theory was utilised to help guide how the research and analysis was conducted.

The methodology of choice was a case study because the goal of the research was to obtain a detailed picture of a particular case. To understand and draw conclusions about tenant understandings and perceptions of the process and how this was impacted by the design, an analysis of the surrounding context and relationships comprising the process was needed. A case study can be used to understand complex social phenomena because it enables investigators to retain the “holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events-such as individual lifecycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries” (Yin, 2003, 2). The Tenant Participation System was a valuable research choice because it provided a useful example of the challenges to, and possibilities of, putting participatory democracy into practice in a racially diverse community that is mainly comprised of economically marginalized residents. Punch (2000) notes that one key aspect or reason behind a case study is something can be learned from looking at the particular case. The
case of the tenant representative role in the Tenant Participation System and how it was enacted and understood by the participants can be useful to relate back, not only to other tenant participation programs, but also other participatory democratic processes.

The research in part also looked to the approach of grounded theory to help guide how the research process unfolded and in part how the data was analysed. The motivation behind this was to allow the theory to be constructed as the research progressed instead of having a theory direct the research and limit its focus. Grounded theory is a methodology where a specific theory does not shape the research but instead a theory is built based on the trends that emerge from the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain that if an issue emerges that is similar or opposite from something explained in the literature then it is a good resource to try to understand the phenomena through comparisons of concepts. This means the literature is still utilised to help guide the researcher and help to explain findings or direct attention but is a resource instead of a map. Through inductive reasoning theoretical explanations are drawn out of the data, in a constantly comparative method (Chamez, 2006). It is a particularly useful practice in areas where the research is not extensive and a theory that suits the researcher’s needs may not be there to draw upon. This methodology allowed me the space to have good perspective of the trends arising from the data, while still working with the existing literature to help explain emerging concepts. My conceptual framework started from the Empowered Participatory Governance model and was built concurrently as data was collected and themes and issues started to emerge, in a dialectical process this further helped to direct the research and the focus of the interviews
Sample

The sample consisted of nineteen tenant representatives from across nine CHUs, which were located in different parts of the City of Toronto. The highest concentration of tenants came from Community Housing Unit 2 (CHU2): nine of the nineteen tenant representative participants were from this CHU. The higher concentration of participants from this CHU is the result of a helpful and cooperative tenant council that welcomed my presence as a participant and observer. The interviews from the council members of CHU2, paired with my observations of these tenant representatives and their peers in the council, provided me with a more in-depth picture of how the tenant representatives understood and acted in their role. The interviews from across different CHUs in the TCHC provided me with a TCHC-wide picture of how tenants saw their role. The interviews from the representatives of CHU2 did not demonstrate any noticeably different trends than the comments from the representatives in other CHUs. This suggested to the researcher that CHU2 was not a unique case in the Tenant Participation System but shared in common with other councils many of their ways of functioning, with the tenants of CHU2 sharing similar understanding of the process and their roles. There were variations between councils in terms of the camaraderie of the representatives within, how the meetings were conducted and how the manager encouraged or discouraged participation, however CHU2 did not seem to be an extreme case within this variance. Therefore, the interviews from across the TCHC provided me with a picture of how tenants TCHC-wide were experiencing the process and my observations in the council helped me contextualise some of these responses as well as allowed me to witness the interactions that helped to produce these comments. In addition to the CHU2
council meetings the researcher was also able to observe TCHC-wide participatory budgeting forums and meetings, educational forums as well as community consultation meetings in a number of CHUs. This in turn helped broaden the scope of the observations beyond CHU2.

The tenants interviewed in this study were either active tenant representatives or had been representatives from the previous term. Overall, nineteen tenant representatives and twelve staff members were interviewed. The researcher attempted to keep the sample as representative of differences as possible to give voice to the different perspectives that may have proved significant. Nine of the nineteen tenant participants were from visible minorities, ten tenant participants were female, four were youth and five were elderly. There was also a careful effort to interview representatives who were community activists as well as representatives who stayed out of the front and centre of TCHC politics. Twelve staff and managers were interviewed in addition to the tenant representatives. This data did not directly comprise the results but were used to complete the researcher’s understanding of the process, including how it was structured, and what the relationships were like. Recruitment of participants was conducted from July 2006 to December 2006. Participants were recruited through personal contact as the researcher met tenant representatives, staff members and managers through attending various meetings and education forums.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

To build a comprehensive understanding of the TPS and the social structures and contexts that helped to make up this system, the researcher utilised a number of data collection methods. Various TCHC documents were reviewed to develop a background
of the process and the TCHC. These included, the educational materials given to tenants, material handed out in councils, consultation meetings and forums; and the community management plans produced by the TCHC outlining its goals for the future regarding tenant engagement and participation. In addition the researcher attended council meetings, forums, community consultation meetings, the participatory budget and the election process to be able to observe firsthand the interactions between different actors, the discourse of different actors, and the social norms constructed within these venues.

Finally, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with managers, staff and tenant representatives. Interviews with management were used to provide information about the history and functioning of the process as well as management observations of, and attitudes towards, tenant representatives. The interviews with the tenant representatives provided the base of the data comprising the results section. The interview questions were open-ended and followed a basic framework directed around addressing the main concerns of the thesis. The open-ended interview format provided the flexibility to allow the researcher and participant to delve into particular areas of interest and helped produce a more informal and natural interaction between researcher and participant. The open-ended framework included questions centering around the tenant representatives motivations, understandings and descriptions of the role, feelings of ownership, how the role connected tenants to decision-making, learning of skills and perspectives, and tenant views of the supports and challenges within the process. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to two hours in length and were audio recorded and then later transcribed. The research was carried out between January 2006 to December
2006, which began with a review of documentation and attendance of various meetings, later followed by semi-structured interviews.

On the first four interviews, line-by-line coding was conducted to develop basic themes and categories to help focus the research and future interviews (Chamez, 2006). As themes began to emerge, memos helped to develop categories and concepts. Then focused coding using salient subcategories helped to sift through the data and pull out pieces relevant to the codes. Coding subcategories were then compared and subsumed some into the same category and others grouped under larger themes. The research strategy was abductive more than inductive because the researcher moved “back and forth between data analysis and the process of explanation or theory construction” (Mason, 2002, 180).
6. Tenants Representative’s Perception of Their Role.

In an attempt to provide an in-depth picture of how tenants perceive their role, two themes have been outlined. The first section of the chapter reviews what motivated the representatives to take on this role. The second section examines how tenants actually described or acted in the role. Tenants displayed in their motivations, their description of the role, and their actions in council meetings that they saw this role as a way to make positive changes in their community and to be heard by the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. Often tenants understood this role as involving advocacy for their community and the tenants within, as well as dissemination of information, more than decision-making.

*Reasons for Taking on the Role*

The overall motivation given by the tenants as to why they wanted to take on the role of representative was that they saw this role as a way to improve conditions in their communities. In this regard, tenant representatives provided three main motivations for their participation: 1) to improve maintenance and repairs in their buildings; 2) to further community development within the TCHC; and 3) to gain skills and knowledge for themselves as well as for the benefit of their community.

The representatives interviewed provided a number of different reasons for why they chose to become tenant representatives, but the overarching theme was a desire to contribute to, or improve their community. Tenants often observed problems or shortcomings in their housing communities and considered this role as the best way to address them. Dorthy, who had been active for 11 years as a tenant representative for the
tenant association and then as a representative in the Tenant Participation System,

provided a number of reasons why she was a tenant representative:

Because I was interested right from the beginning I came into this building
in ‘93 and right away you know, don’t ask me why I got the feeling
something is missing you know with the tenant and the whole relationship
with the housing company.

She later explained another reason:

Because of the situation, maintenance and repairs was a situation right
from day one. People would say now this is wrong and that is wrong and
when is this going to be fixed? Oh yes this is another important factor this
is not just here, this is from going around I got a lot of invitations like I
said from the other buildings and housing.

Dorthy also provided a far-reaching reason for why the role was important to her. She
connected changing present issues with a broader vision of helping others in the future:

I take it too hard because no matter what there will always be poor people.
There will always be a housing company and lets say if you will that we
are also fighting for those, you know, that they will have a better life than
we had, the people after you, you have to think about that too. In a way its
a pavement you know. It’s a paving of a way for a better future as well.
Especially in view of all those new nationalities coming to Canada.

Dorthy described the role as both an opportunity for community development,
(putting on events, connecting people, looking after tenants interests) and a way to ensure
maintenance and upkeep was adequate. For many tenant representatives the role
encompassed both community development and ensuring adequate building management,
for some it was one or the other. Some tenants complained the role should not involve
maintenance issues that the TCHC should deal with this, whereas others thought
resources were wasted on community development. Regardless of which was their main
concern tenants saw the tenant representative role as one possibility for making some
changes in these areas and often had a background in community advocacy and
volunteering to begin with.
Tenants concerned with community development highlighted the social issues in their building, such as, drug dealing, lack of community, lack of interaction, or lack of activities for youth. They wanted to use the tenant representative role as a way to tackle some of these issues:

Our community is very much infiltrated by cocaine dealers and alcoholic people, more than ever, because of such problems leading to destabilization of the social structure of our complex I decided to participate. (Mark)

A number of female tenant representatives highlighted the need for youth programming as a drive for them to participate, expressing how youth who had nothing to do would get into trouble.

Some tenants simply saw this role as an opportunity to volunteer rather than having a larger view or particular change they expected to make in their community:

One of the most important things you can do to help further your goals in any area of your life is to give of yourself without any expectation for yourself at all. Give for the community, service and personal fulfillment, something in which I believe I am fairly good about. (Jacob)

I wanted to be involved in something with you know supporting the community but there weren’t a lot of things that kind of fit into my schedule…. So I wanted to do something but I, you know a lot of things didn’t you know I looked at them and said oh I would love to do that but no maybe in two years when she [referring to her daughter] is in school. This kind of just fit in. And I thought it would be, its something that is very different than anything I have done before. So I thought it might be an opportunity to get some experience in doing something different than things that I have done before. (Hana)

Hana pointed to a number of things that motivated her to participate, including, she saw the role as a way to volunteer or give to the community, it worked around a busy schedule particularly with the availability of supports such as childcare, and finally it was an opportunity to learn.
Learning was a motivating factor for a number of tenant representatives. Many tenants saw this role as a chance to gain new skills, learn about how the TCHC functioned and also about their communities. The opportunity to learn was seen as a personal advantage to some and to others as another way to benefit their community:

I grew up with parents that were very much into the academics, so I excelled at academics but not a lot in community work or you know things like that. So I thought it was just a different, something different to do. And also just my personality, I’m not a big socialiser and I though it might be a good opportunity for me to just learn new skills (Hana).

It was an opportunity for me to do community development; I had to find out where the money was, to know "who is who" in the TCHC, and to know the types and levels of participation which is allowed, that is why I ran. (Mark)

One tenant made the explicit connection of how she was learning about the TCHC not only for herself but also for her community:

I think the whole idea of being more active in my community and getting to know deeper about what goes on and how rules are made and how decisions are made in the community, getting to know that better not just for myself but to take that information and taking it back to the community and tell them. (Makena)

Tenant representatives described a number of different reasons for their drive to participate but generally the motivations connected to making a contribution or positive change in the community. Tenant representatives seemed to have a strong tendency to help and dedicate their time to their community. As Makena explained, “You know what I mean because tenant reps. their roles are quite vital I would say its a passionate role because you have to be passionate you have to have a love of your community to do this job.” This seemed to be the case, as tenants who became tenant representatives were often active doing related work, either through activism or volunteering before the formal system was established.
The Triple Role of the Tenant Representative

Tenants often described their role as having wide ranging responsibilities that included taking on the role of advocate, communication link and community caretaker. As advocates, representatives pushed to have their community’s issues and needs addressed, both through the TPS and outside of it. Tenants would take on the role of advocate when they needed to represent and promote issues and concerns of individual tenants, groups, or an entire community. When representatives described the advocacy aspect to their role it was more often in terms of looking after, or speaking for, rather than taking tenant decisions forward. The tenant representative’s role approximated a communication link in that representatives brought forward complaints and concerns from tenants and brought back information to the tenants. As a communication link, representatives also informed tenants about TCHC policies and activities. Tenants acted as community caretakers in their assumption of responsibility for the welfare of the tenants they represented, which included advocating for their rights and well-being, dealing with maintenance issues and duties of the superintendent, as well as taking on community concerns such as improvements of living conditions and even starting up programs or initiatives in the community themselves. The three roles were not clearly discrete categories, but blended and overlapped with one another. For example, as representatives were acting as communication links, they were often not simply transmitting information to management but also advocating for their community, and trying to ensure the welfare of the people they represented.

This representative role seemed to help tenants to feel as though they were making a difference in their community, speaking up for tenants or particular groups and
ensuring some accountability. More critical tenants felt the role was simply taking over staff jobs or doing “free work” for housing. Some tenants explicitly mentioned how they did not have much power attached to this role.

**Advocate**

Tenants could often be seen taking on the role of advocate in the tenant meetings, as they pushed to get the needs and concerns of their community and tenants they represented looked after. The representatives would advocate for the tenants they represented directly to the manager as well as in tenant meetings and budgetary sessions. When tenants were elected both tenants and representatives seemed to hold the assumption that this meant they were responsible for representing the tenants and getting things for the community. Some representatives feared tenants would lose faith in them if they did not provide results:

If a tenant is noticing that you talk about something and you promise something in the community. Which is management, but it boils back down to the tenant rep also. Like I promised to do this and you are at the meeting and you say yes we are going to do it but what happened. A lot of tenants they look forward to you to go and represent them and get things done. (Zuri)

I am afraid that the community asks me the changes they want to see (like the fences) but nothing happens, and they say how come it is not happening. They will also lose faith in me. (Tanya)

Tenants would advocate for the entire community they came from, a specific group they felt needed representation or even particular individuals that approached them. For example as a youth representative, Amani described how she advocated for the needs of the youth:

I remember in the beginning last year they sort a thought it was a little weird for a youth to take part you know but they are really accepting of me and I am the only youth now…. When it comes to social issues they
mention the youth and then I have to stand up and defend the youth and the ideas. I am glad to be there I am glad that they are not being put down if it was only adults what adults are going to stick up for. (Amani)

A number of tenants discussed how they advocated for tenants who would not speak up for themselves:

I speak out for the majority who can't speak up: for non-Canadians. Many of the tenants think that they cannot speak up because they might think they would be thrown out of the housing. They are afraid to speak up. (Margaret)

That’s why we complain and make a fuss because they [Immigrants] are afraid to complain or speak up. (Dorthy)

Tenant representatives also mentioned speaking up for individual tenants that felt more comfortable taking their issues to the representatives than the managers. This is an example of how the role of advocate often crossed over with both the role of a communication link and the role of a community care-taker. As they advocated for the tenants concerns they acted as a communication link between management and the tenants but also as a caretaker: taking on the responsibility to try to make sure tenants needs and concerns were taken care of.

**Communication Link**

As a communication link, representatives would take tenant problems forward to management or council meetings and could inform tenants about TCHC policies and activities. Some mentioned that this role was sometimes frustrating because in the end it was up to Housing what happened, others were happy to be heard and proud to be a communication link. Kristina told me, “A tenant representative is the link between tenants and the management, I am happy that the new staff takes my suggestions into account.” Tenants with this view and even tenants that were frustrated with some limitations of their
power were still appreciative that this system now provided them better opportunity to communicate with and hold the management accountable. At the same time many representatives mentioned that this position was limited or dependent on management’s actions, and other tenants often assumed tenant representatives had more power than they did, which could put pressure on tenant representatives. Makena explained that although this role was useful it had its limitations. She informed me that a tenant representative provided:

…A good way of communicating between tenants and housing, being a middleman between the two. Sometimes it’s hard because tenants think you should do everything but you can only ask for things to be done. They think that you have all the power but all you can do is pass on their concerns and then it’s up to housing.

Zuri described something similar, she felt she could help tenants bring forward their complaints but her power was limited:

There are a lot of complaints so I said ok I will go to management but also I still try to encourage them to also make the time to go to management. Because my area is to listen to the tenants but I cannot give them a suggestion like oh yes they are going to fix. I ask them to go to management to the office and go to management. “I will give a compliant or whatever you tell me but at the same time you need to go and make a time to talk to management also.” Because you don’t want to give the tenants the impression that you have a certain position, because this position is just a position where it is a volunteer position. So you have to stay within that volunteer work and not go over your boundary. And a lot of tenants from other communities complain about um I guess tenant representatives exercise more power than they are really given but I stay within whatever field and what responsibility I am allowed. I stay within that… Basically to advocate and listen to tenant complaints and bring it to management.

Similar to these two women, many tenants described an understanding of the role that entailed bringing forward and advocating tenant issues to management. These descriptions from representatives illustrate an informal link that they enacted between tenants and management: tenants came to them with complaints, representatives decided
which ones were important or widespread enough to take forward, and then they
advocated for the issues to be resolved. Some tenant representatives discussed how their
role was important because it provided someone who tenants felt comfortable talking to
within their own community. Tenant representatives provided a secure and approachable
link for regular tenants who may have been intimidated to deal directly with the TCHC
about their issues or complaints:

… I’m like a personal, instead of just a phone call to Joël [the HPO] or
Adel [the manager] I am their personal voice. See like they feel more
safe. Like I will do better because they know I know them or
something…They feel comfortable that I am doing it because they know
me and they know that I know them. So they figure they are talking to a
stranger you know they never met Adel or Joël. (Gary)

Other than I guess I would say, clearing out the confusion, whatever that
they may be confused…and to know it’s a familiar face in the community,
I guess it comforts them, they feel comfortable knowing that it is someone
they know and not just someone that doesn’t know their issues, someone
that they don’t talk to someone that doesn’t reside in an area that they
reside in. It’s different for them too. (Amani)

Although tenant representatives often stressed how they brought issues from
tenants to the council the communication was not only one way, tenants representatives
also brought information back to their community such as, what happened in council
meetings, the status of ongoing projects, or new policies implemented by the TCHC.
Amani described how she connected tenants with what was happening at the TCHC and
smoothed relations out for the management:

They always ask me, they always know that it’s at the end of the month.
Okay so what happened at the last meeting, we talked about this we talked
about that. If we talked about the roofing or the security, I remember
when he [the manager] was talking about the cameras and the lighting
being fixed, I will take that back to them, I'll tell them he’s working on it.
And um one time he explained about the contractors and how its up to
them how long the process takes, some people would be furious, so I will
sort of cool them down before they call to Adel. You have to understand
Amani expressed pride in being able to tell tenants in her community what was happening, that she was the person that people trusted to tell information to and get information from. The feeling that representatives provided someone in their community to talk to, that people were familiar with, came up repeatedly.

To many of representatives, although the focus was not on decision-making, they still felt their role was empowering and important because they connected tenants with management and useful information and also were able to fight for tenant interests. Other tenant representatives had a negative opinion of being an information link. They spoke of feeling like there was a lot of information coming from the top down. More than one tenant pointed out that although they were supposed to be representing tenants sometimes they felt they were working for the TCHC or being used to help spread information about corporate policy. Although tenants often focused on their role as a communication link, when tenant representatives felt an issue in their community needed to be resolved they would work hard, often with management and sometimes outside of the TCHC, to ensure they were addressed. The role of the tenant representatives seemed to contribute to their ability to get issues they were concerned with attended to.

**Filling in the Gaps as a Community Caretaker**

This theme arose as tenants repeatedly described their role as involving everything and anything that would improve tenant living conditions and well-being. The description approximated a caretaker, where tenants described filling in gaps some felt were left by staff. This role overlapped with the advocate role but went beyond simple communication as tenants took on a more paternal role, of looking out for, taking
care of, as well as advocating for and overseeing tenants. This also included tenant representatives taking on community development work; many representatives discussed the tremendous amount of time that their role consumed.

Often tenant representatives described taking on individual problems as well as a wide variety of jobs and putting in an immense amount of hours to work in the service of the tenants. Dorthy, a long time tenant representative, gave a number of comments that suggested the representative role included filling in the job of a social worker, superintendent, advocate and communication link. She felt that there should be room for promotion or for tenant representatives to be compensated. Dorthy also took on the role of community developer. She discussed how she put on events to encourage the interaction of residents, particularly of the immigrants who could not speak English well and who she felt needed to be integrated. Interestingly at one point in the interview a man from her building came down into the lobby and started yelling at her, telling her that she was not the boss of him just because she was building president (referring to her tenant representative status). She had been personally getting involved with what this tenant was doing and he had become angry about it. After he left I asked her to explain the role of a tenant representative, she explained that it was everything particularly because they keep on cutting back staff:

Well I don’t. Well practically everything. But uh no there is a restriction but that’s not very much a restriction anymore because they keep on cutting down, cutting down. Like before we had; now you see this wouldn’t happen if we had a social worker. We used to have a social worker you see and now I would phone after you leave I would phone the social worker and the social worker would give him the third degree or would say well if you keep that up you will ending up with the police getting a restraining order or whatever he's after.
She later goes on to compare herself to the superintendent. She expresses dismay that tenants cannot be promoted and when asked what they could be promoted to she responds:

I could be a superintendent or anything. I mean because you know I know the building history now I don’t mean uh like this guy we have now he never does anything I don’t mean uh I am not starting to repair things but the book work, and another thing the superintendents are not allowed to do half of the things anymore anyway because everything is contracted out here. But do you understand me, why don’t we get anywhere higher, anywhere. And the point is they get maybe what they must get 40 thousand dollars I'm sure a year or whatever but its me I'm doing their dirty work, now don’t you agree? I'm the one that gets oh ya well Dorthy this well Dorthy that. Well the less you talk the better it is for us…. That is another thing the superintendent it should be 50/50, the superintendent should have responsibilities too. You know team work not just oh well Dorthy, go to Dorthy.

Many tenants described taking over jobs that disappeared after cutbacks and often like Dorthy tenants complained about the immense amount of time the role took, often comparing it to a job:

I think it is downloading of the staff works and responsibilities onto tenants. Because they just went through amalgamation. TCHC tries to use us as tenant liaisons. They call it TPS; we call it ‘can you do some for our work, please’?

Later in the interview he insisted, “I am investing a lot of my time. This is my second unpaid job, our time is wasted by this spending on everyday stuff.” Another tenant Danny explained, “You know all these hours we put save them lots of dollars. Bringing info to the management is an unpaid job. We provide lots of good info for the management.” He later told the interviewer:

I made a coffee club out of my own pocket, it helps building a community, people should see and talk to each other more often, if you run out of something you can ask me to get it to you or borrow it to you, having this kind of networks help a lot. I could not continue the coffee club because of money. You know if tenants on a regular basis see that you are doing good things in the building, the things that usually the paid employee should do, they get out and help you out. People imitate if you do good stuff. You have to be passionate if not it is only a failure.
Jamie explained how he advocated for tenants rights where the staff fell short and could
do so because of the knowledge he gained through the position:

> Because I am involved at the policy level I am now able to tell them exactly how it works. Many tenants have come to me and asked for a transfer; I am now able to help out. I do individually help them, they all know it. One would ask me what should she do, it is three days no response for her toilet. They come to me for individual concerns but as a collective or group, No! Another tenant was about to get evicted. Due to my involvement in higher levels, I knew how to help her. I knew that TCHC would pay and help her for some time. I knew that there are ways to help her in her tough time, so she could keep her place. This should be the job of the CHU manager, but she never does that.

As mentioned above by both Jamie and Dorthy many tenants described stepping into personal disputes or helping with personal issues; to some this was part of the duties as a tenant representative. Gary described helping a woman with her broken toilet.

Makena described stepping in when a tenant was being very loud late at night when she was above a tenant with a young baby. Jacob after explicitly repeating that his job was not to solve personal issues later in the interview described how he would personally speak to kids that another neighbour complained about. This sometimes created tensions with the parents of the children, who he felt were not parenting well enough. Jacob also provided a good example of how tenants understood themselves as a communication link and mentioned how he filled in gaps where the staff was not present:

> So you ask why I am volunteering in housing so our main purpose of volunteering in housing is that we are a go between. We are between the tenants and the housing staff. We are not there to report on their fridge or their stove we are there to report on the surroundings hallway, by going around and so on and getting feedback. Some tenants don’t understand that is the role. But every time we go to the meeting there is another new ideas, what about the role of tenants, what about the role of tenants. Its simple, you take all the action, what is happening around the building because we don’t have any staff living in our building like the superintendent. So I said it’s to quickly observe something let them what is going on so when they come they can follow up. You don’t need to advise them on their job or demand something we are there to let the
housing staff know what is actually going on in the building so they can follow up on it.

Jacob reiterated some of the sentiments of other tenant representatives: that they were a communication link and filled in where the staff could not be. He also touched upon something that many of the tenants quoted above suggested: that they often put in a lot of energy to try to help improve the situation for the people in their community, but they were acting more as a volunteer than a decision-maker. This was a common theme running throughout the responses; they were in the service of the tenants and the TCHC but often did not describe how they linked tenants to decision-making or how tenant representatives themselves were directing or working with each other to make decisions.

Whether tenants were content or frustrated with the privileges and constraints of their role, they appeared to see their role as important because it gave them a better place to make some positive changes in their communities and the TCHC. The most prevalent way they understood the opportunity to do so was through acting as an advocate, communication link, and community caretaker. This mainly allowed tenants to pass on information and put pressure on the TCHC when issues needed to be dealt with. This position allowed representatives to better advocate for the tenants whether this was getting things in the building fixed or helping tenants with individual issues. The role also allowed tenant to hold the TCHC to account and provide a comforting presence in the community.
7. Interactions and Relations

Reviewing the relationships that defined the tenant representative role allowed a better understanding of what the role meant to tenant representatives and the boundaries for action and participation animated through this role. As a theorist in participatory development claimed, “Agency cannot be exercised in a vacuum and it is the very minutiae of social life and relationships which shape the forms that citizenship can take.” (Cleaver, 2004, 272). The interactions of tenant representatives with each other, management and with other tenants helped to shape what was of focus to tenant representatives, who was important and the possibilities and limitations of the tenant representative role. It was outlined in the last chapter that tenant representatives viewed their role as a chance to advocate and volunteer in the service of the community. The understanding of the tenant role by both the tenants and management helped to shape how tenants interacted with each other and management and for what purpose.

Tenant Representative Relations to the Tenants They Represent

Tenant representatives described their relationships with the tenants as one where tenants brought forward complaints to them with the hope or expectation that it would get dealt with. In some ways this relationship was similar to an elected official in our traditional systems, with tenant representatives collecting concerns of their constituents and then dealing with the issues themselves. It differed in that tenant representatives seemed to feel more personally responsible for the tenants and their individual problems as well as the issues in the building and provided more of a familiar face and comfort to the people. It varied how connected the representatives were to tenants and their
concerns and there was not a clear avenue of how they were supposed to connect tenants to decisions.

Tenant representatives often spoke of themselves being known to tenants because they worked or volunteered in the community, their picture was up in a high traffic area or they had simply been in the community awhile and people knew who they were. Still tenants did not always have a clear understanding of who the tenant representatives were in the different TCHC communities or what exactly they did. Hana said that she knew the previous tenant representative but didn’t know she was a representative until the woman asked Hana to take on the role herself. Hana then explained the loose connection between herself and some of the tenants:

My picture is in the laundry room. So I keep wondering when I walk out of the laundry room if I should take it down yet. But uh no I started knowing soon after that people were figuring it out, they would come up to me, oh she knows, lets ask her. So uh ya my picture is up there. I don’t know if tenants understand these are the things that the sheets left in the laundry room about what your tenant representatives do but I don’t know if the rest of the tenants have such a good idea about the role of the tenant rep. what they should ask them about or tell them about.

Some tenants who were approached on Election Day reported that this was the first time they had heard of the TPS even though it had existed for a number of years. Most people did not know who their tenant representatives were the previous term. This issue was improving, particularly with more visible elections such as the most recent. Amani described how people were starting to recognise her as the tenant representative although they were still foggy on what that meant:

I guess there is more pressure now that more people know about the representative system….There is more enthusiasm too, everyone wants to be a part of it now, everyone wants, and some people in the community think you get paid for it, its like if you only knew…
Although the tenants seemed to have some fuzziness around what the representatives were there for and even sometimes who their tenant representatives were, as the TPS continued more tenants were gaining familiarity with it. Many more tenants were involved in the last election than in the past, both in terms of people nominated and people voting. Amani gave a window into how she interacted with the tenants in her building as they started to realize she was the tenant representative:

Everyone’s face that is out there I have seen, especially with the flyers that are going around, so its easier to interact with them now and they aren’t afraid to stop me when I’m going to work saying hey do you know that this and this is going on can you tell them that. Like they know my face they know I am representing them.

Tenant representatives often mentioned that once tenants knew who they were they trusted them to “represent them and get things done.” Katrina described how she had an office to ensure that she could be accessible to collect tenant complaints, “I have an office to receive all the complaints by tenants. Tenant representatives should have offices so that tenants can come and talk to them about their problems.”

Although the clearest way that tenant representatives related to the tenants was to listen to their concerns and relay information, not all tenant representatives were so diligent about personally collecting tenant concerns on issues. Gary explained how he was more relaxed about bringing tenant views forward because he felt he already knew their issues:

…Sometimes you make your own decisions for your building. Oh ya because I know most of the people in the building there are probably four or five people I don’t really know. But I know everybody on a personal basis. And I know how they would think, what they would want.

Another tenant representative, Francis explained how he held meetings and collected the concerns of tenants but it did not change what he was asking for. He also described how...
the status as a tenant representative moved him from complainer to a legitimate carrier of tenants’ issues:

Well, no as a tenant rep. like I mean I can always speak on behalf of tenants and tenants bring me some feeding they feed my grievance or whatever and on my own it wouldn’t be seen the same, like if I do all the grievance on my own it would make me look like the one that is never happy and you know if you bring all the stuff. So if you say for instance, well a tenant told me that, they don’t need to know whose tenant I am talking about it gives me more weight, in that position. It makes me say it is different it has a different weight to be a tenant rep. because I represent a lot of tenants. Like I am not different acting for myself or acting for the group all me grievances are the same. I always talk the same way with them, I don’t have this in mind that I am the tenant rep. I talk common sense. But I realize that on behalf of tenants I have more weight but I feel that it’s a question of angle. You cannot weigh it but I know that if I be the only one complaining about stuff in my building I would be taken as the one as the one that is never happy. And whatever we do for him he’s never happy so why bother doing things, but now the situation is different cause I can always say oh a tenant complained about this a tenant complained about that I have been informed that blah blah. So that makes the job easier but the grievances are the same.

As the relationships between the tenants and their representatives were not always strong and the expectation was often for the representatives to go and get things done, there was not much evidence of tenant representatives holding regular meetings in their communities, with only a few representatives claiming they did this. The only structured regular meetings that were held in every CHU were run by the TCHC in the form of community consultations and although the tenant representatives were usually there they did not run the meeting but instead attended more as regular tenants.

Still some tenant representatives did describe holding meetings, and the TCHC had been encouraging this more, but there was no particular structure or requirements for what should be involved in these meetings and what the tenant representative should do with the input. Some held meetings as more of an information session, to tell people what was going on and gather information. Other tenant representatives described
holding meetings with active groups of tenants who regularly attended to get issues addressed in the community. One woman who had been a tenant representative since the conception of the TCHC but had just recently started meetings with an active group of tenants in her building, explained what they do:

Yes we have a committee that we meet together. We meet once a month and that committee represents the other tenants. It is tenants who are representing tenants along with the tenant representatives. So it’s like ten of us on a committee who would come in who would meet once a month and we would talk about all the issues facing the other tenants. Because they are complaining to the other tenants too. Ya most definitely, this is the one. This is the committee that we put forward to meet the management to have a meeting with management. We have different people on it. (Zuri)

Steven described the same sort of tight tenant group who would come to his meetings. He would hold a lot of meetings, sometimes many a month. He explained it was the same group that always came out so they worked closely together to address community issues. Other tenant representatives described meeting with people only when there was a significant matter that needed to be dealt with:

The way that the tenant rep. connects with the other tenants is that if there is burning issues or something you go out and you have a meeting within your community and you bring that to the tenant council meeting with the property manager and the health promoter and the youth program coordinator you know and if there is some supportive agency that works with our CHU they are at the table too. So there is a big long table in a boardroom setting where you have all these different individuals in a room. (Makina)

Amani described how she did not hold meetings at all but the community did meet when a large problem happened:

No the only time there is the big community meetings (and I live in the town houses), the only time that there are big meetings is if something tragic happens or there are big events, that’s about it.
Some tenants reasoned there were not proper facilities to have meetings or that tenants just were not that interested:

Well I mostly deal with people on an individual level, because its, cause we don’t have a meeting place so basically its like more of a one on one. People ask me are we getting this, you know if the super is coming in tomorrow. We don’t have a meeting place to see what uh, you know Dorthy’s building have you been there? They have a big meeting place. Our place is small and that’s the whole thing when we had a meeting one night only ten people came to the meeting. But a lot of people don’t even, they don’t concern themselves, they pay their rent they live there and that is it. They got a leak in the ceiling they will call someone. Don’t bother me and I won’t bother you a lot of people are like that you know. But some people are involved in what is going on so they ask me and that’s how we get our communication. (Gary)

Although Frank reported that he held regular meetings, he complained that there was a lack of interest from other tenants and also that holding meetings was sometimes challenging:

There are regular meetings with my tenants whom I am representing. Just simply holding meetings is very challenging. I have hallway conversation with them, news on bulletin board. Some tenants are not even interested…People do not have a sense of community. People only come out when they have a serious problem.

The extent to which tenant representatives connected with tenants in their buildings varied with some tenant representatives putting in a lot of time to collect tenant concerns and others feeling they knew what tenants wanted or what was good for their community. Regardless of how connected tenant representatives were with the people they represented, the dominant relationship seemed to be one where tenants were there to advocate for and help solve issues facing the community, whether that was representatives knowing what the community needed, tenants telling their representative to go and get something addressed or a group of tenants working on something together.

There were not clear requirements of how tenants should connect to the people they
represented or if they should hold meetings, and this was reflected in the loose connection that tenants had to their representatives and the decision-making that happened in the TPS.

Tenant Representatives Working With Each Other and Management

Tenant representatives generally focused more on interacting with management than with other tenant representatives. The manager was an important factor in the how the tenant representatives experienced the process and what they could accomplish. Whether in council or outside of council, managers and to some extent other staff, seemed to be seen as the ones that could really make things happen. Therefore although sometimes tenants would appreciate and build camaraderie with other tenant representatives, working as a council or with other tenants to make decisions was rarely the focus of tenant representatives. The workings of the councils varied widely between CHUs, with some more directed by tenants and others mainly directed by management. Relationships between tenant representatives also varied from antagonistic to co-operative and supportive.

The relationship between tenant representatives and management was a key component to the TPS; it could determine how tenants participated and what they were able to achieve. Many tenant representatives who had particularly helpful and dedicated managers often spoke of their achievements in their community as intertwined with their manager. Jeenah explained that her manager was a great listener and easy to work with. When asked if her experiences as a tenant representative would have been different if there was a different manager she strongly agreed replying:
If we had a different manager we wouldn’t have won anything [in the participatory budget]... Joël and Adel helped a lot. Right now we can achieve so many things because we have the experience [from the participatory budget] but we didn’t know how so they helped. They said, “You have to fight for you rights” and directed us to the right place telling us what we had to do to win: things like going up to people individually and convincing them.

A number of tenant representatives tied their achievements to the work or assistance of their managers. Makena, when asked what she felt were her greatest achievements as a tenant representative described things that her manager had done, such as improving safety in her community and starting a work program for teenagers. When asked whether the manager makes a big difference to a tenant representative she replied,

Ohhhhh! It makes a world of a difference it really does. Because when you don’t have someone that you can have a good rapport where can you go. Because as far as I’m concerned there won’t be any exchange of dialogue and when there is no exchange of dialogue that’s communication and when there is no communication how can you understand each other? You know so it makes a world of a difference when you do have someone you can relate to and would really and truly listen to the issues and the concerns.

Many tenant representatives described how having a good manager made a big difference in helping them achieve things. Zuri discussed how when the current manager came in she started to really get issues addressed in her community:

She [previous manager] is always talking about where she allocates money and no money is in the budget. She never can find money. Its like this community, is a small community and its like it had been forgotten. But since Adel has come on board its like its been recognised. But before there was nothing (this community) had never gotten anything.

Tenant representatives not only spoke of how important a good manager was but how the tenant representative role was useful because it provided them contact with the management:

Absolutely because being a tenant rep. puts me in the door with the property manager right in the office right in their face and talking to them
saying this is what is happening it needs to change. I have been quite blessed. I have a lovely property manager …you know because what she has done for our CHU since she has come over a year ago. Everybody is absolutely marvelled at her work. She is darn good. (Makena)

In many of the tenant representative’s comments it was reflected that having access to the manager was the focus of their concern and perhaps their main source of power. To most of the tenant representatives the council meetings were more about accessing management and pushing to get issues addressed or things done than working with fellow council members to make decisions:

Tenant meetings are the time to have access to the manager, tell Adel my buildings issues. Like for instance last week I had something to say because we had appliances delivered and people were mad because they did not get proper (24 hour) notice so I told Adel, that and the security cameras we need. (Gary)

It seemed for most this was the purpose of the tenant meetings: to tell the manager their building issues:

Well for me I find it’s a good place because you meet with your manager direct and you meet with your CHU council direct. And you lodge your complaints and your concerns but I think they should rotate where they meet. (Zuri)

Some tenants mentioned how it was more effective to personally speak to managers out of the meetings. Mark claimed “I got more by individual meetings with the management not thru the meetings.” He explained that “All CHU council meetings are venting meetings.” Danny described how although him and a tenant representative worked together on some things, for CHU issues he met with management alone and made sure his needs were clearly laid out for the manager:

I am a friend with one of them; we go together to express our concern for out of CHU stuff. For TCHC stuff I prefer to go alone, you know I always write the issue down and then go to the manager, I do not wait for the council to decide for it. I call the CHU manager and try to meet with him. I avoid meeting him too many times. When I come back from the meeting
with him, I write it down what happened and I email it. Verbal communication is very easy to forget because of the load of work. I email them the point format of what we discussed.

Amani explained how she found it easier to talk to the manager one on one than to try to “argue” about it in council:

Well if I am in a meeting and someone is hosting it where that person, some people just have an attitude that they have lived with for so long and you can’t really change it or do much about it but I just am like: ‘I will listen to you for now but I will call Joël or Adel and will say I don’t really think this and this is’. I will speak about it then because it is a waste of time to sit there and argue in front of everyone.

As management was the main point of agency for most of the tenant representatives and the main point of focus, deliberation between tenants was often limited. In the council that I observed, I witnessed most interaction between management and tenants and very little deliberation between the tenants. This council had a manager with a community development focus, a big ear for tenant concerns and a lot of time for tenants but still this paradigm of management with the power persisted. An example of this was when the manager could not make a council meeting the council decided to cut it short and not have a proper meeting because everyone seemed to agree they could not achieve much without the manger there. What this resulted in was often very individually active tenants fighting and advocating for funding, maintenance and programs for their building and little group decision-making or collaboration amongst tenant representatives. As the council was often about getting access to management with so many council members to talk, meetings could be seen as a drawn out process to some and even competitive to others. Zuri provided an example of feeling as though the meetings were not the best use of her time:

It’s kind of tiring. I have places and things to attend to but because I made a commitment during the election that I would attend these meetings I try
to, but it’s a lot of time. It takes away time from me really. Even though I still enjoy and I hear from other councillors their experience, it’s time taken from me…

As tenants were there to advocate and often had their main focus on the management, tenants were less likely to work with each other. Some tenants complained about lack of community or how tenants did not work together:

There is no sense of co-operation among the tenant reps…Many of the tenant reps only attend the council meetings to ask about their maintenance needs, washing machine, security camera and more, this is the mindset, they do not consider themselves activists…” (Mark)

Steven described something similar: “everyone is always asking the manager for a bunch of stuff.” He explained how as an active and informed tenant representative he would find out information about funding opportunities like the participatory budget and then the other council members would “jump on it like vultures” and he wouldn’t get anything. He attributed much of not getting anything to the fact that he did not get along with the manager. He lamented that tenants were often only concerned with getting more for themselves instead of working with each other. Margaret, a female tenant representative who had been serving her community for over 20 years, also complained about tenants only focusing on their own needs instead of focusing on what was best for the wider community:

People are tunnel-visioned. You can think of your building and the CHU and the City at the same time. So many of the tenant representatives only focus on individual needs. There is no sense of community. For example the tenant representative from a newly built senior residence always thought that it is unfair that we get more money at our big community where the buildings are very old and need of repair. In the pursuit of community garden no tenant representative helped me. There is no collectivity with other tenant representatives.
This lack of collectivity even pushed some to say they would not continue. Jamie explained she had no collective initiative with other tenant reps, "we do not do much. I will not run for the next term.”

Although there were complaints about tenants not working with each other this was not always the case and there were examples of camaraderie between tenant representatives in both council meetings and in the larger TCHC budget. The council I sat in on did show respect and some affection for each other and I witnessed them supporting one another in meetings. One of the members of this council Dorothy, explained:

Oh yes oh yes we have an excellent council and like I said what I don’t know, someone else would come up and say what about this or what about some other and uh everybody would chip in and say you are right or you are wrong or to the housing company, what are you doing about it and so forth.

Although this council did focus on management to get issues addressed and often did not work as a collaborative to solve issues or make decisions they usually showed a lot of respect for each other, their opinions and a willingness to help each other out and support one another’s concerns and views. The manager and the HPO also respected the tenant representative’s views and tried hard to keep relations between everyone in the council smooth and respectful. The issue was that although willing to support each other on individual issues, achieving something as a group or participating in extensive deliberative problem solving and decision-making rarely if ever occurred. Instead when decisions were made it went very quickly to a vote without much discussion and most representatives voted for their own interests.

The relations between tenants, representatives and the managers, created something of a hierarchical structure that did not necessarily encourage tenant
participation. Instead representatives once elected rarely brought tenants into the
decision-making structure beyond collecting complaints or concerns. The focus seemed
to be for tenant representatives to use their position to go out and get community issues
addressed by the manager. This meant representatives did not often focus on working
with each other to get things done but instead looked to their managers, which seemed to
inhibit tenant collaboration.
8. Empowerment, Citizenship Skills and Decision-making

This chapter reviews the potentials and limitations for empowerment enacted through the tenant representative role. Empowerment is a key component of participatory projects; particularly in the processes that include traditionally marginalized populations. Empowerment is understood here in terms of Somerville’s definition where empowerment occurs when “people’s control (collective or individual) over their lives is increased” (1998, 233). Included in the realm of empowerment is the building of capacity, where knowledge and skills gained can help increase personal or group control (Lyons, Smut & Stephens 2001).

There were three key ways that the TPS fostered tenant (particularly tenant representative) empowerment: 1) tenant representatives were able to point to achievements they made within their community because of the TPS; 2) tenants felt as though they had better access to management and as if they were being listened too (this also included a feeling by some, both tenants and representatives, that they were important, because they were valuable enough to be heard and make decisions); and 3) tenant representatives were empowered through gaining efficacy including, increased feelings of self-worth and confidence along with the knowledge and skills that enabled them to be more effective actors within the TPS and the TCHC as well as outside of it.

The ways in which tenants and tenant representatives were empowered are encouraging but there was also evidence of serious limitations to tenant empowerment. Some tenants suggested they were not really the decision-makers or the ones with power. There seemed to be two main issues behind this evaluation: first, that tenants did not seem to see significant opportunities to make tenant led decisions: tenants felt that things
were often directed by the TCHC with some even suggesting representatives were being used to implement TCHC policies, and second, that decisions tenants did make were not always followed through on.

**Achievements and Feelings of Self-worth**

One aspect of the TPS that encouraged empowerment was the tangible achievements tenant representatives were able to accomplish through their role. This could increase confidence and feelings of efficacy as tenants witnessed their positive impact in the community. Every tenant interviewed could name something that they had achieved through their role as a tenant representative. Achievements most often cited by representatives involved gaining improvements for their building, such as, new carpets, painting or furniture, as well as increases in security. Tenants also spoke about achieving less tangible benefits, such as making tenants feel more comfortable, giving tenants a voice, and organizing to bring the community together at events, such as barbecues or Christmas parties. Tenants mentioned that they had achieved these things through hard work and advocacy on their part as well as through pressuring management, voting in council, the participatory budget and putting pressure on the TCHC through the city council.

Margaret named a number of achievements she gained as a tenant representative including getting computers for tenant representatives, getting people “off their couches” and participating, organizing local events and finally getting a community garden:

There is also a new garden; we had all these meetings and researches to see what types of plants we want. It will be a Native garden in the shape of a canoe. It is multi-functional, it will be at specific height so that the elderly does not need to bend. This garden is also located between two schools, it could be used for education purposes and students will also feel
ownership and will take care of it. This is my legacy. This garden shapes the idea of the people who come to the community from this entrance. I have done research, threw my ideas and got people's feedback.

Danny conveyed how the little achievements could help a person’s state of mind:

“Cleaning, the elevators being done everyday, you know these small things build your self-confidence, you feel great.”

What seemed to be the most important thing about the TPS to the tenants whether they felt the system as a whole worked well or that it was frustrating was that it created a mechanism for them to be listened to, which allowed more voice and control over conditions in their community. Zuri, a tenant representative that had many positive things to say about the TPS discussed how the system was an improvement from what was there before:

Well the reason why I do think it’s affective, years ago when it was not Toronto Community Housing it was Metro Housing, tenants were not heard. Even if tenants would put forward their complaints or they would continue to complain and nothing was done. But after having this system where tenants could participate in the decision-making I find that its necessary and I find that it does work in our favour. We put forward something, like I say its not a quick process but at least its being heard. So I think it’s very important that they do have this system where the tenants do have a representative and things so far have been working. Its been coming forward we are being heard now.

Even tenants who were very critical of the TPS expressed how they felt the system was better than nothing or better than before because at least they were being heard. Frank explained why the TPS was a step in the right direction, while still recognizing its shortcomings:

The TPS makes it easier in the sense that there is a mechanism in place to collect tenants’ ideas around issues and presenting the problems, the tenant rep. is the person to present the problem. It also makes it easier that there is a communication in place about the issues of the building. But this is not guaranteed. This does not necessarily help us get a bike park,
No. The mechanism in place but the effectiveness is unclear or better to say non-guaranteed.

Frank had mixed feelings about the TPS, he expressed a lot of frustration about its limitations but at the end of the interview made a point of clarifying that he felt the TPS was important. He too mentioned something he achieved as part of the process. “At my building we had a security issue. Tenants who moved out did not return keys, so we asked for swipe keys, we got them and we also changed the access to the garage.” Frank was not the only one with mixed feelings about the TPS. Jamie had complaints about the system but still could name some changes that she made through her role, “I had very little achievements. I am not unhappy, although I went ten steps and got seven back, at least I got three steps ahead.”

The TCHC-wide participatory budget was one way that tenants could gain money for capital improvements in their communities and also act as decision-makers. A number of tenants remarked on achievements they had gained through the Participatory budget:

I was the one who presented our project to the whole council. Knowing that not only my community wanted the money that we needed but that now I have a place that I can look at every day and can say that was me, you know. (Amani)

Amani not only spoke about her achievement but how it made her feel good about herself. Many tenant representatives discussed how their experience gave them feelings of increased self-worth and the opportunity to learn about politics and decision-making:

Ya its wonderful. Nothing works better to have I don’t want to say small people do or make, just to known that as a tenant you get to have a say no matter how small or minute you know but you get to have a say and a lot of people really appreciate that. (Makena)

The participatory budget was a really good experience because we were able to fight for what you want but in a democratic way. I never
campaigned before I’ve never gotten involved in politics. It made me feel like I can do something. (Jeenah)

Some tenants mentioned increases in self-worth and confidence, as the TPS made them feel like they, as well as their communities were important enough to be listened to. Some describe the feeling of having a special status, as people that had really achieved something for their community. Francis described how his position graduated him beyond a “simple tenant”:

For that I feel some appreciation, which is different from what I felt as a simple tenant. Like I mean as a simple tenant you don’t have any recognition you do your day to day life and don’t expect anything but since I am a tenant rep like I mean everybody say hi. On this aspect there is a little different sense of what you can like I mean the recognition is important to me anyway.

The possibility that the tenant representative position had to raise the self-worth of both the tenant representatives and the tenants was an important aspect to the process and one that a number of tenant representatives and staff pointed to. Margaret learned through her role the importance of self-worth for the tenants and how to support this:

I learned that self-worth is more important than self-confidence. People living at housing have been put down all their lives by their parents, teachers, spouses, housing staff, they believe they are among the lowest people, they have no self-worth.

The benefits of increased self-worth were discussed by tenants both in terms of individual increases in self-worth and communities of people feeling as though they mattered. Amani said that the position made her feel more important and as if she was being taken seriously, and said that this same effect trickled down to other youth in her community. As a youth the position not only made Amina feel more important or taken seriously but all youth:

When I say matter more I don’t mean just me I mean youth in general. The manager or other people in the community that were involved in that
always told me that it was always adults that were in those decision-making-committees and there was never a youth that was participating in those sort of councils. And that me being involved and also David and both of us being there, I felt liberated you know I felt like it was really the beginning of a journey.

Amani went on to explain why this system was important and how the community itself felt raised to a higher status because they were being listened to:

… It shows them that you guys do matter its not just the upper people that are making the decisions right and the decisions have to start with your ideas and your concerns and your issues. And only when your mouth is open and you let your representative know that your voice will be heard. I guess it does help because I remember a time when managers would only be called if a sink was broken or a bathroom or if there was flooding. No one ever felt comfortable doing anything else it would just be complaints or what not but now that I see big community events. You know the managers themselves getting to know the communities and the residents, instead of just a phone call saying your sink will be fixed on this and this day do not worry. Now it’s like come out to a barbecue Canada day this that, to help them feel more positive that they belong to a community. The whole voting system when you vote for a mayor it’s important. Mayors represent you or whatever and now tenant reps. this is important too, right, they are representing you.

**Empowerment, Efficacy and Citizenship Skills**

Along with describing increases in feelings of self-worth and control over what was happening in their community, tenants representatives reported increases in their capacity such as, knowledge and skills that could contribute to empowerment. Many representatives mentioned increases in their confidence and public speaking skills that helped them interact with tenants as well as staff and councillors. Amina described what she learned as a tenant representative that contributed to increased efficacy; from gaining the confidence to speak about her issues, to learning skills that helped her in her role and her life. Below she described how she eventually learned to speak about her interests in council:
I was just too I though that my issues were baby issues, like I needed a basketball court compared to the ceiling need to be fixed, they all had common issues and I didn’t want to be a red pain in the black room I wanted to keep it to myself but once again Joël was like, hey Amani do you have anything to say? So ya and eventually I got used to it I got used to the whole idea that everyone is going to have their own issues and if you have issues then don’t hold it back you have to say what is on your mind or your issues are never going to be solved. And everyone is going to come and say you supposed to be our tenant rep. So I made it my priority that I’m going to say what I have to say.

Amani went from not feeling confident enough to speaking in council to presenting her CHU priority at the Participatory Budget in front of tenant representatives from across the city. She also chaired a meeting and was sent to the World Social Forum in Africa. She described her experience in the participatory budget:

….. Getting to know more people and having more confidence and speaking in front of a lot of people... The capital fund, my heart was racing it was beating so fast it was a lot of people and I had a presentation the week after so it helped me a lot I had a presentation for school so it was a life skill public speaking.

The skills she gained not only helped her in her role but also had the potential to enhance her standing in her outside life:

There are rewards to it, when I finished my first year I received a certificate that uh my position title and um whatever I was accredited with when I took it to school my professor was amazed she was like wow this is so great and she told me to put it in my portfolio, like that it makes me look good too and not only for school or organisation or your job, its also community members that see your face and know that you care, its like a role model.

As a youth Amina had a lot to gain in terms of confidence and skills through her experiences as a tenant representative. Still, regardless of age, many tenant representatives reported how the role allowed them to increase their self-confidence and communication skills. These gains could then better help them perform their roles within the TPS:
It helped me become self-confident; I talked a lot in the public, which I never done before. I talked with politicians easier, what I learned was how to be able to communicate with people at different levels. Some people talk fast and aggressively, some people talk calmly, some people have a mental condition, in our neighbourhood we have all kinds of flavour, it was all trial and error. I can say that it made me a better person than I was before. I do have more skills, I do have public relation skills, before that I was store security I talked with people if I had to but now I have no problem talking with a stranger. What helped me and enabled me to do so was I do not talk from my mind, I just talk from my heart. Then if the person is insulted, I explain and apologize and say what I meant exactly. Sometimes people judge me but now I am confident I do not care if people misjudge me. You know putting the time and the ability to listen well to people is another important thing I learned. (Danny)

Along with gaining the confidence and ability to speak in public tenants also discussed how the role helped them interact with others in their community:

I would ask anybody to run and represent their community like I said its very rewarding, it allows you also to interact with different people if you are a shy person. Because truthfully I was always a slight a shy a very shy person. I never really talked too much in the public. I am more of a listener rather than a person who talks a lot I always lay back and allow the person to express themselves more so that I can listen to them. I do talk. So being a tenant rep. I notice I do talk more now. I meet with more people I attend a lot of different meetings. It has allowed me to learn how to deal with the public generally. (Zuri)

Yes it has forced me to get out and talk to people and learn about people and in terms of in my own building I have learned I have made contact with a lot more people. You know I have a much better understanding now about my building. Knowing who the tenants are, and what the problems are, stuff like that. (Hana)

In addition to gaining confidence and communication skills, tenants learned information about how the TCHC functioned, what their rights were and where to apply pressure when they were not satisfied with the TCHC response. These skills allowed the tenants to get the issues that they cared about dealt with. Margaret explained how she learned that "…people at any rank are still people”, as well as “what button to push to get something done. I learned how the system works, who you should get hold of to get
something done.” Mark mentioned a number of different aspects that helped enhance his effectiveness as a tenant representative. “The TPS helped me to develop a good knowledge of the TCHC and the neighbourhood and very well enhanced my public speaking skills.” Some tenant representatives described gaining information about tenant rights. “That’s one thing about being a tenant representative is you learn about your rights and your rights as a tenant. Also you learn better about how the TCHC works. How tenant transfers work etc.” (Gary).

Many tenant representatives gained information about the TCHC through their role that helped them more effectively get issues addressed in the TCHC, but this was not always enough to achieve what they wanted. Sometimes to get things done tenants had to gain knowledge of City Council and the bylaws as well as, make connections to apply pressure from outside the TCHC. Many tenants reported making relationships with their councillors and using tactics such as contacting media to get issues addressed in their community. Once these connections were made, tenants had very useful resources that could help them impact decisions and actions in the future. Dorthy reflected, “Yes I learned by trial and error. You know but like I said I was determined to do the best I can and by that I mean I found out all the bylaws.” She later explained about how she learned to go to the councillors to get an air-conditioning unit in her building fixed. Dorthy researched what section of the government dealt with these issues and went down to the office to complain. The TCHC ended up getting fined and the air-conditioning unit was fixed. Another tenant representative, Francis, described writing his councillor as a tactic to pressure his manager to move on an issue he felt was important. In the recent municipal election a number of tenant representatives actually ran as councillors. In
addition both HPO’s and tenant representatives organized many different candidate forums so that people in the TCHC could pressure potential candidates about issues important in housing.

**Partial Empowerment.**

Although the evidence for increases in tenant empowerment through the TPS system was encouraging there were also substantial limitations to empowerment when it came to decision-making and agency. As reflected in some of the earlier comments although tenants did feel like they could make some changes in their community through their role, tenants did not often see themselves as the ones with the decision-making power. Although all of the tenants when asked said that they had been involved in some decision-making, many tenants interviewed particularly the activist minded tenants had some complaints about the limitations on tenant led decision-making. Often tenants described how they did not have much power, that the final decisions were in the hands of the management or that the structure was more top down than bottom up. Some tenants complained that the TPS was mostly lip-service, or that tenants were distracted with more minor issues, rather than focusing on the important issues. As tenants understood their role mainly in terms of advocation some tenants saw their opportunity to impact decisions as one of pressure and proposals more than really making the decisions:

> We do not make decisions, we make proposals. Each tenant rep. is supposed to propose what benefits the tenants of his or her building and other projects that benefit others as well. (Danny)

> Many tenants described how their decision-making role was limited to small decisions and in the end it was up to TCHC to decide what was happening. Frank explained the type of participation opportunities and limitations he saw in the councils:
As tenant representatives in my CHU, we have all the control of council meetings. We set the agenda at council meetings (however there are so many agenda items that come from TCHC, which we have to discuss at the meeting), we can bring forward our building issues (low priority items not the main problems), we can decide on what we want at the meeting (it does not mean that TCHC is moving on it), we can decide to send representatives to training workshops (we have the budget for it), we can decide on our public space use and other little stuff like that, so nothing major happens...In terms of impacting serious policy, no we are not there yet. We can vote to send a resolution to TCHC, but again it depends on whether TCHC is interested or not.

Frank later complained:

They talk about the tenants' impact on decisions; they like to involve us for a lot of discussions about stuff but we are NOT really impacting decisions. They want our input on certain issues but at the end of the day the decisions are made separately.

Frank referred to many agenda items coming from the TCHC, which was an issue raised by other tenant representatives as well. Some tenant representatives complained that they felt they were co-opted by the TCHC to implement their policies. Mike stated, “The TPS is good for the TCHC authorities to make out of us a human shield against what they want to fight for. They come up with proposals and we believe we should say yes to those proposals. This is how things are delivered to us...in this TPS we are just doing what you are telling us to do.” Jillian expressed a similar concern:

(The) TCHC is trying to develop community from top-down but it never does, thru CHUs and councils, no it does not work. ...One other reason is that they put tenant reps. in an impossible situation to some degree. For example in the fist CMP [Community Management Plan], they were going to recover five million dollars from tenants thru non-rental. So this thing came down to us, we had discussions in the CHU and then area meetings. Because to me it just boggled my mind. They were going to take five million dollars from the pockets of the poorest people in the city, it is a tax. And we were supposed to approve it or suggest the ways to do it. I went and I had some stats on washing machines, parking and for some cable TV. For someone on welfare to double the cost of washing is a chunk of their welfare (500-600 dollars). I went and argued against all this. They then decided to forget the washing costs, then they plan to triple the costs of parking, they say if people could afford a car they
should pay market value for the parking. From 20 to 90 dollars and you know that and we were supposed to go back and report this to the tenants in our buildings. We get the blame for their policy. I told other tenant reps. that I am personally not a shell for the corporation especially when I do not agree with a policy. I am not here to enforce corporate policy. I am the tenant representative.

A number of these comments allude to what seemed to be a common perception amongst tenant representatives: that the TCHC was still dictating what happened and leaving a small space for tenant decisions. Dorthy touched on something similar when explaining the battle that tenants had to fight to get things done:

If you want to be good, if you want to have any impact, which means standing up to god almighty, and that’s another point like I said from a legal stand point of view. They are not going the conventional rule they have their own law you know the housing company, that’s another thing. but I wouldn’t dare say that but I know. So they are not they are their own you know law and order no, judge and jury, judge and jury that’s what they are.

Amani who was generally happy with the way the TPS worked also mentioned how she felt limited in the opportunities available to her to make change or impact decisions:

I wanted to put that on the table this year but the thing I found sorta weird was that after we got the money from the capital fund, we had one last meeting but I guess that is the only chance you have to put a concrete idea on the table, to get something done. That’s how I feel now.

Amani suggested that she felt the participatory budget was the only opportunity to really bring forward an idea and “get something done” and yet not all tenants reported having much to do with the participatory budget. Tenant representatives’ experience and knowledge of the participatory budget, (the main opportunity for substantial tenant control over decision-making) was quite varied. Many tenant representatives do not get to participate in the budget. The tenant participation involved in deciding on the priority and taking it forward to the city-wide budgeting forum, in large part depended on what
happened in council and whether the manager promoted tenant-led decision-making around this item.

There were other issues with the budget that could limit tenant empowerment. One problem seemed to be that tenants did not always see the results of their decision-making. Some tenants complained that, although they won funding for their priority through the participatory budget, it was never completed because the project was over-budget or there wasn’t enough time to finish it. Often tenants did not really know the reason why the priority did not get accomplished and were left feeling disappointed and powerless because the TCHC did not do their part. This is the sentiment that Amani expressed when the year earlier her council won the money and then did not see anything come of it:

Ya I definitely think so like when they are making decisions, I understand we have meetings but I don’t think we are told everything, I understand that we are not workers and we don’t have to know everything, I don’t know how to say. Ok for example last year when Lawrence Heights won, Dean was our speaker and we thought everything was fine. We got the money whatever and then all of the sudden we hear that the money that was estimated was too little and that we needed more and so we had to give back whatever was required. So I guess it bummed out a lot of community members, that’s like saying we won and then getting their hopes up….I don’t feel that reasonable information was given, all they said was that they estimated too little and therefore they couldn’t complete the project and so they had to give it back. It was like they didn’t do their part, we did ours.

Tanya had a similar story:

Right away, we got involved in the PB process. We presented the project (changes of the fences) and got the money. Youth were engaged in making the proposal and taking photos for the proposal. This was motivating; I felt that I was doing something for the community. The council had already approved this project, so I did not have to convince others to vote for it in our council. When we got the money, we were excited, we even had thought about the contractor, everything was set to go but then it went down, it was taken away from us. The whole point for me was to create youth employment for this project. Now the manager
says it is not that easy. There is no progress yet; people are frustrated. It was supposed to get started in the summer, then now they say in September but nothing has happened yet. We thought we could get a contractor and they could hire some of the youth, but apparently because it is a large sum, it has to be tendered. Companies have to compete to get the project. It is now H.S.I. who should do it but I cannot pick up the phone and call them to do it. Other CHU managers say it should be you (the tenant representatives) who should be in charge.

For both Tanya and Amina, not only did the TCHC’s failure to follow through on what they expected disappoint them, but they felt it jeopardized their standing with the tenants they represented. As tenants expected them to go and represent them it was now also the responsibility of the representatives when things did not happen:

It’s not only that we feel that way but it’s the residents that would come up to us every day and say didn’t we win a lot of money last year what happened. They feel like robbed you know. You’re a part of it now you don’t want to be known for that. They won’t vote for you next year. (Amina)

I cannot say that tenant council is very active. I am afraid that community asks me the changes they want to see (like the fences) but nothing happens, and they say how come it is not happening. They will also lose faith in me. (Tanya)

In addition to tenant representatives losing face with the tenants they represented, the representatives themselves could lose interest in the process when they did not see results for their participation. Many tenant representatives mentioned a story about tenants putting their energy into a meeting or a project and then not seeing the results of the decisions made. Frank who wanted to have an impact on policy decisions at the TCHC described his experience spending time writing up an after-hours emergency response manual:

My involvement was updating the after-hour emergency response manual. We did work (lots of volunteer hours) on it but it is disregarded. Why did you pretend that you are asking for participation? It was our commitment to prepare the guidelines but what is your freaking commitment? You
heard us, NOW what are you doing to fix it? Nothing happened with that work. You should not just ignore us.

When the TCHC does not always follow through on tenant led decisions and tenants do not know of any clear way to follow up on decisions, it can help create the attitude that tenants are not really the ones with power. Jacob a tenant representative, who was generally positive about his role and just happy to volunteer, still expressed his doubts that the tenants had any power. He mentioned a number of times how he was frustrated that when tenants made good decisions they could not always depend on the TCHC to follow them:

Oh well if the tenants really had the power that they are saying, we could do something what we are doing, but we don’t have the power. They have the power right? So they should convince us that they can give us the results when we make a really intelligent decision. That is what I am looking for.

There were substantial benefits produced through the TPS that the tenants named, for example, feeling they mattered more, were listened to more and had increased impact and control over what happened in their communities. Still tenants did not generally feel they had substantial control over the decisions made at the TCHC, which could cause frustration as well as seriously limit the extent of their empowerment and feelings of agency. Tenants had an impact on decisions but the TCHC was still viewed as having the power to dictate what happened, without the tenants always having a clear way to hold the TCHC to account.
9. Impact of TPS Structure and Education Initiatives on Tenant’s Understandings of the Role

Although the structure of the TPS and the education component were briefly outlined earlier, this chapter is to try to better highlight some of the properties of the TPS that help to shape and guide how the tenants participated. It is meant to fill out the issues and responses in the previous chapters and to look at how structure and education can contribute to both the possibilities and limitations of the process, particularly in regards to tenant empowerment and deliberative decision-making.

In the previous chapter it was outlined that although there were important ways that tenants were empowered through the TPS, there were also limitations on the extent to this empowerment in terms of how much agency tenant representatives had. Jillian, an active tenant representative explained how she felt a key issue associated with tenants not taking on a decision-making role was that tenants did not know they should have any power because they were accustomed to a different relationship than this:

It is a question of power and most tenants do not know that they have any. They do not recognise that there might be even a possibility to have power. They are also used to it, because of the way that the social structure of the City was that they have been told what to do or what not to do. They were told by Ontario Works Welfare or whoever. The rules were there and they lived with them. They are more comfortable that there is an institution doing that rather than tenants.

Tenants traditionally have been socialised into a relationship in public housing and most likely outside of this environment, where they follow structure and rules instead of make them. They likely have not been given much opportunity to practice decision-making in the public realm. This is why there is such potential for empowerment and capacity building, but also arguably why structure and education need to be carefully crafted to ensure tenants are to some extent directing the process and engaging in the role
as decision-makers. Both the Structure and Education in the TPS will be reviewed to attempt to better discern why tenants understood and experienced the role as they did.

**Structure**

The TPS empowered tenants in that it provided them with a concrete forum to connect to management and have a say on decisions made in their community. It also allowed them to practice decision-making themselves both through minor decisions in council and through the TCHC-wide participatory budget. The TPS was very much a decentralised system where how the councils were run, what they decided upon and how the people within interacted was largely up to the discretion of the individual CHUs, particularly the management and HPO’s and to a lesser extent the tenants.

The decentralised structure although positive in one sense because small units allow participants to engagement and deliberate, can cause problems if there is no guiding structure to help ensure participation or no centralised body holding the decentralised units to account. There seemed to be an issue with this in the TPS as both the extent of participation and much of the education was dependent on the philosophy, enthusiasm and competence of the manager and the HPO. The extent of tenant control over the councils and opportunity for decision-making could therefore largely depend on the manager, with some tenant representatives even reporting it was more the manager who decided on which priority went on to the participatory budget than the tenants.

The opportunities for when and how tenants should participate in decision-making were not standardized and so were not clear, what was clear across every CHU was that the position gave the tenants better access to management and money to improve their community. As this was the clearest opportunity for agency tenants did not necessarily
have a reason to engage in extensive deliberation with each other or focus on working as a collaborative, instead energy was often directed towards the manager. The unequal relations between tenants and management within the councils constructed the tenants as advocates asking and pressuring management to address issues they found important. This still allowed tenants to achieve some real gains within the TPS, as well as, feel proud to be advocates and sources of comfort in their communities, but the unclear structures of defined participation and focus on management seemed to inhibit tenant agency, deliberation and the extent of empowerment. Bottom-up participation and deliberation was not only limited because tenant representatives looked to the manager instead of each other for decision-making and problem solving, but also because tenant participation was not strongly encouraged from unelected tenants.

Often the only way tenants could connect to CHU council activities and decision-making was through asking their representative what was happening and passing on their complaints through them. The only clear routes for regular tenants to get involved in the TPS was voting on Election Day, telling the tenant representatives their issues, and attending consultation meetings run by the management and the HPO not the representatives. As the management instead of the tenant representatives ran the consultation meetings it did not help connect a clear line of participation from the tenants up through their representatives. Additionally these meetings were consultations, and so tenants did not necessarily see the results from their decisions after the meetings were finished.

In the CHU I observed, tenants who ran in the election as candidates for the representative position, showed a lot of enthusiasm to be a part of this system but they
seemed to disappear after they did not win the election. There was no obvious way for them to continue to take part if they were not tenant representatives. There were other initiatives and community development projects that regular tenants could engage with but how they could integrate as decision-makers in the TPS was less clear. This helped to solidify the representative role into one, which was mainly focused on advocating, communicating and community caretaking because the most straightforward way for the tenants to be heard was through approaching their tenant representative and asking them to get things done. The lack of clear and transparent structures directly connecting tenants to decision-making not only inhibited bottom-up participation but also limited the kind of empowerment that tenants experienced, as they still did not feel that they were the ones with substantial power.

The conception of tenant representatives as advocates was again encouraged through the structure of the participatory budget. There was not much opportunity for tenant representatives to meet and learn about different CHUs, and build working relationships with each other. There was not a lot of inter-CHU collaboration because most of the time councils functioned as distinct separate units and only came together to discuss TCHC-wide budgeting priorities for one day. On this day delegates arrived prepared with a persuasive argument to help them convince others to vote for their priority. The process included a speech given by each delegate, a question and answer period, one on one networking and finally ended with a private vote. Tenants mainly focused on getting their item funded and then individually voted for what they preferred, instead of deliberating as a group on what items were most deserving or most in need. In addition there were no guidelines or allocation scheme to help ensure a fair distribution of
funds. As there was not much interaction between CHUs beyond this one day, little focus on group deliberation to decide what priorities were most deserving, and no clear guidelines for a fair allocation scheme; tenants mainly focused on winning money for their own CHU instead of engaging in collaborative problem solving to attempt to reach relatively fair or acceptable solutions.

**Education**

Generally there was not a very comprehensive education program to ensure tenants understood the TPS system, how to make things happen and how to hold people to account. Many tenants spoke of simply learning as they went to develop some of this knowledge. Often much of the education was left up to the Management and HPO’s who already had full duties outside of the TPS system; or to the plethora of pamphlets and reading materials handed out to tenants describing the TPS and outlining the role and responsibilities of the tenant representatives.

Although the education provided by the CHU staff, the information handouts and the workshops did have some impact, together it did not supply tenant representatives with in-depth knowledge of the system. Nor did it provide the support for tenants to move beyond advocation and engage in collaborative decision-making and deliberative problem solving. Indeed the materials handed out to the tenant representatives outlined a similar understanding of the tenant role and duties as the tenants expressed themselves. The focus was on tenants as advocates and communication links and there was not much information on how tenants could take on a decision-making role or bring in other tenants as active participants into the process. For example a sheet that provided a brief point form synopsis of the representatives responsibilities named the three duties of the tenant
representative: to “represent community issues at the CHU Council meetings”, “Collect information from tenants and provide feedback to staff”, and “…Advocate for broad tenant and community rights (as well as) encourage tenants to identify community needs and issues” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006d). This information sheet also explained that the role was not for taking on individual tenant problems, but as these representatives were the main communication link to management and the figure in the community advocating for tenants and their rights, they often slid into the role of looking after the community both in terms of individual and group issues.

The need for providing education and information to the tenants so they could best utilise the TPS could be seen in the actions and comments of both tenants and representatives. As described in chapter eight, not all tenants seemed to know about the TPS or who their representative was. Some tenant representatives provided stories of tenants thinking they had powers or responsibilities they did not. If tenants knew who their tenant representative was they sometimes expected them to take care of any issues in the community, this could include both maintenance and personal problems. For example one tenant explained he “had 27 calls on the blackout day.”

In turn tenant representatives would often take on the responsibility of looking after a wide range of tenant problems. Some representatives claimed that their roles and responsibilities were not well understood, “it is vague and many tenant representatives do not clearly know what to do.” This was seen in a number of interviews as tenants sometimes seemed confused about their roles or how to access information. As has been reviewed tenants were still learning valuable knowledge and skills through their participation. Tenants were learning, but their knowledge about how the TPS worked and
how to act as a decision-maker within it was arguably limited due to a lack of training.

For example, Dorthy explained when she found herself in the representative role she took it upon herself to learn what the tenant rights were and how to contact city councillors to get issues resolved. Still, although Dorthy learned how to be an effective activist for tenants in her building she too was unclear about her responsibilities as a tenant representative. She felt her role was everything and could not distinguish it from the responsibilities of a staff member such as a superintendent or a social worker. She also showed the same pattern as the other tenant representatives in focusing on management as the way to get most issues resolved.

There were also evident holes in the knowledge of some tenant representatives that could inhibit what kind of agency they had over the process. For instance they were not always clear on what opportunities there were for actual decision-making and how to follow up on the TCHC actions once decisions were made. One tenant representative who was relatively new but had been carrying out the role for a number of months explained she was not clear on some major components of the TPS. When I asked if she had been involved with the participatory budget opportunity that happened once a year she responded, “No I didn’t go there. I’m not sure I even heard of that. I think I heard of something but that happened? Okay.” Although Hana was lacking on this information she was an intelligent, educated and a competent individual and did describe how she was learning as she went:

Well as I mentioned I’m a new tenant rep. so I have only been doing this for a little while now so I am still learning. The structure is kind of coming out of the fog now. Ya I am still trying to understand fully how much tenants impact the system and um ya, I still don’t have a really great understanding but I am getting better.
Hana described learning as she went but she was not able to name much education or training provided to help her understand “how tenants can have an impact.” Perhaps this was why she was unsure about the main opportunity for tenant controlled decision-making (the participatory budget) after a number of months at the job and having been a tenant representative when it occurred:

Ya I think we have been taking things one-step at a time um just learning, I have been just learning as I go. Other than the lump of information we got at the beginning I have been just reading that and then kind of getting a sense of how everything is run. Um but other than that there hasn’t been any other kind of training.

Confusion or lack of information about how to act effectively in the TPS was not only limited to new tenant representatives. More than one tenant representative that had been acting in this role since the conception of the system indicated they did not know how to follow up on decisions reached or input they had given. For example Zuri described frustration with not knowing what happened with tenant budget requests:

We should have a ball figure on what amount of money we should ask for you know but you come in and you promise the tenants and you build their hope up. So whenever you have a meeting they [the tenants] don’t come because they are frustrated, they think your lying. So this is exactly what is happening. So where does this money go you don’t know.... like for example when they have these meetings and they promise you that they are going to fix this or they are going to give you this. Vote on the most project that they want and you vote on it and you still never get it…. Ya you don’t see what happens.

Tenants expressed frustration over putting energy into a decision and then not always seeing the results, sometimes the only way tenants knew how to make something happen or to check up on the status of an issue was to ask their manager or HPO.

Steven a tenant representative that was well informed about the TPS and how it worked because he took it upon himself to learn, complained that there was, “…no
capacity building was done for tenant reps” and described how instead, tenants relied on him or the manager for information. Dorthy discussed the same problem:

I don’t know if you have that question or not but its unfortunate that tenant representatives are really not, I should stress that they are really not educated enough for the job, what they are supposed to do. I think that is the only thing that you should be aware of.

Some of the more experienced or active tenant representatives mentioned how the lack of education and knowledge limited the tenant representatives and seriously constrained the possibility of the system:

Before TCHC, I went to a meeting of active tenants from both organisations. Derek by then was appointed as the TCHC director. He laid out that CMP [Community Management Plan], the concept of self-governance. I went up to him and I said this is a tremendous concept and there is nothing that I cannot disagree on, but I know that the devil is in details. I said where is the community development and education part of this concept, because if that is not there, it ain’t going to happen and it is a farce. He said oh no, that would be there. When the first CMP came out that is what I looked for and that was not there only the TPS, not even any flushing out how they are going to develop the Tenant Representatives, nothing but just the TPS. Twice a year we had forums with over 360 to 400 people with some workshops. They kept breaking it into groups but you know [she laughed at all those forums and its potential for adult education]. I came back and repeatedly said we had to do more, we had to do more. We did some stuff with our council money. We used some of it to rent a bus to go to all the sites, it was necessary to see where everybody else was living if we were to work together in the council. We had a workshop on how to chair a meeting, one on governance. Those and the forums were pretty much it. I got frustrated. (Jillian)

Two types of education opportunities for the representatives that Jillian did describe were the tenant forums and the tenant council funds and although tenants did suggest in some ways both of these things were beneficial, almost no tenant mentioned either as a significant learning source for them. Forums only happened approximately once a year for a day, so tenants did not necessarily hold onto the information learned. The Council Tenant Training Fund did get used for many important things but it was not utilised for
strictly education purposes and some tenant representatives were unclear on how to access it. Zuri explained that she was aware of the fund and thinking of ways to take advantage of it to further her learning, but was not that clear on how to access it:

Zuri: I haven’t been asking for that fund yet but I need to get some education I need to get more information. I have to sit down and talk with Joël (HPO).

Erica: How would you access it, would you go to Joël?

Zuri: Yes I think I would have to go to Joël. For example to get in some computer knowledge or public speaking.

Erica: Is that the tenant-training fund?

Zuri: I definitely don’t know if I can get money from that but I assume so. You know I don’t really know too much about the finance what they can give and what they can’t give I never really asked anyway. I don’t know I have to ask that information.

Zuri, in addition to not having very firm knowledge on what the fund could be used for, expressed reliance on the HPO for information and approval to access the tenant fund. The HPO and manager were not only responsible for much of the participation that happened in the tenant council but also supplying education, information and support to the tenants. The drawback to this was that these staff members had busy jobs outside of the TPS and therefore did not always have the time to provide extensive education and support. Also depending on the CHU manager and tenant there were very different stories to what kind of support and education tenants were receiving from the staff. In the CHU I observed the HPO and manger for the most part did a remarkable job in supporting and providing information to the tenants and some of the gains in empowerment and knowledge could be connected to their assistance. Unfortunately not all staff were equal, a number of tenants complained that either their manager or HPO were not very helpful or even sometimes detrimental to the participatory process. Also
staff did not necessarily have extensive experience in how to foster participation and
decision-making and it may not have been in their interest to do so. Finally, having the
manager and HPO in charge of both the education and information along with the
decision-making process and much of the money solidified the relationships of the
tenants asking management to address their concerns, instead of taking ownership over
some of the process in concert with other tenant representatives. So although some of the
support and information that the HPO's and management supplied to the tenants was very
valuable, an outside or more neutral group would negate some of the issues and conflicts
related to these education providers. Dorthy expressed her reservations about the TCHC
supplying the education at all:

First of all the housing company should not train us! We should be trained
from outside the company, because you know we are supposed to go by
their views not by the tenants. We are elected by the tenants, not by the
housing company. Oh I have all kinds of paper upstairs of the courses I
have taken you know. But uh the last couple of years I was not even
aware that there was such a thing as a training period or anything else for
that matter.

Later she explained tenants might have more power if they were trained outside
the TCHC:

Well they may have more power if they would have more training outside
training, because that is a conflict of interest to me. That’s a conflict of
interest training your own people your supposed to speak up for them you
know but uh anyway as far as I can see I think we are going down instead
of up you know.

An important point that Dorthy brings up is that who is educating and for what
purpose can have an impact on the process and may limit the power of the tenants. In the
TPS the fact that the staff were responsible for facilitating participation and educating
tenants may have helped to continue past relations of power and inhibit tenants engaging
in deliberative problems solving.
**Strengths and Possibilities of TPS Structure and Education Initiatives**

Although there were shortcomings in both the structure and education that seemed to help to construct tenants as advocates who focused their energy on management instead of deliberating with each other; there are important positive aspects and possibilities connected to the TPS. The TPS is constantly changing and evolving as participation is practiced and problems arise. Within this process there is space for tenants who are unsatisfied with the system to be heard and work towards change. A key component to the TPS that seems to enable empowerment and provide possibilities for improvement of the system, is that the TCHC at least to some extent listens to the tenants.

An encouraging aspect to the TPS is that there is dedicated staff willing to work with determined activist tenants to increase tenant participation and collaboration. The creation of the Participatory Budgeting Committee is one such example of shared efforts from these two groups. This Budgeting Committee will review and change some of the aspects of the participatory budget to try to improve the process. Within this group there is also a subcommittee that has been established to help increase the accountability of the TCHC to tenant decisions. This subcommittee formed to follow the status of budgeting projects to ensure decisions made by tenants were followed through. An important aspect to The Budgeting Committee is that there has been a concerted effort to get a tenant representative from each CHU council to sit on this committee and help make these decisions. This allows tenants TCHC-wide to meet and work together to shape the structure and guidelines to the participatory budget and supplies an important tenant-led mechanism that may address some of the structural issues reviewed above.
The spaces available for criticism and tenant activism no matter how small allows the more critical and dedicated tenants to work to change the system in ways they feel are important. These determined and knowledgeable tenant representatives, who are dedicated to increasing the quality of tenant participation, provide the potential for the TPS to move towards a bottom-up and participatory framework. Tenants like Steven provide encouraging examples: although frustrated with the TPS he refused to quit because he claimed the only way to make things better was to stay involved and try to make changes. He is now one of the tenants working with the central office and participating in the Participatory Budgeting Committee. Jillian is also a tenant representative working on the Participatory Budgeting Committee and dedicating her time to make sure there are positive changes in the TPS. She described how she and a group of tenants got together and tried to fill in the gaps they saw in the education system in order to improve the tenant decision-making and collaboration happening in the participatory budget:

I am just non-stop hammering it that we should come up with ideas to educate people at even the building levels. With the info. we provided this year...people got it, they got it immediately we had none of this off the wall requests, they saw it.... We have to do more every year. The booklet should include all the funding and allocations so people see the pattern for the funding. We have to draw the picture for them and then pose the question that do you think this is fair or do you think that it is reasonable? I cannot blame tenants if they are making decisions in a vacuum. If they do not have the information to base their decisions on, their personal agendas come in no surprise. We have to do more and more, and we are working really hard. And it has to be at the building.... It is making those connections with people, drawing the lines, and it has to happen at the building level where the choices start to come up. Tenants are not stupid, if you give them the information they see it.

Finally another encouraging aspect to the Tenant Participation System is the engagement with praxis. There is evidently some willingness to practice, reflect and
change as the TPS continues to exist. The TPS has constantly been adjusted since its conception. As it became evident that there was a lot of variation between CHUs in how participation occurred, the TCHC moved to increase some of the centralization or standardization of the participation structure. Also as it has been recognised that there is a lack of connection between tenants and representatives there has been a push to encourage representatives to hold community meetings. Finally creating a mechanism for tenants to check up on decisions made through the Participatory Budgeting Committee helps to ensure tenants know what is happening to the decisions they make. This openness to reflection and change along with the spaces for activist tenants to work with management to help direct where the TPS is heading leaves open the possibilities for improvement towards a more empowering and participatory system.
10. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

**Summary**

Through studying an effort at instilling participation in community housing, this thesis allows us to look at a number of challenges and possibilities attached to invited participatory spaces. The way in which the participatory process is structured, the relationships that permeate the process, and the culture fostered throughout, can help to shape the expectations of participants, how they understand their roles, and the potentials for empowerment.

The representative role in this participatory practice was the main opportunity for agency of the tenants and so provided a good window into how the opportunities for participation were constructed. This thesis illustrates the role of the tenant representative, how the tenants conceptualised it, the relationships surrounding the role, and how the role was supported or facilitated. Understanding these aspects was crucial to mapping out what kind of participatory space was created, and allowed for analysis of how the structure and types of facilitation affected tenant-empowerment, transformed relationships and enabled active citizenship of the tenants. A number of questions were addressed in the attempt to illustrate these issues.

The first question that the thesis sought to answer was how tenant representatives understood their role, and the possibilities and limits attached. Within the TPS, the tenant representative role appeared be understood as a chance to volunteer for the community and improve the living conditions of the representatives and the people who they served. This was enabled through the representative position because the role: provided an opportunity to advocate for tenants and their concerns, improved communication between
tenants and management, and better positioned tenant representatives to access funds for their communities.

Secondly, the research was concerned with the social relationships that defined and directed the tenant representative role. The relationships comprising the participatory process were directed toward the presumed access points of power, or places to get issues dealt with, and this tended to replicate traditional, more hierarchical forms of representation and power relations. For the general resident population, tenant representatives were the conduits for their concerns because the representatives had better access to management and were elected to go and get things done. Within the councils the tenant representatives focused on the manager, who retained the power to make decisions and solve tenant issues, and possessed extensive knowledge and information.

Thirdly, the research showed the potentials and challenges of the tenant representative role to encourage empowerment of the tenant population and achieve broad and deep participation. The participatory process, and the roles and relations that comprised it, had mixed results in the empowerment of tenants. Some tenants were able to gain real achievements for their communities, acquire valuable skills and knowledge (which increased their political capacity), and practice some decision-making. However, this empowerment was tempered by the expression from a majority of the tenants that they felt, in the end they were not the ones with the real power. The focus of the representatives was directed toward getting their concerns heard and gaining things for their community, more than acting as agents and decision-makers in the process.

Finally the last chapter made some connections between how the structure and the education helped to shape these relations and the understandings of the roles within the
process. This chapter was an attempt to explicate how the pedagogical supports and
design of the process affected tenant perceptions and experiences. The decentralised
structure, which lacked in accountability and clearly understood opportunities for tenant
led decision-making, helped to construct tenants more as advocates and communication
links with management, instead of decision-makers working with each other. In addition,
there was not extensive education to help tenants make a shift from their former roles and
paradigms to the role of decision-maker and actor. The most obvious form of support
was from the HPOs and managers who would provide information to tenant
representatives and facilitate council meetings. These supports were often helpful for the
tenants, although without much check-up or centralization there were widely varying
evaluations of managers and HPOs. This arrangement also arguably helped to solidify a
relationship where tenants depended on the staff to deal with issues and give direction.

Conclusions

Within every social sphere there are expectations about how people relate to one
another, what behaviour is appropriate and what a member’s responsibilities and
expectations are. In terms of participation, these expectations and relations have been
referred to as a space or culture within the participatory process (Cornwall, 2004; Fischer,
2006). The construction and definition of these spaces determines the relations of power
and the extent to which participants are empowered.

A participatory space can be shaped and fostered with rules and design as well as
with facilitation and education. This study outlines how a particular space and culture
was shaped within the TPS and what impacts this had on how participants assumed their
role and acted within a space. Understanding the culture fostered throughout the TPS,
and the space created within for tenant action, helps us to comprehend the possibilities for and challenges to, creating active citizens, transforming relations, and empowering tenants.

The first two questions in this thesis examined the kind of culture that was constructed in the TPS system and analysed how tenant representatives understood their role and what kinds of relationships and interactions made up the process. Cornwall (2004) suggests that to understand the possibilities for agency within a space it is useful to look at how the roles of the actors within are constructed. The relationships and culture comprising the TPS process often did not construct tenants as “makers and shapers” but more as “users” and the tenant representatives as advocates, communication links and community caretakers, more than decision-makers. The construction of roles in a process shape expectations of what actors “are perceived to be able to contribute or entitled to know or decide, as well as the perceived obligations of those who seek to involve them” (Cornwall 2004, 83). As the tenant representative role was mainly constructed in terms of an advocate, community caretaker and communication link, representatives often pressured management to solve problems and allocate resources, rather than looked to the other tenants within the council as peers with whom they should deliberate and problem-solve with.

This meant that although representatives were enabled to impact decisions in the TCHC and get problems addressed in their community, tenants rarely engaged in the kind of deliberative problem-solving outlined by Fung and Wright as part of the Empowered Participatory Governance model, because they did not necessarily understand their role to include this aspect. When tenants understand their role in terms of an advocate and
communication link instead of a “maker and shaper” it limits the extent tenants engage in
decision-making and deliberative problem solving. This provides an illustration of
Cornwall’s claim that: the way in which roles are defined and understood determines the
expectations and actions of the participants. If representatives are viewing the managers
as legitimate decision-makers and themselves as community advocates, they often do not
have a reason to look to each other to engage in deliberative problem solving. The
practice of citizenship becomes focused on volunteering and looking after community
concerns instead of on working together in council. When tenant representatives do have
the opportunity to make a decision in the council or in the city-wide budget, this
understanding of themselves as community advocates encourages them to focus on
resolving their own community issues above working as deliberative decision-makers. A
more competitive environment is then produced instead of one that encourages
collaborative decision-making and problem solving. This can actually help to de-
legitimize tenants as decision-makers and even the participatory process itself as tenants
are seen to only “ask the management for a bunch of stuff”, or have “no sense of co-
operation.”

Jensen’s (1996) discussion of the difficulties involved in moving from a more
fatalist or hierarchical culture to an egalitarian one, also provides some insight into
obstacles that may face the tenants in the move toward a paradigm of participatory
democracy and viewing themselves as deliberative decision-makers. Jensen suggests that
when people are socialized into functioning within one set of rules they often cannot
switch into a whole new framework of actions and abilities simply because the venue
they are in is assumed to work with a different framework. In the case of the tenant
representative, if the framework is one of them pushing to get the most for their community, (usually by focusing on management), when the infrequent opportunity arises for them to become decisions-makers, this may not be enough to move from simply advocating for their own community to a role of deliberative decision maker, seeking out the most fair or rationale solution.

The understandings and interactions that comprise the TPS have implications on empowerment and the extent of broad and deep participation, which was the third area of focus in this research. Although the focus of the TPS was not for tenants to become deliberative decision-makers, tenants were enabled, through the process, to gain real improvements in their communities, to feel as though they were being listened to and provide the entire tenant community with a better connection to decision-making structures. This encouraged empowerment of the tenant representatives as well as the general tenant population because it gave them the feeling that they were important enough to be listened to. Also there were examples of transformation of power relations as tenants expressed increased feelings of self-worth and confidence and were able to hold management to account with a regular mechanism. There were also examples of tenants working within and outside their councils to make the process more participatory and challenge the limitations they saw on tenant agency.

In some respects, the tenant representative’s role moved the tenants towards the realisation of a more active citizen, in that the local councils provided a forum where they could practice decision-making, work to solve issues facing their community and learn skills and knowledge that helped them better make their demands in the political world. Many tenant representatives described learning-by-doing, which helped them gain skills
and knowledge to become more effective actors in their local communities, both TCHC-wide and beyond the TCHC in municipal politics. The tenant representative role also enabled tenants to take on more responsibility towards a wider community as well as contribute input to the decisions made that impacted their community. These findings support some of the claims by other researchers regarding the benefits associated with participatory spaces, including potentials for citizenship learning, capacity building and empowerment (Schugurensky, 2004; Fung & Wright, 2003; Mansbridge, 1999; Berry, Portney & Thomson, 1993; Pateman, 1970).

Although the structures and culture created within the TPS are empowering in that they allow tenants to learn important skills, enable them to better get issues addressed in their community, and practice decision-making to some extent, there are important limitations on empowerment and broad and deep participation. There were limits on the extent to which tenants had agency and ownership over much of the process, and the extent to which they saw themselves as decision-makers. Although tenants felt they could better impact decisions, could better access structures of power and gain access to resources to make improvements in their community, tenants also expressed that in the end it was the TCHC making the decisions. For example, comments such as “Oh well if the tenants really had the power that they are saying, we could do something, but we don’t have the power. They have the power right” and “If you want to be good, if you want to have any impact, which means standing up to god almighty… judge and jury that’s what they are” suggested that tenants often felt the TCHC possessed all the real power and that tenants had limited space in which to act.
Although as Fung and Wright suggest, tying action to the discussion is an important way that people can be empowered, there are factors that go beyond simply tying action to decisions that can impact or limit empowerment. In the Tenant Participation System, even though action was often tied to the discussion, many of the tenants still felt like they were not really the ones making the decisions. Other factors that likely impact empowerment include how consistently action is tied to the discussion, what kind of issues people are given control over, how often there are opportunities for decision-making, what way discussion determines action (is it through group consensus, vote or because an expert feels their request is valid), and how the process of decision-making is conducted (how much of the process is citizen led and how much of it is directed by authorities). These factors could provide a window into why tenants expressed feelings of empowerment and self-worth, which they connected directly with their experiences in the TPS, while they also expressed frustration and a view that the TCHC had all the power. The results suggest that there are a number of issues that impact the extent to which ownership and empowerment are produced. Somerville (1998) maintains that participation does not necessarily produce empowerment but the opportunity for empowerment. Appropriate skills and rights attained by the tenants as well as the particular relationships and actors within housing both between tenants, mediators and the authorities are some suggested factors that can impact empowerment (Somerville, 1998; Cairncross et al., 1994).

Hickman raises the point that tenant agency and empowerment in participation schemes is often limited because projects are generally designed within a traditionalist framework rather than one geared towards a citizenship framework. In other words the
dominant concern is for housing to retain control over the process, and tenant empowerment is secondary. Hickman notes that housing authorities generally control the where, when and who of tenant participation, with tenant decision-making often relegated to everyday minor decisions instead of policy decisions. This seemed to be the case in the TPS, where, although there was definitely a citizenship focus of empowering tenants, there was a stronger traditionalist approach in that the housing authority retained their control over decisions, determining the where, when, and what, with most decision-making staying in safe, small realms.

Within the TPS, there were constraints on deep participation because tenants were often not engaging in deliberative problem solving together but instead voting on preferences without much discussion. Often the focus was more on pressuring management to get things done than tenants engaging in decision-making. The participatory culture within the TPS also arguably limited broad participation as it reproduced some of the disconnection seen in our traditional representative systems. There were often not obvious ways for tenants to connect to decisions made in the TPS through their representative, beyond individually asking what was happening. Although the TPS staff did run local consultation meetings within every community, the system did not often provide opportunities for tenant to practice decision-making with their representative at more local levels. Therefore the stepping-stones for tenants to get actively involved into the TPS system were limited. This disconnection limited the opportunity within the TPS for tenants to practice the kind of active citizenship described by Cornwall & Gaventa (2000) and Jansen et al. (2006) mainly to the representatives, who were already active tenants. The Porto Alegre model provides an example of how
direct democracy can still be utilised in a representative system, which would allow people who were not representatives to still be actively involved in the process. In Porto Alegre there were local neighbourhood and regional meetings that connected everyone who was interested in the decision-making structure with their representatives (Gret & Sintomer, 2005; Abers, 2000).

As the TPS did not ensure bottom-up participation, it reproduced some of the disconnection with representative decision-making seen in our broader representative structures. At the same time as discussed earlier, it also did not support the main benefits attributed to representation in a participatory process, which is, enabling deliberation. For example, Cohen and Fung (2004) justify the use of representation in governance because it enables deliberation, which allows decisions to result from reasons based on democratic values such as liberty, the common good and fairness, instead of resulting from pure interest aggregation.

The issues regarding the limits to broad and deep participation as well as empowerment are tied up in the structures and supports of the process. As was outlined above, the lack of clear avenues for tenants to connect to decision-making in the councils seemed to limit broad participation. The final question looks at the structures and supports that impact the culture of participation as well as relationships, empowerment and the representatives’ understandings of their roles.

Fung & Wright (2003) provide a useful framework to determine what components of a process can help produce empowerment, increase social justice and better decision-making as well as deepen and broaden participation. To some extent as Fung and Wright prescribe; the TPS deepens tenant participation and influence over the decisions that
affect them. It reflects the attributes of the Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) model in that it deals with problems of practical concern to the participants, includes ordinary people in the decision-making as well as traditional decision-makers, often ties action to discussion and involves some deliberation. Where it moves away from the EPG model is that the decentralised units are not held to account, deliberation is limited and often overshadowed by voting and decision-making is generally more top-down than bottom-up.

Although the structures and culture created within the TPS empowered tenants in that they, allowed them to learn important skills, enabled them to more effectively address their community’s issues, and practice decision-making to some extent, there were significant limitations produced by the structure and culture making up the TPS. Some structures and lack of supports arguably helped to produce unequal relationships of power between tenants and staff, limiting deliberative problem solving and constructing tenants as volunteers and advocates. As tenants’ roles were constructed in this way, with only limited opportunities for tenant-led decision-making, when they did move to a decision-making role such as the participatory budget, it would be difficult to move from the focus of pushing for their issues to be addressed to deliberative problem solving. Morrell's research suggests providing opportunities that are frequent and significant for decision-making may help to increase the evaluations of the decisions as satisfactory or fair and encourage people to change their positions (1999). Also when there is a lack of opportunity to practice deep participation, it can cause frustration and alienation of tenants and actually discourage participation. This was seen in some of the comments of
the tenants when they discussed the limitations of tenant power and “the lip service” of the TPS.

There are two notable aspects in the TPS that encouraged the understanding of the representative role to be one of advocacy and communication more than a “maker and shaper” role. One was that this was how the role was constructed in the design of the process, the education material given to the tenants and often in the understanding or actions of the staff. The second issue was that the decentralised structure put the responsibility of the participatory process and the education mainly on the management and HPO, which meant that practices of enacting deep participation could be limited depending on the skills of the staff in the councils. Also when the HPOs and managers were in charge of facilitation and providing advice, it reinforced a relationship where the managers were the ones with the knowledge and the decision-making powers, and the tenants were the advocates for their community. This demonstrates the drawbacks that may happen when too much responsibility for all aspects of the process is left up to the decentralised units and clear supports are not provided to foster participation and equalise power relations.

The importance of co-ordinating decentralised units is outlined in the EPG framework and also justified by Mansbridge through the paradox of participation. The argument for such an arrangement put forward by both Kaufman (1969) and Mansbridge (2003) is that when a participatory system is first implemented people have not yet learned participatory skills or behaviours and so expecting groups to enact a good process in isolation can produce unsavoury results. The decentralization of the units, particularly in a new process, where both the staff and the tenants did not necessarily have extensive
experience with practicing participation, created barriers and confusion as to how to construct a good process and enable tenant decision-making. This produced differing practices of how councils were run; with some tenants reporting the manager did not leave much room for tenant agency. As most tenants and managers were new to this system of governance they did not necessarily have the tools or know how to enact a good participatory process. In addition managers had a lot of discretion on how much participation was actually happening in the council and as they were also often the sources of information for the tenants this could result in the managers having much of the control over the activities and decisions in council.

Although complete decentralization can raise concerns, too much centralization of power comes with its own problems, such as co-optation and oligarchy of the centre (Taylor, 2007; Sintomer & Maillard (2007). Fung and Wright (2003) suggest a balance between ensuring some empowerment and autonomy of the decentralised units while still keeping a web of connection and accountability amongst the units or system. Capacity building such as popular education by a neutral group could also work to negate this issue as it would give the tenants in the decentralised units the tools to challenge uncalled for authority. It could also be an important component for ensuring the tenants in the local councils were directing the social space.

In the TPS although there were some intermittent training sessions, there was not a consistent or extensive capacity building program, and the onus for educating tenants was left to the HPO and management. This reaffirmed management as the centre of power as well as the dependency of tenants on management for knowledge. Krantz, (2003) in her study on participation in Madison, Wisconsin, suggested that having city
staff as both facilitators and “experts” was problematic. She claimed that the staff holding both the facilitator and educator role produced an undemocratic nature as the staff had undue influence on the decisions. Likewise in the TPS, the manager and HPO supplied much of the information, facilitated the meetings, and were responsible for much of the decision-making. This gave them a gross imbalance of power in a process designed to empower tenants. In many cases, the staff generally seemed to have good intentions and worked hard to support tenants and provide valuable assistance. The problem was that the arrangement recreated a relationship where the tenants looked to the management and staff as the ones with the knowledge and power to make things happen. Krantz contends that in the Madison example, people were not aware that they could challenge the experts. She suggests that the Madison process would likely be improved by “providing a facilitator who attends solely to group processes, rather than combining facilitation with content expertise” (234). Within the TPS a neutral education provider would likely help to improve power inequalities and increase tenant agency by providing tenants with what Cornwall (2004) refers to as “the tools of the powerful.”

**Recommendations for Practice and Future Research**

There are a number of changes that could build on the positive attributes found in the TPS to create a stronger culture of participation. In some areas the TPS is already improving on the shortcomings outlined above. The limitations on active citizenship and empowerment are being addressed to some extent as the process continues and both dedicated staff and tenants work together to improve the system. This includes a tenant body that is reworking the rules of the participatory budgeting process to reflect their experiences so far and what they feel needs to be improved. In addition, a committee has
been formed to ensure the decisions made in the budget are followed through upon. The Budgeting Committee that both these councils work under includes tenants from almost every CHU, which is a step towards developing a web of connection between CHUs. The TCHC is also in the midst of trying to recentralise some of the TPS to ensure that aspects of the participatory process are being carried out in every CHU. Having mechanisms to ensure tenants’ decisions are followed through upon, and stronger connections of the units to each other and the authorities can likely increase empowerment and help to enable deliberative decision-making. These changes reflect an important quality of the TPS: the willingness of the TCHC Organisation to reflect on the process and try to change and improve it.

In addition to the creation of accountability mechanisms, clearly outlining opportunities of participation that should be directed by the tenants, and taking steps to ensure tenants are aware of these opportunities, would also enable better participation and help construct tenants as decision-makers. An important accompaniment to this is providing substantial, frequent and supported opportunities for tenant participation so that the possibilities of tenants engaging as makers, shapers and deliberative decision-makers are increased. Also of key importance are efforts to ensure there are more equalized relationships in the councils between staff and tenants. In addition, enabling stronger connections between representatives and tenants through community meetings directed by the tenants and their representatives would connect tenants to the decision-making structures as well as enable more broad participation.

Finally, providing capacity building to supply participants with “the tools of the powerful” and popular education to enable tenants to direct the process and challenge
norms is one strong possibility for increasing tenant agency and improving the participatory process. This could help transform learned relationships and enable tenants to better engage as deliberative decisions-makers. The provision of this by a neutral group would also help to democratise the process.

Although this study pertains to a particular case, the issues discussed here could inform other participatory processes as well. Attending to how structures and capacity building expand or limit the space for participation and the actions of actors within can help to inform the creation of empowering participatory processes. Also how to balance power differentials and transform relations of power is likely an issue that all participatory processes face. Although every participatory space is different, and could therefore benefit from different structures and designs, the EPG model and methods of capacity building such as popular education provide useful resources to look to for creating spaces that foster agency, empowerment and deep participation.

There are a number of interesting directions in participatory research that could add to these findings and the literature that already exists. Research that continues to focus on what impact the different structures and forms of support produce in different settings could add to our present understanding of what can help to deepen democracy and empower citizens. Questions regarding, what extent prior culture affects the quality of participation, and what methods can help move from a culture of authority or antagonism to one of collaborative participation still need attention. Although there are some scholars that suggest capacity building is an important component to participatory processes, there is a lack of research focusing on the role of different capacity building schemes and providers in participatory projects. More research in this area analyzing
what is being done, what is working and what limitations capacity building programs have, would be timely.

Finally it is not the intention of this research to suggest that there is no place for managers or experts. It does not go unrecognised that their authority over some decisions is appropriate as they bring with them valuable skills, knowledge and experience. The issue is to provide some relevant and real decision-making opportunities for citizens who possess valuable knowledge and experience as well, and are the ones being impacted by the results of the decisions. This raises questions around how citizen participation can be supported while still utilizing expert knowledge and in what places and spaces citizen participation is particularly useful to foster active participation and empowerment.
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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

Dear_______

Date_______

Thank you for considering participating in my research project. As I mentioned in earlier contact, I am a Masters student at the university of Toronto in Adult education and Community development. I am completing this research project as part of my requirements for obtaining a Masters degree. This letter is to provide you with more detailed information on the project so you can decide whether you want to participate. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time.

The name of the research project is “Experiences in Participatory Governance: Perceptions of Tenant Representatives in the Toronto Housing Tenant Participation System.” If you choose to participate please sign this consent form and return one signed copy to me and keep the other for your reference.

The goal of the research is to gain an understanding the Tenant Participation System and what kind of space it provides for the tenants to get their concerns heard and to work towards improving the community. Specifically I will be asking questions about the experiences of the tenant representatives, what their motivations for participation were, what changes in attitudes or thinking took place and what the challenges for the tenant representatives were. I will also try to gain a better understanding of how the tenant representatives view the Tenant Participation System and what they feel it means for tenants. The motivation behind this is to look at ways that the TPS can provide a supportive space to allow tenants to impact decisions made about their community. The participants will have the opportunity to make suggestions on how this could be achieved.

I will be conducting interviews with tenant representatives who have participated in the Tenant Participation System and possibly with a small number of new tenant representatives. In addition I will be asking the supportive staff such as HPOs what their views of the Tenant Participation System is and what their roles have been in education and support of the tenant representative. Interviews with staff will also seek to try to understand the relationship between tenant representatives and staff in the TPS. The interviews will take place between May 2006 and October 2006 in Toronto, Canada. The tenant representatives who agree to participate will be interviewed for approximately one hour. In this interview you can decide to not answer any question and can end the interview at any time. I will request to be able to tape record the interview so that I may listen to it after and take notes. If requested I will send the transcribed version of the
interview to the participants so that they can make changes if they wish and confirm that what they said was properly represented. The participant at any time can request the tape recorder to be turned off. Notes may also be taken during the interview with the participant’s permission. Participants may also withdraw from the research at anytime, in this case the tape recordings and notes of the interview will be destroyed.

The anonymity of people involved in this research is ensured as well as the confidentiality of the information given. The TCHC will not know which specific tenant representatives I have interviewed and no identifiable information will be provided in the written report. With the exception of my thesis supervisor Daniel Schugurensky, my colleague Behrang and my second reader the raw data will not be shared with anyone without your permission. All raw data will be kept on file for five years after the completion of the project and then will be destroyed. Furthermore, I may publish the results of the study and give talks about the study at presentations or conferences.

Participants may benefit from reflecting on and discussing their experiences with the Tenant Participation System. Participants may also benefit from having the opportunity to give feedback in an anonymous manner about the TPS program. I do not believe that there are any risks to you as a result of your participation in this study. No compensation will be given for participation.

Attached to this letter, you will find a proposed interview schedule. Please read this carefully before signing.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at any time via e-mail at ethekla@yahoo.ca or call me at (416) 901-9411. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Daniel Schugurensky, at: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counseling Psychology 252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, ON M5S 1V6 e-mail: dschugurensky@oise.utoronto.ca

☐ I have read and understood the consent form and agree to participate in this research project.

☐ I agree to have my interview audio taped.

☐ I have kept a copy of the consent form.

__________________________    ___________________________    ___________________________
Signature                        Date                               Email Address
Appendix B: Tenant Interview Questions

Motivations

1. Why did you become a tenant representative?

2. Do you feel that you have accomplished what you expected at the beginning of your term as a tenant representative? If yes, how? If no, why?

3. Did your motivations or ideas about being a tenant representative change throughout the process?

4. Why did you run for a second term?

Understanding the Role of the Tenant Representative

1. Can you describe your role and responsibilities as a tenant representative?

2. In your view what is the purpose of this role?

3. Can you describe an issue that was solved by the tenants in your CHU council?

4. How often was there discussion or debate over an issue? Can you remember something that there was a debate over: describe the issue and how it was resolved

Ownership and Empowerment

1. How much effect did you feel you had on the decisions being made at the CHU level? At the TCHC level? Explain

2. What were the ways you could make sure decisions were followed through on?

3. Did you feel as though you had much control over the direction of the meetings, if not who did? Why?

4. Is there a particular area that tenant reps should have more decision-making power over?

5. Can you describe an example where you were able to accomplish something for your community through the Tenant Participation System
Supports and Challenges of the Process

1. Do you feel that you have accomplished what you expected at the beginning of your term as a tenant representative?

2. Are there any supports or actions by the TCHC that you feel helped or hindered your ability to be an effective tenant rep?

3. How has the role been challenging?

Learning Skills and Perspectives

1. Did your way of discussing, listening to others or expressing yourself in the meetings change at all as you took part in the process?

2. Did your attitude towards your community and other tenants change through participating in this process? If so how did this change and why?

3. Did you learn any skills or knowledge that you feel could help you affect political decisions outside of the Tenant Participation System (example: how to get issues addressed by city council.)?

4. Did any training provided by the TCHC help you learn the skills or confidence to more effectively voice the concerns of your community? If so what was it?

How the Representative Role Connects the Tenants to the Decisions made at the TCHC

1. How often did you discuss the decisions or issues that you faced with the other tenants in your buildings? Did you have meetings with tenants in your community to know about their concerns and interests regarding the residence and the community
If yes, How often?
If no, what are the challenges in holding meetings with tenants in your community

2. How much effect do you feel tenants who are not tenant representative have on the decisions made?