

Planning for Partnerships under the Neoliberal Paradigm: A Study of the Bedford Waterfront Development's Public Consultation Process

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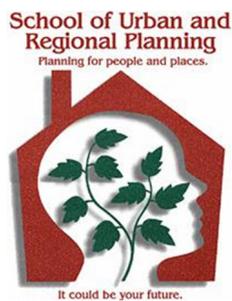
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Executive Summary

Cities have long been considered very physical expressions of social relations, movements, and ideologies, so it stands to reason that physical change can provide some insight into broader political change – neoliberalism being one example – that converge to produce and reproduce everyday urban life. Unfortunately, the connection between urban form and neoliberalism is ignored...

- Hackworth 2007, p. 79.

This report aims to bridge the gap between the sociopolitical landscape and the physical landscape of every day urban life. The urban landscape, particularly the urban waterfront, is a contested site where different forces – the political, the social, and the physical - come together to produce change. Processes like public participation highlight the power and potential for cities to develop under principles that are not predetermined, despite the clout of neoliberal dominance and normalcy. Through the effective management and realization that there are a variety of interactions, movements and ideologies that influence urban form and everyday urban life, the dynamic nature of a city is revealed. This report is a critique towards the ‘monolithic city’.

The Bedford Waterfront Development (BWD), located in Bedford, Nova Scotia, Canada, is used as a case study in order to support this critique. Specifically, this case study asks the following: *given the neoliberal paradigm of the Bedford Waterfront Development, what challenges, limitations, and constraints – and even opportunities – exist for the public in the planning decision making process?* By critically evaluating the BWD’s public consultation process this report addresses the different ways in which the Bedford community’s voice was heard under a neoliberal waterfront planning framework.

The objectives of the report required two distinct evaluation frameworks: 1) to explain why the BWD is neoliberal and, 2) to assess the quality of the BWD visioning and public consultation programs. The first was done in order to situate the BWD project within the context of the larger sociopolitical structure of our time - that being neoliberalism. As Jason Hackworth explains, “neoliberalism is everywhere and, apparently, everything” (2007, p. xii). As such, the following table was created in order to evaluate and justify the reasoning that the BWD is a neoliberal development. The table describes the neoliberal characteristics to which the BWD clearly identifies with:

CHARACTERISTICS OF A NEOLIBERAL DEVELOPMENT:
THE BEDFORD WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT

| Descriptive Factor | Theoretical Foundation | BWD Characteristics |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Governance | Entrepreneurial: 'The Public-Private Partnership' | Urban regime; planning hierarchy; private investment vs. public good |
| Geography | The Spatial Fix: 'The Mega-Project' | Centralized urban locale; long-term economic investment. |
| Demographics | Uneven Development: 'Corporatized Gentrification' | Affluent users; |
| Planning Alternatives | Hegemonic Power: 'The TINA Syndrome' | Hegemonic dominance |

The second evaluative framework is a more technical and stringent criteria established by Rowe & Frewer (2000). Their model was used to assess the levels of public participation within the primary methods used for the BWD consultation process.

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR THE PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES USED IN THE BEDFORD WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT

| | Public Hearings | Citizen Advisory Committee | Public Opinion Survey |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Acceptance Criteria | - | - | - |
| Representativeness of participants | High | High | Low |
| Independence of true participants | Moderate | High | Moderate |
| Early involvement? | Low | High | Low |
| Influence on final policy | Moderate | High | Low |
| Transparency of process to public | High | High | Low |

As can be seen from the results of this analysis, the criterion for public hearings has a variant score overall, whereas the public opinion survey has scored generally low overall. What is significant and interesting is that the Citizen Advisory Committee scored a consistent 'high' across all acceptance criteria.

It was concluded that despite the variable differences amongst the scoring of the BWD participation methods, the participation process was nonetheless helpful in contributing to a fuller understanding of the ways in which more flexible, innovative, and community driven planning processes can engage in waterfront development in neoliberal times.